

Planning Committee Recommendation for 2014 General Assembly Site

In the Spring of 2009, Don Plante (GACS Meeting Planner), Melissa Saggerer (GACS Assistant) and Jan Sneegas (GACS Director) visited Providence, Rhode Island. While the site offers many advantages, there were also some fairly significant concerns. Providence offered to host the Planning Committee for their September meeting providing complimentary hotel rooms, breakfast and tours. This gave the entire committee an opportunity to participate in a site selection process (usually only one member accompanies the GACS staff) and to see the advantages and disadvantages of Providence.

General

Providence, Rhode Island is located 55 miles south of Boston and three hours north of New York City. It is the state capital and home to five universities including Brown University, Providence College, the Rhode Island School of Design, Rhode Island College, and Johnson and Wales University (most noted for its culinary and hospitality programs). The city is 18.5 square miles. It has many attractive features: it is compact, walkable, culturally rich and diverse, architecturally and historically distinctive, liberal, and LGBT friendly. In June, the average temperature is 76 degrees.

Affordability in the Northeast

Holding a GA in the Northeast is very desirable as it has the largest concentration of congregations and UUs in the country. Providence is the only city in the Northeast Corridor (Maine to Washington, DC) that has sufficient facilities to accommodate us at an affordable price. Boston, New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia, while large enough, are currently out of our budget. Proposals were solicited from Pittsburgh and Baltimore, asking if they could meet the \$159 rate guaranteed by Providence. Pittsburgh presented an additional challenge in that their headquarter hotel (and the only hotel attached to the convention center) lacks even one ADA room with a roll-in shower, which excluded them from consideration. We have concluded that Providence is our only current option.

Travel

Providence's airport, (actually in Warwick, RI) TF Green is a ten-minute drive from downtown Providence. 14 major carriers provide more than 160 direct flights daily. Southwest Airlines flies into TF Green. Due to open in the Spring of 2010, a new rail service that goes from Boston's South Station to TF Green. Currently there are Amtrak and MBTA trains servicing Providence with the downtown train station within four blocks of the majority of hotels in our block. Providence is located on I-95.

Convention Center and Arena

The Rhode Island Convention Center is right in downtown Providence and is connected to the Dunkin' Donut Arena. The Center is also connected by sky-walk to the Westin Hotel. The Center is a state-of-the-art facility, but is smaller than most centers we utilize. The meeting space at the Westin would also have to be used for breakouts. The Arena seats 14,000 and would be used for our general sessions. **Providence has offered a deeply discounted rental rate of \$40,000 for 2014.**

Housing

There are 1800 rooms within a quarter mile of the convention center. We toured the Biltmore, the Hilton, the Renaissance, the Marriott, the Courtyard by Marriott, the Providence Hotel, and the Westin. Johnson and Wales dorms are two blocks from the convention center. We anticipate a large number of daily drive-ins. **The city has offered a guaranteed rate of \$159 for hotels in 2014.**

Food

There seems to be an adequate assortment of restaurants in the Convention Center area including a food court in the Providence Place Mall which attaches to the Westin hotel. Deli's, pubs, as well as fine dining establishments, are plentiful.

UU Support

Bill Zelazny, the District Executive of the Ballou Channing District met with the Planning Committee. He indicated there would be great support from the Providence congregations (there are three) and the District. One of the 2009 Breakthrough Congregations, South County, is nearby. General Assembly has never been held in the Ballou Channing District.

Summary

Advantages of Providence

- Attractive, accessible small city
- Economical hotel rates and food costs
- Economical and accessible rail access
- "Full service" downtown area
- Supportive UU congregations and District – GA has never been held in the BCD
- Beautiful convention center centrally located
- Professional staff at both the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Rhode Island Convention Center

Disadvantages

- Small convention center requiring adjustments in General Assembly programming and the need for hotel break out space
- Small convention center with limited exhibit hall space requiring some non-commercial exhibitors in a non-secure hallway