

CITY OF PROVIDENCE
RHODE ISLAND



CITY COUNCIL

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

No. 34 City Council Special Meeting, Thursday, February 22, 1996, 12:30 o'clock P.M. (E.S.T.)

PRESIDING

COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

EVELYN V. FARGNOLI

ROLL CALL

Present: Council President Pro Tempore Fagnoli, Councilmen Allen, Clarkin, DeLuca, Councilwoman DiRuzzo, Councilmen Glavin, Igliozi, Jackson, Lombardi, Mancini, Councilwoman Nolan, Councilman Rollins and Councilwoman Young—13.

Absent: Council President Petrosinelli and Councilwoman Williams—2.

INVOCATION

The Invocation is given by COUNCIL-
WOMAN BALBINA YOUNG.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COUNCILMAN JOSEPH DeLUCA leads
the members of the City Council and the
Assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance to
the Flag of the United States of America.

CALL FOR SPECIAL MEETING COMMUNICATION FROM MAYOR VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.

February 7, 1996 to be held on Thursday, February 22, 1996 at 12:30
p.m. in the City Council Chamber.

The Honorable Michael R. Clement
City Clerk
City Hall
Providence, RI 02903

At this meeting, I will deliver my State of the
City Address for 1996 to the Honorable Members
of the City Council.

Dear Mr. Clement:

Sincerely,

Pursuant to Section 406 of the Providence Home
Rule Charter of 1980, I am this day requesting
a special meeting of the Providence City Council

VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.
Mayor of Providence

Received.

WARRANT FROM THE CITY CLERK

The City Clerk reads the following Warrant with the City Sergeant's Return endorsed thereon, certifying that he did notify the Members of the City Council of the Special Meeting to be held Thursday, February 22, 1996 at 12:30 o'clock P.M. (EST) by Personally Delivering a Copy of the Warrant.

February 13, 1996

I, Ralph Guglielmino, City Sergeant, do hereby certify that I have notified each Member of the

City Council of the Special Meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday, February 22, 1996 at 12:30 o'clock P.M. (EST) in the Chamber of the City Council, City Hall, Providence, in accordance with the subject warrant by delivering to each member, a copy thereof.

RALPH GUGLIELMINO
City Sergeant

Received.

AT EASE

COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE FARGNOLI Declares the Council to stand at ease at 12:45 o'clock P.M. (EST) to Reconvene at the Call of the Chair and appoints MAJORITY LEADER IGLIOZZI; DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER LOMBARDI and DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER DIRUZZO to escort HIS HONOR, MAYOR VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR. to the Chamber of the City Council.

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

President Pro Tempore Fargnoli, Members of the Providence City Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I rise to deliver my State of the City Address during a time of great promise and great peril for our fair city.

As we prepare for the new century, Providence is rediscovering her greatness. Our generation is transforming this city so completely that native sons, returning after a long journey, can hardly recognize the city of their birth.

River front parkways, ornamental fountains, and festive street lamps, burgeoning college and hospital institutions, a fashion mall bigger and more beautiful than any in the tracts of suburbia, an arts and entertainment district built with the energy and zeal of youthful artists, the hushed excitement as the curtain rises on a magnificent Broadway musical, the thrill of a street luge careening down College Hill, the elegance and refinement of a new restaurant called Federal Reserve — opened in the opulent banking hall of a bygone era . . .

These are the sights and sounds, the sensory delights, of the new Providence. We must all engage in the ceaseless work of birthing, nurturing, and growing the new city that will bring us such rich rewards in the coming decades of the new century.

At the same time, the decade of the 1990s is a time of great peril for the citizens of our city. There are great challenges which we must successfully surmount, lest we jeopardize the prosperous future which is within our grasp.

Even as billions are invested in a new skyline for our city, the state economy is flat and unpromising. Economists now predict that Rhode Island will not return to the high levels of

employment enjoyed in the late 1980s until some time after the year 2000. There is concern in the state government and the city government because of insufficient revenue to support necessary services.

The fiscal dilemma is particularly acute in Providence because so much of the new economy — the expanding college, hospital and governmental institutions — are beyond the reach of property tax. When taxable value is declining by one hundred million, and tax-exempt value is growing by four hundred million over the same period, it is obvious that change there must be. The limitations of the property tax must be decisively addressed — and soon.

I am certain that solutions will be forthcoming from the alternative tax commission which is about to be established by the Honorable City Council. I will work cooperatively with the new commission on these important matters.

Providence is imperiled by other forces that must be tamed if we are to realize our potential for renewed greatness.

I refer to the continued influx of immigrant families to this city, which is a source of great energy and creativity but which is also causing explosive growth in the cost of public education.

I refer to the deterioration of housing in many parts of the city, and the upsurge of absentee ownership, which will require another round of public investment in the rebuilding of our neighborhoods.

I refer to public concern with the noise, the litter, the speeding cars, the theft from home and auto, and the other so-called "nuisance" crimes which must be effectively curtailed if we are to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

And I refer to concerns regarding gang-related violence in the neighborhoods. Cities as near as Hartford and New Haven have experienced a significant increase in violence because they failed to act decisively to suppress gang illegality. Providence will not make the same mistake. I have instructed Colonel Prignano to take whatever steps are necessary to control gang violence.

Yes, major challenges lie ahead. But we should all take comfort in the fact that, together, we have already achieved so much to improve our neighborhoods.

In little more than a year, the new Gun Court has already put scores of gun-wielding criminals behind bars.

In only three years' time, the housing programs we created have produced more than \$80 million in public and private investment in the city's neighborhoods.

In five years' time, we have reduced the rate of violent crime to its lowest level since 1978. The rate of automobile theft, remarkably, has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years.

In five years' time, we launched an exhaustive study of the Providence public schools, we crafted a plan to bring about sweeping change, and are now putting into place one of the most ambitious agendas of school reform in America.

And in a decade's time, we've cut the student dropout rate in half. Now who would have thought in 1985 that this could be possible?

Anything is possible, if we put our minds to it. Providence has won national acclaim for its historic architecture, the essential livability of its neighborhoods, the exciting new public spaces we've created by moving railroads and rivers, the colleges which draw students from all over the world, the fine restaurants that are located here, and a great deal more.

We cannot allow concerns about the present to

cloud our vision of the future. We must push ahead, boldly, into the new century, carrying proudly the banner of Providence, showing the way for the cities of America.

The downtown is where our banner will fly the highest. But it is in the neighborhoods — in our homes, our schools, in the hopes and dreams of our young people — that the victory must be won.

Three years ago, when we launched the housing programs of the Providence Plan, I said the battle for the renewal of the city had to be fought house by house, block by block. Nothing ensures victory so much as a stretch of well-maintained homes, each with an owner-occupant. Nothing crushes the spirit of renewal so much as the spread of blight, the spread of despair.

The housing programs we launched together in 1993 were remarkably successful in spreading the spirit of renewal. The record in less than three years: 2,000 houses painted and renovated, 1,500 sidewalks resurfaced, more than 700 houses sold to owner-occupants, more than a hundred abandoned houses fixed up or torn down. Perhaps most impressive of all is the fact that sixteen million of our dollars leveraged a total investment of eighty three million dollars.

Now we must provide another round of funding for these housing programs. We must resume the rapid pace of renewal. The times demand it; the people demand it. The battle for the neighborhoods is being fought right here and now. Families are making decisions every day whether to stay or to leave. A year without well-funded housing programs in the field is a year lost to the forces of decay and despair.

Despite the financial limitations of the moment, I believe that we can have another round of funding for housing rehabilitation.

Legislation we've submitted to the General Assembly will permit the city to sell delinquent property taxes to private companies, which proceed to collect the taxes on their own. A number

of cities in other New England states have profitably adopted this approach. I am advised by our finance director that Providence could raise up to fifteen million dollars by this means. A second round of funding could result in a total investment of more than eighty million dollars in our neighborhoods.

Can we afford to make such an investment? I say we cannot afford not to. If we are to rebuild our neighborhoods — house by house, block by block — we must give the people of Providence the tools they need. In the weeks and months ahead, I will be presenting more details of this essential program to the Honorable Members of this City Council. Let me emphasize that this new source of funding should be used for the neighborhoods — not for balancing the budget.

The retirements of last summer and the appointment of Colonel Prignano have brought a new generation into leadership positions in the Providence Police Department.

The Colonel, under my direction, is busily bringing about major changes in the operations of the department. He has earned the support of the City Council in this endeavor. That's because the Colonel is in the process of converting the entire department into a community-oriented police force. Already, there is a renewed emphasis on maintaining order and curtailing the nuisance crimes which affect all of us on a daily basis.

Strict instructions have already gone out to district sergeants. They must hold patrol officers accountable for everything that takes place within their car posts. Potholes, booming radios, cars revving on side streets, kids breaking into cars, and a host of other nuisance crimes are the patrol officer's responsibility.

In generations past, patrol officers always had what the department calls "beat responsibility".

But accountability was gradually lost as patrol officers became increasingly mobile, and were regularly pulled out of their patrol districts to

respond to emergencies. This problem has been addressed with another departmental directive. It reduces the number of patrol cars which can be pulled out of their districts to respond to needs elsewhere in the city. More and more, the same patrol officers will have the same car posts, day after day, and will be expected to truly "police" that post.

Meanwhile, community police officers have been given the responsibility to investigate misdemeanors within their neighborhoods. The theft of a car radio or a bicycle — misdemeanors such as these have been the "forgotten crimes" in our neighborhoods. In most cases, no one ever had the time to investigate. Anger over these unanswered and unsolved urban crimes was undermining loyalty to the city.

Now community police officers are investigating these crimes, and in the process making personal contact with the victims. We all know how comforting this can be. Over time, all of these personal contacts will strengthen the department's relationship with law-abiding citizens and make all of us feel safer.

The safety of our elderly residents is another very important objective. I will soon be announcing a major new police initiative to provide improved protection for our cherished senior citizens.

Other city agencies are also waging the war against nuisance crimes. Our successful campaign against graffiti will continue. In addition, I am seeking greater powers from the legislature to crack down on the owners of litter-strewn vacant lots. Owners must either clean the lots themselves, pay the city to clean the lots, or pay substantial fines. The biggest owner of vacant property in the city is the Providence Redevelopment Agency. Beginning this spring, many of the PRA's 300 lots will be cleaned on a regular basis.

In order for new strategies of the Police Department to succeed, there must be determination, follow-through, and enough manpower to get

the job done. My Police Department budget for the coming year will reflect this important priority.

This has been a very difficult winter for the city — record snows, bitter cold, and a large number of house fires in a short period of time. We are all extremely grateful that Fire Lt. John McKenna is doing well after a terrible fire on Detroit Avenue that threatened his life. Our best wishes go out to Lt. McKenna and his family.

Also, there has been tragedy — the tragedy of two small children who lost their lives in a fire in Elmwood, and a third child who died yesterday in a fire on Manton Avenue. Many of this winter's fires were in houses without smoke detectors; it is for this reason that I have proposed to strengthen the ordinances regarding such detectors. Please join me in a moment of silence for the three small children who tragically lost their lives because of fire.

With the new teachers' contract in place, school reform can finally begin in earnest. At last, teachers and parents will have the opportunity to create self-governing schools. At last, each school will be able to adopt its own budget and hire its own teachers. At last, each community will have the opportunity to strengthen its own schools.

If school reform is to succeed, children must be educated close to home. Busing and community schools are not compatible.

Let me state emphatically that new schools will be built where the need is greatest. And that means in the neighborhoods of South Providence, Elmwood, the West End, Federal Hill and Olneyville.

Now let me turn to the urgent matter of education funding.

The cost of education in Providence continues to rise at a rate far beyond what we in Providence can afford to pay. The historic migration of

hispanic families from Latin America, which began in the 1980s, continues today with little sign of abatement. School enrollment rises relentlessly in Providence, causing dramatic increases in school costs every year.

The property tax cannot begin to cover these rising costs of education. We must depend on the state government. Over the last four years, school aid has risen by thirty-five million dollars. Despite the increase in aid, Providence still spends less per pupil than any other community except Central Falls.

With enrollment expected to rise by 4,000 students in the coming decade, the school department proposes to build seven new schools over the next five years, the total cost of the building program: seventy-five million dollars. Next year alone, enrollment is expected to rise by 900 students. It will cost five million more just to provide teachers and classroom seats for the new arrivals.

Obviously, the nine-hundred-thousand-dollar increase in school aid proposed for Providence by Governor Almond is much too small.

Providence needs at least six million more just to meet the most minimal education needs next year.

Where is the money going to come from? Governor Almond says the state has no additional money to give out and he declined to consider any increases in state taxes.

However, it is obvious that level-funding of education at the state level will force most communities to raise property taxes instead. And I do not believe that is in the best interests of the state.

The property tax burden in Rhode Island is among the highest in the nation. The property tax is also regressive. By contrast, state income and sales taxes in Rhode Island are relatively low.

The legislature should keep these facts in mind as it reviews the Governor's budget.

Some will say, "Don't ask for more school aid; cut your school costs."

To these critics, I reply: "This Mayor, and this City Council, have put their house in order. Our record in cutting school costs is the best in the state." Three years out of five without pay raises. No more Blue Cross for life for families. Managed health care. Privatized janitorial service in the schools. Privatized school lunch. Because of our efforts, the taxpayers of Providence are saving millions every year. We should also give full credit to the teachers union and the laborers union, which recognize that in hard times sacrifices must be made.

Despite savings we have achieved, our costs rise relentlessly because of growth in student enrolment. The General Assembly must fulfill its responsibility to promote public education. The Assembly must provide additional school aid to Providence and other needy cities.

The financial agenda for the City of Providence can be stated succinctly:

First, it is obvious that the property tax no longer meets the needs of Rhode Island's capital city. In order to provide vital public services that benefit the entire state, Providence must have access to new, dependable, and growing sources of revenue that would supplement the property tax.

Second, it is obvious that, henceforth, the state must take the lead role in financing growing costs of education in this city. The state's commitment must be constant year after year.

Third, it is obvious that the municipal unions must contribute their fair share to solving the financial problems of the City of Providence.

We will do everything we can to increase salary levels, however gradually. However, reductions in

pension benefits, and other fringe benefits, are absolutely essential. Reductions in some city services may also be necessary. The movement towards financial reform which began last year must be brought to a successful conclusion. Let the city and its unions form a new partnership in order to achieve these goals. Strengthening the finances of the City of Providence is in the enlightened best interest of taxpayer and city worker alike.

Despite the concerns of the present, I am confident that Providence will continue to play the leading role in this region during the century to come. We will continue to attract men and women of talent and determination, and great deeds will be accomplished here.

As manufacturing fades, the great educational, health and governmental institutions of this city are erecting new structures that reshape the skyline of this 360-year-old city.

There will also be a great marketplace in the heart of this city once again. As many as ten million shoppers a year will make their way to Providence, raising a mercantile din that will be music to our ears.

Providence will be much more than an office park or a shopping mall: it will be a vibrant center of arts and entertainment, attracting millions for theater, concerts and fine dining and, let me add, first-run movies. Three new museums will grace the city's waterfront along the "Museum Mile". Five universities in the center city will attract tens of thousands of students. Art and commerce, research and recreation, medical doctors and fashion boutiques will form a woven tapestry of urban fabric covering but a few hundred acres.

There is a grand plan for the renewal of our greatness that is manifest for all to see. It is in this context we should take up such matters as the financing of the Providence Civic Center or the offering of tax incentives for the restoration and repopulation of historic downtown buildings.

All fit into a grand plan which will be our legacy reborn. We can, and we must, stand up to the perils
to the rising generation in the new century. in our midst. We can, we must, and we will.

We can fulfill the promise of a Providence

RECONVENTION

**COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
FARGNOLI Reconvenes the City Council at
1:20 o'clock P.M. (EST).**

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, on
motion of COUNCILMAN IGLIOZZI,
seconded by COUNCILMAN LOMBARDI, it
is voted to adjourn at 1:25 o'clock P.M. (EST).

Michael R. Clement

City Clerk

