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INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT  
CITY HALL  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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Y E A R L Y R E P O R T

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January 15, 1954

The Honorable City Council of the  
City of Providence  
City Hall  
Providence, Rhode Island

Honorable Sirs:

I respectfully submit for your information and consideration,  
a report of the work of the Department of Inspector of Buildings  
for the year 1953.

Attached hereto are two tables setting forth by wards and types  
of occupancies, the number of buildings and miscellaneous structures,  
including the estimated costs, for which permits were issued. The  
table marked "New Work" contains data pertaining to the construction  
of new buildings and miscellaneous structures. The table marked  
"Additions and Alterations" contains data pertaining to building  
operations on existing buildings in order to provide additional  
space or to make interior changes to satisfy current and anticipated  
needs.

The estimated costs as set forth herein, taken from the  
accompanying tables, do not include the costs of heating, plumbing  
and electrical installations.

From the tables, the estimated cost of construction for the  
year 1953 is as follows:-

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| New Buildings-----                         | 384 Permits     |
| Estimated Cost-----                        | \$9,697,015.00. |
|  |                 |
| Additions & Alterations-----               | 971 Permits     |
| Estimated Cost-----                        | \$2,947,340.00. |
|  |                 |
| Total Estimated Cost of Construction ----- | \$12,644,355.   |

Permits (not included in tables) issued during the year 1953,  
are as follows:-

|  |    |            |
|--|----|------------|
| Razing of Dilapidated Buildings                  | -  | 70 Permits |
| Sandblasting of Buildings                        | -  | 9 "        |
| Moving of Buildings                              | -  | 4 "        |
| Gasoline Stations (Storage & Sales of Petroleum) | 18 | "          |
| Erection of Billboards                           | -  | 49 "       |
| Erection of Wall Signs                           | -  | 78 "       |
| Erection of Signs over Sidewalks                 | -  | 290 "      |
| Erection of Fire Escapes                         | -  | 142 "      |
| Construction of Vaults                           | -  | 7 "        |
| Use of Street & Sidewalks                        | -  | 187 "      |
| Erection of Fences                               | -  | 1 "        |
| Storage of Dangerous Chemicals                   | -  | 29 "       |
| Storage of Petroleum Products in Bulk            | -  | 1 "        |

Note:

- 1) The above installations, not included in the tables, do not include estimated costs (not required by ordinances).

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249 Family Units have been added during the year 1953  
as a result of building activities through private  
channels as follows:-

|                   |   |                  |
|-------------------|---|------------------|
| (a) New Buildings | - | 236 Family Units |
| (b) Conversions   | - | 13 Family Units  |

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Total Inspections for the year 1953 - 12,904  
Total Fees collected during year 1953 - \$20,472.81

### BUILDING ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR 1953

Private building operations, during the year 1953, in the City of Providence with a total declared estimated cost of \$12,644,355 was \$3,838,155 more than the 1952 estimated construction cost totals, an increase of 43%. These estimated costs are neither total nor accurate due to a number of reasons which have been clearly set forth in previous annual reports. However, the degree of accuracy does not vary much from year to year so that comparisons can be made, figures analyzed and conclusions drawn. New construction showed an increase of 43% in estimated costs over the year 1952; but the number of permits issued during the same period indicates an increase of only 2%. This great difference in percentages is due to the estimated costs of the following building projects:-

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| R. I. Hospital (new 10 story building)                    | \$4,191,215       |
| Providence College Gymnasium                              | 1,143,000         |
| 2 Municipal Garage Buildings                              | 672,650           |
| Narragansett Electric Co. (new building and boiler plant) | 405,000           |
| What Cheer Mutual Fire Insurance Co. Building             | 490,962           |
| Blessed Sacrament Rectory                                 | 100,000           |
| Banigan Court (apartment building)                        | 144,000           |
|   | <hr/> \$7,146,827 |

The estimated costs of the above eight buildings - eight (8) building permits - accounts for 73% of the total estimated cost of new buildings; thereby leaving only 27% of the total estimated costs for 98% of the total number of new buildings - three hundred and seventy-six (376) building permits.

The cost figures for additions and alterations to existing buildings show an increase of 48% over the year 1952, while the permits issued during the same period show an increase of only 1%.

The great difference in percentages between total estimated costs of additions and alterations to existing buildings and the total

number of permits issued during the same period is indicated by the estimated costs of additions and alterations to the following buildings:-

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| St. Joseph's Hospital - 2 story addition to existing building including new power plant    | \$336,561          |
| Water Supply Board Building on Academy Ave. additions and alterations to existing building | 280,000            |
| Jewish Home for the Aged - addition to existing building                                   | 200,000            |
| N.Y., N.H., & H., R.R. Co. alterations to Union Station                                    | 190,000            |
|  | <u>\$1,006,561</u> |

The cost figures set forth above pertaining to additions and alterations to four existing buildings clearly indicate that more than 34% of the total estimated costs of additions and alterations to existing buildings in 1953, accounts for less than 1/2 of 1% of the total number of permits issued during the same period - 4 from a total of 971 permits.

The total estimated cost figures of building construction for the year 1953, while impressive, should not be misinterpreted and accepted as a clear indication of an upward trend in building construction activities. A study of the cost figures pertaining to the twelve (12) buildings set forth herein, shows beyond any doubt that the increases were due to construction operations on church, institutional, public utility, and municipal buildings; buildings that add little or nothing to our taxable wealth or the creation of many new permanent jobs. Residential, commercial and industrial buildings, which are sorely needed, account for only 50% of the total estimated cost of building operations.

The attention of the municipal administration is directed towards creating a healthier climate for private as well as public building construction through its planning and redevelopment agencies; the enactment of a new building code of the functional type; amendments to the new Zoning Ordinance and Map by approving changes

considered necessary by a group of officials now conducting a study of the Zoning Ordinance based upon experience gained after 28 months of administration and enforcement; and the promulgation of a housing code setting forth minimum sanitary and safety standards. Some of these tools are now available and in limited use and the remainder can be made available by the legislative process within a short period of time and put to use. With these legal tools and intelligent planning and application, improvements, that are highly desirable and necessary, will come within the realm of possibility. With public awareness, understanding and participation, many barriers that now stand in the path of progress, can be removed expeditiously and economically, thus making it possible to clear our city of slum areas, reprocess the land and redevelop such areas according to needs, stop the progress of blight through the formulation and adoption of a housing conservation program with a housing code. All of these are positive steps leading to long range benefits for the community as a whole.

The year 1954, according to some reliable forecasters in this community, will not measure up to the 1953 level in building activities unless mortgage financing is available at lower rates and under more favorable conditions. It can also be stated that upward pressures on building costs are still exerted by rising land costs and labor costs with a slight upward rise in the cost of some materials which is contributing to this downward trend. However, public construction projects will provide a formidable prop to any strong dip in private building activities.

Building activities, nationally, will dip approximately 5% to 8% from the 1953 total of \$36 billion a year level. By years end in 1954, some analysts believe that building materials and labor costs will stabilize. The building industry is now in a healthy condition, and present signs do not point to any radical change during the year 1954. For the present, the boom period is over but the lull, nationally, will be of short duration because of the rapid rise in the growth of the population; early marriages and big families mean greater needs, expanding markets with more houses, etc.

INSPECTIONAL ACTIVITIES PERTAINING TO  
SAFETY REQUIREMENTS IN BUILDINGS

The annual inspections of all licensed occupancies (hotels, assembly halls of all types and sizes, cafes, barrooms, restaurants, etc.) were carried on in the usual manner by checking:

- (a) The general structural conditions of the building;
- (b) The type, construction, protection and accessibility of exits, the swing of exit doors, exit signs and lights;
- (c) The type, condition and location of heating and cooking equipment including their safety devices and controls;
- (d) The type, condition and location of fire protective equipment; such as, automatic sprinkler systems (wet and dry), fire extinguishers, fire hose and standpipe installations, fire alarm systems, etc.

This program of annual inspections, started some years ago and now considered routine, provides that type of inspectional service that is entirely devoted to the elimination or correction of hazardous conditions that come within the purview of the rules. All new licenses and transfers require careful inspection before approval is given and applications are signed by this office. Every year the number of violations decrease in number and character. This class of occupancy (public and semi-public), because of the periodic inspections made by the field inspectors from this office and the office of the Fire Prevention Bureau, can now be considered generally good, according to approved standards of safety.

During the last year, only minor violations were found and corrective steps were taken without delay to eliminate these hazards so that no court action, revocation of license or suspension of license were necessary to effect compliance. No such record could be attained without the cooperation of the owners and operators of these occupancies. To maintain approved standards of safety, it is necessary to maintain the type of inspectional service that is

thorough, impartial, effective and courteous.

The processing of complaints is another important function of this office requiring inspectional services. The list of buildings inspected through this medium every year includes many types of occupancies: residential, commercial, institutional, educational, religious, storage, industrial, and mixed. Inspections are made and reports of violations are processed and filed so that the correction or elimination of the hazards reported, is made expeditiously on a voluntary basis, if possible. When this method fails, court action follows within a reasonable period of time.

This type of inspectional service has been carried on in cooperation with the members of the Fire Prevention Bureau for many years. Thousands of buildings have been made safer by the installation of approved automatic sprinkler systems, fire resistive enclosures around stairways and vertical shafts of all types, fire division walls, fire resistive partitions and ceilings, opening protectives on windows where exposure distances to other buildings and lot lines are insufficient, opening protectives on horizontal exits to provide access to refuge areas, exterior fire escapes, fire extinguishers, fire alarm systems, approved fire dampers on ventilating and air conditioning systems, etc.

This type of inspectional service should be expanded so that a survey of the entire city can be made within a given period of time. The magnitude of the task and the obstacles that lie in the path of progress and successful completion of such an effort are generally known because of many years of experience. To conduct a city wide survey on existing buildings, with any hope of success, will have to be deferred until the Proposed Building Code is adopted so that a program can be planned under the control of a central authority and carried out efficiently and effectively bringing into action the staffs of all the related agencies assisted by the members of the Fire Prevention Bureau and a member of the City Solicitor's staff for legal advice and court action. It will be



necessary to use the best tools (legal and technical) in our possession in order to surmount all obstacles that may be encountered. Compliance will not be attained without stern opposition and resistance, but the saving of human lives and the protection of property are certainly worthy of our best efforts.

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### THE ZONING ORDINANCE

The new Zoning Ordinance, approved by the City Council on September 21, 1951, has been in effect approximately twenty-eight (28) months. During this period, the City Council has approved many petitions requesting changes from residential uses to commercial or industrial uses, as designated on the new Zoning Map, while there were only seven amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. These amendments pertain to off-street parking regulations for many occupancies; restrictions on signs over sidewalks setting forth maximum projections and heights; permission to increase the areas of recorded lots that are below minimum area requirements for building purposes; special exceptions and variances approved by the Zoning Board of Review expire after six months if work is not started and carried on with diligence within that period of time, etc. The Zoning Board of Review and the Ordinance Committee of the City Council has been kept very busy trying to satisfy the many requests for changes, exceptions and variances made by persons aggrieved by certain provisions of the Zoning Ordinance and certain uses designated on the Zoning Map.

In the yearly report of 1952, I set forth my observations, objections and recommendations in order to stimulate appropriate action concerning the correction of some errors, omissions and ambiguities in the Zoning Ordinance and some errors in the Zoning Map. Since that time a group of interested public officials have been requested to a restudy and reconsider the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance based upon the experience gained by the application

and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance since its enactment on September 21, 1951. This is a definite step in the right direction. It is reasonable to assume that this effort will produce good results soon.

Changes that will benefit the economy and welfare of the community are always opportune for no obstacle should be permitted to stand in the path of the healthy growth of a city.

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#### THE PROPOSED BUILDING CODE

The Proposed Building Code was presented to the City Council on February 15, 1951, and, according to legislative procedure, was referred to the Ordinance Committee for study and recommendation. The Ordinance Committee, because of the variety and complexity of the technical rules and regulations contained in this document, referred the document back to the members of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee requesting them to conduct a series of meetings and hearings so that all outside groups, in interest, would have ample opportunity to discuss freely all matters in controversy by appearing in person and/or presenting their views and recommendations in writing.

The committee proceeded without delay to arrange a schedule of meetings and hearings in order to comply with the request of the Ordinance Committee. On April 19, 1951, the first hearing was held and thereafter no week passed without one or two meetings or hearings taking place until a total of 89 conferences were held to complete this arduous task. Every group, through their representatives, desirous of being heard and participating in this effort, was heard. Time was consumed without restraint so that all matters in controversy could be considered and discussed freely with a view of resolving differences, where possible. As a result of these conferences many revisions were approved by all participants concerned and these revisions were subsequently compiled and set forth in two off-set

printed reports entitled "Proposed Building Code Report of Revisions" and "Rules and Regulations for the Installation of Electrical Wiring and Apparatus in the City of Providence."

The revisions set forth in the two reports, approved by the Providence Building Code Revision Committee, does not and cannot include all the recommendations submitted by the outside groups; but the number of sections of the Proposed Building Code in controversy, have been reduced to a possible minimum and some sections have been added. The variety and complexity of the subjects discussed and considered made it impossible to resolve all differences and get unanimous agreement.

The Secretary of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee, your Inspector of Buildings, has a typewritten record, duly approved, of the minutes of every meeting and hearing. A careful reading of the meetings will convince anyone that this review was made by the greatest array of experts within the borders of our state and to some extent beyond the borders of our state by representatives of national societies and associations, not to mention the time and effort put into the study of the many recommended codes and standards compiled by nationally recognized associations. To my knowledge, no document has ever received such review.

The "Proposed Building Code Report of Revisions" and the "Rules and Regulations for the Installation of Electrical Wiring and Apparatus in the City of Providence," the two reports containing the approved revisions were submitted to the Ordinance Committee the third week of April 1953. Since that time the Ordinance Committee has conducted a number of conferences with officials affected by the regulations of the Proposed Building Code and the members of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee has held six more conferences, during the same period, with representatives of outside groups. Some minor revisions have been approved as a result of these conferences. These revisions will also be submitted to the Ordinance Committee by the Secretary. The Ordinance Committee

has set a date for a public hearing to be held in the City Council Chamber, City Hall, Thursday, January 14, 1954, at 7:15 P. M. A notice of the public hearing was published by the Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin in order to give all persons and groups an additional opportunity to be heard. This notice published by the local press will also satisfy one of the legal requirements before final action of the City Council.

In view of the many years spent in the preparation and writing of the Proposed Building Code and the time and effort put into the subsequent revisions, with many skilled technicians, tradesmen and dealers participating, the members of the Ordinance Committee should not have any valid substantial reasons for permitting any unnecessary delay in presenting their recommendations - the Proposed Building Code including all approved revisions-to the City Council for final action.

The community can ill afford unwarranted delays in the adoption of a document that will produce savings and cut the cost of building construction without sacrificing standards of fire protection and structural stability. A modern performance type building code, intelligently and efficiently administered and enforced, will benefit the community by providing for safer buildings at lower costs.

Since these benefits are not confined to the building industry alone, but do affect many segments of our economy, the path should be cleared for early adoption of the Proposed Building Code by the members of the City Council.

Respectfully submitted,

IN CITY COUNCIL

JAN 21 1954

RECORDED:

WHEN RECEIVED IT IS CHECKED THAT  
THE NAME BE RECEIVED.

*D. Everett Whelan*  
CLERK

*Alexander Addeo*  
INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS



# ADDITIONS & ALTERATIONS

WARD

|                            | I         | II      | III    | IV     | V       | VI      | VII    | VIII    | IX      | X       | XI      | XII     | No. | EST. COST |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|-----------|
| Dwellings                  | 10        | 35      | 10     | 15     | 24      | 16      | 14     | 13      | 12      | 14      | 3       | 5       | 187 | 150,450   |
| 1 Family                   | Est. Cost | 15,450  | 42,700 | 5,800  | 18,000  | 10,550  | 7,450  | 9,700   | 2,250   | 3,550   | 3,550   | 2,450   |     |           |
| Dwellings                  | 15        | 17      | 14     | 30     | 25      | 13      | 22     | 24      | 23      | 12      | 6       | 3       | 231 | 202,050   |
| 2 Families                 | Est. Cost | 15,400  | 33,900 | 13,300 | 35,200  | 11,050  | 16,500 | 12,100  | 18,050  | 6,400   | 3,800   | 2,450   |     |           |
| Multi Families             | 10        |         | 4      | 20     | 18      | 12      | 11     | 25      | 12      | 2       | 12      | 18      | 104 | 132,810   |
|                            | Est. Cost | 9,650   |        | 13,900 | 17,550  | 10,700  | 9,700  | 13,360  | 9,450   | 2,950   | 2,450   | 18,450  |     |           |
| Churches Homes, Etc.       | No.       |         |        | 1      | 2       |         |        |         | 3       |         | 3       | 5       | 13  | 433,630   |
|                            | Est. Cost |         |        | 300    | 17,300  |         |        |         | 1,450   |         | 227,250 | 15,500  |     |           |
| Amusement & Recreation     | No.       |         |        |        |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         | 8   | 259,950   |
|                            | Est. Cost |         |        |        |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         |     |           |
| Office Buildings and Banks | No.       | 3       | 1      |        |         |         | 2      | 2       | 2       | 1       |         | 11      | 32  | 322,300   |
|                            | Est. Cost | 3,900   | 1,200  |        |         |         | 9,250  | 2,500   | 49,300  | 500     |         | 196,700 |     |           |
| Public & Municipal         | No.       |         |        |        | 1       |         | 1      |         | 1       |         |         | 2       | 5   | 478,050   |
|                            | Est. Cost |         |        |        | 230,000 |         | 100    |         | 450     |         |         | 197,500 |     |           |
| Schools                    | No.       | 1       |        | 1      |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         | 3   | 6,900     |
|                            | Est. Cost | 900     |        | 5,000  |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         |     |           |
| Gasoline Stations          | No.       | 1       | 1      | 3      | 1       |         | 2      | 2       | 2       | 1       | 2       | 2       | 21  | 36,650    |
|                            | Est. Cost | 1200    |        | 2,150  | 1,350   |         | 2,300  | 1,300   | 14,700  | 3,300   | 1,420   | 7,010   |     |           |
| Garages                    | No.       | 6       | 4      | 6      | 5       | 3       | 2      | 12      | 6       | 7       | 1       | 5       | 61  | 90,200    |
|                            | Est. Cost | 4,400   | 800    | 7,000  | 2,400   | 1,800   | 1,300  | 10,200  | 21,100  | 24,450  | 300     | 11,500  |     |           |
| Stores                     | No.       | 6       | 2      | 3      | 7       | 1       | 12     | 3       | 5       | 3       | 3       | 46      | 121 | 250,550   |
|                            | Est. Cost | 2,050   | 3,300  | 13,500 | 10,050  | 400     | 29,550 | 2,500   | 4,300   | 46,050  | 1,300   | 32,550  |     |           |
| Storehouses                | No.       | 7       |        | 2      | 1       |         |        | 1       | 4       | 1       | 2       | 5       | 27  | 189,450   |
|                            | Est. Cost | 109,100 |        | 1,300  | 1,000   | 3,000   |        | 500     | 18,900  | 2,000   | 5,700   | 10,000  |     |           |
| Manufactories and Shops    | No.       | 1       |        | 1      | 3       | 4       | 5      | 6       | 5       | 7       | 12      | 12      | 69  | 381,200   |
|                            | Est. Cost | 2,600   |        | 150    | 1,650   | 11,000  | 8,400  | 24,700  | 13,900  | 68,600  | 139,750 | 48,350  |     |           |
| Oil Burners                | No.       |         |        |        |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         |     |           |
|                            | Est. Cost |         |        |        |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         |     |           |
| Miscellaneous              | No.       | 1       | 1      | 1      |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         | 4   | 8,100     |
|                            | Est. Cost | 1,500   | 800    | 800    |         |         |        |         |         |         |         |         |     |           |
| Total Number by Wards      |           | 62      | 53     | 33     | 36      | 49      | 71     | 35      | 35      | 60      | 48      | 123     |     |           |
| Estimated Cost by Wards    |           | 173,150 | 95,200 | 40,250 | 85,500  | 409,350 | 84,550 | 177,160 | 160,850 | 157,950 | 500,730 | 354,750 |     |           |

Total Estimated Cost by Wards  
\$1,000,000.00