

**Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Neighborhood
Statement of Vision and Shared Goals
August 27, 2006**

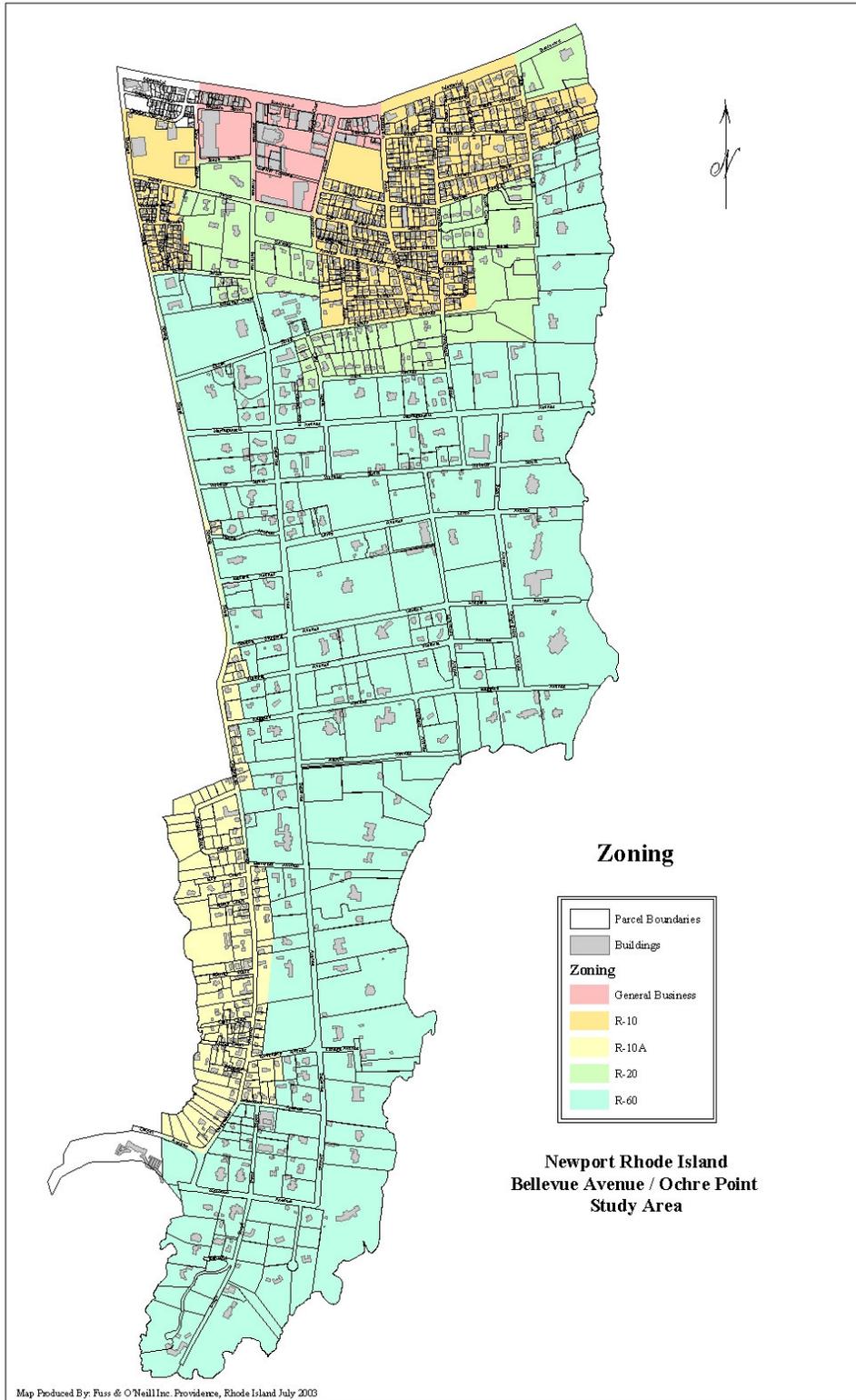
1. Map of Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Area.....page 2
2. Introduction.....page 3
3. Vision Statement for Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point...page 5
4. Goals and Agreed Upon Action Items.....page 10
5. Conclusion.....page 18
6. Participant Signatures.....page 19
7. List of Vision Plan Documents.....page 20

Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Vision Process Participants:

Preservation Society of Newport County
Ochre Point Neighborhood Association
Salve Regina University
City of Newport

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Map of Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Area



Introduction

The Preservation Society of Newport County, the Bellevue Avenue-Ochre Point Neighborhood Association and Salve Regina University share the historic area of Newport around the Bellevue Avenue corridor and the adjacent Ochre Point area. This is roughly defined as the area south of Memorial Boulevard, west of the shoreline at Cliff Walk, north of the RI Sound, and east of Coggeshall Avenue (see specific map on opposite page). The City of Newport regulates this area through its Zoning Ordinance and Historic District overlay and is responsible for maintenance and improvement of infrastructure. On some occasions in the past, conflicts about land use, traffic, demolition, new construction, impacts to the community as a whole, and other issues have arisen among area institutions, area residents and local government.

From 2002 to 2005, these four organizations participated in a Vision Process in an attempt to identify the qualities of the Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point area that are worthy of preservation, as well as the issues that were at the core of previous conflicts. A Steering Committee composed mainly of representatives of all four institutions had primary responsibility for carrying out the Vision process. Members of the committee were Trudy Coxe and David Leys from The Preservation Society of Newport County. The Bellevue Avenue-Ochre Point Neighborhood Association was initially represented by Sid Gorham and Jay Schochet and, after a leadership change in 2005 was represented by Tom Goddard and Jim Moore. Sister Therese Antone and Michael Semenza represented Salve Regina University, while Paige Bronk, AICP and Councilwoman Kate Leonard (and later Councilwoman Colleen McGrath) participated in discussions as representatives of the City of Newport. As part of the process, two at-large members were added to the group to bring specialized knowledge and broad viewpoints; these were Ronald Lee Fleming, AICP and Keith Stokes from the Newport County Chamber of Commerce.

The Newport Collaborative Architects (NCA), a Newport-based design and planning firm, assisted the effort. Grants from The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Prince Charitable Trusts, The Preservation Society of Newport County, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the Fleming Charitable Trust II and the Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Association supported the Vision Process.

At the beginning of the process, the Steering Committee brainstormed positive and negative conditions in the neighborhood. NCA documented physical conditions in the neighborhood and researched historical and regulatory issues. NCA also interviewed 11 key stakeholders for their input into the current challenges and personal vision for the future. Additionally, a public meeting was held which was attended by nearly 100 Newport residents. From this body of

work, the *Existing Conditions Report* (Appendix 1) was created and presented to the Committee. It identified historical and architectural significance, defining physical attributes, regulatory systems and key issues. With this as a base, the Steering Committee identified problems that needed to be addressed and formulated a series of possible solutions.

At the conclusion of this process, the participating organizations have agreed that working together this important part of Newport can be saved. This document sets out an agreed-upon Vision and a set of Goals to guide the future of the neighborhood.

Vision Statement for Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point

Overall Vision Statement

The residents of the Bellevue Avenue and Ochre Point area of Newport, including institutions, organizations, families and individuals, believe that the area is an irreplaceable historic and architectural treasure, essentially residential in character. As an established mixed-use neighborhood, it is home to private residences, museums and educational facilities, condominium associations, and commercial enterprises such as shopping centers and a nursing home. We believe that this mixture of uses can be maintained in a successful and vibrant balance that results in the preservation of the buildings, landscapes, viewsheds¹, and the general character of the area. We share a Vision to make the neighborhood an attractive place to live, go to school, carry out business and to visit.

There are nine specific elements that make up the Vision for the area's future:

Element 1: Historical and Architectural Significance

The Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point area of Newport, Rhode Island is a historical resource with significance on the national, state and local levels. This fact is recognized by the designation of the area as a National Historic Landmark District, one of the few in the United States. The area was developed primarily as a residential district, constructed in the period from 1850 to 1920 and composed of large, elaborately designed houses, located on spacious, landscaped lots surrounded by extensive plantings and garden walls. Preservation of this character is vital to the future of the neighborhood.

Element 2: Current Land Uses

Over the past 75 years, the area has evolved from a mainly residential district of Newport to an area with a mix of land uses. Residential use still makes up sixty-five percent (65%) of the land area, but it is now a mixture of single-family houses, condominiums, apartments and a nursing home facility. Only twenty five percent of the parcels used for residential use conform to the legally-mandated minimum 60,000 square foot lot area required by the R-60 zoning

¹ The term "viewshed" is defined by the American Planning Association "an area of land, water, and other environmental elements that are visible from a fixed vantage point. In urban planning, for example, viewsheds tend to be areas of particular scenic or historic value that are deemed worthy of preservation against development or other change."

designation. Other prominent land uses include education and museums. The Ochre Point section has become home to Salve Regina University, which has a substantial campus of adaptively-reused historic mansions and limited new construction. Along Bellevue Avenue, 10 large historic houses have been converted into museums that welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

We believe that the existing mixture of land by diverse constituents will exist into the foreseeable future. Specifically:

- Residents value the quality of life in the area,
- Salve Regina University continues to be a successful educational institution, and
- Museums are the mainstay of Newport's tourism industry.

Therefore, the harmonious coexistence of these uses is necessary for all to remain viable. Both educational institution expansion and additional museum facilities have the potential should be balanced with the goal of preserving the essential residential character of the area.

Element 3: Educational Use:

We believe that educational institutional uses are an integral component of the neighborhood providing a positive, economic and cultural impact on the area. The University's growth should continue to be accommodated in ways that uphold and enhance the historical and architectural significance of the area and its residential scale and quality. The University's stewardship of historic and cultural setting is to be applauded and encouraged. With continued successful collaboration, Salve Regina University can be accommodated with appropriately scaled buildings, well-planned systems for parking and transportation, and continued diligence regarding the impact of programs and students on the immediate campus area and the City of Newport.

We believe that the National Register and National Historic Landmark status of local properties must remain sacrosanct and therefore no action(s) should be undertaken that might jeopardize these designations. It is essential that regulatory systems be in place and exercised to ensure that the physical conversion of historic properties for educational, museum, or commercial purposes will have no, or minimal, impact on the residential character of the area.

Element 4: Museum/Visitor Attraction Land Use:

We believe that the existing museum institutional buildings are in the neighborhood to stay. The Preservation Society of Newport County, the Newport Restoration Foundation, Beechwood, the American Museum of Illustration, and Belcourt have taken on the stewardship of many significant historic buildings, some of which were threatened with demolition. This stewardship is to be applauded and encouraged because an important priority is the preservation of the historic buildings in such a manner that avoids or minimizes any negative impact on the residential character of the neighborhood. Further, we believe that these existing facilities are a benefit to the City of Newport and the community as a whole from an economic and cultural perspective. Indeed, the continuing preservation of many landmark buildings is because of their viability as functioning museums.

There has been a great deal of successful collaboration between museum institutions, neighborhood organizations and the City to minimize impacts from visitors who come to the attractions on matters such as parking, bus traffic and informational signage. These museums should to continue to operate in a way that respects and retains the residential character of the district.

We believe that any proposals for new museum facilities should be examined rigorously by the City of Newport, and that it is essential that regulatory systems be in place and exercised to ensure that the physical conversion of historic properties for educational, museum, or commercial purposes will have no, or minimal, impact on the residential character of the area.

Element 5: The Impacts of Successful Visitor Attractions

We believe that museums and visitor attractions are the foundation of the tourism economy in Newport, and that they can successfully coexist with adjacent land uses, residents and institutions. It is important to the entire community that we assure their continued viability while carefully managing their impacts on residents and the overall quality of the area. To this end; museums, visitor attractions and the City of Newport should actively pursue an overall system of tourism management that addresses issues of vehicular traffic volume (cars and buses), number of specific vehicle trips, mass transit, parking, proper directional signage and visitor interpretation systems, expansion of tourism-related facilities and the other elements of this vital and successful industry.

Element 6: Residential Quality of Life

While educational and tourism-based institutional uses are present in the neighborhood, they should not detract from the quality of residential character

that is still the majority land use in this area of Newport.² We believe that all residents are entitled to the reasonable use of their property within a quiet neighborhood. To safeguard this, residents, institutions and City regulators have joined to create this vision for balanced land use and systems of enforcement to achieve that vision.

Element 7: Regulatory Systems

The existing Newport zoning ordinance and its designation of this area as R-60 (primarily residential land uses with a minimum lot area of 60,000 square feet) provides a sound basis for regulating existing land uses and addressing future requests for change of those uses. This is a strong statement about the preferred land use, but it allows other uses (such as educational and museum facilities) to be allowed when deemed compatible.

In particular, the Special Use Permit system is the appropriate zoning tool to evaluate the expansion of non-residential uses in the area. This system allows an entity to show how its project will fit in with the residential character of the adjacent areas. This puts the primary responsibility on the applicant to meet the goal of residential character and compatibility with nearby residential areas. The specific legal criteria³ for the granting of a Special Use Permit are:

Special use permits shall be granted only where the zoning board of review finds that the proposed use or the proposed extension or alteration of an existing use is in accord with the public convenience and welfare, after taking into account, where appropriate:

- 1. The nature of the proposed site, including its size and shape and the proposed size, shape and arrangement of the structure;*
- 2. The resulting traffic patterns and adequacy of proposed off-street parking and loading;*
- 3. The nature of the surrounding area and the extent to which the proposed use or feature will be in harmony with the surrounding area;*
- 4. The proximity of dwellings, churches, schools, public buildings and other places of public gathering;*
- 5. The fire hazard resulting from the nature of the proposed buildings and uses and the proximity of existing buildings and uses;*
- 6. All standards contained in this zoning code;*

² Residential land use accounts for approximately 65% of the gross land acreage in the project area, and on approximately 90% of the land parcels (351 of 387). This indicates that many of the largest parcels are in non-residential use.

³ Section 17.108.020, *Newport Zoning Ordinance*.

7. *The Comprehensive Plan for the City.*⁴

The designation of the area as a local Historic District Overlay Zoning is also appropriate, given the National Historic Landmark status of the area. Historic District Zoning requires review and approval of all exterior alterations by the Newport Historic District Commission.

Element 8: Transportation Systems

Most of Newport's street system was designed to accommodate a lesser volume of smaller vehicles than are currently on the streets. The system is often clogged with visitors, students and residents, making travel inconvenient for all. We believe that the property owners, tourism organizations, educational institutions and commercial enterprises, and the City and State should continue their efforts to minimize large tour busses and private automobile congestion, and to foster walking, cycling, mass transit and more innovative ways to reduce traffic congestion in the area and throughout Newport. The overall goal should be to reduce the amount of vehicles entering the area as well as reducing the number of vehicle trips taken by visitors once they arrive.

⁴ *The Newport Comprehensive Plan* (updated in 2003) is the defining document for guiding land use, development and preservation in the City of Newport.

Goals and Agreed-Upon Action Items

This section enumerates the goals that are shared by the participating organizations, and articulates the Actions that they will undertake to improve the function and appearance of their neighborhood.

Goal A: Establish a system for community dialogue and decision-making.

Action Items to achieve the goal:

- 1) All organizations (including the Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association) should develop, adopt and share long-range (10 year) physical infrastructure master plans. All organizations have the responsibility to be proactive as they plan for the future in such an important neighborhood. These plans should continue to be shared by the organizations in several ways: 1) an annual meeting of all organizations which invites a broad audience of residents and decision-makers and 2) leaders of each organization attending the annual meetings of each of the other organizations. Through these information-sharing methods, parties are well-informed and cooperative planning can take place. This has the potential to allow conflicts to be aired and a settlement negotiated before they become a contentious and public legal process.
- 2) At a minimum , these physical infrastructure master plans for each organization should address the following issues:
 - Strategic vision for the future and how that fits into the overall character of the area;
 - Design for use, reuse, change, expansion;
 - Facilities needs;
 - Areas of future development;
 - Projected construction.
- 3) Create and continue stronger relationships and collaborative efforts between the City of Newport, Salve Regina University, The Preservation Society of Newport County, other area organizations, (cultural and commercial), and neighbors (especially organized community groups such as the Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Neighborhood Association). Do this through dissemination of annual community reports by neighborhood organizations and institutions such as the Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, Salve Regina University, The Preservation Society of Newport County and others. Other methods such as informal meetings and updates,

shared membership on each others' Boards, cross-communication and other means in order to know each other better and have stable lines of communication should be used to build collaborative efforts.

- 4) Work with the City of Newport to assist in the development of more specific guidelines and standards related to Historic District & Zoning. All parties should participate, through scheduled public hearings, in the formulation of improved HDC guidelines standards that make specific requirements for building and site design that are in character with the residential history and quality of the neighborhood. These should address all rehabilitation and new construction projects, focusing on issues of architectural style and character, site design, parking quantities and siting, landscaping, and transportation systems.

Goal B: Improve the system of land-use regulation that preserves historic character and allows appropriate change.

Action Items to achieve the goal:

1. Assist the City of Newport in assessing and updating a more current definition for the land use designation "museum"; the zoning ordinance now in effect reads: *"MUSEUM means a building having public significance by reason of its architecture or former use or occupancy or a building serving as a repository for natural, scientific, historical or literary collections or objects of interest, or works of art, and arranged, intended and designed to be used by members of the public for viewing, with or without an admission charge, and which may include as an accessory use the sale of goods to the public as gifts or for their own use."*

The State of Rhode Island's Zoning Enabling Act does not provide a uniform definition for museum, therefore it is in the hands of each municipality to define the term in their own zoning ordinances. The City of Newport, because of the unique concentration of museum facilities, should look to adopt a national standard of guidelines. The American Association of Museums (AAM) is the national body that accredits museums and sets the standards for operations, conservation and interpretation. The AAM has an accepted set of criteria for accredited museums:

- *Be a legally organized nonprofit institution or part of a nonprofit organization or government entity*
- *Be essentially educational in nature*
- *Have a formally stated and approved mission*
- *Use and interpret objects and/or a site for the public presentation of regularly scheduled programs and exhibits*
- *Have a formal and appropriate program of documentation, care, and use of collections and/or objects*
- *Carry out the above functions primarily at a physical facility/site*
- *Have been open to the public for at least two years*
- *Be open to the public at least 1,000 hours a year*
- *Have accessioned 80 percent of its permanent collection*
- *Have at least one paid professional staff with museum knowledge and experience*
- *Have a full-time director to whom authority is delegated for day-to-day operations*
- *Have the financial resources sufficient to operate effectively*
- *Demonstrate it meets the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum*

This set of criteria might be a logical starting point for a discussion of Newport's legal definition for museum and for the standards for operations.

2. Applications for Special Use Permits should focus on strict retention of the residential character of the surrounding area. Issues for consideration are protection of the public view shed; siting of new buildings and overall site planning, including parking, paving materials, pedestrian connections, fencing, gates, landscaping and lighting.

Goal C: Preserve and maintain the neighborhood's physical character

Action Items to achieve the goal:

1. The Newport Historic District Commission (HDC) is the primary agency protecting Newport's historic resources. To strengthen the capabilities of the HDC:
 - a. We support the City of Newport and the HDC in developing and adopting detailed, illustrated, written standards that address preservation across the City and which provide applicants and property owners clear direction regarding appropriate and inappropriate alterations and designs. Wherever feasible, these standards for design, rehabilitation, additions and new construction should be specific to each of the distinct historic Newport neighborhoods which lie under its jurisdiction. Many communities have published such guidelines for historic districts containing different building types, so that they are specific to the area's architecture, scale and siting. A good example of this is the Providence Historic District Commission's *Standards and Guidelines* (Appendix 2).
 - b. Develop and adopt standards for signage on historic buildings and sites.
 - c. Refine the City Zoning Ordinance to address the HDC's authority and standards for site design, parking areas and new landscape design.
 - d. We support the City's efforts to identify and appoint the best possible Commission members with professional experience and expertise⁵ to support vigorous deliberations. Methods to achieve this include 1) inviting neighborhood organizations to nominate, 2) inviting local preservation organizations to nominate, 3) placing advertisements and stories in local newspapers.
 - e. We encourage the HDC, supported by the Historic Preservation Planner, to continue to engage in training for Commission members, focusing on legal precedent, design review and best-practices from other communities. The City should allocate an appropriate budget for this training.

⁵ Applicable experience could be in the fields of architecture, landscape design, planning, historic preservation, construction, interior design, graphic design and related fields.

- f. When necessary, the HDC should have the benefit of legal counsel available at meetings to support the Commission's deliberations and decision-making process.
2. Major institutions such as The Preservation Society of Newport County, Salve Regina University, Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association and others should create a set of architectural guidelines to use on its own projects to guide architects, engineers and other designers as to each organization's preferred philosophy for appropriate design. This should include broad issues such as architectural character, site design, parking, landscaping and pedestrian connections.
3. Assess significant public viewsheds to be considered in historic planning. Significant viewsheds are composed of both architectural, landscape design and open space elements and require inventory prior to inclusion in any protective system.
4. Create a Historic Landscape Preservation Plan for the Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point area as a whole.⁶ Because the landscape plantings are on private property, such a plan would need to be innovative and balanced. The first part of any Plan would be proactive and voluntary, providing clear guidance for the preservation and rejuvenation of the houses' historic landscapes for private owners. The second part of such a plan could be a set of municipal landscape preservation regulations to protect and enhance significant landscapes and features from out-of-character alteration or removal, as well as to guide design on new parking areas.

The Committee recognizes the importance of Bellevue Shopping Center, the Travers block, Newport Casino, and the Stop & Shop shopping complex as the gateway to the Bellevue Avenue National Historic Landmark Historic District. Given its prominence if any of these sites are redeveloped, they should have a better relationship to the historic streetscape represented by the Travers block and the Newport Casino.

⁶ The City of Newport is in the process of creating a citywide landscape ordinance (February, 2006)

Goal D: Implement Transportation Systems for Diverse Neighborhood Interests

Action Items to achieve the goal:

1. Create systemic solutions to traffic and parking problems in the project area and the City of Newport.
2. Continue to encourage and support successful mass transit systems that reduce vehicular traffic volumes, such as the RIPTA trolley service.
3. Increase the use of alternate transit systems (vans for museums, trolleys, bicycles).
4. Encourage further pedestrian traffic through the creation of appropriately-designed walkways and sidewalks that connect key sites and institutions. Given their high volume of pedestrian traffic and their connecting link to Bellevue Avenue, sidewalks should be considered for at least one side of Narragansett and Ruggles Avenues. Cliff Walk should also be integrated with this system at key points to provide connections from shore to Bellevue Avenue.
5. Develop pedestrian-accessible educational markers mounted at the street perimeter of several of historic Bellevue Avenue properties. Passersby will be provided with photographic images and text information depicting the history of the Avenue, and its extant and existing historic properties.
6. Encourage reduction of vehicle trips by private automobiles by allowing existing attraction visitors at museum attractions to purchase food in limited quantities at some museum houses, as is done in many museums in the U.S. This use would be subject to all applicable City regulatory approvals and must be sensitively designed with hours limited to the hours of museum operations.

Goal E: Protect the Quality of Residential Life

Action Items to achieve the goal:

1. Protect residential quality and character by holding Special Use Permits to the highest standards, ensuring preservation of the physical appearance of the neighborhoods – including viewsheds and external functions (landscape, parking, etc.).

Goal F: Manage the Impacts of Newport's Tourism Industry

Action Items to achieve the goal:

1. We support the City in further developing a proactive Tourism Management Plan. The broad community (City government, tourism industry, institutions, neighborhood organizations, residents) should study other communities that are dealing with similar tourism, traffic and parking issues. The City of Charleston, South Carolina, is a national leader in implementing a comprehensive system of marketing, infrastructure, regulations and management of tourism and its impacts. This includes such diverse areas as traffic management, parking lot and garage systems, bus traffic regulation, times of operation for museums, festivals, etc. Charleston's *Tourism Management Ordinance* and *Tourism Management Plan* (copies of each are included in the *Vision Plan for Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point*) are very effective and may serve as a models for Newport. At the very least, they are a starting point for discussions about how Newport manages the impacts of our successful tourism industry.

Conclusion

Three non-profit organizations (The Preservation Society of Newport County, the Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, Salve Regina University), the City of Newport and selected community leaders collaborated in the creation of this *Statement of Vision and Shared Goals*. They volunteered to identify key planning issues and formulate shared goals, and thus possible solutions. The group set a goal to further encourage neighborhood cooperation that will better the immediate area and potentially serve as a planning paradigm for other neighborhoods in Newport.

The process of creating this document has been beneficial in and of itself; fostering better communication between the participants and increased understanding of concerns and shared goals. Beyond those accomplishments, the stakeholders have come to an understanding that by focusing on the many things they share in common, the organizations can effectively address the few key differences they have, and collaborate so that the Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point neighborhood can function successfully with a diversity of uses coexisting in a landmark historical setting.

With this shared vision and concrete action steps in place, the neighborhood stakeholders can begin to immediately implement changes to solve common problems, improve and protect this unique historical and architectural treasure. This *Statement of Vision and Shared Goals* is a framework only; the work that it outlines will be a continuing process, achieved only through close collaboration between the leaders and residents who care about the area's architecture, history and quality of life as a place for those who live here and those who visit.

Compact Signatories and Witnesses

We hereby affirm our commitment to our community: the Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point neighborhood in Newport, Rhode Island. We also pledge to work openly with each of the parties of this compact, in order to plan collaboratively for the future of our shared neighborhood.

We, the undersigned, affirm the vision, goals and action items contained in the *Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Neighborhood Compact Statement of Vision and Shared Goals* (June 13, 2006) and pledge to work together to carry them out.

Signed on this _____ day of _____, 2006:

Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association

Tom Goddard: _____

Jim Moore: _____

The Preservation Society of Newport County

Trudy Coxe: _____

David Leys: _____

At large members

Ronald Lee Fleming, AICP _____

Keith Stokes : _____

Compact Witnesses:

We, the undersigned, have attended meetings and been part of the discussions that have lead to the creation of the *Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Neighborhood Statement of Vision and Shared Goals*. We hereby witness that the document reflects those discussions. Witnessed on this _____ day of _____, 2006:

Salve Regina University

Sister Therese Antone: _____

Michael Semenza: _____

List of Vision Plan Documents

This *Statement of Vision and Shared Goals* is the result of the three-year Bellevue Avenue/Ochre Point Neighborhood Vision Process. To start that process, a great amount of research was completed to understand the physical and functional elements of the neighborhood. With that data in hand, a community visioning process was completed in order to understand the shared goals for the future of the area.

Copies of the planning documents that memorialize these processes are available at each of the four non-profit organizations which participated in the project (The Preservation Society of Newport County, the Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, Salve Regina University and the City of Newport).

The documents (with abbreviated tables of contents) are:

<i>Existing Conditions Report - June 17, 2003</i>
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Table of Contents

Section I: Introduction

Section II: Methodology and Project Boundaries

Section III: History of Bellevue Avenue and Ochre Point Neighborhoods

Section IV: Physical Conditions

Land Use

Transportation (Automobiles, Buses, Pedestrian, Parking)

Sewer/Septic Systems

Water Supply

Open Spaces/Recreational Facilities

Natural Resources

Historic and Cultural Resources

Section V: Regulatory Setting

Section VI: Key Planning Issues

Vision Plan - April 12, 2004

Table of Contents

Section I: Introduction

Section II: Vision Statement (Draft)

Section III: Key Goals and Proposed Solutions

Goal 1: Establishing a system for dialogue and decision-making for changes

Goal 2: Establishing a system of land-use regulation that preserves historic character and allows appropriate change

Goal 3: Preserving and maintaining the neighborhood's physical character

Goal 4: Implementing Transportation Systems for Diverse Neighborhood Interests

Goal 5: Protecting the Quality of Residential Life

Goal 6: Managing the Impacts of Newport's Tourism Industry

Section IV: Prioritized Action Items

Section V: Methodology for Vision Statement Formulation

Existing Conditions Report

Outcomes from Stakeholder and Resident Interviews

Outcomes from Public Workshop

Appendices

Appendix A: Providence Historic District Commission's Standards and Guidelines

Appendix B: Tourism Management Information from Charleston, S.C.

- Tourism Management Ordinance
- 1998 Tourism Management Plan Update
- Residents' Guide to Tourism Enforcement

Appendix C: Providence Historic District Commission's Standards and Guidelines