



Summit News

January 2003

Miriam Project Clears Health Department

Miriam Hospital overcame a challenge by the SNA and received approval from the Department of Health (DOH) to go ahead with its construction plans. The hospital plans to tear down two buildings on its main campus and replace them with a single, larger building which would eventually rise to over four stories in height.

The SNA argued in its challenge that Miriam hospital had considered and rejected several lower cost alternatives, including renovating existing space and building a smaller building, that would have met their project objectives and saved money. The DOH must factor cost into their decision, since the capital expenditures of hospitals impact local health care costs.

Of course, the SNA is concerned not only with the health care system, but with the prospect of Miriam once again expanding its operations on its main campus in the heart of our one- and two-family residential neighborhood.

Miriam underutilizes prime commercially-zoned properties that it owns, and on which it pays no taxes, nearby on North Main Street. The former Sears Department Store building, Miriam's least viable building, remains boarded up and mostly vacant (a cardiac rehabilitation unit occupies part of the building). The former arena site between Second and Third Streets provides only surface parking.

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Unwelcome Changes for Hope Street

Richard Nilo, the owner of 783 Hope Street, is proceeding with his suburban strip-mall style building with parking in front, at the corner of Hope and Burlington, despite overwhelming opposition by neighbors and city officials. The Boston-based developer has received calls and letters urging him to rethink his plan for that site. Department of Planning and Development Director Sam Shamoon urged him to consider an alternative site layout. Undeterred and lacking any legal obstacles, Mr. Nilo is forging ahead with a building and a parking lot

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SNA opposes CVS's plan to replace this sign.

North Main Project Slated for Spring

All through the past year and a half, a volunteer subcommittee of the Summit Neighborhood Association (SNA) has continued to monitor the progress of the R.I. Department of Transportation's (RIDOT) repaving plans for North Main Street. Readers will recall that due to our involvement, with support from Coun-

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State Approves Summit Historic District

The State Review Board gave an enthusiastic thumbs up to the Summit Avenue Historic District at a meeting in December. Among the first Twentieth-Century districts to be nominated in the state, the Summit nomination is the first of two that the Providence Preservation Society is working on in our neighbor-

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City Reconsiders I-Zone

The Providence Preservation Society and the Department of Planning and Development have invited neighborhood groups and institutions to attend an ongoing series of meetings to consider changes to the Institutional Zone ordinance. I-zones overlay existing zones and relax the underlying restrictions. They are drawn around college and hospital campuses, and are supposed to represent a compromise. The bargain is that these institutions get a freer hand to make changes, but in exchange they must limit their growth to their I-zone, and they must coordinate their campus plans with the City by filing an institutional master plan.

Established in 1994, the I-zone was a response to the unchecked growth of institutions like Miriam Hospital that had purchased and demolished whole blocks of

houses to make way for new buildings and parking lots.

The I-zone ordinance has failed the city's neighborhoods in several ways. The height and use restrictions in the existing ordinance allow huge commercial-type buildings to be built across the street from single family homes. The institutional master plan requirement has no teeth in it, which allowed Miriam to submit its 1995 five-year master plan in September of 1999. And the ordinance has discouraged institutions from expanding into commercial and industrial zones, where they ought to be encouraged to locate.

The SNA is participating in these discussions and helping to craft a zoning ordinance that we hope will protect neighborhoods, serve institutions and encourage sensible land use throughout our City.

Hope Street

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that is not welcome in our neighborhood.

A few blocks to the north, CVS Corporation recently renovated their Hope Street Store. They would like to make some changes to the exterior, and representatives of the company recently met with the SNA board to consider them. CVS will require relief from zoning regulations to add some signs to the building and to replace the pole sign near the corner of Hope and Lauriston.

The new, free-standing sign CVS has proposed looks very nice, but it would include an "animated" electronic sign. Zoning regulations prohibit such a sign in a low-density commercial zone like Hope Street. There are no other such signs along the street, and the SNA board told CVS that it would oppose a variance for such a sign. The

board feels it would be garish, distracting, and out of character with the street. Also, it would open the door for other businesses to propose such signs, threatening an arms race of poor taste.

Not backing down, CVS has signalled that it may bring the matter before the zoning board anyway. The SNA stands firm and will oppose it. As for Mr. Nilo's strip mall, the SNA supports a proposal that will change the zoning regulations to prohibit such development on streets like Hope Street. It is too late to stop his project, which is already underway, but it will prevent this sort of thing from happening in the future.

It is notable that both of these projects are one-size-fits-all solutions from nonlocal decision-makers. We are sure Mr. Nilo's other strip malls dot the landscape, and CVS plans to put electronic signs on all of their stores. But not all commercial

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corridors are alike, and what might be appropriate on North Main Street or Mineral Spring Avenue is not appropriate on Hope Street.

The character of the Hope Street business district, a pedestrian friendly "urban main street" lined with small independent stores and restaurants, gives Summit Neighborhood much of its charm and appeal. Let's recognize what makes Hope Street both profitable for business and attractive to neighbors and work together to keep it that way.

Yard Sale in May

The success of our annual Yard Sale depends on contributions from neighbors. Please consider donating old furniture, appliances, clothing, books, CDs and other items gathering dust in your attic or destined for the trash. Look for an announcement in our May newsletter.

Historic District

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hood. The Summit Avenue district includes the area bordered by Rochambeau, Camp, Memorial, Creston, and Summit. The second district, which has been named the Elmgrove Gardens Historic District, will be submitted to the state in February. It is bordered by Rochambeau, Morris, Woodbury and Cole.

These nominations are the first fruits of a collaboration between the Summit Neighborhood Association and PPS that began seven years ago with a call for volunteers to research and photograph the neighborhood. The Summit nomination will now go on to the National Parks Service for final approval. The SNA and PPS are committed to identifying other parts of our neighborhood that are eligible for historic district status, either by expanding established districts or proposing new ones.

Business Scene

Three construction projects are underway on Hope Street. At the south end, work has begun on the library renovation and addition. Across Rochambeau, work continues on the former Lad & Lassie store at 744 Hope Street, but no word yet on what businesses will be moving in. Finally, the strip mall at 783 Hope Street has broken ground.

Congratulations to Lynn and Jim Williams, owners of **Seven Stars Bakery**, who were recognized by the Providence Preser-

vation Society with an Adaptive Reuse Award for their sensitive restoration of an old Art Deco gas station at 802 Hope Street.

We are saddened to report the closing of the **Park Place Grille** at 959 Hope Street, due to the sudden and unexpected death of owner and chef Susan Hand last October.

On North Main Street, **Jazz Masters** nightclub has closed. **Rhode Island Spine Center** is now at 600 Pawtucket Avenue.

Miriam

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Among the filings submitted by the hospital to the DOH is an investment report from Moody's Investors Service. The report notes that "[Miriam's] operating profits have increased in each of the last three years.... Future growth and financial improvement will be limited by the current campus configuration which has limited on-site parking and a landlocked facility...."

What is Miriam's long-term plan for growth? The institutional zone limits their expansion, within the neighborhood, to land on which they have already built. The parking lots on Summit Avenue and on Seventh Street are zoned residential. Do

they plan to keep building upward? Or are they simply waiting for neighbors to become complacent, for the political winds to blow their way, so they can redraw the boundaries and expand outward?

We worry that investing \$23 million in their main campus now creates momentum for change in the future. In five or ten years when they need to expand again, will they cite this investment as justification for changes in zoning?

No one expects Miriam to pack up and move all their operations to North Main Street. But that is where their momentum should be. The main campus is as big as it should get, and the hospital needs to plan for its long-term growth elsewhere.

Join The Summit Neighborhood Association

Complete this form and mail it to: *Summit Neighborhood Association
Box 41092, Providence, RI 02940.*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Enclosed is \$10.00 for **2003** Individual Family Membership

(Make checks payable to *Summit Neighborhood Association*).

I am concerned and would like to help with SNA activities. I am particularly interested in working on the following:

I can leaflet _____

North Main

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cilman Jackson, RIDOT agreed to merge two of their projects into one. The first involved the repaving, which is sorely needed as residents have seen. The other project involved upgrading and re-synchronizing the traffic lights. Planning for the merger of these two projects unfortunately led to a year's delay in starting the repaving, but the benefit for area residents, travelers, and businesses is that the street will be torn up once instead of twice. RIDOT now expects the work to begin this spring, 2003.

The project will extend from the south at the intersection of Charles and Orms Streets, along Charles, then up Randall Street to North Main and continuing all the way north to the Pawtucket boundary just past Hillside Avenue.

The subcommittee also spent time doing several on-site inspections, once with RIDOT representatives, planning for more trees (including replacement of dead ones) and smaller plantings in the median strips and along sidewalk edges to beautify North Main Street. Some deteriorated sections of sidewalk will be replaced as well. By federal mandate, RIDOT will also be modifying all sidewalk corners along the street for handicap accessibility. Additional improvements SNA sought will include widening of the narrow center median, with plantings installed, on the approach to Tenth Street from both directions where the turning lane is longer now than needed since Sears closed years ago. Lastly, another change we sought, the conversion of Smithfield Avenue to two-way at the intersection with North Main, has been postponed. Complications that arose during planning forced RIDOT to delay this part of the project.

How You Can Help

Want to help but not sure how? Come to a board meeting. They are held the second Wednesday of each month and members and visitors are always welcome. Call or email to confirm the time and place.

Become a member. Your membership dollars help pay for this newsletter and the other things we do. Volunteer to leaflet - our leafleters help us get the word out to more than 4500 households.

Consider joining the board. Board members are expected to attend monthly board meetings, to leaflet, and to help out with with at least one other activity or event. If you are a member in good standing, you can nominate yourself at the annual meeting, or contact us beforehand to submit your name.

Summit Neighborhood Association

Annual Meeting

Tuesday, February 4th, 2003

7pm - 9pm

Hillside Health Center

99 Hillside Avenue

Agenda

- 6:30 Refreshments
- 7:00 Welcome and Summary of Activities
- 7:10 Election of Officers and Board for 2003
- 7:20 Q & A with City and State Representatives
- 8:30 Q & A with Police Officers
- 9:00 Adjourn

Free and open to all

Memberships and SNA T-shirts available at the door

Members please bring \$10 dues for 2003

Free parking