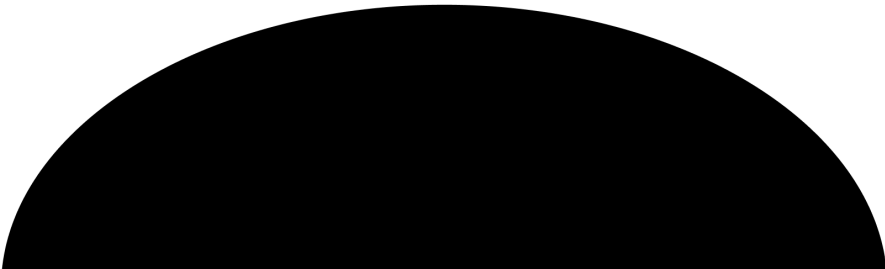


Rhode Island Unabridged: how infrastructure failure impacts the cityscape and economic ecosystem of a small state

by Ellary Jenkins, Maya Muravlev, Lucy Nguyen
Pham, Radhika Chauhan and Owen Carson

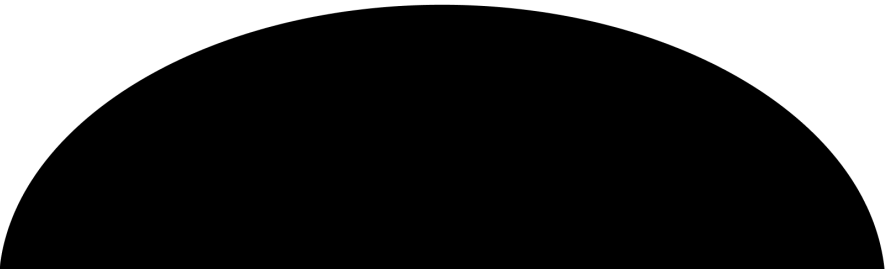


“Our city is changing, and the old guard is moving on.”

The city's renowned restaurant scene has taken the largest hit one year after the sudden closure of the Washington Bridge in Providence. Historic establishments across Downtown Providence, Fox Point, and Wayland Square, which typically attract visitors from across the river, faced an immediate and severe impact.

Within a month of the closure, the bridge closure had a calculated \$114 million impact on the hospitality industry. Projected to 2029, students at Salve Regina University calculated that the economic loss for the industry would be \$748 million.

The recent closure of the Old Canteen restaurant two weeks ago serves as a stark example of the continuing pressures that Providence’s historic dining industry has been experiencing. The loss of this restaurant has emotionally impacted the Providence community, being a restaurant that was central to many families’ traditions and weekly rituals.



🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 After 70 years Joe Marzilli’s Old Canteen Italian Restaurant is closing. I will miss that place on the hill. Whenever I would get the opportunity I would ask Sal to make me a stuffed Lobster. 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

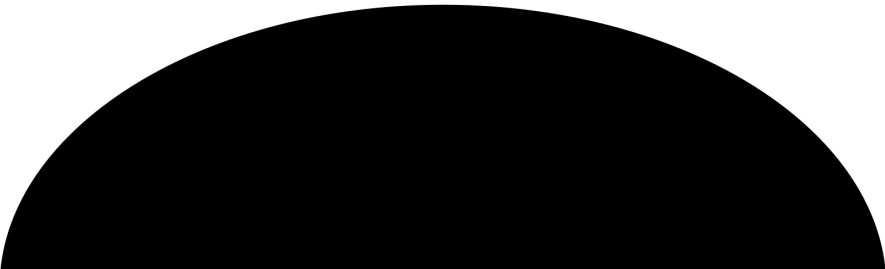
Online comment from a community member

Heartbroken the Old Canteen is closing for good and not keeping its original charm or menu 🇮🇹🇺🇸

Online comment from a community member

One phenomenal place: atmosphere, service, food and especially the wait staff. THANKS to all the Marzillis. Mille grazie!!!!

Online comment from a community member



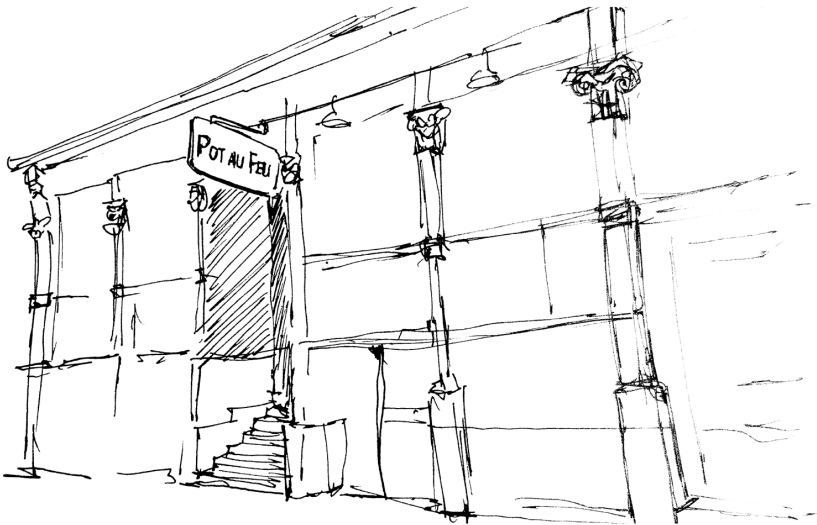
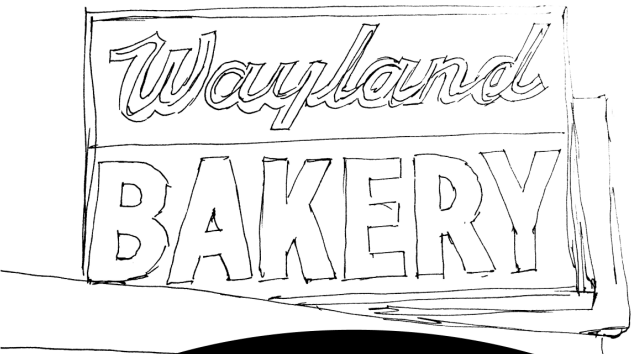
Robert Burke, owner of the historic Pot Au Feu restaurant in Downtown Providence, said that the Old Canteen was a favorite of his for many years. "Our city is changing, and the old guard is moving on," Burke said regarding the "vanguard" of restaurateurs who have been fighting to keep Providence a great restaurant city.



From our Councilman

In Wayland Square, where City Councilman John Goncalves conducted personal visits to assess the situation, establishments reported a **30% drop in initial foot traffic**. While traffic patterns have stabilized, the damage to some long-standing restaurants has proven irreversible.

"It is disheartening when you have long-standing businesses that close after servicing the community for so many years," Goncalves explained. "It's just hard these days to compete in the hospitality industry."



Goncalves brought attention to Noodles 102, a beloved Fox Point institution of 17 years, which announced its closure on June 8, 2024. The decision was directly attributed to the bridge repairs. "It is with a heavy heart here that we share with all of you that Noodles 102 will be closing its doors," the owners stated. "This decision to move on is a result of the harsh economic conditions we are facing and the I-195 bridge repairs."

Similar stories echo throughout the area. Now-closed Minerva's Pizza reported a **20% decline in business** since December, according to owner and chef Ben Lloyd. Both businesses closed alongside Wayland Square's Salted Slate and reached out to the Rhode Island Commerce for financial assistance following the bridge's closure. Goncalves pointed out how Providence's thriving yet competitive restaurant scene fosters these scenarios.

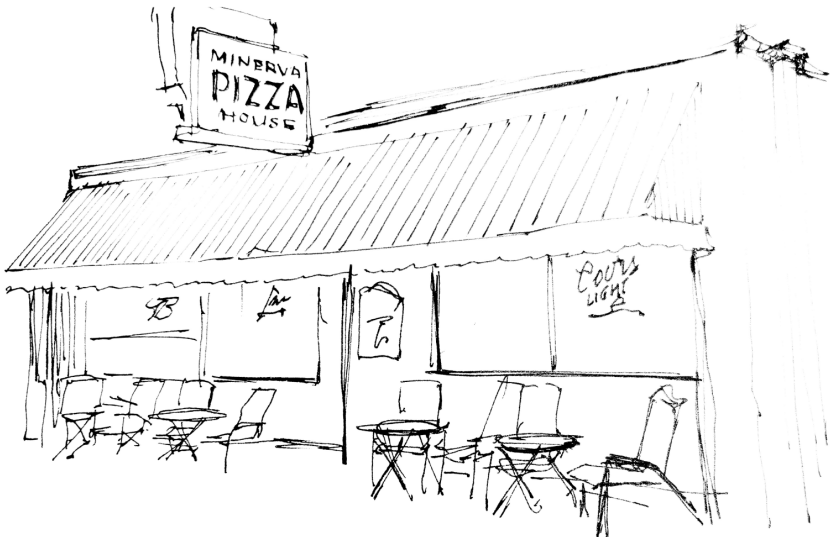
OH MY GOD. my best memories and my whole childhood was at this restaurant [Minerva's Pizza] 🥺 i loved you guys

Online comment from a community member

oh how i hope you move locations and don't close! my favorite pizza since i started coming to rhode island in 2020. thank you for always greeting me like a friend and giving everyone who walks in your doors a big smile. you remember all of your regulars and you all put real love and passion into your food & it shows. sending so much love! ❤️🍕

Online comment from a community member

"This is happening everywhere, frankly, and the restaurant business is hard. Every single day, people have the option to choose where they have a meal, and there's so many."



A nationwide industry crisis

The challenges facing Providence restaurants reflect a broader national crisis in the industry. While the Washington Bridge closure has created a series of specific local disruptions, it has arrived at a moment when restaurants nationwide are grappling with soaring food costs, rising labor expenses, and stubbornly high commercial real estate prices.

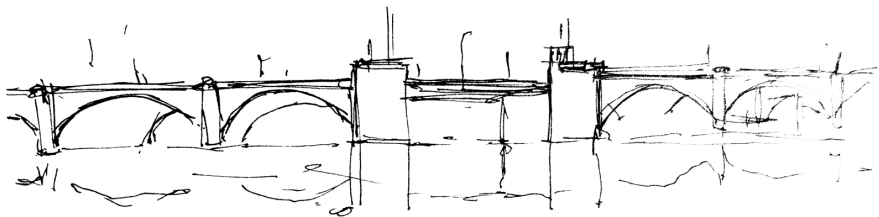
Beyond historic mom-and-pop restaurants, corporate fast-food companies, sit-down chains, and takeout-only kitchens have been facing what some call the end of an era in the restaurant industry. Many restaurants grappled with increased debt and a new lack of commuters and office workers post-pandemic.

To combat the increases in food and restaurant operation costs nationwide, Representative Brian Rea has sunset the Rhode Island meal and beverage tax from 2025–2029, meaning that these tax rates will annually reduce by 0.25% until they are eliminated. This unique approach was welcomed in the State House, reflecting the compounding need for financial relief with both the Washington Bridge closure and national industry trends.

Looking forward

While Providence's historic districts have struggled, surrounding communities have seen growth. Bristol County reported a \$6.6 million increase — or 2.34% — in meals and beverage tax revenue in the year following the bridge closure. East Providence, once overshadowed by its larger neighbor's dining scene, is projected to see nearly \$2 million in additional meals and beverage tax revenue by 2029, when the bridge is scheduled to reopen.

“Many of our old traditions will not be the same,” reflects Robert Burke, “but so long as the tradition of welcome continues, we will still be one of the best places in the world to dine.” Councilman John Goncalves, who experienced the bridge closure's impact both as a local representative and an elementary school teacher, has observed a gradual return to normalcy. “The initial weeks were incredibly challenging,” he acknowledges, “but our community has adapted, and we're seeing signs of stability returning to our neighborhoods.”



As Providence's restaurant scene evolves, we invite residents to be part of its transformation. Whether through exploring the emerging dining destinations in East Providence and Bristol County or maintaining loyalty to established favorites in Wayland Square, diners' choices today will shape the region's culinary future. The bridge closure may have disrupted traditional patterns, but it has also revealed the remarkable adaptability of Rhode Island's dining culture — suggesting that while change is inevitable, the area's reputation for exceptional dining experiences remains unshaken.