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PLANNING STUDY CALLS FOR INDUSTRIAL ZONING ALONG THE ALLENS AVE CORRIDOR TO PROTECT WORKING WATERFRONT AND INDUSTRIAL BUSINESSES

PROVIDENCE, SEPTEMBER 23 – Working waterfront and industrial businesses along the Allens Avenue corridor should be protected from incompatible residential and hotel uses through amendments to the city’s Interim Comprehensive Plan and the creation of a new Industrial/Manufacturing Overlay District according to a planning study released by the Providence Working Waterfront Alliance.

The study, conducted by planning specialists at the Horsley Witten Group, reviewed Providence’s Interim Comprehensive Plan, economic and infrastructure analyses associated with the area, the city’s existing Zoning Ordinance, materials presented at June’s four-day Waterfront Charrette, and zoning protections in place at other working ports. From a review of these materials, the study concludes that:

- The Port of Providence is a unique regional resource due to its recently dredged 40-ft deep-water channel, oil storage capacity, and significant number of high paying blue collar jobs.
- The potential for residential or hotel uses in waterfront industrial areas creates a sense of unpredictability that serves as a disincentive for new industrial development or the expansion of existing operations.
- Working waterfront and industrial business along the Allens Avenue corridor are physically and visually isolated from adjacent neighborhoods.
- Experts from other ports have emphasized the need to definitively separate residential and hotel uses from working waterfront industrial areas.
- Language in the Interim Comprehensive Plan attempting to balance the presence of residential, hotel, commercial, and heavy industrial uses would create a counter-productive situation.

“Looking at the unique aspects of Providence’s working waterfront and reviewing the testimony of port experts at the Waterfront Charrette, we felt the Interim Comprehensive Plan had identified potential uses for this area too broadly,” said Nathan Kelly of the Horsley Witten Group. “The changes we recommend for both the plan and the City’s Zoning Ordinance will protect the area’s working waterfront and industrial businesses while still providing the City with the flexibility to attract certain compatible non-residential uses.”

The study recommends two primary changes to the city’s Interim Comprehensive Plan:

1. Extending the existing Jobs District, which prohibits all residential and hotel uses, from ProvPort northward to include the entire working waterfront and industrial area along Allens Avenue.
2. Changing the Proposed Land Use Map’s current “Waterfront Mixed Use/General” area to a “Waterfront Mixed Use/Industrial” area that prohibits residential and hotel uses, but maintains flexibility by encouraging the establishment of criteria for the inclusion of lower intensity non-residential uses.

Finally, the study calls for amending the city's Zoning Ordinance to create a new Industrial/Manufacturing Overlay District or IMOD:

This overlay zone is intended to provide heightened protection to those areas in the City where significant levels of commercial, manufacturing, or industrial activities take place. These areas represent unusual local and regional economic opportunities for high intensity uses due to established land use patterns and/or proximity to transportation infrastructure. Regulations imposed on these areas will be designed to facilitate new development, redevelopment and expansion of heavy commercial, manufacturing and industrial uses by limiting and, in some cases, eliminating the potential for incompatible uses.

Modeled after Baltimore's successful Maritime Industrial Zoning Overlay District, the IMOD would protect Providence working waterfront and industrial businesses from incompatible residential and hotel uses. While restrictive, the IMOD would allow for certain non-residential uses so long as they follow development criteria designed to minimize interference with existing industrial businesses.

"This is a very thoughtful planning study that has shaped the feedback received during the Waterfront Charrette into concrete changes to the Interim Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance," said Joel Cohen, Vice President of Promet Marine Services, and Chairman of the Providence Working Waterfront Alliance. "This is exactly the kind of zoning that working waterfront businesses need to prosper and grow, and I look forward to working with the city to make these recommendations a reality."

"Our current facility is at capacity, and we need more space," said Ellis Waldman, President of Walco Electric. "Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty over zoning, we've been reluctant to invest here. If the industrial zoning changes in this report are implemented, I'd feel much more confident expanding on Allens Avenue."

The study was commissioned by the Providence Working Waterfront Alliance, a group of businesses and organizations who believe that the Port of Providence is a vital regional economic resource that must be protected from mixed uses that are incompatible with a working waterfront.

To download the complete economic impact study, visit:

<http://providenceworkingwaterfront.org/index.php/2008/09/24/planning-study/>

Horsley Witten Group is a full-service environmental science and engineering firm with offices located in Sandwich (Cape Cod), Newburyport, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island. The firm specializes in providing consulting services in sustainable development techniques, site design, coastal and watershed protection, hydrology, hydrogeology, engineering, land use regulation, and technical information transfer and training. www.horsleywitten.com

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