

INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT
112 UNION STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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

1 9 5 4

January 17, 1955

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 1954.

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 1954 is as follows:-

New Buildings-----	332 Permits
Estimated Cost-----	\$2,881,700.00.
Additions & Alterations-----	1078 Permits
Estimated Cost-----	\$2,070,300.00.
Total Estimated Cost of Construction-----	\$4,952,000.00

Permits (not included in tables) issued during the year 1954,
are as follows:-

Razing of Dilapidated Buildings	- 102 Permits
Sandblasting of Buildings	- 11 "
Moving of Buildings	- 12 "
Gasoline Stations	- 23 "
Erection of Billboards	- 39 "
Erection of Wall Signs	- 82 "
Erection of Signs over Sidewalks	- 273 "
Erection of Fire Escapes	- 116 "
Construction of Vaults	- 3 "
Use of Street & Sidewalks	- 214 "
Erection of Fences	- 2 "
Storage of Dangerous Chemicals	- 27 "
Storage of Petroleum Products in Bulk	- 3 "

Note:

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

234 Family Units have been added during the year 1954
as a result of building activities through private
channels as follows:-

(a) New Buildings	--	195 Family Units
(b) Conversions	-	39 Family Units

Total Inspections for the year 1954 - 13,841
Total Fees collected during year 1954 - \$14,971.15

BUILDING ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR 1954

Private building operations, during the year 1954, in the City of Providence with a total declared estimated cost of \$4,952,000, was \$7,692,355 less than the 1953 total estimated construction costs - a drop of nearly 61%. This drop, the lowest in many years, is due to the depressed condition of all types of building operations with the exception of residential buildings, which accounted for approximately 50% of the yearly total building construction estimates. New one family dwellings, with a total declared estimated cost of \$1,737,000 for 1954, accounts for 36% of the total building construction estimated cost, 60% of the 1954 total new buildings estimated cost and 74% of the total cost figures for residential building operations.

During the year 1954, 1410 permits were issued for the construction of new buildings, additions and alterations to existing buildings - 55 permits more than the number of permits issued during the previous year, 1953 - an increase of 4%. This increase in number of permits in 1954 with a decrease of 61% in the total estimated cost of building operations during the same period as compared with the figures for 1953, is not a mere manipulation of figures when one considers, that, during the year 1953, the issuance of two permits, the R. I. Hospital (new ten story building) at a declared estimated cost of \$4,191,215 and the Providence College Gymnasium at \$1,143,000, exceeds the 1954 total estimated cost of building operations.

The cost figures for additions and alterations to existing buildings show a decrease of 29% from the year 1953, while the permits issued during the same period show an increase of 11%.

The estimated cost figures used in this report are neither total nor accurate due to a number of previously mentioned reasons, some of which are set forth in the Fee Schedule of the Building Ordinance and the usual reluctance on the part of some people to declare fair cost estimates, etc. However, comparisons and conclusions can be drawn

with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Private building activities locally are not improving, and present signs do not point up to any rapid change for better. Dips and drops in the volume of building operations are all parts of downward or negative trends which cannot be allowed to continue for any long period of time. The underlying causes are generally known but they are so deeply rooted that corrective remedies are both very expensive and time consuming so that any hope of rapid changes are remote and fanciful. Some steps have been taken by the present administration with the aid of federal funds to give some measure of relief by the adoption and approval of long range and short range building and land reprocessing programs prepared by the Providence City Plan Commission and the Providence Redevelopment Agency. The Willard Avenue Project, consisting of two units, is now in process with the "demolition of buildings" phase of the work nearly complete, with the second or construction phase of the work in the designing and planning stage. The Point Street Project, an industrial redevelopment project, is now tied up in the Courts awaiting final disposition so that the condemnation of land can be completed and work on the site started. Other redevelopment projects are now in the planning stage and in turn will be processed legally and financially so that some day sub-standard and blighted areas will be transformed into thriving modern residential, commercial and industrial communities with sufficient land areas set aside and properly located for recreational, educational, institutional and religious needs.

The rehabilitation of existing sub-standard dwelling houses is of immediate concern and plans are now in progress so that proper action can be taken when federal requirements have been complied with. The Housing Act of 1954 makes it mandatory for any city seeking federal funds for redevelopment projects to have a Housing Ordinance in effect in order to stop the progress of blight and obsolescence. The Housing Committee appointed by Mayor Reynolds, some time ago, has been meeting regularly for the last two years studying, researching and discussing modern housing codes of many cities including

the model housing code proposed by the U. S. Public Health Service. At this time, the Proposed Housing Code is near completion and, according to the latest information, will be submitted to the City Council before the end of the year, for consideration and approval.

A housing code contains minimum requirements for light, ventilation, sanitation, equipment, maintenance, and occupancy; and is intended to reclaim deteriorated housing and arrest the spread of urban blight and slums. It is evident that a housing code without a modern building code will, at best, become a weak legal instrument, for the housing code, in a general sense, sets forth, "What to do," in order to reclaim these sub-standard houses; and it is the province of the building code to set forth, "How to do it." It is, therefore, very urgent for the City Council to give prompt consideration for the adoption of the Proposed Building Code without any further delay, for the benefits, direct and indirect, that will accrue to the community in general and the building industry, in particular, are of sufficient magnitude to warrant immediate action.

A few months ago, the City Council adopted a number of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance; thereby removing inconsistencies and errors in the ordinance, relaxing unwarranted yard restrictions on small lots, revising parking provisions, clarifying and revising sign and outdoor advertising regulations, etc. These amendments, recommended by a group of officials, after months of study and discussion, will help to stimulate greater building activities. Additional stimulation will come from land use map changes, if serious consideration and prompt action is given to the resolution presented to the City Council during the latter part of 1954 pertaining to a restudy of the Zoning Map of the City of Providence, so that more land can be rezoned for industrial uses; changing these zones from residential to industrial, where feasible.

It is opportune and adviseable at this time to restudy and reconsider the Zoning Map of the entire city. Three years and four months of experience gained from the issuance of permits, has pointed-up errors of zoning which should be corrected. It is important that

the City Government gives the matter of rezoning the attention and study necessary to stimulate building activities in general and to attract new industry.

The construction industry in 1955, according to all reliable forecasts, faces the pleasant prospect of topping 1953 and 1954, nationally, reaching a high of 39.5 billion dollars. The big boom will be in housing with official estimates of 1.3 million homes to be started during this year. Materials, prices, and labor rates will remain stable. No price rise is in prospect for new homes. The demand for homes will continue to remain strong and healthy for many years because of the steady rise in the growth of the population, early marriages with more children, change in the mode of living, expanding markets, 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 many years ago and now considered routine, provides that type of inspectional service entirely devoted to the elimination or correction of hazardous conditions that come within the purview of the rules. Annual inspections of all public and semi-public occupancies are made in order to maintain approved standards of safety. The License Bureau

will not issue any license without first obtaining the approval of this office concerning the structural and fire-safety conditions of the premises. This type of inspectional service places an unusual burden on the field inspectors during the months of October and November every year - two months to complete inspections and submit reports for processing before the approvals or denials can be reported to the License Bureau.

The processing of complaints is another important function of this office requiring inspectional services. Through this medium, residential, commercial, institutional, educational, religious, storage, industrial and mixed occupancy buildings are inspected and reports processed; and where hazardous conditions are reported, notices are mailed to owners, managers or agents to take whatever steps are necessary to correct or eliminate the unsafe conditions within a specified limit of time. One notice, in the majority of cases, brings compliance. This type of service has been given special attention expanding the scope of such inspectional activities to almost 50% of the total number of inspections per year. The members of the Fire Prevention Bureau, have for many years, participated in this effort and their cooperation has made it possible to focus attention on the elimination and/or correction of hazardous conditions in many old buildings of all types, which otherwise would have escaped our notice. As a result of this type of service, thousands of buildings have been made safer by the installation of approved automatic sprinkler systems, fire division walls, fireproof or fire resistive enclosures around stairways and vertical shafts of all types, fire resistive partitions and ceilings, opening protectives on windows where exposure distances to lot lines and to their buildings are insufficient, exterior fire escapes, fire extinguishers, fire alarm systems, approved fire dampers and automatic fan shut-offs on ventilating and air condition systems, etc.

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 arranged a program of meetings and hearings; the first hearing was held on April 19, 1951 and after 89 such conferences, a number of revisions were approved and were later compiled and set forth in two off-set printed reports entitled "Proposed Building Code Reports Of Revisions" and "Rules And Regulations For The Installation Of Electrical Wiring And Apparatus In The City Of Providence," which were submitted to the Ordinance Committee on April 17, 1953. During the remainder of the year 1953, the Ordinance Committee conferred with officials affected by the regulations of the "Proposed Building Code" and the members of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee which held six conferences with representatives of outside groups during the same period. These conferences resulted in some minor revisions which were recorded by the Secretary of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee.

The Ordinance Committee then set a date for a public hearing to be held in City Hall in the City Council Chamber, Thursday at 7:15, P. M., January 14, 1954. The notice of the public hearing, published by the Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin, alerted all persons and groups, in interest; and on the evening of January 14, 1954, the City Council Chamber was filled with persons representing local chapters of national professional associations, organizations

of craftsmen and tradesmen, etc. The majority of these representatives voiced approval with no reservations, urging the speedy adoption of the "Proposed Building Code" including the reports of revisions; a few persons presented recommendations for two or three minor changes; and only one speaker, representing a local group of tradesmen, attacked the "Proposed Building Code" objecting to the regrouping of agencies. No one can deny that the majority of persons in attendance were strong in favor of speedy adoption of the "Proposed Building Code".

The recommendations presented orally at the public hearing by representatives of technical, labor, tradesmen and governmental groups, were submitted in typewritten form to the Ordinance Committee for consideration. The Ordinance Committee again decided to submit these recommendations to the members of the Providence Building Code Revision Committee for study and consideration and to report back their findings. The committee held six meetings on the "pros" and "cons" of the recommendations and a report setting forth additional approved revisions has been filed with the Deputy City Clerk for the Ordinance Committee.

The latest revisions approved by the Providence Building Code Revision Committee were compiled and the report entitled "Supplement To The Proposed Building Code Report Of Revisions" was submitted to the Ordinance Committee; together with another report setting forth a number of changes recommended by the City Solicitor in order to resolve all legal and other issues involved in effecting the reorganization and amalgamation of related, inspectional agencies, including the changes of official title designations, the termination of powers and duties, etc. The City Solicitor later recommended that all the revisions to the "Proposed Building Code" approved by the various groups subsequent to March 16, 1953, when the "Proposed Building Code Reports of Revisions" was submitted to the Ordinance Committee, should be accurately set forth in and made a part of the "Proposed Building Code Reports of Revisions"; thus avoiding the risk of confusion and misunderstanding resulting from reading a series of reports which contained changes to the same numbered sections. This last report will be complete before the end of January 1955.

Recapitulation of Hearings And Meetings By The Providence
Building Code Revision Committee And Its Sub-Committees

Prior to February 17, 1951, when the
"Proposed Building Code" was presented to
the City Council-----355

From February 17, 1951, to April 1951,
when 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"----- 91

From January 14, 1954, date of Public
Hearing in the City Council Chamber, to
March 31, 1954----- 6

Total 452

A number of conferences were held by the
Ordinance Committee, the City Solicitor and
other officials, which are not included in
the list set forth above.

The "Proposed Building Code", including the latest revisions,
is a performance type building code based on functional standards,
in so far as it is practicable, and establishes minimum safety re-
quirements as determined by inherent structural, fire and sanitary
hazards. It is unlike our present outmoded specification type
building code in scope, arrangement and subject matter; some of
the innovations are as follows:

- (a) Buildings will be posted for floor
load, occupancy load, use group and
fire load.
- (b) Classification of use groups by in-
herent fire and life hazard, based
on available performance records
reported periodically by the National
Fire Protection Association.
- (c) Height and area limitations of
buildings are graduated in order
to secure a uniform degree of fire
hazard in accordance with the
anticipated degree of fire severity
in each use group and the factual
time-temperature performance of the
type of construction.
- (d) The fire-resistive requirements
for the elements of the structure
may be reduced so as to provide
for the minimum essential for the
safety of life, rather than the
ultimate conceivable, thereby re-
tarding the use of fire-safe
construction.

- (e) The design of fire division walls, segregation of mixed-used groups and fire separation of buildings based on exterior fire exposure, have been determined by the fire-load factor for each use group-expressed in hours of equivalent time-temperature performance.
- (f) The structural requirements, including the design of walls, foundations, chimneys and pre-fabricated structural and mechanical assemblies will be based on performance standards.
- (g) Adequate controls are provided to meet the introduction of new devices and innovations in equipment, such as, escalators, elevators, revolving doors and hazardous processes of air-conditioning and refrigeration.
- (h) Supplemental means of emergency fire ventilation to safeguard against the dissemination of toxic gases, smoke and hot lethal air from fires. The code specifies emergency ventilation for buildings and automatic ventilation of shaftways and exitways.
- (i) The Building Code Revision Board, as set forth in the code, provides the means for keeping the building code current. Procedures are set up for expeditious revision of the rules and regulations, the approval of new methods of construction and the approval of new materials including their assemblies. With this type of procedure, a great degree of flexibility is attained and the arduous, complex and exasperating task of building code revision becomes a comparatively simple assignment.

The community cannot afford the luxury of further delays in the adoption of the "Proposed Building Code" including the latest recommended revisions. Benefits, direct and indirect, that will accrue to the community cannot be calculated accurately; but no one, who is acquainted with the contents, of this code, will deny that great economic benefits will be realized if, and when, this new performance type code is adopted and intelligently and efficiently administered. No person or group of persons, has been denied the

opportunity to be heard. Most matters in controversy have been resolved; especially as it concerns the technical parts of the building code. Ample time, study and deliberation has also been given to the administrative parts of the code, which pertain to the creation of four separate divisions under the supervision and control of a Director. Exhaustive research and study has pointed-up the necessity of centralizing the authority and responsibility of administration and enforcement. Experience in many cities has shown that the regrouping and/or rearrangement of existing agencies of government has been the direct or indirect cause of delays in the adoption of new building codes. To disturb the "status quo" is not a pleasant task but public safety and convenience must come first.

The citizen and taxpayer should get the protection that is provided for him by law and ordinance at the least possible cost. He expects to get direct, intelligent and accurate answers to his questions without running the risk of getting involved in legal difficulties by obtaining permission to install equipment and apparatus, in his building, from one agency, and later discovering that he has violated the regulations of another; or worse, he should not be put in the position of being forced to make expensive alterations or vacate his building because of insufficient fire protection or illegal occupancy, after he has already payed the contractor. All of these undesirable possibilities must be avoided or eliminated and certainly would not occur if the related agencies functioned under a central control.

The delays have been many, but there is ~~now~~ substantial reason to believe that the adoption of the "Proposed Building Code" including the latest revisions, will be a reality within a few months.

Respectfully submitted,

IN CITY COUNCIL
FEB 3 - 1955

READ:
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

Deverett Whelan
CLERK

Alexander Adder
INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS

New Work 1954

WARDS

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	NO.	EST. COST
Dwellings	No.	21	4	14	81	29	10	2	13	-	-	-	-	-	-
1 Family	Est. Cost	379,700	44,900	118,500	154,400	224,000	86,500	16,000	113,000	-	-	-	-	174	1,737,000
Dwellings	No.	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Families	Est. Cost	-	-	-	16,000	9,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	25,000
Multi Families	No.	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	90,000
Churches, Homes, Etc	Est. Cost	90,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	78,500
Amusement & Recreation	No.	-	-	28,000	1	-	-	50,000	500	-	-	-	-	1	45,000
Office Buildings and Banks	Est. Cost	-	-	-	45,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	30,150
Public & Municipal	No.	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	2	1	3	-	-	-
Schools	Est. Cost	-	-	5,000	-	-	-	2,200	-	19,500	2,000	1,150	-	-	-
Gasoline Stations	No.	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	185,000
Garages	Est. Cost	-	-	-	-	185,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stores	No.	3	9	5	34	9	8	3	8	2	1	1	20,500	6	31,350
Storehouses	Est. Cost	3,900	11,400	18,700	33,550	9,600	13,700	2,800	10,600	3,300	900	1,200	17,700	101	140,350
Manufactories and Shpps	No.	1	-	-	-	-	3	-	4	1	-	1	1	11	178,800
Oil Burners	Est. Cost	4,000	-	-	-	-	70,000	-	68,800	20,000	-	8,000	8,000	-	-
Miscellaneous	No.	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	3	1	9	124,400
	Est. Cost	18,000	-	900	500	12,000	-	-	50,000	-	-	38,000	5,000	-	-
	No.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	4	1	3	9	213,850
	Est. Cost	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	65,750	-	87,500	3,500	57,100	-	-
	No.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Est. Cost	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	No.	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Est. Cost	-	-	200	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	2,300
Total Number by Wards	Est. Cost	6	30	10	30	42	22	9	29	5	6	2,000	-	3	-
Estimated Cost by Wards	Est. Cost	115,900	391,100	63,900	849,450	438,700	172,200	71,850	366,500	42,800	90,400	538,500	149,300	-	-

Total Est. Cost - 2,881,700
Total Permits - 332

Additions and Alterations 1954

WARDS

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	NO.	EST. COST
Dwellings	No.	21	25	17	14	33	16	17	10	22	7	5	10	201	142,750
1 Family	Est. Cost	12,900	36,400	11,700	8,200	17,750	9,700	6,550	7,200	14,400	2,750	2,500	7,250	5,450	
Dwellings	No.	20	11	9	21	26	15	22	21	18	14	11	21	217	150,200
2 Families	Est. Cost	11,500	15,100	6,500	19,650	16,350	8,200	22,150	9,750	10,150	6,250	5,650	7,100	11,850	
Multi Families	No.	25	7	5	19	27	16	12	23	13	8	22	19	221	194,050
	Est. Cost	34,350	10,000	2,500	23,700	15,450	11,050	13,600	12,700	8,550	8,050	16,100	10,450	27,550	
Churches, Homes, Etc	No.	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	2	-	-	3	4	61,800
	Est. Cost	4,200	-	-	9,000	2,000	100	-	2,700	30,700	-	-	6,400	6,700	
Amusement & Recreation	No.	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	19,350
	Est. Cost	18,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,350	-	
Office Buildings and Banks	No.	2	2	-	1	2	-	1	2	-	2	4	14	2	125,300
	Est. Cost	12,500	400	-	20,000	3,100	-	1,500	1,700	-	1,300	31,500	52,350	950	
Public & Municipal	No.	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	2	30,500
	Est. Cost	5,250	2,000	-	-	4,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,250	9,000	
Schools	No.	5	2	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	131,350
	Est. Cost	55,900	19,500	3,000	4,100	-	550	-	4,450	-	3,850	-	-	40,000	
Gasoline Stations	No.	1	-	2	4	4	2	6	6	-	1	3	-	1	77,900
	Est. Cost	200	-	450	10,700	17,600	1,600	7,550	9,500	-	23,000	500	6,300	500	
Garages	No.	2	7	7	4	2	4	4	4	7	1	2	7	4	73,350
	Est. Cost	400	3,400	7,900	1,000	10,500	2,400	6,300	8,850	1,600	1,000	850	34,400	4,500	
Stores	No.	7	3	7	5	7	9	9	4	7	7	3	85	13	402,050
	Est. Cost	33,650	5,000	7,700	2,350	9,700	54,350	9,100	2,100	47,900	3,150	1,250	178,500	47,300	
Storehouses	No.	4	-	-	1	-	3	1	-	1	5	1	5	8	144,950
	Est. Cost	46,000	-	-	100	-	1,000	4,700	-	10,000	35,600	200	6,350	41,000	
Manufactories and Shoppes	No.	4	-	-	3	4	4	5	6	4	8	11	17	17	516,750
	Est. Cost	5,850	-	-	2,750	2,350	13,500	6,950	30,500	10,950	33,700	28,550	45,550	336,100	
Oil Burners	No.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Est. Cost	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	No.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Est. Cost	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Number by Wards		95	58	48	74	107	71	77	78	74	54	56	178	108	
Estimated Cost by Wards		249,700	91,500	39,750	101,550	89,350	102,450	78,400	89,450	134,250	118,650	87,100	366,250	530,900	

Total Est. Cost - 2,070,300
Total Permits - 6,078