

August 20, 2013

Mr. John M. Shehan and Commission Members  
Newport Historic District Commission  
43 Broadway  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

Dear Chairman Shehan and Commission Members:

I am writing in strong support of the Preservation Society of Newport County's proposal to construct a welcome center on the property of The Breakers. During my time in public life I developed a deep appreciation for the important role this organization plays in our community. In many ways the mission of the Preservation Society and the historic buildings over which it maintains stewardship define the city of Newport.

The Preservation Society's proposal to build a welcome center fills a great need for visitor amenities for The Breakers' 400,000 annual visitors. It will also enable the Society to continue to be financially successful, which will directly benefit our local and state economy, and allow the Preservation Society to carry out its mission to preserve, protect and present its many magnificent properties. As you know, this issue has been contentious for a decade and it is my feeling the time has come for resolution. Common sense dictates a visibly pleasing building consistent with the neighborhood is a better option than the seasonal tent that is currently in use.

It is only in the best interest of the PSNC to enhance the experience of their visitors not to degrade the historical significance of the Breakers' property. Granting permission for this petition and improving the product PSNC provides will only strengthen this organization which is one of the largest employers in the city. Nearly 400 people work there, including 175 of our fellow Newport residents.

I have friends both vocally in favor and against this welcome center. But from what I have seen the bulk of the opposition is based upon opinion about aesthetics, losing site of the wider benefits the welcome center would have to maintain the viability of the PSNC as the steward of Newport's most famous properties. People come to Newport to see these mansions and want to do so in a convenient and comfortable fashion. These same visitors spend money in our retail shops, restaurants, hotels and at other attractions. Real Newporters work in these businesses and their livelihoods depend on Newport's continued reputation as a world class destination that is welcoming to our visitors.

This strikes me as a pivotal moment for the future of Newport. The city's cultural institutions are the lifeblood of the community. Such investment is visionary. And it is necessary – not only for the PSNC – but for the city as well. My time in office helped me recognize that change can have a positive impact and that we as a city can evolve without diminishing the value of our historic treasures.

The proposal before your commission is reasonable, one that meets the needs of the PSNC while also respecting the integrity of the historic district. I respect your volunteer service on a board

that is often misunderstood and even more often unappreciated. The decision you have to make is a serious one that will have a profound influence on Newport's future and how we preserve our history. I urge your support for the proposed welcome center based on the merits of its design, its programmatic goals, and its benefit to the community.

Sincerely,

Stephen C. Waluk

Mayor of Newport, 2007-2009, 2011-2012