

The Bellevue - Ochre Point Neighborhood is a unique residential area adjacent to Narragansett Bay, and recognized as a National Historic District. It is characterized by large 19th Century houses, including some grand mansions, on appropriately-sized lots with significant landscaping. Today the great majority of these large houses are still residences, whether single- or multi-family.

The property values in the Neighborhood are among the highest in the City of Newport, reflecting the character of the land and the structures in this part of the City. These high values depend on preservation of the essential characteristics of the Neighborhood.

The Bellevue - Ochre Point Neighborhood Association (BOPNA) was founded for the purpose of acting, on behalf of BOPNA members, to preserve the essential character of the Neighborhood. One way we do that is by monitoring proposals for alterations or new construction within the Neighborhood. To protect our neighborhood, we have taken and will continue to take action requiring the enforcement of all regulations that govern alterations or construction in the Neighborhood.

The Neighborhood is within Newport's Historic District. Newport ordinances require that any new construction and any alterations of existing structures within the Historic District must conform to standards that are intended to maintain to the maximum extent possible the look and feel of the area as it was originally built, which is a quiet, private, and protected residential area.

The quality and character of the Neighborhood exists because a delicate balance has been achieved between the primary use in the area (single family and multi-family residences in historic buildings) and the more intensive, public, and quasi-commercial uses of college/university and museums. Maintenance of this delicate balance is critical to the enjoyment by BOPNA members of their properties, and the maintenance of the values of those properties.

The Breakers is the largest and most famous of the Newport mansions, and is the flagship of the Preservation Society of Newport County's (PSNC) collection. In its advertising, PSNC emphasizes The Breakers over its other properties, using The Breakers as the leading attraction in its efforts to promote its ticket selling business. The Breakers attracts more than 400,000 visitors annually to its grounds. The PSNC expects to receive a Certificate of Appropriateness for a planned Welcome Center, and intends to move forward with the construction of that Welcome Center.

If constructed, the Welcome Center with its restaurant facility would constitute a significant intensification of the use of The Breakers property. It would result in an increase in the amount of traffic in the area and an increase in the numbers of visitors who will be in the vicinity of The Breakers, and in and around the streets where the members of BOPNA reside. The increase in the intensity of use of The Breakers will affect the current balance within the Neighborhood between private use as family dwellings and the more intensive uses by exception, i.e., museum, thus tilting the balance and fundamentally altering the character of the Neighborhood.

A real and continuing controversy exists between the parties as to whether the PSNC's proposed construction of the Welcome Center is prohibited by applicable laws and zoning ordinances. We believe that if the Welcome Center were to be approved by the Zoning board of Newport, such approval would set a precedent for all the Preservation Society properties and at least the 4 other museum-houses in our neighborhood: Vernon Court, Astor's Beechwood, Belcourt, and Rough Point. So-called welcome

centers with attendant restaurants could easily proliferate throughout the length of our neighborhood. Indeed, the precedent such a ruling would establish could damage many other residential neighborhoods of Newport as well.

If any further indication is needed for where all this is going and what it portends for Newport, the Preservation Society has recently applied to the City Council for victualing licenses for its Elms and Marble House museum properties. If granted, this would establish yet another precedent that could easily be copied up and down Bellevue Avenue as well as in any other residential neighborhood in Newport. We believe that The Point, Historic Hill, Castle Hill and Catherine-Kay neighborhoods might be particularly vulnerable to the historic-house-turned-museum-turned-restaurant precedent that would be established by the granting of these victualing licenses.

The potential for the destruction of Bellevue Avenue as a quiet, peaceful, and quite important residential zone is in front of us all. The potential for the precedent effect to cascade across our city is real. It must be stopped now.

Therefore the Bellevue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association feels compelled to take action in the Superior Court of Newport County against the Preservation Society, to clarify the limitations established by law as a result of their limited use status within our Residential Zone. An action for a Declaratory Judgement was filed today, March 7.

We would expect the Zoning Board of Newport to defer action on any permit applications until the Superior Court has ruled on this issue.