

246 Prairie Ave Redevelopment Community Workshop Series Summary Report

September 2025



MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

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Introduction

246 Prairie Avenue is a 4.6 acre property in the heart of Providence's South Side neighborhood. Formerly home to the Urban League of Rhode Island, this parcel was acquired by the Providence Redevelopment Agency (PRA) in late 2022 following an announcement that the building was in disrepair and the property would need to be redeveloped.

To guide the redevelopment of this important property, Mayor Brett Smiley's Administration at the City of Providence worked with Councilwoman Mary Kay Harris to design and facilitate a community workshop series. The goal of the workshops was to bring together South Side community members to envision feasible future uses of the property that meet the neighborhood's wants and needs, while respecting its rich history. The feedback from these workshops will inform a 'request for proposals' process that will select a team to redevelop the property.

Timeline

Acquisition & Site Preparation

246 Prairie Avenue acquired by Providence Redevelopment Agency.
Site cleanup and demolition begins.

Community Workshop Series

Building upon previous community conversations, a collaborative process establishes a new shared vision for the property.

We are here!

Request for Proposals

A competitive "RFP" process solicits development proposals & scores them based on alignment with community's priorities.

Continued Community Input

The selected development team continues community engagement to finalize plans for new development.

Predevelopment & Construction

The selected development team completes all necessary preconstruction steps, incl. design, financing and permitting, before breaking ground!



Community Workshop Series Team

Community Facilitator



Dwayne Keys
D Key Solution

Architecture & Design Consultant



STUDIO ENÉE

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP

Beverly Ledbetter
Urban League of RI & Brown Univ.

Margaret DeVos
Southside Community Land Trust

Ron Crosson
South Prov. Neighborhood Association

Shane Lee
Nonviolence Institute

Harold Metts
Former State Senator

Silaphone Nhongvongsouthy
PVD Housing & Human Services

Madeline Burke
CCRI Liston Campus

Ruben Ogando
Business Owner



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Workshop 1 (October 2024): Kick Off + Community Assets, Wants & Needs Activity



Workshop 2 (November 2024): Preferred Uses



Workshop 3 (December 2024): Site Analysis



Workshop 4 (February 2025): Preferred Uses, Site Design & Recap



Historical Context

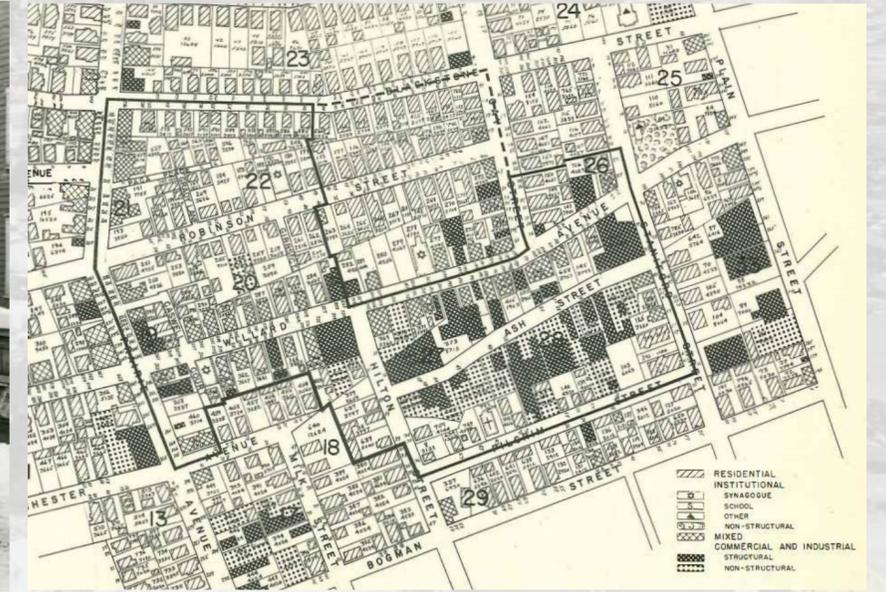
The deep level of community connection to 246 Prairie Ave is rooted in the property's storied past. Sharing and reflecting on this history was a common theme of community workshops.

In the 1950s, 246 Prairie Ave was one piece of the larger Willard Center Urban Renewal Project, which displaced hundreds of families, a business district, religious buildings, and more to establish a shopping center, elementary school, and playfields.

In the late 1960s, the shopping center became the site of local civil rights protests, emblemized by the center's renaming to Martin Luther King Jr. Shopping Center.

Since the 1970s, the property housed a variety of community services and resources, including as the home of the Urban League of Rhode Island.

Any reinvestment in this site must begin with respect for the area's history, so as not to erase it, but build upon it with intention and care.



Images from left to right, top to bottom: Willard Avenue in 1948 (Prov. Public Library Digital Archives); Willard Center 1953 Urban Renewal Map (Providence City Archives); 1967 Emancipation Day Rally at Willard Avenue Shopping Center (Providence Journal Archives); Urban League of Rhode Island in 2010s.

Community Feedback

Over four workshop events, hundreds of community members shared their views on the needs of the neighborhood and the opportunities of 246 Prairie Ave. This input has been distilled into the following six overarching themes:

1



This site has the potential to be an **active neighborhood hub**. Most participants envisioned the site including a vibrant mix of uses and activities that add to the neighborhood.

2



The design of any new development should be **sensitive to the neighborhood context**, potentially by stepping down building height along Prairie Ave and improving connectivity through the site.

3



The project should aim to **provide economic opportunity** to the area, potentially through the development team makeup (incentivizing MWBE participation & apprenticeships) or providing space for small businesses to grow.



Community Feedback (continued)

4



Neighbors would welcome **community gathering space**, whether through open space, community or non-profit organization space with programming for youth and seniors, or “third space” retail uses like a grocer or coffee shop.

5



The project should **help green the area**, potentially by preserving or adding trees and open space where possible, including community gardens, utilizing green roofs, or extending the existing green strip along Prairie Ave north of the site.

6



The project should **respect and celebrate the neighborhood's history and culture**. This can be demonstrated in many ways, incl. by supporting public art, commemoration, and storytelling; proposing uses that reflect cultural awareness; intentional recruiting of local businesses and residents as tenants; and more.

Development Feasibility Considerations

The City of Providence aims to facilitate a transformative development project at 246 Prairie Ave that meets as many of the community's goals as possible, while still being financially feasible and self-sustaining. Three considerations that the local and regional development community have shared with the City relating to 246 Prairie Ave are:

1 “A site of this size will likely require a phased approach to development.”

2 “Given Providence’s real estate market, a viable development on this site will likely need to include some amount of housing at an apartment building density on at least part of the site.”

3 “There may be a market for retail and commercial uses (in a mixed-use or stand-alone building) for this site, but likely only at strategic nodes, not along the entire Prairie Ave frontage.”

Next Steps

Share your feedback on this report by emailing comments to 246prairie@providenceri.gov and attending a public meeting to be scheduled in early Fall 2025.

The City anticipates publishing the Request for Proposals in Fall 2025 and selecting a development team in early 2026.

Visit providenceri.gov/246prairie for the latest updates!