

## PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

### Position Statement to the Providence City Council Committee on Ordinances Regarding proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance relating to Gilbane Development Company's 257 Thayer Street Proposal

June 26, 2012

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Before PPS can endorse changes to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, the following outstanding issues (ranked in priority order) must be explored:

**1. Address critical neighborhood preservation issues of much-greater-than-allowed density and the removal of historic properties.** This could be achieved by scaling back projects, and/or by relocating individual buildings to adjacent or nearby parcels.

**2. Develop a more substantive plan for "Thayer Street District 2020" over the next 6-8 months under the direction of Providence Planning Department with the support of Brown University** that includes real protections for historic resources, (including the local "landmarking" of certain structures, and a survey/evaluation of buildings), which has buy-in from as many of the concerned parties as possible. We should be able to communicate the input of various stakeholders (including neighboring residents, neighboring institutions, commercial-property owners, business owners, and students) in terms of scale, what the district can reasonably accommodate, and then receive some assurance from the City that there are agreed upon processes in place to uphold and enforce these goals, rather than merely anticipating how to subvert the goals. We would also suggest an in-depth inspection of properties in the district to ensure that they meet code be undertaken by the City immediately.

The proposed 257 Thayer Street project should not go forward until the following planning goals are achieved:

- A fact-based; data-based planning study/process is concluded.
- The study/process (funded in part by Brown and run by the City) defines and incorporates the entire Thayer Street area, addressing the existing institutional zone parcels and the role of the Thayer St. Business Improvement District
- The study/process addresses existing historic resources, economic development, density, use, and design.

**3. Establish a process for approval of new projects that is predictable for developers, property owners, business owners, and neighbors,** and which would state clearly what is not allowed. The scenario preferred by PPS would include the establishment of a **design review overlay district** for the Thayer Street area. This process would always include substantial participation from PPS and CHNA.

**4. Improve the design of the individual projects, and the District, based on guidelines,** beginning with 257 Thayer, and its immediate environs. The 257 Thayer project, if approved, should be reduced in density, further fragmented in massing, and more carefully integrated visually with the historic properties in its immediate environs.

**5. *Limit damage to previously agreed upon neighborhood plan by making the changes far less sweeping.*** This is currently being addressed by Councilman Zurier through their proposal to limit the changes to zoning to only the nine lots within the 257 Thayer project.