



PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

November 22, 2019

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Providence City Council
City Hall
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

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Executive Director
Brent Runyon

Dear Council President Matos:

Downtown Providence has turned a corner. It is lively with hundreds of new residents, acclaimed restaurants, bustling hotels and year-round activities. But the work is not complete. Three vacant buildings on what is essentially Providence's "Main Street" are slowing progress and dragging down the entire area. One is the Industrial Trust Building. The other two are the former Providence Journal building at 203 Westminster Street and the former Kresge Department Store at 191 Westminster Street.

The 1906 ProJo building, one of the most architecturally-interesting in downtown, has a French classical exterior designed by Architects Peabody & Sterns, among the country's most prominent at the time of its construction. In the 1950s the building was "modernized" with porcelain-enamel panels. As concern for Downtown's historic buildings increased in the 1980s, developers Joseph Cerilli and Joseph Mollicone restored the exterior to what we see today. It has been mostly vacant for years, as has the Kresge building, about which we know little more than that it is a good example of Art Deco architecture.

What we do know is that these two buildings are eyesores in the core of Downtown. They drag down the sense of positivity, invite negative uses and reflect poorly on the City because of their location *immediately across the street* from City Hall. This sends a message that things are wrong with our City, whereas we know that the City itself is on the upswing. The City Council, with your leadership, has the ability, creativity, resources, and, hopefully, interest to effect positive change here.

It would seem that the current hotel proposal could remedy this blight. We urge you to give strong consideration to a creative way to bring these buildings to life.

Sincerely,

Brent Runyon

cc: Councilman John Igliazzi