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Providence City Council, City Hall
Councilman Sam Zurier
25 Dorrance Street, Room 310
Providence, RI 02903

April 18, 2012

Dear Councilman Zurier,

The College Hill Neighborhood Association (CHNA) Board of Directors has formed a response regarding the 257 Thayer Street Gilbane Development Company proposal. After reviewing materials from the developer, feedback from residents, and discussions with various stakeholders, the CHNA Board of Directors has determined that there has not been sufficient time or adequate materials available for the CHNA Board of Directors to be able to clearly endorse or oppose the proposed 257 Thayer Street student residence project. The CHNA Board of Directors has therefore voted unanimously to abstain from voting directly on this project. It is our intent, moving forward, to be proactive in our approach and collaborate effectively to preserve the best interest of the residents of College Hill and the greater community.

The College Hill Neighborhood Association Board of Directors has voted unanimously to provide the City Council and the Providence City Planning Department the following recommendations for the 257 Thayer Street / Gilbane Development Company proposal or any other high-density development project proposed for this area going forward.

- 1. Slow down the process.** The city recently finalized a long-term comprehensive plan and a neighborhood plan, both of which were developed with extensive participation from residents of the affected areas. Any major zoning changes that affect density as greatly as the proposed project should go back to the residents through a charrette to determine if such zoning changes would be to the benefit of the community.
- 2. Consider multiple projects together.** The proposed zoning change for the 257 Thayer Street apartment building should be considered in conjunction with the hotel and dorm proposed for neighboring blocks since they would greatly affect each other's design, scale and impact on the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, the relative merits of an apartment building should be weighed against other prospective projects to maximize the impact on economic development.
- 3. Guaranteed placement on the tax rolls.** As described, the proposed 257 Thayer Street student residence project could be of interest to Brown in the future and we request a guarantee that the property will never be taken off the tax rolls. This could take the form of a "poison pill" contractual obligation from the developer or then-current owner to the city, such as a lump sum payment or annuity, which would take effect should the property ever be transferred to an entity exempt from property taxes.

4. Hiring of a locally sensitive architect. The most universal feedback specific to the 257 Thayer Street apartment building project as proposed has been the inadequacy of its design. The building should be one that will make the city and Thayer Street proud for years to come. We request that this or any project for the area be designed by an architect who has demonstrated design sensitivity to the local contexts.

5. Review and approval of design by PHDC or other appropriate design review board. We request that the design of any approved high-density project be subject to approval by PHDC or a City Council appointed board of local experts who can ensure the structure will fit with local architecture as well as exhibit excellence in design in its own right.

6. Issuance of a completion bond. Any project that involves demolition of multiple historic residences should be guaranteed with a completion bond so the city does not risk a change in economic factors leaving behind an incomplete project that would be a blight on the neighborhood.

7. Proper abatement of hazardous materials and low-impact demolition. Historic properties in various states of disrepair should be expected to have layers of lead paint and possibly asbestos and other hazards. These properties lie directly adjacent to Wheeler School and measures need to be taken to protect the school from health hazards and potential cleanup costs. Children are present on and in the areas surrounding the Wheeler property throughout the summer as well as during the school year.

8. Preservation should not be dismissed. The city has been recognized nationally for making preservation a priority and should not dismiss it completely in favor of economic factors, nor should it dismiss economic development for preservation at any cost. We ask that if the comprehensive plan is modified to support higher density development in these areas, that any potential projects for these properties should be weighed against each other in part by considering their ability to preserve and restore as many historic properties as possible. Currently the proposed 257 Thayer Street apartment does not offer any preservation benefits at all.

We thank you for your time and consideration of our role in this matter.

Sincerely,



Allison Spooner, President
College Hill Neighborhood Association

cc: Robert Gilbane, Gilbane Development Company
Robert Azar, Director of Current Planning