Downtown Sidewalk Repair: State and City Partnerships

The Downtown Improvement District (DID) is partnering with both city and state officials to ensure that downtown sidewalk repairs move forward. In order to repair particularly dangerous brick sidewalks in the downtown district, the DID has agreed to a 50/50 match program with the City of Providence, totaling $50,000. Working with John Nickelson, Director of the Department of Public Works, the DID has already completed an inventory of brick sidewalks that need immediate attention. Repairs are expected to be completed within the next few months. Thanks to Councilor John Lombardi, the Department of Public Works and the Downtown Neighborhood Alliance, city bond funds will also be used to pay for additional downtown sidewalk improvements.

On the state level, the DID is working with Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) to repair the worst sections of sidewalks in the district along Washington, Westminster and Weybosset streets. RIDOT has allocated $900,000 for the project, and final plans are currently under review. Although some tasks have already been completed, the majority of the work will be bid this winter for completion in the spring and summer of 2009. By advocating for the repairs and helping RIDOT to coordinate the plans, the DID has been instrumental in keeping the funding for the project alive.

According to Bob Smith of RIDOT, "this project is a collaborative effort between the State and City of Providence to provide necessary improvements for pedestrians in the downtown area." He adds that "close coordination and a positive working relationship with the DID has enabled us to overcome several design challenges, and will produce a better final product."

People making a Difference in Kennedy Plaza:

SERGEANT GEORGE SMITH

When Sergeant Smith arrived in Kennedy Plaza earlier this year, the culture had to change. He began to focus on quality of life issues, and he involved the property owners and business community in the conversation. By listening to what the community perceived as problems, he took steps to make the transit station a safer place for those who travel.

To address loitering, Sergeant Smith developed a rough draft of a city ordinance, which mirrored the state statute, and submitted it to the City Solicitor. Councilman Cliff Wood sponsored the ordinance, and it has now been signed by the Mayor and passed into law. Although it is only used as a last resort, when subjects are warned for several days, the ordinance gives police the tools to prevent loitering in the Plaza. This has made a significant difference.

Sergeant Smith would like to see the Kennedy Plaza area become the "heart and soul" of the city. He believes that there is a "metamorphosis happening in the area, and people are taking notice." The parks that surround the plaza are becoming active with new programming, and they’re comfortable places for families to spend time. We know that Sergeant Smith has played a significant role in making those changes.
OFFICE MARKETING
To promote the downtown’s office sector more aggressively, the DID has partnered with The Providence Foundation to create a downtown office marketing brochure that supplements efforts by the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, the Providence Department of Planning and Economic Development, and the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. With suggestions from local officials and members of the downtown real estate community, the staff has created a document that highlights opportunities downtown, focusing on its central location between Boston and New York, attractive spaces ranging from Class A offices to historic lofts, and the variety of commuting options for employees, among other assets. The updated brochure will be distributed to brokers and economic development agencies, and is available for downloading on the downtown website: www.providencedowntown.com. An inventory of available office space has also been posted online.

CLEAN & SAFE UPDATES
May 1, 2008 through September 30, 2008

Clean Team:
Trash removed (in lbs): 113,735
Graffiti tags removed: 894
Stickers/handbills removed: 701

Combined Clean & Safe Team:
Pedestrian assistance: 7,522
Property/business contacts: 3,410
Motorist assistance: 18
Passive panhandling: 292
Aggressive panhandling: 67

BOARD CHANGES
The DID welcomes former Vice-Chair Bob Gagliardi in his new role as Chairman of the organization. We also thank former Chairman Evan Granoff, who remains an active Board member today, for his leadership since the DID’s inception in 2005, and congratulate him on his citation from Mayor David N. Cicilline, recognizing his service. In addition, we want to express our appreciation to Stanley Weiss, who recently completed his term as Treasurer on the Board.

AUDIT
Lefkowitz, Garfinkel, Champi & DeRienzo P.C. (LGC&D) recently completed an audit of the DID. Their report had no findings, and stated that the organization is in a solid financial position. To review a copy of the audit, please call the DID office: (401) 421-4450.
PLANTERS: TRANSITIONING TO FALL
This past summer, the DID continued its flourishing planting program by doubling the number of hanging baskets filled with flowers from Lincoln Gardens greenhouse. Along with colorful ground-level planting areas and large planters on sidewalks, the baskets softened the cityscape with greenery and bright blooms. DID staff learned several lessons about plant selection, and will take them into consideration when choosing next year’s greenery. In the hanging baskets, you’ll likely see vincas replacing the sweet potato vines, which grew at an incredibly fast pace, producing several hundred pounds of potatoes! DID Chairman Bob Gagliardi has commented that “the plantings throughout the district show a high level of care. The DID Clean Team has done a great job maintaining them in a timely manner.” The plantings were the focus of a September 23rd Providence Journal editorial, and have been a frequent topic of conversation in the city throughout the summer.

Although the hanging baskets have already been removed for the fall, seasonal ground-level plantings are now in place. You’ll also see plenty of color on light poles in the next few months, as the DID will help to install holiday wreaths and artistic banners in select locations.

MORE TREES DOWNTOWN
Downtown Providence is getting greener! This fall, 24 trees will be planted in empty tree wells throughout the district, while the 24 remaining unusable tree wells will be paved over with concrete and brick. Stumps will be removed from all areas, and once the project is complete, every visible downtown well will be filled with a tree! In order to beautify our city streets for years to come and make this happen, City Forester Doug Still agreed to contribute $4,000 in a 50/50 match with the DID.

DOWNTOWN LIGHTING PROJECT
Let there be light! With encouragement from the DID, the City of Providence recently spent $76,000 to upgrade lighting in 3 separate areas within the district, including the highly visible Emmett Square intersection at the corner of Francis Street and Exchange Terrace. With this effort, downtown streets will be brighter and safer!

TRASH RECEPTACLES
Through a $20,000 Community Development Block Grant, the DID purchased 30 new trash receptacles from The Steel Yard, and donated them to the City of Providence to replace older cans. Between the private receptacles in front of downtown buildings, the city receptacles, and those owned by the DID, we now have a total of 173 trash cans in the downtown area.

GRAFFITI REMOVAL
The DID continues to partner with individual property owners to eliminate graffiti in hard-to-reach places. On a separate note, we are pleased to announce that DID equipment will soon be stored securely in the Union Street Garage, beside the Courtyard Marriott. In this new location, the chemicals used for graffiti removal are less likely to freeze, allowing the DID to extend its work throughout the winter.

STREET SIGNAGE
In an excellent partnership, Frank LaTorre, DID Director of Public Space, has completed an inventory of street signage on every downtown intersection, to share with Bernard Lebby, Director of Traffic and Engineering for the City. With a $15,000 contribution from the DID toward the total cost of the project, the City should be able to construct and install new street signs and install several new poles next spring. The purple signs will continue to identify three distinct districts within downtown: the Financial District, Cathedral Square, and the Downtown Arts District.

In November, a group will meet again to review the signage progress. Future goals include the installation of generic blue signs leading to parking lots, featuring a large white “P” along with the creation of a complete wayfinding system.

HOSPITALITY RESOURCE PARTNERSHIP
The Mayor’s Substance Abuse Prevention Council and the Hospitality Resource Partnership (HRP) sponsored two days of training for Providence bar and nightclub staff led by nationally-recognized specialist Robert Smith, CEO of Nightclub Security Consultants. During the workshops at The Hotel Providence on October 4th and 5th, bar owners, managers and security employees addressed topics such as crowd management, conflict resolution, and underage serving. Following the training, Mr. Smith will complete a report filled with recommendations, and will continue on as part of the team.

The DID was instrumental in creating the HRP in 2007, with a goal of creating a safer, more vibrant arts and cultural environment downtown. Since its beginning, great progress has been made. Three task forces meet on a regular basis to discuss community standards and regulations, community policing, and the responsible beverage service task force.

In addition, Frank LaTorre recently participated in a panel discussion at the International Downtown Association Conference in Calgary, Canada, about HRP successes in Providence.
KENNEDY PLAZA

Since Project for Public Spaces, a New York based nonprofit organization, led stakeholder meetings last spring, the community has witnessed positive changes in programming and security in Kennedy Plaza. The Greater Kennedy Plaza Working Group has programmed several weekly events throughout the summer-including Public Market Tuesdays, Market Bazaar Thursdays, and a Farmers Market on Fridays. Although the Farm Fresh Rhode Island Farmers Market had been located in Biltmore Park (in the vicinity of Kennedy Plaza) for three seasons, current sales are about 20% higher than they were in 2007. Organizers attribute this recent success to several factors including the market’s movement to a more visible spot beside Washington Street, the increased marketing and promotions for the park, and the introduction of movable café tables and chairs. In addition to the regular programming, exciting special events-such as the Indie Arts Fest and the Providence Street Painting Festival-have also called Kennedy Plaza home. The community will build upon this season’s successes, and will continue to improve the parks, transit center, and surrounding blocks. For more information, visit: http://www.kennedyplaza.org/.

NEW BUSINESSES

CW28, (WLWC-TV) 275 Westminster
Hampton Inn & Suites, 58 Weybosset (coming soon)
Heir Antiques, 65 Eddy
Petit Mange, (crepes and panini) 99 Weybosset
Gourmet Heaven, (grocery store) 171 Weybosset (coming soon)
T-Mobile, 10 Dorrance (coming soon)
Ardeo, (restaurant) One Union Station (coming soon)