

## READERS' LETTERS

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# Breakers welcome center is an attractive, appropriate design

Change in our world is inevitable; it is how we change that is critical to building a better tomorrow. In my view, the Preservation Society of Newport County is embracing change after a period of thoughtful research and careful consideration as it seeks to build a new state-of-the-art welcome center at The Breakers, considered to be the grandest of Newport's summer "cottages" and a designated National Historic Landmark.

The Preservation Society has reached out to many community stakeholders in a very thoughtful manner to gather feedback about how to best develop the design and

functionality for the dynamic new center. I've had the opportunity to evaluate the inspiring architectural plans designed by Epstein Joslin Architects and Reed Hilderbrand Landscape Architects. It is evident the Preservation Society and these two experienced firms have brought together key elements in terms of site location, business function, the visitor experience and aesthetic style, resulting in a decidedly attractive design.

Many historic homes across America have invested wisely in new interactive welcome centers that serve visitors well without compromising the integrity of

the site. Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, Va.; George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate in Alexandria, Va.; and Springwood, the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt in Hyde Park, N.Y., are just some examples of treasured historic sites (and National Historic Landmarks) that merge 21st-century visitor expectations with a sensitivity to the communities in which they exist.

Reflecting back to 1988, when the Gateway Visitors Center was developed, there was certainly good intent and a sincere hope that the city of Newport would embrace the contemporary-style architecture. However, 25 years later,

history has shown the architecture has not endeared itself among locals and has even drawn stiff criticism from the Providence Journal. Had the Gateway Center been designed in a more traditional New England style, in my opinion, it would have blended more easily into the historic streets of this classic seaport. The Preservation Society has a chance to learn an important lesson from the road we took and it would seem it has done an impressive job of finding the right balance for this very important design project.

**Evan Smith, president and CEO, Discover Newport**