PART III--RENEWAL OF COLLEGE HILL

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

The College Hill Study, as an intensive city planning effort, considers the broad range of community problems which beset any old residential section of a city. In this part of the report, Renewal of College Hill, the lessons and techniques for historic analysis and preservation developed in the previous parts are incorporated into planning and urban renewal programs. Part Three is organized as follows:

3-A. Description of College Hill, which presents the physical, social and economic characteristics;

3-B. General Plan, which contains recommendations on overall matters such as zoning, land use, traffic, schools, and recreation;

3-C. Detailed Proposals, which present in detail the specific projects both in text and drawing form; and

3-D. Recommended Program, which contains a slate of actions linking the specific proposals to private and public groups and individuals. The principal recommendations proposed in this section are listed below:

- An urban renewal project, which will include much of the historic area and will combine three areas which were recommended for redevelopment study in 1951. The proposed project would employ three types of renewal action; clearance, rehabilitation (particularly of historic structures) and conservation.

- The development of a historic trail along Benefit Street, recommended to act as a stimulant to home owners to maintain their properties, as well as to provide a unique attraction for local residents and out of state visitors. In conjunction with the trail, it is proposed that national historic park status be given to the Roger Williams' Spring site, accommodations for visitors be provided, and various museum type facilities be introduced.

- A long-range plan for the growth of major educational institutions in College Hill, which takes into consideration the needs of the institutions and the community. It recommends areas for expansion based on growth predictions and reserves space for certain land uses according to projected demands for space.

- Recommendations for community facilities, which include a 550 pupil elementary school to be located in the northern part of the area, 5 acres of park space, and 2.7 acres of play space.

- A special zoning ordinance to protect the area of historic architecture.

- Changes in the existing zoning ordinance to be made both for the zoning map and for the zoning regulations.

- Traffic proposals intended to reduce traffic on Benefit Street, improve intersection conditions along George M. Cohan Boulevard, and at Smith Street. A program for increasing off-street parking to meet the present demand of 725 cars which will grow to 1,155 by 1968 and 1,825 by 1983.

- Plans for two major sections of the study area are suggested. The study area naturally divides into a section lending itself to the urban renewal program and an institutional section. Separate plans are set forth for each.

- Detailed proposals for private projects made as part of an urban renewal program, including new single family and multi-family housing, new commercial buildings, an inn and motel, and various other developments.
III A--DESCRIPTION OF COLLEGE HILL
III A--DESCRIPTION OF COLLEGE HILL

SUMMARY

The 381 acres included in the College Hill study area comprise most of the original seventeenth century settlement. The area is located on the east side of the city of Providence; it is surrounded by traffic arteries and is bounded on the east and north by residential sections, on the south by a small industrial area, and across an open expanse on the west, by the central business district. It is situated on a steep hillside which rises abruptly from a flat strip of land skirting rivers leading into the head waters of Narragansett Bay. This steep hill has helped the area to retain some of its early character.

Population studies show that 13,000 people live in College Hill, of whom over 3,000 are students and about 2,000 are non-white. The studies also show that, while population is decreasing in other parts of the city, the College Hill population is increasing.

There are approximately 1,700 structures in the area, 300 of which are eighteenth or early nineteenth century buildings. Housing conditions in the residential area vary greatly, ranging from slum to mansion. Concentrations of low rent, tenant-occupied houses are located in the northern and southwestern parts of the area, where conditions of overcrowding and building deterioration are also prevalent.

Public and institutional uses account for one-quarter of the land in the area. Major educational institutions, including Brown University, Pembroke College, and the Rhode Island School of Design, are situated in the middle of the area and tend to split the residential sections into northern and southern parts. Hope High School, occupying the largest parcel of public land, is located in the northeast corner of the area. Assessment data indicate an abnormally high amount of tax exempt property in the area.

Commercial uses are limited, and are primarily related to the neighborhood except for a strip of warehouses, wholesale outlets and parking lots adjacent to the central business district. A shopping center north of Waterman Street serves the colleges and the residents of College Hill. A smaller shopping district has developed along Wickenden Street for the Fox Point neighborhood.
PERIPHERAL AREAS

College Hill is primarily an institutional and residential area situated within walking distance of the Providence central business district which lies just to the west. It is bounded on the north by Olney Street, on the east by Hope Street, on the south by George M. Cohan Boulevard, and on the west by the Providence and Moshassuck Rivers.

North of Olney Street lies a blighted residential section known as Lippitt Hill. Under the city's urban renewal program, final planning is nearing completion for the renewal of this area. Northwest of College Hill is one of the city's three major industrial areas, part of which, West River, has recently been cleared for another urban renewal project. It is separated from the study area by the railroad and U. S. Route 1, the city's principal links to points north. On the northeast, extending from Hope Street to the Seekonk River, lies a good residential section.

The area east of Hope Street is divided into a northern and southern part by a strip of doctors' offices and apartment buildings two-blocks wide which terminates in local shopping centers at either end. On the north side of the strip, and just to the east of the College Hill area, lie two large institutional tracts: one, the grounds of Moses Brown School, a private school for boys; and the other, the former Dexter Asylum grounds recently purchased by Brown University to be developed for athletic facilities, parking, and other institutional uses. South of this strip extends a good residential area which shows signs of blight at its southern extremity.

George M. Cohan Boulevard, which skirts the southern edge of College Hill is the main route into the city from southeastern Masachusetts. Beyond the barrier of the heavily-traveled boulevard lies a narrow strip of land containing a few isolated houses, vacant land, a variety of industrial buildings, a scrap iron depot, and a railroad spur. It is here, from Fox Point, that boats depart on trips to Newport and Block Island. Occasional inundation, when hurricanes come up Narragansett Bay, has been a detriment to a more substantial kind of development in this area.

Downtown Providence lies immediately to the west of College Hill. Part of the financial district is on the edge of the downtown area and overlaps the western part of the study area for a few blocks. The area known as Market Square bridges the Providence River and provides the principal link between College Hill and downtown for motorists and the many pedestrians who walk to work or shopping from their homes on College Hill. North of Market Square, the main line of the New Haven Railroad separates College Hill from the State House grounds and a vast parking lot serving downtown Providence. South of Market Square, the Providence River cuts off College Hill from the city except for two bridges; the old Point Street Bridge which handles traffic coming from south of the city, and the new Providence River Bridge, a part of the freeway system which will eventually form a traffic loop around the central business district.

It can be seen, then, that College Hill is strongly related to its peripheral areas and any planning proposals must take this relationship into account. To the north and east, the neighborhoods are residential in character. They are contiguous with those in College Hill and will influence decisions concerning recreation, schools, and shopping facilities. To the west and south, definite physical boundaries exist, and planning relationships with adjoining areas will be concerned primarily with traffic problems.
TOPOGRAPHY

From the time of the first settlement, the steep topography of College Hill has influenced its architectural growth and street layout. Skirting the western boundary between the rivers and North and South Main Streets is a strip of flat land one-block wide on which most of the commercial uses are found. The hill rises abruptly to the east of this strip and reaches an elevation of 200 feet in just three blocks. This uniformly steep grade exists along the entire west side of College Hill and has discouraged the expansion of the commercial area. Consequently, a large collection of old residential building has remained relatively untouched. The steep grade has made east-west circulation difficult and there are only two through streets in this direction: Angell and Waterman Streets carry the bulk of the traffic through the center of College Hill.

Although the steep slope presents difficulties in building construction, it affords some excellent sites with a view of the entire city for residential development. Some of the low land along the Providence River and at the head of the bay has not been completely suitable for development because of periodic inundation from hurricane waters, a situation which will, however, be corrected within a few years with construction of a barrier dam at Fox Point, now being designed by the army engineers.

The topological map shows contours at intervals of 10 feet starting at elevation 10 feet along Canal and South Water Streets which run parallel to the Moshassuck and Providence Rivers lying just to the west.
ASSESSED VALUATION

The accompanying map shows the total assessed valuation, including land and buildings, in College Hill. The areas of low valuation, under $1.50 per square foot, coincide, in general, with blighted residential districts, although a small group of merchant mansions with large grounds also falls within this category. A similarly low level of assessment occurs in the shopping district on Wickenden Street, an indication that it is not a prime commercial area. Areas assessed at $1.50 to $3.00 include most of the low density residential neighborhoods and a large part of the commercial strip along North and South Main Streets. This comparatively low level of valuation for the commercial areas underlines the fact that they are at present marginal in nature. The areas assessed at $3.00 to $5.00 per square foot are located along the fringes of the institutional areas, in the shopping and professional center along Thayer and Waterman Streets, and in the commercial district along North and South Main Streets. Properties assessed at from $5.00 to $10.00 per square foot are contained largely in the tax exempt institutional area. Assessments of over $10.00 and in some cases over $70.00 per square foot exist in the Market Square area where some high value commercial uses associated with the financial district located just across the square are found. Since 24 per cent of the land in College Hill is given over to tax exempt uses as compared with 18 per cent for the rest of the city, it would be advisable to consider increasing the tax base in the redevelopment areas where possible, and to attempt to limit further conversions of taxable properties into tax-exempt properties.
POPULATION

A knowledge of the number and characteristics of the people in the study area is basic for the preparation of plans and for the development of action programs for improvement of College Hill. Population totals are given below for the years 1950, 1958, and projected for 1975. They are based on the United States Census of 1950 which contains the most recent accurate figures for the area. Following is a summary of the more significant findings of a detailed population report previously made for the study.

The 1950 population of College Hill was 11,950, approximately 2,000 of whom were students living on campus. These students, plus a significant number of others living in the area but not on campus, constitute an important planning factor because they are for the most part not year-round residents.

The 1958 population of College Hill is estimated at approximately 13,000, of whom about 3,000 are students living on campus. This increase in resident student population is due to construction by Brown University of dormitory facilities for more than 1,000 students. An estimated increase of 200 other persons is accounted for by the fact that many large single-family houses have been converted to multiple dwelling structures. While the total population of Providence has decreased over the past eight years, that of College Hill has increased by about ten per cent. This growth will probably continue as the colleges expand and as both older people and young married couples find the area well situated for their needs and attractive because of the cultural resources of the colleges. The map shows the distribution of the estimated population in 1958. Each ● represents 10 college students while each ○ represents 10 non-collegiate residents.

It is estimated that the 1975 population of College Hill will be 15,000, of whom over 4,000 will be resident students. This population increase will be caused by three factors: growing student enrollments, residential construction in the urban renewal areas by by private and public action at higher population densities, and continued structural conversions and new construction activity to
meet the rising demand for apartments near the central area of the city.

The student enrollment in four institutions of higher learning, (Brown University, Pembroke College, Rhode Island School of Design and Bryant College) is currently around 5,800. In addition to 3,000 living on campuses situated in the study area, 600 more students live in the area but not on campus. It is difficult to predict enrollment growth for the colleges in the face of pressure on the colleges to increase the number of students. However, Brown University has stated recently that it hopes to limit its student increase to 10% per decade. In making estimates for this report, that rate has been applied to the other institutions as well.

One of the larger communities of nonwhites in Providence is located in College Hill. In general, there are two localized groupings of nonwhites in the area: one in the northwest corner numbering about 700 and one in the southern part numbering about 1,000. The group in the north is composed chiefly of American Negroes and is part of a larger nonwhite community in Lippitt Hill located to the north of the project area. The group in the south is part of the Fox Point neighborhood which is made up predominantly of Portuguese Bravas (the generic term applied to Cape Verde islanders who came to America as seamen in the late 18th and early 19th centuries) intermingled with some American Negroes.

Three Providence census tracts, numbers 31, 36 and 37, have importance for the College Hill area. The distribution of age groups in census tract 31 at the northern end of College Hill and in census tract 37 at the southern end is very similar to the pattern for the entire city; but that in tract 36, the central part of the area, is unusual in several respects. Within it the census figures show that there is little need for playspace but the needs of an increasing elderly population should be met. In the northern and southern areas the number of children is expected to remain at such a level as to warrant consideration for more playspace and better school facilities.

There are other differences between tracts 31 and 37 and tract 36. Characteristics of the central tract indicate a considerably higher rate of income, less mobility, and a higher level of education.
INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

College Hill is a major center in the city for civic organizations partly because it is the oldest residential section in the city and partly because three of the city's institutions of higher learning are established here. They make an incalculable contribution to the intellectual, cultural, economic and social character of College Hill as well as to the city and state. Most of the organizations are located along or within a few blocks of Benefit Street.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Brown University is an institution primarily devoted to the teaching of liberal arts and is composed of three principal units: The College, for men; Pembroke College, for women; and the Graduate School. The university, founded in 1764, is the third oldest in New England. Originally located in Warren as Rhode Island College, it was moved to Providence in 1770 and became known as Brown University in 1804. Pembroke College was organized as The Women's College in Brown University in 1891. Its campus is located north of the University Campus proper. The two colleges offer programs leading to the same University degrees, and make joint use of library and laboratory facilities.

The physical plant of Brown University has been expanded rapidly during the last five years to meet the needs of a growing enrollment. Recently dormitory facilities for 1,300 students have been constructed in the heart of College Hill; and forty acres of land to the east have been acquired for future expansion. The enrollment for 1957–1958 was 3,742, made up of 2,425 students in The College, 902 in Pembroke College, and 415 in the Graduate School.

BRYANT COLLEGE

Bryant College of Business Administration, founded in 1863, is located just to the east of the study area. The college has three major divisions: the School of Business Administration, the School of Secretarial Science, and the School of Business Teacher-Education. Through an accelerated academic program this business college enables students to earn certain bachelor's degrees in as little as two years. Facilities for the 1,200 students are located in twenty-two buildings in the East Side with some dormitories within the College Hill study area boundaries. In recent years, Bryant has converted many former private residences into dormitories for the use of its 320 students.

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

The Rhode Island School of Design, founded in 1877, is a coeducational institution granting degrees in Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Fine Arts in thirteen fields of study. The five major divisions of instruction include architecture, fine arts, industrial production, textiles, and teacher education. Annual enrollment is about 800 students, and an evening adult education program with slightly higher enrollment is offered each session. In addition, Junior School classes provide training for some 400 young people between the ages of six and eighteen.

CHURCHES

Many of the churches located in College Hill, although serving a larger area, are also engaged in activities concerning the community around them. To mention a few, the Cathedral of St. John is the mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island and works both on the local and state levels. The Diocese is currently considering expanding its program for housing the elderly. The Roman Catholic Holy Rosary Church serves the Portuguese-American community in Fox Point. It also conducts recreational and social events in a building on Wickenden Street. The First Baptist Church, the oldest in America, is considering sponsoring a neighborhood nursery school.

COMMUNITY SERVICE GROUPS

Several welfare organizations are quartered in an office building at 100 North Main Street. Among these is the United Fund, Inc., which raises and distributes funds to other voluntary groups throughout much of Rhode Island. Another important organization is the Fox Point branch of the Providence Boys' Club, on South Main Street, which is a center for recreation, training, crafts and guidance for young boys in the area.

OTHERS

Of the organizations oriented toward community betterment, one of the more active is the Providence Preservation Society formed in 1956. Together with the City of Providence and the federal government it has sponsored the College Hill Demonstration Study.

Noteworthy in the cultural field is the Museum of Fine Arts of the Rhode Island School of Design, which houses the city's largest collection of art, stages temporary exhibitions and sponsors series of programs of lectures and of music. The Barker Players, an amateur theatrical group, presents five plays each season. The Providence Art Club holds lectures and exhibits.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHURCHES</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL</th>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>OTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>15 Angell League (gallery and studios)</td>
<td>21 Community Workshops of Rhode Island, Inc.</td>
<td>Brown University and Pembroke College</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mt. Carmel Righteous Church of God</td>
<td></td>
<td>22 Providence Boys' Club</td>
<td>Rhode Island School of Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cathedral of St. John</td>
<td>16 Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art</td>
<td>23 Volunteers of America</td>
<td>Mary C. Wheeler School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 First Baptist Church of Providence</td>
<td>17 Providence Athenaeum</td>
<td>24 Salvation Army Day Nursery</td>
<td>Bryant College of Business Administration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Congdon Street Baptist Church</td>
<td>18 American Association of University Women</td>
<td>25 Ambrose Society of Rhode Island</td>
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HOUSING CONDITIONS

OWNERSHIP AND RENTAL

The map on the left of the page shows the pattern of home ownership and rental throughout the College Hill area, according to the 1950 Census of Housing. These figures show a large concentration of renter-occupied dwelling units along the western border, particularly in the northwestern (Constitution Hill) and southwestern (South Main and Wickenden) sections.

As a general rule, owner-occupied properties tend to be in better condition than renter-occupied units. This was evident in a special housing survey of the northwestern section of College Hill made in the summer of 1958 by the Urban League of Rhode Island. Samplings taken by interviewers indicated that out of 239 families interviewed, 84 per cent rented their dwellings. Approximately 65 per cent of all Providence families rent their dwellings; thus this percentage is high when compared to the city as a whole.

The sampling showed that 39 per cent of the owner-occupied units were reported to be in "good" condition, as compared to 27 per cent of the renter-occupied units. In addition 51 per cent of the owner-occupied compared to 41 per cent of the renter-occupied units were in "fair" condition, and 10 per cent of the owner-occupied as against 37 per cent of the renter-occupied units were reported to be in "poor" condition.

AVERAGE MONTHLY RENT

The map on the right showing the rent structure clearly points up the low rents in large sections of College Hill. The rents are...
shown in the following categories: • = less than $25.00 per month, •• = from $25.00 to $50.00 per month, ••• = between $50.00 and $75.00 per month, and •••• = over $75.00 per month. The 1950 Census figures showed that many blocks in the southern section around Wickenden Street and South Main Street and in the northwestern section, Constitution Hill, contain dwellings the average rent of which is less than twenty-five dollars per month. In addition, many other blocks average between twenty-five and fifty dollars per month. These census figures also show some high rentals in the area, an example of the extremes which are characteristic of College Hill. Certain blocks in the central section have rentals above seventy-five dollars a month and many apartments rent for a considerably higher figure.

The 1958 survey made by the Urban League in the northern section of the area indicates that 68 per cent of the families in that area now pay a rent averaging less than forty dollars per month. 41 per cent of the families pay a rent which is in the range of thirty to forty dollars per month. These figures indicate a slight upward trend from the eight year old rental figures contained in the 1950 census.

The following chart, developed from the Urban League’s survey, gives a breakdown of rents in the limited area reviewed by the survey group. It is probably typical of the rental structure in the extreme northern and southern portions of College Hill which have the most serious housing problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Rent</th>
<th>Number of Dwelling Units</th>
<th>Number of rooms in unit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10.00–19.99</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.00–29.99</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.00–39.99</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2 4 19 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.00–49.99</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4 1 5 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.00–59.99</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 1 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.00–69.99</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1 5 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.00–79.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.00–89.99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.00–99.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.00 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONDITION OF STRUCTURES

The map on the left shows the condition of housing by structures in the College Hill area. Over a period of years, surveys were made by the Providence Redevelopment Agency using American Public Health Association procedures, in sample portions of the area. These figures have been supplemented by a current house-to-house examination in critical areas. The map shows the location of structures considered to be in "slum" and "substandard" categories. The majority of these structures are located in the extreme northern and southern portions of the College Hill area where other indices of housing conditions spotlighted factors contributing to housing blight.

OVERCROWDING

There is a considerable amount of overcrowding in the College Hill Area according to information based on the 1950 census standard in which overcrowding is defined as an average of more than 1.5 persons per room in a dwelling unit. Conditions of overcrowding are most prevalent in the southern and northwestern portions of the hill where other poor housing conditions are also found.

DENSITY OF HOUSING

The average amount of land for each dwelling unit (density of housing) is an indication in some cases, of quality of housing. Quite often, when dwellings are crowded on the land, poorer housing conditions result. According to census information, the densest areas again coincide with other evidence of poor housing conditions in the extreme northern and southern sections of the area.