

# A Year in Providence

## Nailing the Questions

October 6, 2005

New Commons

During the conversations on the evening of October 6<sup>th</sup>, we asked participants to declare: What are your questions? What are the conditions behind each question?

We described the six ways to enter a network conversation as follows:

1. **The Conceptual** – idea, notion – via the mind
2. **The Poetic/Image** – dream state – via heart, soul
3. **The Cusp** – debate, posing tension, structural tension, creative tension, dilemma, opposite, paradox
4. **The Concrete** – grounded, just do it
5. **Integrators** – those that mix images, concepts, cusp, and concrete; hear the question in all modalities
6. **Wildcard** – go your own way, invent

Through the process of voting, the participants deducted these to be the most important questions to pursue in our Year in Providence conversation:

How to make Providence the “innovation city”?

Can we use common discontent to mobilize change?

Why do we keep “punting” on public education in Providence?

What size does Providence want to be? Is that consistent with its aspirations?

## The Six Conversations

At the event, each participant was able to select which conversation (conceptual, poetic, the cusp, concrete, integrators, or wildcard) they wanted to join. They recorded their discussion on a paper tablecloth. To wrap up the evening, each group was asked to select which questions they felt were most important to present to everyone. After every group presented, each participant was given the opportunity to pick the three questions that were most important to them out of all of the questions presented.

In the section that follows, the chart gives the questions that each small group choose to present to the entire crowd. The questions are listed in order of importance. The blue questions were selected as the most important by the group after all questions had been presented. (The red questions follow the level of interest and importance of the blue.) The text that follows each chart is the discussion that was recorded on their tablecloths.

## 1. The Conceptual

Question	Context
<b>Can we use common discontent to mobilize change?</b>	
<b>How do we regionalize planning and focus development in cities?</b>	Discontent can lead to innovation.
Why aren't people responding yet to the pain? (Bad schools, transportation issues, etc...)	As an outsider, I find Rhode Islanders all think something is wrong
Where is the leadership?	
What is a healthy city?	

- Grow Smart?
  - What does a healthy city look like?
  - Leadership!
  - CRMC 175' vs 200'
    - No building can cost a ...
    - ↙ - Can we use technology to assist in building a regional plan?
    - ↘ - Can people build a regional plan?
    - ↙ - Can we publicize the conversation?
    - ↘ - Can we involve the people in creating the conversation?
      - "We Are Rhode Island" Campaign
      - Can we use common discontent to mobilize the people?
- Wikipedia.com org

## 2. The Poetic Image

Question	Context
<b>How to have Providence become the "innovation city" ?</b>	Establishing our niche
<b>The beauty of public art – could there be more? (aesthetic urbanism, city as theater)</b>	<b>How do we use our public space to engage people in community?</b>
How do we better understand the identity of our neighborhoods?	How do we help neighborhoods understand their identity?
Can a city have a self-image?	Can a city have a self image and can we raise it?

1. Why do we need a highway? 95?
2. How can we improve public transit?
3. How do we create a city where the broadest possible spectrums of people are involved?

4. How do we use our public spaces better? (ie. Waterfire, Sound Sessions sponsored by Black Rep and Arts, Culture, and Tourism?)
5. What creates soul of a city?
6. What would make people be drawn to Providence?
7. What can we do to add more energy to cultural activities to Providence neighborhoods?
8. How do we better understand the identity of our neighborhoods?
  - schools
  - civic/park
9. How do we get bike parks throughout the city? What will make Providence world class?
10. What makes education in Providence better?
11. How do we develop a funded national urban agenda?
12. How do we bring good jobs to the city?
13. How can we make Providence a place to “Flaneur”...Promenade Stroll the streets?
14. How can we bring the river so we can see it?
15. Romantic Lighting (Aesthetic Lightening)
16. The beauty of public art, could there be more?
17. Can a city have a self-image?
18. How to generate the idea that Providence is the “innovation city”?
  - Encourage alternative energy companies to be based in Providence – subsidies
  - Alternative energy conference
  - Wind farms
  - Robotics
  - Design
  - New Urbanism

### 3. The Cusp

Question	Context
Whose Providence? Who is Providence? How can we create expansive definition of Providence?	
What is our urban fate for Providence? Will we only be a city for the rich?	
Who is the government serving?	
How do we get around apathy and alienation?	
What is the role of the city in social contract?	Changing the nature of the social contract
What is comfort? Monetary wealth? Happiness? Gross National Happiness?	

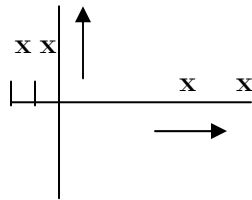
- Questions → Set the stage for the Quest
- Community Business Government
  - How do we get around apathy & alienation?
- Who's the government power serving?
  - Who participates...
  - Who benefits...
  - Who is it creating for...
- What are the questions? & who asks it when → neighbors & Providence
  - Universal Questions → basic needs, psychological wants, my trio
  - - Forum Agenda
    - Whose Providence? Vs. Who is Providence?

### Standardization vs. Specialization?

- Paradox -

Variables to measure – what about those variables that you can't measure, but are part of our being a citizen = character responsibility

- Expansive definition of Providence



- What is our urban fate for Providence? Will we only be a city for the rich?
- What is Comfort?
  - Monetary wealth?
  - Happiness?
  - Gross national \_\_\_\_\_?
- City as creating the space for the for social contract
  - Social Contract: not employee/employer partnership
    - What is role of City?

### Social Interaction

What is the frame for our work? “New entrepreneurial career” – you create your own job and manage self

#### 4. The Concrete

Questions	Context
<b>Why do we keep punting on public education in Providence?</b>	
<b>What 3-5 signature buildings should be preserved to maintain Providence identity?</b>	<b>The coolest Providence building is the Armory – it should have the coolest use</b>
Are the universities doing enough to increase job growth? What can they do?	
How do we maximize the water? It's magic! Noise, rythm, tides	
Explicit connections to neighborhoods growth and equity, pride and prejudice?	Its about connecting South Side, West End, Olneyville
Small steps, victories, powerful signals	

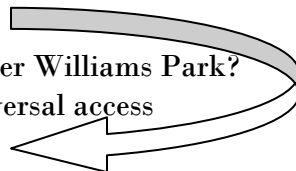
- How to define, preserve, develop, connect neighborhoods/areas
  - South Side
  - West End
  - Olney Ville piece
  - Schools
  - About Families?
  - Youth-Build
  - Anchors
  
- Are Little Steps Ok?
  
- Are the Universities doing enough to stimulate growth? Develop jobs?
- Concrete yet signals powerful image
  - Eg., Mill – reuse message
  - What criteria for acting?
  - Big Issue – 195 ReUse
    - Rezoning Bay
    - How to maximize value of 195 redevelopment – Neighborhoods piece
    - Armory – How to identify bldgs that must be preserved to maintain Prov. Identity w/ potential to drive redevelopment
      - 3-5 signature bldgs and surrounding area to focus?
  
- How do we hit critical mass?
  - Infusion of younger professionals downtown
  - We seem to have plateaued
- Focus: Jobs & Economics in PVD
  - Casinos?

- Lack of employment opportunities force many young college grads who want to stay to leave
  - Also fewer options for boomer empty nesters
  - AMEX Building – Not sold, in open market due to weakness in market?
  - Move on economic agenda – 3<sup>rd</sup> highest child poverty rate in the US
  - The 2 Americas
- How do we revive the biotech beltway?
- Neighborhood schools—applied learning
  - Has investment downtown really taken root yet?
    - Retail base
    - Artist lofts
    - Bigger loss
    - Taxes and parking still big issues, but not as fragile as in 1980s
  - Why did we choose this table?
    - Err on the side of results and action
    - Impatience
    - Action orientation
    - Getting something done = most challenging part

### 5. Integrators

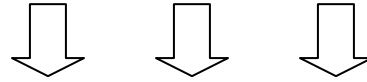
Question	Context
Can community building become a goal of k -16 education system?	
How can we broaden ones sense of “my” community?	
What value should drive development of public transport and access to it?	
How do you create and sustain a public space so that EVERYONE feels comfortable, safe, and involved?	

- How can we broaden one’s sense of “my” community?
- Can we create a mechanism to match good plans & designs programs with target for successful implementation & results?
- What if you transformed Roger Williams Park?
  - Public space with universal access



- Why not go now?

- How to connect rural, suburban, other urban communities to Providence?
  - How to integrate cultural + social elements into decision making allocation of resources, physical planning, etc.
  - How to communicate to a broad audience on issues from the conceptual to the concrete.



- What values should drive PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION? + ACCESS!?
- How to “loosen the purse strings” to permit innovation in the neighborhoods?
- How do we infuse the best of the best in Providence Schools in all the schools?
- Can we design the city differently to enable integration?
- What is the value in having specific cultural neighborhoods?
- Can community building become part of the education process?
- Can we include more people in decision making? (About resources, community-building, etc.) -who has to give up power to broaden the base of decision making? How do you reallocate it?
- How do we build bridges between classes and geographically divided parts of the city?
- What are the venues for expanding connections between segregated groups?
- How do we engage the “right” people in the conversation to ensure it makes a difference?

### 6. Wildcard

Question	Context
What size does Providence want to be? Is that consistent with its aspirations?	Seems to be a mismatch between size and function aspirations – critical mass? We want to do bigger things than we currently are doing
How to make diversity into innovation?	Lots of diversity but not much integration
Where will the city grow? Where is the energy?	Lots of organic stuff happening

What is the city responsible for beyond its borders?	
Who is the city for?	New Orleans



- Where will the city grow (up)? Where is the energy?
- There is all kinds of pasta fusion going on! Italian Diversity
- Who is the city for? Context: New Orleans → Mixed income housing (and mixed use)
  - How to make diversity into innovation...intercultural vs. multicultural
  - Context: Providence has a great “stock” of diversity, but not a great mixing of the diversity elements.
- How/what for is the city responsible for things beyond its borders? Beyond the borders of its host nation?