

# URBN.

SPRING 2021

*A biannual student-run, student-published newsletter for Brown University's Urban Studies department.*

*Edited and designed by Hanna Wells*

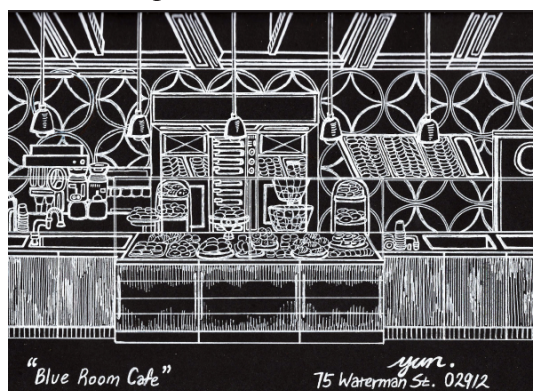
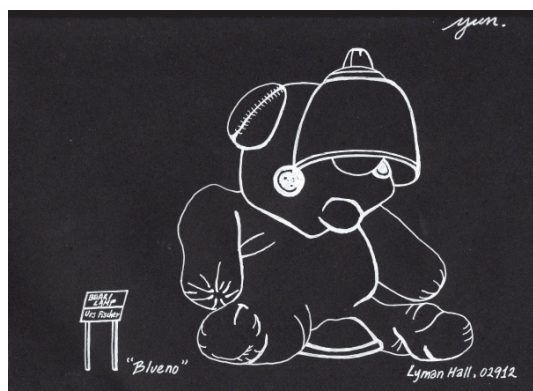


*Spring blooming over Maxcy*

## Yunni Cho '21 illustrates prints for seniors

How will this year's graduates remember campus? Yunni Cho, Brown | RISD Dual Degree student and Urban Studies concentrator came up with a creative solution to gift the graduating class: 10 drawings from College Hill, featuring iconic scenes that resonate with the class. "I hope [these prints] can be a way for us to treasure our beautiful memories of being in Providence."

*Click here to view prints at the Brown Bookstore*



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## SNEAK PEAK

From Maxcy Hall to Brown's campus to the City of Providence, the Urban Studies newsletter has it all:

## Welcoming new faces to Maxcy

MEET THE NEW faculty in our department.

» continued, PG. 3



## Senior Theses

TAKE A glance into the theses that our seniors completed this year.

» continued, PG. 4



## From Seniors

WHAT DO the seniors really think about Urban Studies and Providence?

» continued, PG. 7



# LETTERS

## Letter from the Director

Hello URBN!

As we reach the end of another semester in this strange and disquieting new pandemic world, I wanted to offer a quick note of greeting, thanks, and encouragement.

We've all learned much these last few months about being together in new ways. We've been forced to rethink what community and presence actually mean as we have taken and taught classes online, held meetings virtually, looked to connect with each other in new online spaces, and considered the future of actual, physical, urban spaces in the wake of the pandemic. Many of the pieces in this year's Urban Journal, edited by junior concentrator Thomas Wilson, take up these very topics (and more!) so I hope everyone will make some time as the semester ends to read the work of your peers. Thanks to Thomas for his work, to Hanna Wells, our newsletter editor extraordinaire, and to all of the DUG for working to make Urban Studies a welcoming and creative space, pandemic or no.

## Introducing Suzanne Brough

A fresh face is representing the Urban Studies department! Our new program manager, Suzanne Brough, has brought us a slew of opportunities to connect with Providence activism and city planning. Suzanne has a Bachelor's Degree from Boston University, magna cum laude, and 16 years of experience in higher education administration. Suzanne spent the last 13 years as a staff member in the Political Science Department at Brown University. She ran day-to-day operations, organized 75+ events/meetings per year from small groups to large 100+ invite only special events, and managed the website, all while having an enormous role in the management of the PhD program, which doubled in size during her time there. She loves working at Brown and enjoys attending a variety of University events. •

This year we welcomed Suzanne Brough as our new program manager, and I hope all of you have had a chance to meet her on Zoom. We all look forward to the fall, when she'll be holding down the fort in Maxcy Hall. In the coming months several faculty members will go on leave for next year or part of it, but we are excited to welcome several new faculty members. We'll be joined in the fall by Aimee Bourassa, a political scientist, who joins us through the Dean's Faculty Fellow program and Teo Wickland, a planner and specialist in alternative transportation, who will be with us through the Presidential Diversity Fellows Program. As you all know we're also in the midst of hiring a new full-time Lecturer in the program—more news on that as it becomes available. Each of them will offer new classes in the Program and have offices on the first floor of Maxcy Hall.

Here's hoping that things continue the way they appear to be heading and that we can all be back to working and learning together in Maxcy Hall, in actual classrooms,

in Providence, and cities that are beginning to come back to life.

Thanks for everything you do,  
Sandy Zipp

## Letter from the Editor

While the full academic year has ended in the similar remote manner in which it all began, Zipp's note assures us that next year will be exciting, not just with the promises of in-person community, but with the coming of new members to our tight-knit community. I myself took my second gap semester hoping for a more fruitful year to come, but the resiliency of the class of '21 has been inspiring. Not only did they complete incredible theses and capstones, but they are persevering through the emotional turbulence of graduating remotely as well. As I have officially become a member of the class of '22, I want to wish my friends, many of whom I met during my freshman fall in Urban Life in Providence goodbye, and a hello to the concentration's next leaders.

- Hanna Wells



# FROM CAMPUS

## Meet new faces joining our community next fall

### Aimée Bourassa:

Aimée Bourassa will be joining the Urban Studies Program as a Deans' Faculty Fellow Visiting Assistant Professor in 2021-2022. She is currently finishing her PhD in political science at Brown University. Her research focuses on governance and development in Global South cities, and in particular on the politics of social housing and infrastructure provision in Mexico. Before coming to Brown, Aimée earned a BSc in International Studies from the University of Montreal and a MA in Political Science from McGill University. She also worked in the field of participatory urban planning

in both Canada and Mexico. Next fall, she will offer URBN1870X "The Political Economy of Cities: American and Comparative Perspectives." This interactive upper-level seminar examines how economic and political factors shape urban life and processes while critically evaluating the efforts of different actors to shape and reshape cities in the U.S. and beyond. In Spring 2022, Aimée plans to draw on her experience and research to teach on issues of urban governance and development in the Global South or on urban research design and methods. •



### Teo Wickland:



I'm currently a PhD Candidate in the Department of Urban Planning at UCLA (Tongva land) and finishing my dissertation on "Transportation epistemologies: Currents of relation and (de)modernization in Fenua Mā'ohi." At UCLA, I also completed certificates with the Urban Humanities and Leaders in

Sustainability programs. I will be joining the Urban Studies department this September as a Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow. I'll be teaching a seminar this fall semester on transportation epistemologies and transformative possibilities, tentatively titled "Transportation theory and praxis: Creative methods and decolonial options" (URBN 1871D). I am excited to teach this class and to get to know and work with students in Urban Studies, and to collaborate with faculty from US and other departments. As a fellow at Brown and newcomer to Narragansett land, I will spend much of my time on research. I position my research program at the intersection of three themes: modernity/coloniality, transportation epistemologies, and abundant futures. (Transportation epistemologies, my intervention,

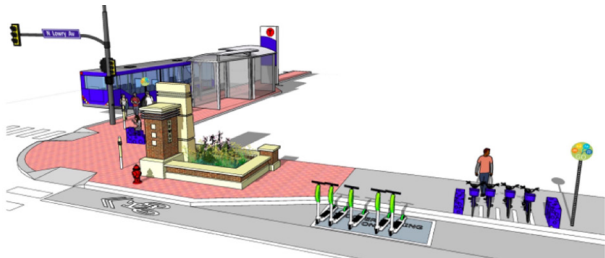
are lenses for understanding plural actualities and possibilities of knowledge production about, through, and as transportation.) Prior to my doctoral studies, I completed my undergraduate degree in Physics at Harvard University (Massachusetts and Pawtucket land) and master's degrees in Civil Engineering and City & Regional Planning at UC Berkeley (Ohlone land). Between Harvard and Berkeley, I had a career in capitalist business strategy; after Berkeley, I worked as a transportation planner for the City of San Francisco (Ramaytush Ohlone land). I have worked and studied in several other regions of the world, including Mexico, Western Europe, the Maghreb, India, China, and eastern Moana (Oceania). I was born on Alnobak land (Vermont) and trace my ancestries to Africa, Europe and Turtle Island.



# FROM CAMPUS

Two seniors completed their theses in the Urban Studies department. Check out their abstracts below:

## Jeremy Berman: Los Angeles and Shared Scooters: A Regulatory and Infrastructural Experiment



SOURCE: Minneapolis City Plan

Los Angeles is notorious for its traffic-related transportation woes. To fix these issues, Los Angeles has turned to a number of innovative solutions, most recently welcoming over 12,000 privately operated shared electric scooters to the city. These scooters were expected to have a positive impact on pollution and equity, while providing a valuable solution to the first-mile last-mile (FMLM) transportation conundrum that plagues public transportation. However, these

benefits have not materialized, even as scooter companies burn hundreds of millions of dollars fighting unfavorable unit economics and attempting to comply with heavy

handed regulations and attract market share. Los Angeles's current approach to scooter regulations, which follows NACTO recommendations, is sound. They extract fees from scooter companies that fund infrastructure for active transportation, and offer a panoply of incentives to get scooter companies to adhere to desired behaviors (such as deploying scooters in underserved neighborhoods).

However, as the scooter companies discover the power of

dynamic pricing and Markov chains for optimizing fleet deployment to meet historic demand trends and maximize short term profit, fleet distribution requirements and incentives lose their weight. To achieve its transportation goals, Los Angeles will need to adjust its incentives based on an improved understanding of scooter unit economics. Trip-based incentives, in the indirect form of new infrastructure such as mobility hubs at key locations like transit stations, have shown promise for achieving scooter fleet distributions that favor municipal interests in Minneapolis. These incentives, implemented indirectly through infrastructure and directly through dynamic credit systems, will need to replace fleet-based policy if scooters are to serve Los Angeles's interests and become profitable. •

## Alicia Mies: "The 'Just City' in Crisis: How Connecticut's Child Welfare Agency Adapted to COVID-19"

My thesis is an examination of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families, the state's child welfare agency, and how it operated pre-pandemic, how it adapted to COVID, and how it has impacted the parents and children in its care. This investigation will reveal that DCF has always been an expansive, bureaucratic agency with the power to separate children from their parents and that, because of this enormous capability, for years many parents have expressed a feeling of unfairness and lack of care when interacting with DCF. After

the pandemic broke out, the state of Connecticut and DCF wielded executive power and prohibited parents and children from seeing each other in person, demonstrating how DCF is a state organization with the overwhelming power to block children from seeing their biological parents indefinitely in an emergency. Ultimately, I aim to show that the pandemic exacerbated DCF's structural issues and made clear the true jurisdiction and power imbalance of Connecticut's child welfare system. •



*I learned that while undertaking a big project like a thesis, it's often hard to see the big picture of what you are trying to argue until the very end. Working on the thesis made me really want to go into children's law!*

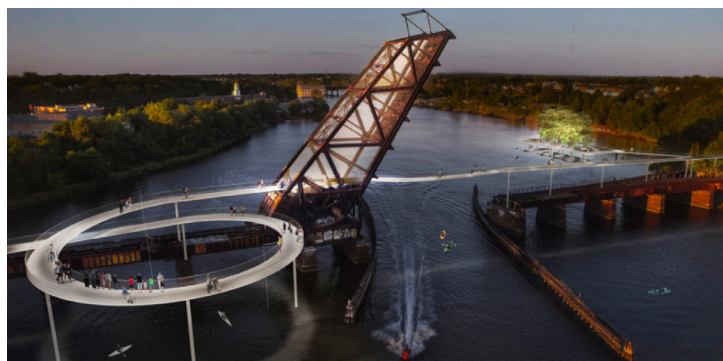
# ON COLLEGE HILL

## Crook Point Bridge Update

Thomas Wilson

The competition to redesign Providence's popularly stuck Crook Point Bridge has been whittled down to five entries. Run by the Providence Redevelopment Agency (PRA), the contest is meant to inspire a new thought process on the future of the infrastructural relic that was abandoned 45 years ago. Of the five finalists, two of them come from Providence-based firms, while one comes from a RISD graduate based in New York. Each of the entries involves converting the bridge into some type of pedestrian amenity, while two of the finalists actually proposed creating entirely bridges that would connect the two sides of the Seekonk River (with one even going through the bridge now!) Many of the projects also involve creating parks and walkways on each end bank of the river.

Because the bridge is owned by the state, the city-sponsored contest will not result in any official redevelopment. Instead, the winner, which will be chosen in May, will be awarded \$10,000. Meanwhile, the bridge's future is still in question, as it was previously earmarked for demolition by the state before the start of the contest. •



Providence-based firm UltraModerne's vision for the river, titled "Take Me to the River."

## Ward 1 residents criticize revised Brook Street dorm plans

Katy Pickens – Originally published in *The Herald* on 4/8/2021



Ward 1 residents expressed their concerns in reaction to the University's revised plan for the two-building residence hall on Brook Street at a virtual community meeting April 8.

The original layout for the dormitory would have crossed through the Providence Historic District and housed approximately 375 students. The revised plan has 350 beds and reduces the cumulative square footage of the buildings by 16,000 square feet and removes

the physical structure from the Providence Historic District.

With roughly 70 people in attendance, residents expressed their apprehensions about the demolition of local businesses

and the subsequent loss of taxable revenue. Attendees also had concerns about the demolition of two homes at 245 and 247 Brook St.

Ward 1 Councilman John Goncalves '13 MA'15 hosted the panel, featuring several University representatives involved in the project to answer residents' questions about the revisions to the Brook Street residence hall plans.

According to the University announcement, these changes had been made in accordance with

community input regarding the size and look of the buildings, as well as the transitional edge between the residential neighborhood and University housing.

Craig Barton '78, University architect and professor of the practice in architecture, emphasized that one of the core purposes of the project is to increase on-campus housing for upperclassmen to "ease strain on the rental market" caused by students living off campus.

Though some attendees worried the University would simply increase enrollment targets with increased residential capacity, Al Dahlberg, assistant vice president of government and community relations for the University, said there are "no long term plans" to do so.

» DORM continued, pg. 6

# ON COLLEGE HILL

## DORMS cont.

The changes also include the acquisition and maintenance of a historic property and home at 126 Power St., which will house students and enable the expansion of the green, grass-filled spaces, explained Noah Biklen '97, an architect from Deborah Berke Partners who is working on the project.

While some residents appreciated the aesthetic and design modifications, attendees were largely unimpressed with the addition of green spaces. One resident said she appreciated the quality of the work by the architects and landscapers she had seen but thought the added green spaces wouldn't add to the community.

"This is not something we see as something we would ever use," she said. "I can't see any of us going off in the morning with our cups of coffee and sitting in those spaces." Many other attendees agreed with the sentiment.

She also expressed frustration that the new dormitory will be at 250 Brook St., a lot currently occupied by businesses like Bagel Gourmet and East Side Mini-Mart. Students have expressed mixed reactions to the relocation of these shops, The Herald previously reported.

"For many of us, the loss of retail is a significant issue. It has to do with quality of life," the resident said. The lot occupants, including the Providence Police Department,

are expected to vacate during the summer so construction can begin in fall 2021. The original plan had included a rental retail space on the first floor of the residence hall, but the University removed it in reaction to community feedback, expressing concern that it would increase foot traffic in a residential area. Attendees pushed back against this change.

Another resident said that businesses such as those slated for demolition "are amenities that people want," and that he was "unappetized" by the added green spaces.

Residents also mentioned that since the University largely does not pay taxes on its properties, demolition of these buildings could decrease tax revenue, thereby increasing burden on the city. The University provides voluntary payments to the city through Payment in Lieu of Taxes, which totaled \$6.2 million in Fiscal Year 2020. The Herald previously reported that per an estimate from 2012, the University would owe \$38 million in annual property taxes if it were not exempt.

Residents were frustrated that the University was going to further reduce city tax revenue through its expansion. "All I see with Brown is they're just trying to incorporate themselves in the community without really trying to make it better," said one attendee. Regarding the demolition of two historic properties, Goncalves said that Brown has demolished 37

historic homes, which "undermines the historic fabric" of the College Hill and Fox Point neighborhoods.

The Providence Preservation Society had raised concerns with the original plan for the residence hall, saying in a March 29 statement that "This dormitory project is cheek by jowl with one of the most beautiful and historic residential neighborhoods in America; its design needs to be respectful of this."

During the meeting, PPS Executive Director Brent Runyon said that he was "pleased to see how Brown responded" to their concerns about the design of the building.

Katie Silberman, University director of community relations, emphasized that Brown invested time and effort into finding a way to relocate or preserve the two Brook Street houses that are set to be demolished, but that their research concluded that preservation or relocation of the buildings would be impossible. Runyon commended the University in this effort, attesting that Brown "went above and beyond" trying to find a way to preserve or move the homes.

Silberman also explained that the revision is "an ongoing process" and that the University will continue gathering input from the Providence community regarding its revised plan, including in a public meeting with the Fox Point Neighborhood Association April 12. •



# ETCETERA

## From Seniors

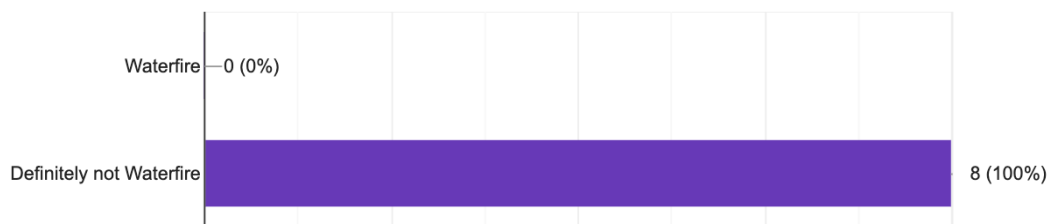
### *Favorite class?*

- The Just City (Prof. Carter)
- Modern Architecture (Prof. Neumann)
- Downtown Development (Bob Azar)
- Urban Planning of Transportation (Bob Azar)
- American Culture and the City (Prof. Morone)

### *Best PVD/RI gem?*

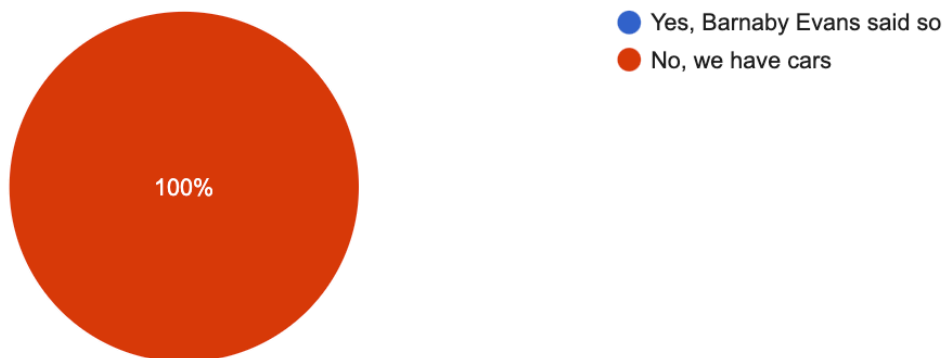
- Carr Pond
- Rhode Island Desert
- Roger Williams Park (in Elmwood)
- The park ranger at Roger Williams National Memorial on N. Main

*Is Waterfire overrated? 8 courageous seniors tell us their favorite local activity.*



*Turns out William Warner, architect of the Providence River relocation and Water-place Park, agrees. Waterfire overshadowed his creation and therefore his legacy and ego. (Source: architect who worked at Warner's firm)*

*Is Providence really like Venice?*



*Venice has a strict car ban and recently, after years of protests, has finally banned cruise ships from enteric their historic port. Cars, roads, and highways have shaped the spatial history of our city. How many times have you learned, and re-learned, about I-195?*

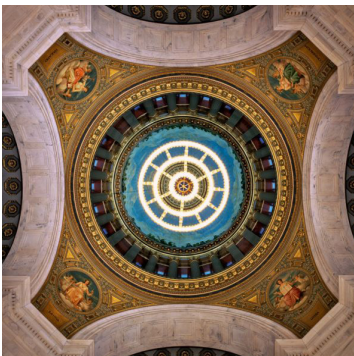
## Order self-supporting marble domes from largest to smallest

\_\_\_ Rhode Island State House

\_\_\_ St. Peter's Basilica

\_\_\_ Taj Mahal

\_\_\_ Minnesota State Capitol



*1. Basilica, 2. Minnesota State Capitol, 3. Taj Mahal, 4. Rhode Island State House*