

Interpretive Themes

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Theme Abstracts

NORTH MAIN STREET: LIVING WITH HISTORY North Main Street is most distinctive for its rich layers of history. Residents live amidst this history and RIPTA patrons ride through the corridor's invisible heritage, perhaps unaware of the importance of this route to the city, state, and nation. Artists and designers are called to create tangible reminders of important elements of history that are no longer apparent. As Paul Klee observed, "art does not reproduce the visible, it makes visible." Artists will help create a sense of place along the corridor and help the people who use North Main Street today recall and appreciate the cultural landscape. From its early Native American, colonial, and Revolutionary War history and the inclusive philosophy of the North Burial Ground, to a thriving African American music scene and the early 20th century sports clubs, artists may propose to manifest some piece of history or discover connections between them.

BROAD STREET: EXPERIENCING WORLD CULTURES Broad Street is most notable for its international character, especially its distinctive concentration of international markets, world foods (restaurants, food trucks, and bodegas), and festivals. Artists and designers will interpret the diverse ethnic character of Broad Street, drawing inspiration from the vibrant commercial center with active street life and sidewalks, filled with entertainment, food, social life, colorful murals, and small businesses operated by local, mostly Latino and Asian entrepreneurs. Broad Street's visual and human dynamism provide artists ample opportunities to be part of and contribute to an already lively environment.

North Main Street -- Living with History

Layers of history North Main Street is most distinctive for its rich layers of history. Residents live amidst this rich history and RIPTA patrons ride through the corridor's heritage, perhaps unaware of the importance of this route to Providence, Rhode Island, and the nation. While bus riders and drivers zip along a busy, multi-lane artery, they follow an historic Native American footpath through four historic districts shaped by forces that defined Providence. North Main Stakeholders speak often of "what used to be" along their corridor.

Artist guidelines Artists and designers who interpret North Main Streets' *Living with History* theme are called to create tangible reminders of important elements of this history that are no longer apparent. Artists will help create a sense of place along the corridor and help residents and commuters recall and appreciate that they pass by hallowed ground. There is much more to North Main Street than is obvious.

Through public art and design commissions, artists may find metaphors and inspiration from the invisible layers of North Main's history, its people, events, and important places. A corridor dominated by vehicles, contemporary urban form, and under-utilized properties, reveals little of the street's storied past to the general passer-by. As residents talk about "what used to be here," artists can help us see beneath the surface, to experience the invisible, or connect history with the future. Artists may draw upon a multi-layered palette. From its early Native American, colonial, and Revolutionary War history and the inclusive philosophy of the North Burial Ground, to a thriving African American music scene and the early 20th century sports clubs, artists may propose to manifest some piece of history or to discover connections between them. An artist may find a way to connect or contrast historical threads to weave a welcoming place to live, to work or shop, to walk or play, to visit, or to simply pass through.

Early history North Main Street aligns roughly with the Pawtucket trail, home to the Narragansett people who welcomed the exiled Roger Williams. Williams founded Providence in 1636 at a spring near Narragansett Bay, along Towne Street, now North Main Street. He built his house across the street¹ from the present-day site of the Roger Williams National Memorial². Providence grew from this founding settlement inspired by principles of independent thinking, tolerance, and civic government, the first American colony separating church from state.

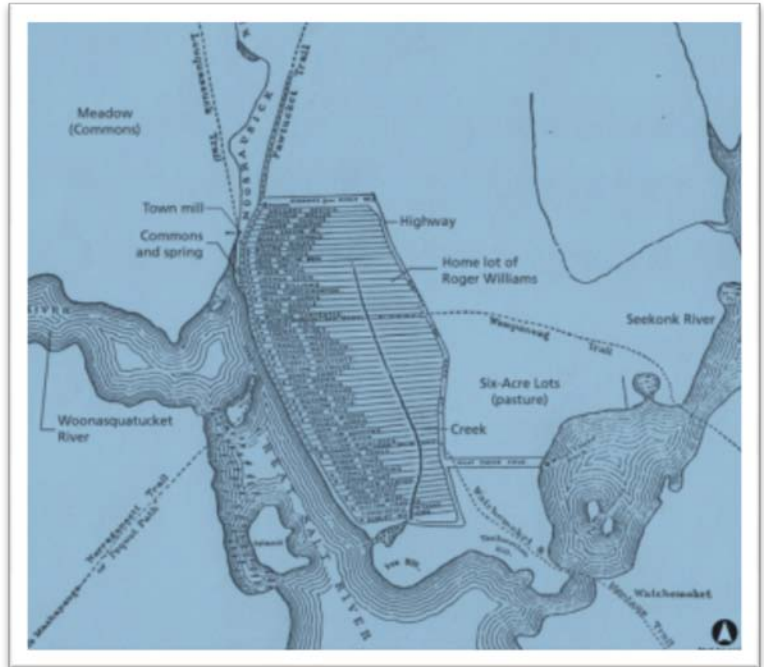


Figure 1A nineteenth-century map of the home lots of Providence Plantations in 1646. The map shows Towne Street (today's North Main Street) with a spring on its west side across from Roger Williams's home lot.

¹ Map Detail, A. L. Boswell map in from Charles Hopkins, *The Home Lots of the Early Settlers of the Providence Plantations, with Notes and Plats*, 1886, annotated by SUNY ESF.

² Cultural Landscape Report for Roger Williams National Memorial, Providence, Rhode Island, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation and National Park Service, Boston, Massachusetts 2010 <http://www.nps.gov/rowi/parkmgmt/upload/2011-03-22-10-29-5>

Military history Rochambeau Avenue and Rochambeau Square recall the French Revolutionary War hero, whose troops encamped along the corridor before joining Washington's army for the decisive Siege of Yorktown. Civil War troops also mustered along the route. The Providence Armory is a contemporary reminder of North Main Street's significant military history.

Historic buildings Among the many historic buildings standing along the corridor are: King's Chapel (St. John's Episcopal), 1722; First Baptist Church, 1726; Colony House (State House), 1731; and Jeremiah Dexter House (shown here).



Dexter House and Preserve Rhode Island



North Burial Ground

North Burial Ground The North Burial Ground, occupies a large area along the northwestern flank of the corridor and is the most frequently cited cultural resource. It is an historic and egalitarian cemetery where governors, philanthropists, college presidents, war heroes, sports icons, the poor, and slaves are buried. The Burial Ground is a microcosm of Providence and Rhode Island history and Roger Williams' legacy of inclusion. Inside the Burial Ground are the Brown Chapel, Armenian Holocaust Memorial, Providence Firefighters Memorial, and a memorial to Rochambeau and the French in the Revolution. Historians have documented the historic tombstones with a database of images. Two interactive

tours of the Burial Ground are in development. While we

have not heard much evidence that the cemetery attracts much cultural tourism or significant recreational use, there is potential for more. Randall Park is an under-used linear park that buffers burial sites from North Main Street. Collyer Park is a popular amateur sports center at the north end of the Ground.

Industrial heritage The rivers that attracted Native Americans and Roger Williams in the seventeenth century provided the power that transformed Providence into a world industrial center in the eighteenth century.

Remnants of the Blackstone Canal are still visible in the North Burial Ground. Eighteenth century milestone markers remain on North Main Street near the Pawtucket line.

Railroad tracks run parallel to North Main and the bus depot is just off North Main on Smithfield Avenue. The corridor has a history of mixed transportation uses, though now is a major artery dominated by vehicles.



Hardscrabble Riot Memorial

African American heritage There is a strong African American history along the route. Snowtown and Hard Scrabble were important African American communities, now mostly remembered for the nineteenth century attacks on these neighborhoods. The Cape Verdean community had a large presence in the North Main Street area. The

IBC was an important Black social club in the mid-twentieth century. This and other clubs made the corridor an important jazz center.

Sports history Many stakeholders spoke with nostalgia about the street's recent history as a sports center. For many people, North Main is the route they travelled to attend professional football, hockey, basketball, and bicycle racing. While the Steam Rollers, Rhode Island Reds, and stadium are gone, names and places like the Penalty Box remind us of their impact. Even now, North Main Street is closely associated with amateur sports and exercise. The Billy Taylor Days engage youth in basketball. North Main Street is also part of the routes for the Rock-N-Roll Half Marathon, the AMICA Iron Man, and the Cox half and full marathons.



Historic Steam Rollers poster

Health care While historical resources have been most frequently cited in our research, the health care institutions along North Main Street are an often cited reason for travel along the corridor today. Miriam Hospital is the corridor's anchor health care institution. The hospital has its roots in the neighborhood's Jewish history. When young Jewish doctors were excluded from practicing medicine, Jewish women raised money to found the hospital.

Healthy living Nine parks and the North Burial Ground create open walking spaces along the corridor inviting people interested in physical activity. Farmers' markets, community markets, and a Whole Foods grocery represent a cluster of local-sourced resources for healthy living.

A major corridor North Main Street is a major bus route and the key connector between Providence and Pawtucket. The corridor stretches from Kennedy Plaza in downtown Providence to the Pawtucket line. Residential areas lie mostly to the east of Main Street, so commuters mostly see institutions, businesses, open spaces, and abandoned buildings near the Pawtucket city line.

Places that matter Cultural attractions with potential for way-finding and bus stop identification:

- North Burial Ground (especially access points and interpretive trails)
- Roger Williams National Memorial
- Dexter House (Preserve RI headquarters)
- Snowtown and Hard Scrabble memorials
- Milestone markers
- Rochambeau Square
- Liberty Tree
- Miriam Hospital
- Parks: Ninth Street, Summit, Collyer, Billy Taylor, Prospect Terrace, South Main Street, Station, Waterplace, Kennedy Plaza
- Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art
- Everett Dance Theatre
- Historic districts: Mount Hope, Doyle Avenue, College Hill, Downtown
- Armory

Broad Street -- Experiencing World Cultures

International Character Broad Street is most notable for its international character, especially its distinctive concentration of international markets and world foods (restaurants, food trucks, and bodegas). Recognizing this energy, the Broad Street Merchant Association (BSMA) has branded the street as an “International Marketplace.” Today, the north end of Broad Street is distinctly multicultural and the south end is distinctly Dominican. There is a strong sense of neighborhood. Many people travel to Broad Street business centers and neighborhoods to experience its foods, Dominican and Puerto Rican celebrations, and ambience. For many local residents, Broad Street is the town common. Its colorful diversity provides ample inspiration for artists and designers to interpret its world cultures’ theme.

Artist guidelines Artists and designers will interpret the diverse ethnic character of Broad Street -- a vibrant commercial center with active streets and sidewalks, filled with entertainment, food, social life, colorful murals, and small businesses operated by local, mostly Latino and Asian entrepreneurs. The visual and human energy provide artists opportunities to be part of, and to enhance a lively environment. The street provides access to Roger Williams Park, the City’s major outdoor and cultural attraction. Artists may find cultural references from the many people who have been part of its past and whose stories connect with current residents. Artists may build on Broad Street’s function as a place to gather, dine, celebrate, and establish or patronize local businesses.

Waves of settlers The international flavor is genuine. Following the ancient Pequot trail, immigrants and their descendants have long made their mark along Broad Street, creating an active street life uncommon outside Downtown. Successive waves of settlers have made Broad Street home, from the earliest Native people, to Irish American settlements, early Irish immigrants, then French Canadian, German, Swedes, Southeast Asians, and Latinos.

Commercial hub and nightlife Broad Street is a busy commercial hub, one of Providence’s seven Neighborhood Market areas, and the busiest commercial district in South Providence. The route is notable for the vitality of its 120 small businesses, often operated by recent immigrants or their families. There is a remarkable concentration of good ethnic restaurants, specialty markets, and bodegas. Each



Broad Street Merchant Association Branding



Dominican Festival



A Broad Street Food Truck

evening Broad Street enlivens as food trucks pull up, music spills out from vehicles and businesses, people shop at the bodegas, night clubs open, and neighbors and visitors gather on the street. The food trucks are a distinctive Broad Street presence -- a Providence innovation that started as horse-drawn trucks for third-shift factory workers.

Ethnic pride and Festivals Algonquin House is home to the Rhode Island Indian Council, scores of nonprofit cultural organizations, and a popular farmers' market. The Dominican Festival on Broad Street has, for 25 years, been a popular celebration of Dominican culture. The Puerto Rican Parade is another special Broad Street event.

Gateway to Roger Williams Park Like Elmwood, Broad Street is also a connector and gateway to Roger Williams Park, a major cultural destination, notable for the zoo, open space, public art, and cultural programming.

Murals There are several notable murals along Broad Street, as well as significant historic homes, buildings, parks, and cemeteries. There is also a concentration of youth arts programs. Broad Street is known for its high-quality murals. These are perfect examples of artists working with neighbors and local business people to animate and define places creatively. More murals are planned.



La Plaza del Arte y Las Culturas - detail

A major route Broad Street is a major bus route linking three public high schools. The northern end of corridor starts at the edge of downtown and I95. Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue diverge at the iconic Trinity Square and historic Grace Church Cemetery. The Street continues through a busy commercial district, past the major eastern entrance to Roger Williams Park and continues on past the park, ending at the City line just past the Washington Park School.

Places that matter Cultural attractions with potential for way-finding and bus stop identification

- Roger Williams Park
- Trinity Square
- Southside Cultural Center
- Grace Church cemetery
- Algonquin House, housing many cultural groups
- City Arts! and Highlander School
- Historic homes
- Murals
- The William B. Cooley, Sr. High School & The Providence Academy of International Studies @ The Juanita Sanchez Complex
- The Met School
- High Schools: Classical, Central, Providence Career & Technical Academy
- Broad Street Synagogue (soon to be the Broad Street Cultural Center)
- Bomes Theatre
- Historic districts
- Parks: Sales, Amos Earley, Roger Williams



Grace Church Cemetery