

To: City of Providence, Department of Planning and Development
From: Roderick Taylor, Rappaport Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School
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RE: Demographic Profile for ULRI Neighborhood

Executive Summary

The purpose of this memo is to assess the demographic profile of the census tracts surrounding the Urban League of Rhode Island (ULRI) site, located at 246 Prairie Ave in Providence. The analysis involved analyzing census data over 15 years, 2008-2022, to better understand the community's needs, changes over time, and to inform future development initiatives. To that end, the following guiding questions were addressed:

- What are the current demographics of the neighborhood?
- How have demographics changed over time?
- What trends can be identified from the demographic data?

To answer these questions, data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2012, 2017, and 2022 were used¹ – providing insights into demographic changes over a 15-year period. The demographic profile offers a look at various aspects of the ULRI area, including:

- **Population Size:** Understanding the total population and its growth or decline over the years;
- **Age Distribution:** Analyzing the distribution of different age groups within the population;
- **Racial and Ethnic Composition:** Assessing the diversity of the neighborhood by examining racial and ethnic groups;
- **Income Levels:** Evaluating the economic well-being of the community through median household income and poverty levels;
- **Educational Attainment:** Understanding the educational background of residents, including high school and college graduation rates;
- **Employment Status:** Examining labor force participation and unemployment rates to gauge the economic activity in the area; and
- **Household Characteristics:** Analyzing household types, housing occupancy, and housing tenure to understand living arrangements and housing market dynamics.

Key Insights

The following key insights highlight significant demographic and socioeconomic changes in the ULRI area over 15 years. These trends reveal a dynamic and evolving community, marked by population growth, increased diversity, economic improvements, and shifting housing patterns.

- **Population Growth and Density:** The ULRI area has experienced a 14 percent growth in total population and a 15 percent increase in population density over a 15-year period, indicating dynamic and expanding community likely influenced by changing census tracts, urban development, and migration patterns.
- **Diversity and Nativity:** The neighborhood's diversity has grown significantly, with the percentage of foreign-born residents increasing from 42% in 2012 to 48% in 2022. This period also saw notable growth in racial and ethnic diversity, particularly among Hispanic or Latino residents and other racial groups.
- **Gender Distribution:** The gender distribution has shown a shift, with the male population increasing from 46 percent in 2012 to 49 percent in 2022, while the female population decreased from 54 percent to 51 percent. This suggests a slight demographic change with a growing male population and declining female population.
- **Educational Attainment:** Higher education levels have improved, with residents holding a bachelor's degree increasing from 8 percent in 2012 to 11 percent in 2022, and those with a master's degree or higher rising from 5 percent to 6 percent, indicating a trend towards greater educational achievement.
- **Economic Improvement:** Median household income in the ULRI area rose by 25 percent, from \$32,051 in 2012 to \$40,073 in 2022 (both figures in 2022 dollars), and the poverty rate decreased significantly from 38.8 percent to 26.1 percent, reflecting improved economic conditions and increased financial stability for residents.
- **Labor Market Dynamics:** The employment rate increased from 76.2 percent in 2012 to 91.1 percent in 2022, with the unemployment rate dropping from 23.8 percent to 8.9 percent, and shifts in employment sectors showing a decrease in the private sector's dominance and growth in non-profit employment.
- **Housing Trends and Composition:** Housing occupancy rates improved from 86 percent in 2012 to 92 percent in 2022, with family households decreasing from 68 percent to 58 percent and non-family households increasing from 32 percent to 42 percent. The proportion of owner-occupied units remained stable around 24-25 percent, while renter-occupied units continued to dominate at 75 percent, reflecting a trend towards renting over homeownership and changing social dynamics.

Background

The Urban League of Rhode Island (ULRI), formerly situated at 246 Prairie Avenue (see Figure I), has been a cornerstone of Providence's social landscape since its establishment in the early 20th century. As part of a broader national movement, ULRI focused on uplifting marginalized communities by promoting housing, education, and employment opportunities. The Rhode Island chapter has provided essential services, educational programs, and civil rights advocacy, aiming to bridge systemic gaps and foster economic development.²

Located within Providence's historical Willard Center redevelopment zone, the site initially featured new construction, including a shopping center and the Edmund W. Flynn School, following a mid-century urban renewal project that spanned 18 acres. However, from 1966 to 1970, the property experienced a significant decline in investment, leading to the deterioration and eventual demolition of the shopping center and school. The current ULRI building, a single-story structure located on more than 4 acres, has been a hub for various social programs and community services.³

By late 2022, the Providence Redevelopment Agency acquired the Urban League's property, and it's slated to be demolished in the latter half of 2024.

Figure I: Former ULRI Site, 246 Prairie Ave



Source: City of Providence

Methodology

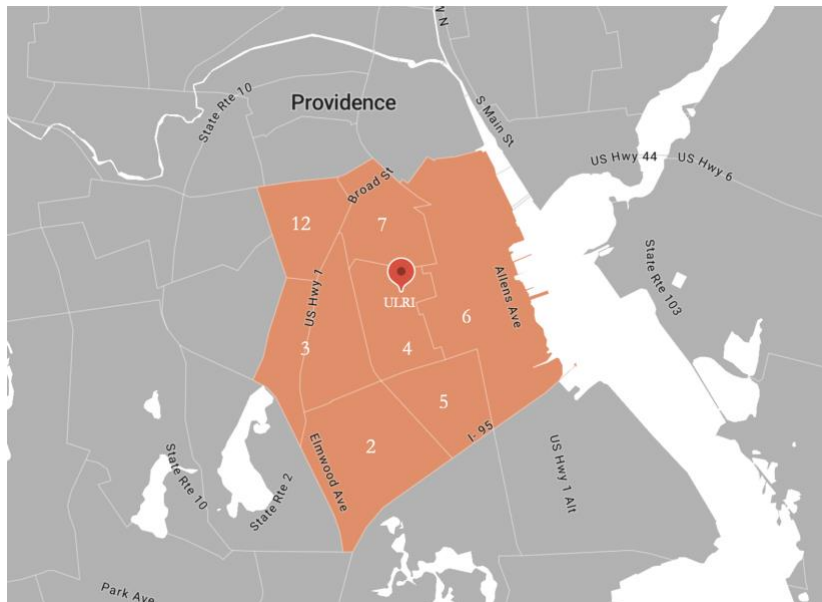
Data sources. To examine demographic changes over 15 years, this analysis utilizes ACS 5-year estimates for the years 2012, 2017, and 2022. These estimates are derived from data collected over five-year periods (e.g., 2012 data represents 2008-2012), ensuring an understanding of long-term trends.

Geographic scope. The geographic scope of the analysis includes the ULRI site at 246 Prairie Avenue (census tract 4) and extends to surrounding census tracts, specifically tracts 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 12. This broader examination allows for a holistic view of the community dynamics and demographic shifts. Figure II below shows the census tracts used in the analysis.

Analytical approach. This analysis employs a quantitative approach to interpret demographic shifts and trends. Key demographic indicators such as population size, age distribution, racial and ethnic composition, income levels, educational attainment, employment status, and household characteristics were analyzed to gauge the social and economic health of the neighborhood. Data analysis was conducted using STATA and tools that facilitate detailed demographic analysis, such as Social Explorer and ACS online data manipulation tools. Lastly, to provide a clearer and more consistent analysis, percentage comparisons are used when possible. This approach accounts for any changes in the census tract boundaries over 15 years, ensuring a more accurate comparison of trends and shifts within the ULRI area over time.

Limitations. There are limitations posed by changes in census tract boundaries, but this analysis addresses it through percentage comparisons to ensure continuity and accuracy in data interpretation. Additionally, while comprehensive, ACS survey estimates come with uncertainties.

Figure II: Census Tracts Surrounding Former ULRI Site



Note: In the figure, census tracts 3.01 and 3.02 are combined into a single tract, labeled as tract 3.
Source: Social Explorer

Population Trends

This section provides an analysis of population trends in the neighborhood surrounding the former ULRI site, focusing on total population, population density, age distribution, gender distribution, and nativity.

Total population. The total population in the analyzed census tracts has experienced significant growth. In 2012, the combined population of these tracts was 28,390. By 2022, this number had increased to 32,293, reflecting a growth rate of approximately 13.7 percent.

Population density. Population density, measured as the number of people per square mile, also reflects this growth. In 2012, the population density was 10,957 people per square mile. By 2022, it had increased to 12,553 people per square mile. This rise in density suggests a higher concentration of residents within the same geographical area, which can have implications for housing, infrastructure, and public services. Increased density often necessitates enhancements in public amenities, transportation networks, and community services.⁴

Age distribution. The age distribution of the population provides insights into the demographic makeup of the neighborhood. Between 2012 and 2022, there were notable changes in various age cohorts. The median age increased from 29.2 years in 2012 to 32.1 years in 2022, indicating an aging population. This shift towards an older median age can impact community planning, particularly in areas such as healthcare, senior services, and housing for older adults. The number of young adults (ages 25-34) saw a significant increase from 3,910 in 2012 to 4,856 in 2022, highlighting a trend towards a younger (and potentially more economically active) population. This influx of young adults can bring vibrancy and economic vitality to the area, spurring growth in local businesses and services. The population of seniors (ages 65 and over) also grew, with those aged 65-74 increasing from 1,379 in 2012 to 1,820 in 2022, and those aged 75 and over increasing as well.

Gender.⁵ The gender distribution in the neighborhood has remained relatively balanced over the years, with a slight increase in both male and female populations. In 2012, the male population was 46 percent, and the female population was 54 percent. By 2022, the male population had increased to 49 percent, while the female population adjusted to 51 percent. This balance suggests that both genders are somewhat equally contributing to the population growth and demographic changes in the area.

Nativity. Nativity data provides insights into the birthplace of the residents and their citizenship status. In 2012, 58 percent of the population were native-born residents and 42 percent were foreign-born residents. Among the foreign-born population, 35 percent were naturalized citizens, and 65 percent were not citizens. By 2022, the number of native-born residents slightly decreased to 52 percent, while the foreign-born population increased to 48 percent. Of the foreign-born population, 48 percent were naturalized citizens, and 52 percent were not citizens. This increase in the foreign-born population highlights the neighborhood's growing diversity and the significant role

of immigration in shaping its demographic profile. The rise in foreign-born residents, particularly those who have naturalized, indicates a community that is becoming more diverse and inclusive.

Overall, the population trends in the neighborhood surrounding the ULRI site indicate robust growth, increased density, a shift towards a younger yet aging population, balanced gender distribution, and greater diversity due to a rising number of foreign-born residents. These trends are crucial for understanding the changing dynamics of the community and for planning future development and resource allocation. By acknowledging these demographic shifts, leaders can better address the needs of the population. Table I below consolidates the ACS data discussed in this section.

Table I: Selected Population Data of ULRI Area

Category	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022	% Δ, '12 to '22
Total Population	28,390	27,901	32,293	14%
Population Density (per sq. mile)	10,957	10,760	12,553	15%
Median Age	29.2	30.7	32.1	10%
Male	46%	49%	49%	6%
Female	54%	51%	51%	-5%
<u>Total Population</u>	100%	100%	100%	
Native Born	58%	61%	52%	-10%
Foreign Born	42%	39%	48%	14%
<i>Naturalized Citizen</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>35%</i>
<i>Not a Citizen</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>-19%</i>
<u>Total Population</u>	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Racial and Ethnic Makeup

This section examines the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood surrounding the ULRI site, focusing on the changes observed between 2012, 2017, and 2022. The analysis highlights the diversity of the community by examining various racial and ethnic groups and the shifts in their population.

The white population has seen a reduction from 12 percent in 2012 to 10 percent in 2022, reflecting broader demographic shifts. The Black population, after peaking at 19 percent in 2017, decreased to 13 percent by 2022. The Asian population (not including Pacific Islanders) saw a decrease from 4 percent in 2012 to 3 percent in 2017, before returning to 4 percent in 2022.

The Hispanic or Latino population, which constitutes a majority in the neighborhood, has grown from 63 percent in 2012 to 70 percent in 2022, indicating a significant demographic shift. The category labeled ‘Other Races,’ which includes American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander among other race and ethnic identities, has fluctuated, with a decrease from 4 percent in 2012 to 3 percent in 2022.

These changes underscore the evolving multicultural landscape of the area, which is crucial for community planning and development initiatives to ensure that community members’ needs and contributions are considered and addressed. Table II shows changes in the racial and ethnic makeup in the ULRI area.

Table II: Racial and Ethnic Makeup of ULRI Neighborhood

Race/Ethnicity	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022	% Δ, ‘12 to ‘22
White	12%	11%	10%	-13%
Black or African American	17%	19%	13%	-26%
Asian	4%	3%	4%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	63%	63%	70%	12%
Other Races	4%	5%	3%	-39%
Total	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Socioeconomic Indicators

This section evaluates the economic well-being of the community through educational attainment, median household income, and poverty status.

Educational attainment. The percentage of residents with less than a high school education decreased from 35 percent in 2012 to 32 percent in 2017, before rising again to 29 percent in 2022. Conversely, there has been a notable increase in higher education levels. Residents with a bachelor's degree increased from 8 percent in 2012 to 11 percent in 2022. Those with a master's degree or higher also increased, from 5 percent in 2012 to 6 percent in 2022. These trends reflect a community that is progressively achieving higher educational levels, which is critical for economic development.

Median household income. The median household income in the ULRI area has seen a steady rise, reflecting improved economic conditions. In 2012, the median household income was \$32,051 (adjusted for inflation). By 2022, this figure had increased to \$40,073. This upward trend indicates that the community is experiencing economic growth, which can contribute to better living standards and increased financial stability for residents.

Poverty. Poverty rates provide crucial insights into the economic challenges faced by the community. In 2012, 38.8 percent of individuals were living below the poverty line. This percentage decreased to 33.2 percent in 2017 and further to 26.1 percent in 2022. While the data shows some improvements, poverty in the area remains high.

Table III: Educational Attainment of People Aged 25+ in the ULRI Area

Education Level	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022		% Δ, '12 to '22
Less Than High School	35%	32%	29%		35%
High School or Equivalent	25%	31%	30%		25%
Some College	26%	24%	24%		26%
Bachelor's Degree	8%	9%	11%		8%
Master's Degree or Higher	5%	3%	6%		5%
<u>Total</u>	100%	100%	100%		

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Table IV: Other Socioeconomic Indicators in the ULRI Area

Indicator	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022		% Δ, '12 to '22
Median Household Income (in 2022 dollars)	\$32,051	\$32,394	\$40,073		25%
Individuals in Poverty	38.8%	33.2%	26.1%		-33%

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Labor Force and Employment

Understanding the labor force and employment dynamics in the ULRI area is crucial for comprehending the community’s economic stability and growth. Analyzing trends in labor force participation, employment sectors, and commute times collectively influence the quality of life and the area’s overall economic development.

Unemployment Rates. Employment rates saw a notable rise, from 9,837 employed individuals in 2012 (76.2 percent employment rate) to 14,000 in 2022 (91.1 percent employment rate). Consequently, the unemployment rate dramatically decreased from 23.8 percent in 2012 to 8.9 percent in 2022, reflecting a substantial improvement in job availability and economic stability in the area.

Employment Sectors. Analyzing the employment sectors for the employed civilian population aged 16 years and over reveals shifts in the job market composition. The private sector remained the dominant employer, although its share decreased slightly from 74.5 percent in 2012 to 69.5 percent in 2022. The public sector maintained a consistent presence, with a minor increase from 7.7 percent in 2012 to 7.6 percent in 2022. The self-employed population saw a slight decrease, from 7.1 percent in 2012 to 7.2 percent in 2022. Notably, employment in private non-profit organizations grew significantly from 10.7 percent in 2012 to 15.4 percent in 2022.

Commute Times. The average commute time for workers in the ULRI area experienced a minor increase over 15 years. In 2012, the average commute time was 22 minutes, which rose to 24 minutes by 2022. This slight increase in commute duration suggests potential changes in traffic patterns, public transportation availability, or residential location choices in relation to where residents work.

Table V: Labor Force, Employment Sectors, and Commute Times in the ULRI Area

Category	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022		% Δ, ‘12 to ‘22
Unemployment Rate	23.8%	17.7%	8.9%		-62.6%
Sector					
Private Sector	74.5%	73.0%	69.5%		-6.7%
Public Sector	7.7%	8.6%	7.6%		-1.3%
Self-Employed	7.1%	6.4%	7.2%		1.4%
Non-Profit	10.7%	11.9%	15.4%		43.9%
Other	0.0%	0.2%	0.3%		
Average Commute Time	22	23	24		9%

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Household Characteristics

This section analyzes household types, housing occupancy, and housing tenure to understand living arrangements and housing stability.

Family versus non-family households. The composition of households in the neighborhood has evolved over 15 years. ACS 2012 data reveal that family households made up 68 percent of all households, while non-family households constituted 32 percent. By 2022, the proportion of family households had decreased to 58 percent, whereas non-family households increased to 42 percent. This indicates a trend towards a higher number of non-family households, which could be attributed to various factors such as changing social dynamics and housing preferences.

Housing occupancy. Housing occupancy rates have also seen notable changes. In 2012, 86 percent of housing units were occupied, with 14 percent vacant. By 2022, the occupancy rate had increased to 92 percent, with the vacancy rate dropping to 8 percent. The increase in both total and occupied housing units suggests a growing demand for housing in the neighborhood, likely driven by population growth and urban development.

Residential occupancy status. The trends in residential occupancy reveal shifts in the balance between owner-occupied and renter-occupied units. In 2012, owner-occupied units accounted for 24 percent of all occupied housing units, while renter-occupied units made up 76 percent. By 2022, the proportion of owner-occupied units had slightly increased to 25 percent, while renter-occupied units remained steady at 75 percent. This significant rise in renter-occupied units indicates a trend towards renting over homeownership, which may reflect affordability issues, housing market dynamics, or lifestyle preferences.

Table VI: Household Characteristics of ULRI Area

Category	ACS 2012	ACS 2017	ACS 2022		% Δ, '12 to '22
Occupied Housing Units	86%	85%	92%		7%
Vacant Housing Units	14%	15%	8%		-42%
<u>Total Housing Units</u>	100%	100%	100%		0%
Owner-Occupied Units	24%	25%	25%		1%
Renter-Occupied Units	76%	75%	75%		0%
<u>Occupied Housing Units</u>	100%	100%	100%		
Family Households	68%	68%	58%		-14%
Non-Family Households	32%	32%	42%		29%
<u>Occupied Housing Units</u>	100%	100%	100%		

Source: Analysis of ACS data

Conclusion

The demographic and socioeconomic analysis surrounding the ULRI site reveals a neighborhood experiencing vibrant growth and increasing diversity. Over a 15-year period, the area witnessed a 14 percent population increase and a 15 percent rise in population density. This growth has been accompanied by a notable diversification, with the proportion of foreign-born residents rising. At the same time, socioeconomic improvements are evident, highlighted by a 25 percent increase in median household income and a significant reduction in poverty rates from 38.8 percent to 26.1 percent.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist, particularly in educational attainment and housing stability. The data shows a gap in higher education levels among residents, suggesting a need for enhanced educational programs and resources. The housing landscape has also evolved, with a shift towards renter-occupied units, pointing to potential issues of housing affordability and availability that need addressing to ensure long-term residential stability.

¹ For brevity, I will refer to the 2008-2012 ACS data as “2012 data.” The same applies for the 2017 and 2022 ACS data.

² For more information, see: “246 Prairie Ave: What’s next for the former Urban League Property,” City of Providence, <https://www.providenceri.gov/planning/246-prairie-ave/> and “Urban League of Rhode Island,” <https://ulri.org>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For more information, see: Steffen Lehmann, “Understanding the Benefits of Urban Density,” Urban Regeneration, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-04711-5_3.

⁵ A limitation of the ACS data is that it only includes information on male and female genders, excluding nonbinary and other gender identities, which restricts the comprehensiveness of gender-related analyses.