



PLANNING CHALLENGE GRANT INITIATIVE

2006 PROJECT SUMMARY

CATHEDRAL SQUARE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Project Sponsor: The Providence Foundation/City of Providence, Department of Planning and Development as Fiscal Agent

Contacts: [Sponsor]: Mr. Daniel Baudouin (401) 621-6131 [Statewide Planning Liaison]: Paul Gonsalves (401) 222-1756

Project Cost: \$50,000 **Challenge Grant Amount:** \$30,000

Completed: October 2007 **Products:** Study Report available at: <http://www.planning.ri.gov/misc/pcgrants6.htm>

Background

Once a thriving focal point and intersection, Cathedral Square saw the end of vehicular traffic come about after the construction of Interstate 95. Soon after the highway dissected the contiguous flow of Downtown into the West side of the City, Bishop McViny Auditorium was built on across Westminster St resulting in a bisected street and a more "closed" the square. The following decline of pedestrian activity in the Square initiated interest in the potential redesign. Several studies within the past decade attempted to resolve design problems with Cathedral Square. This newest Feasibility Study was funded via a \$30,000 Challenge Grant from the RI Division of Planning/Statewide Planning Program.

Objectives and Process

The Cathedral Square Feasibility Study sought to identify opportunities of creating a vital neighborhood, reconnect the city and restore the urban fabric all while creating a positive economic engine for the City. The key objectives stated in the Study included:

- **Improve** pedestrian, vehicular and biking connections between downtown and the western neighborhoods along Westminster St.
- **Reduce** the negative environmental effects of I-95 within the project boundaries
- **Connect** Cathedral Square to its surrounding and redesign Cathedral Square making the square a vital, well-used center of a mixed income/mixed use neighborhood
- **Identify** sites for mixed use and mixed income development including affordable housing.

Major Findings and Recommendations

In evaluating past studies and current conditions, it became clear that there were several options in the potential Square redevelopment. The options took into account traffic and movement (vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle) through and within the Square, a park area, potential building sites, I-95 slopes, parking garages and the Westminster St Bridge elements.

Site Plan Concepts: Two major options dealing with the total area affected

- **Franklin St. Retained:** Leaving this Street (western boundary of the study area) as is would provide a more pedestrian friendly experience on that particular side of the Square.
- **Franklin St Relocated:** Relocating this street by pushing it out closer to I-95 would provide larger parcels for development. *(Image to the Right)*
- **Retain Chancery Wings:** Both of the previous options have the possibility of retaining the wings of the current McViny auditorium (Chancery). The additional developable land in the "relocated" option would be considerably more.

Square Concept Designs: Several options regarding traffic patterns and layout for the focal point (area directly in front of the Cathedral):

- **Island/Sculptural Element:** This design option depicts an elongated oval island in the center of the square, separating the east and west bound traffic along Westminster St. The potential for a statue/monument/fountain in the center of the island would enhance the aesthetic quality of the Square. The park element would also be a major focus.
- **Focus on Architectural Component:** This option seeks to capitalize on the existing architectural elements by additions to the existing apartment structure. This option would also allow for the most land area in the development parcels.
- **Park and Plaza focus:** This design option shows the potential for the most tree coverage and the most siting areas along with a smaller developable parcel geared toward a potential small café-type operation directly adjacent to the park area.

Concept Design Study with 3-D Computer Modeling: A total of eight 3-D images were created in order to show the potential scale of the site and design options. These models showed the overall slope of the study area as well as color coded building concepts for existing buildings, proposed private development and proposed development on publicly owned land. *(Image Below)*

Developable Parcels: The following table details the estimates for the potential Building square footages from each option. (GFA = Gross Footage Area)

Development Option	Building Footprint	Land Value	Building GFA
Franklin Street Retained, Demolish Chancery	73,000 sf	\$6.6 Million	550,000 sf
Franklin Street Relocated, Demolish Chancery	105,000 sf	\$9.4 Million	730,000 sf
Franklin Street Retained, Retain Chancery Wings	87,000 sf	\$5.9 Million	450,000 sf
Franklin Street Relocated, Retain Chancery Wings	105,000 sf	\$8.4 Million	670,000 sf

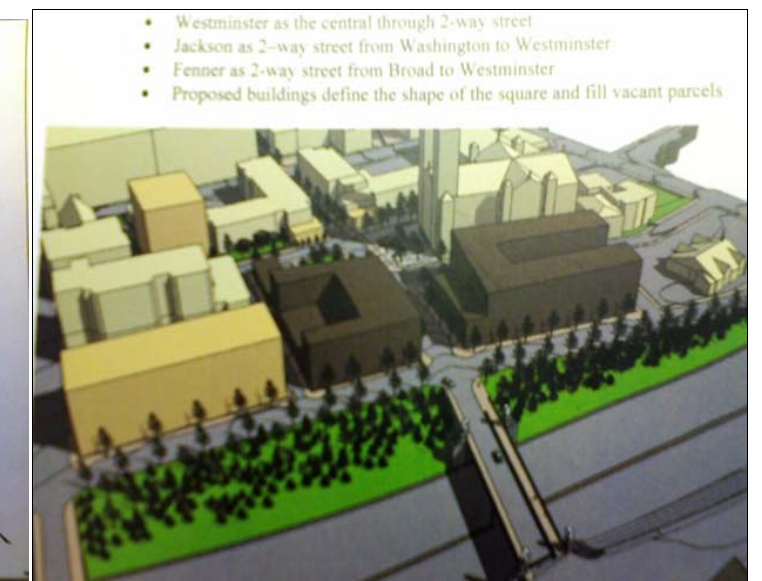
Demolition and Street Option Costs: The demolition estimates range from \$930,000 for the demolition of the Auditorium only, to \$2.35 Million for the demolition with the Chancery wings retained façade restoration. The estimated costs for the roadway and plaza options varied tremendously. With Franklin St retained, the estimate was \$4.4 Million. With Franklin St relocated, it jumped to \$8.4 Million.

Next Steps

This Feasibility Study lays the groundwork for the continued interest in the redevelopment of the Square and the reconnection of the West Side of Providence to the Downtown area. Continued collaboration between all of the stakeholders is essential. These include the Diocese, the City, private land owners and developers, State agencies, non-profit groups and residents, among others. Perhaps the 1st step in discussions will likely occur between the Diocese and the City/Providence Foundation regarding the acquiring of four parcels. As the study concludes, the following step may be the City of Providence Redevelopment Agency likely issuing an RFP for private development of assembled parcels, once roadway infrastructure projects are constructed.



Franklin Street Relocated



3-D Model (Looking East)

