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DOWNTOWN TAUNTON DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Prepared by The Neighborhood Corporation, The Narrow Gate Architects, and Commonweal Collaborative

For the
City of Taunton

August 2009

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Downtown Taunton Redevelopment Study

I. Introduction

Downtown Taunton- *the Heart of Taunton* – is a historic and vital place in Southeastern MA. The goal of the Downtown Redevelopment Study is to build a strong downtown neighborhood by identifying redevelopment potential that will bring new life and energy into the core of Taunton. Specifically, the Downtown Taunton Development Study identifies and assesses the feasibility of possible mixed-use redevelopment projects in the City's Downtown area. Three key properties were studied for their redevelopment potential for mixed-use including housing, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization needs.

The Downtown Taunton Development Study Team – including the Office of Economic and Community Development, the Heart of Taunton, the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative, and the Neighborhood Corporation– began its work in Spring 2009. Consultants to the study are:

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Several other agencies and organizations, including the Taunton Redevelopment Authority and the Old Colony Historical Society, have provided helpful background data.

The Study includes a downtown property database, a downtown housing needs analysis, and a parking and pedestrian analysis of the City Hall parking area, In addition, three key historic landmark sites were identified and were studied in detail for their redevelopment potential. These key sites are:

- Leonard Block/Star Theater, 107 Main Street
- The Union Block, 21 and 25 Main Street
- The Union Block, 27 Main Street

Feasibility studies were conducted on the above sites including structural assessments, zoning and ADA code review, review of Historic Tax Credit potential, use analysis/program options, conceptual design options, and financing options.

II. Civic Engagement Overview

The Neighborhood Corporation's Downtown Taunton Development Study Civic Engagement Plan was designed to be a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public regarding the revitalization of downtown Taunton. The goal of the process was to ensure that the input of a broad range of stakeholders – including residents, business owners, community organizations, and government officials – was incorporated into the study process, as well as into the ultimate recommendations and outcomes generated through the City of Taunton's Gateway Plus Action Grant.

The Civic Engagement process served the following purposes:

- to generate public awareness regarding the study
- to educate stakeholders on the issues related to downtown revitalization
- to keep the community interested and involved during the study
- to generate support for the ultimate study recommendations and outcomes
- to build relationships for future collaborative efforts in downtown Taunton

The Downtown Taunton Development Study's Public Workshop, "Downtown Taunton: Challenges & Opportunities," was held over two sessions on May 13 and 20. Over 70 participants attended, including residents, business owners, nonprofit leaders, and city and state officials. Housing inventory maps and redevelopment potential maps were presented at the workshops, including a conceptual redevelopment plan for the parking lot behind Main Street.

A series of stakeholder meetings were held over the period of 5 months. These included many meetings with property owners, constituent groups, community colleges, city employees, among others. A total of over 15 meetings took place. The final stakeholder meeting was with Senator Pacheco to personally present an overview of the downtown plans to him.

The final presentation, entitled "Downtown Taunton: Sharing the Vision" was presented on August 13, 2009 at the new El Mariachi restaurant on the Taunton Green. Sixty participants enjoyed a Mexican sampler and listened to the Downtown Redevelopment Vision for Taunton. Mayor Crowley ended the presentation with an overall endorsement and his commitment to implementing it.

Top Items You Voiced:

We need to attract more people downtown in the evenings

We have great history…I loved shopping downtown when I was young…we need to bring back that excitement.

Parking is confusing; lots need better signage and layout

We need better pedestrian crossings to the Green

Improving downtown's image is huge; keeping it clean and decreasing crime are top priorities

The city has no downtown meeting center or arts and cultural center

Vacant and substandard buildings detract from downtown

Upscale apartments will attract people to live and work downtown.

Reducing vacancy rates is important

We need a bricks and mortar project. JUST DO SOMETHING!

Coordinating a vision for downtown and working together is critical

Final Vision Workshop, August 13, 2009, El Mariachi Restaurant

III. Strategic Directions for Downtown Taunton

Based on the civic engagement process the following is a summary of public comments for strategic directions the City of Taunton should strive for in order to spur downtown redevelopment:

Center for Arts and Culture:

- Continue dialogue for a "Downtown Event Center" or "Arts and Cultural Center"
- Promote cultural efforts and programming by the Heart of Taunton and other organizations
- Develop and enhance infrastructure and spaces that support the arts and entertainment.
- Promote and give incentives to businesses that enhance the arts and cultural opportunities of Taunton

Enhanced Pedestrian Circulation and Parking:

- Need for public infrastructure improvements to enhance pedestrian movement/circulation
- Pursue the creation of a "Riverwalk" and green space along the Mill River, especially in the back of City Hall parking area.
- Need to continue to look at parking protocol and parking impact from courthouse development.
- Need for a defined central roadway through the parking area behind Main Street.
- Need for more lighting because people are afraid to park in lots at night.
- Improve pedestrian access across Main Street to Taunton Green and Broadway.

Quality Housing:

- Support for residential reuse of vacant second stories.
- Support a mix of housing options, including market rate and "working force" affordable rentals.
- Support for Live-Work studio space for artists in second stories.
- Creation of more housing that is attractive to young professionals.
- Support for housing development that is well managed and has associated parking and open space.
- The need to make downtown more attractive for housing development, including market-rate development

Business and Marketing:

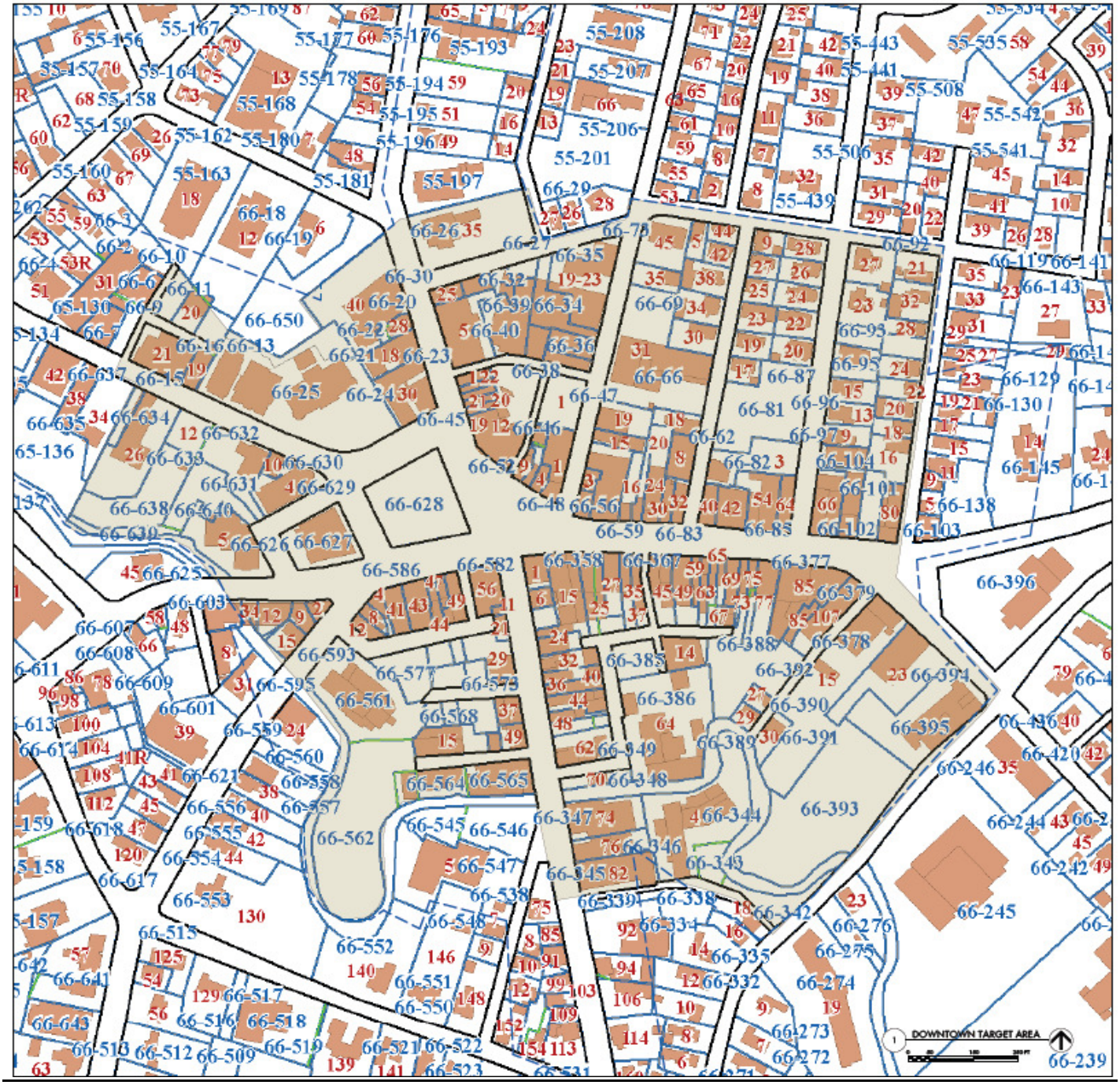
- Promote evening functions and cultural programming at night
- Encourage more restaurants, especially those open at night
- Continue to pursue college/university presence including classrooms and/or downtown campus
- Creation of a downtown "open space" near the river for outdoor theater, a farmers market and other promotional events.
- Support for marketing and improvement efforts downtown including the Business Improvement District.

- Support for a new campaign for "buying locally" and shopping downtown-creative use of incentives to promote campaign, such as discount cards and business specials. Post "Buy Downtown" Campaign on HOT, Neighborhood Corporation, and City of Taunton websites.
- Build on the state's $70 million courthouse project; this can be a huge catalyst for growth
- Promote small commercial establishments like a bookstore or coffee shop

Capitalize on Downtown Buildings:

- Work on the problem of absentee property owners and their lack of any involvement or commitment to downtown.
- Capitalize on the unique architecture and historic buildings in the core downtown area.
- Blighted buildings are a health and safety problem for downtown as well as project a negative image on the entire downtown that need to be addressed.
- Prominent historic buildings are the downtown's strength, give it character, and define its place as a historical area.
- Need for the city and its officials, the Heart of Taunton, and the downtown property owners to work together on redevelopment projects and promotion of downtown Taunton.

The most common comment was the "JUST DO SOMETHING!" attitude; that it is important to move forward with a "bricks and mortar" project that will have a positive impact on downtown and give the impetus to spur other revitalization projects. People are getting tired of study after study – stakeholders want to sustain the current enthusiasm for downtown revitalization and turn it into tangible results



Downtown Taunton base map

IV. Downtown Housing Market Analysis

The Downtown Study includes a downtown property database (Appendix A) with a table of existing housing units in the core downtown area. The database was used to create a building use map (Appendix C) that identifies the number of housing units in existing buildings, also noting bedroom mix and rent rate where available. The database identifies second story vacant space that could potentially be reused for future development of housing units. The database and map reveal the following information regarding existing housing in downtown Taunton:

Existing Downtown Housing:

- *Approximately 275 existing housing units in the downtown target area*
- *Majority of existing housing ouside of the "core" downtown area*
- *Limited housing available on the Taunton Green and Main Street*
- *Approximately 30% of the existing units are Section 8 or SRO housing* – Single Room Occupancy, Section 8.
- *Lack of "workforce" affordable units – in the range of 60 to 80 % of the median income*
- *Foreclosure not clustered in the downtown; currently only 4 foreclosed homes in downtown target area*
- *Housing vacancy very low (less than 10%) suggesting that the downtown market has the capacity to absorb additional housing*
- *Market rate rents downtown are about city average*
- *No "density" of housing downtown – largest building in the core area is 30 units. Average # of units is approximately 5.*
- *Housing redevelopment potential of approximately 90,000 SF in vacant upper stories of buildings in core downtown area*
- *Majority of housing opportunity is rental – no condominiums in Taunton Green or Main Street Area.*

Key Housing Needs in Downtown:

Based on the civic engagement public and stakeholder meetings and the Downtown Study database and maps, the following "housing needs" were compiled to assist the City of Taunton and its partners in a redevelopment agenda for the creation of needed downtown housing.

Need for additional housing opportunities in the core downtown area: *There is a need for additional housing development to support neighborhood revitalization.*

A healthy downtown residential district generates a constant flow of foot traffic to support nearby retailers, services, restaurants and other businesses. The concentrated mix of retail, office, and entertainment typical of a downtown puts residents within walking distance of most daily activities. Living downtown is particularly attractive to many who work downtown. By incorporating a higher density of residents in the downtown mix, the amount of economic activity increases. It is estimated that the typical downtown resident annually spends between three and four times what the typical downtown employee spends on goods and services. This increased spending creates an even more vibrant desirable downtown economy.

The lack of a higher density of housing units in the downtown core area subtracts from the "neighborhood" environment downtown. There needs to be additional housing development in the downtown area to spur additional economic growth. The chart below identifies displays vacant second story space in existing buildings along Main Street that could be redeveloped for mixed-use. These Main Street properties alone total 87,456 SF of space that could be redeveloped for housing. The Housing Opportunity Map (Appendix D) visually displays the data.

Parcel ID	No.	Street Name	Land Use Description	# units	potential SF*
66-22	28	Broadway	Office Bld	partial vacant - housing potential	1500
66-358	15	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	20000
66-361	1	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	6656
66-363	25	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	8000
66-364	27	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	2000
66-60	30	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	5000
66-367	45	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	4000
66-86	64	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	1300
66-377	85	Main Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	12000
66-378	107	Main Street	Store/Shop	vacant - mixed use potential	20000
66-353	44	Weir Street	Store/Shop	partial vacant - housing potential	2000
66-566	49	Weir Street	Rest/Clubs	partial vacant - housing potential	5000
				Total SF Redevelopment Potential	87456

Need for a healthy mix of housing: *There is a need for a healthy mix of various levels of affordable units in the downtown as well as market rate housing opportunities*

Developing a sustainable downtown requires a housing strategy that includes all four components of the urban housing market, including market rate rental, affordable rate rental, market-rate owner-occupied and affordable owner-occupied. A dynamic mix of uses and incomes promotes an interesting and exciting urban neighborhood.

The current mix of housing downtown is almost entirely rental, and the affordable units available are targeted towards very low to extremely low income levels. There is a lack of affordable or "workforce" housing targeted towards 60% to 80% of the median income of the Taunton-Mansfield-Norton Metropolitan Statistical Area. For a two-person household, incomes in this range fall between $39,720 to $52,950.

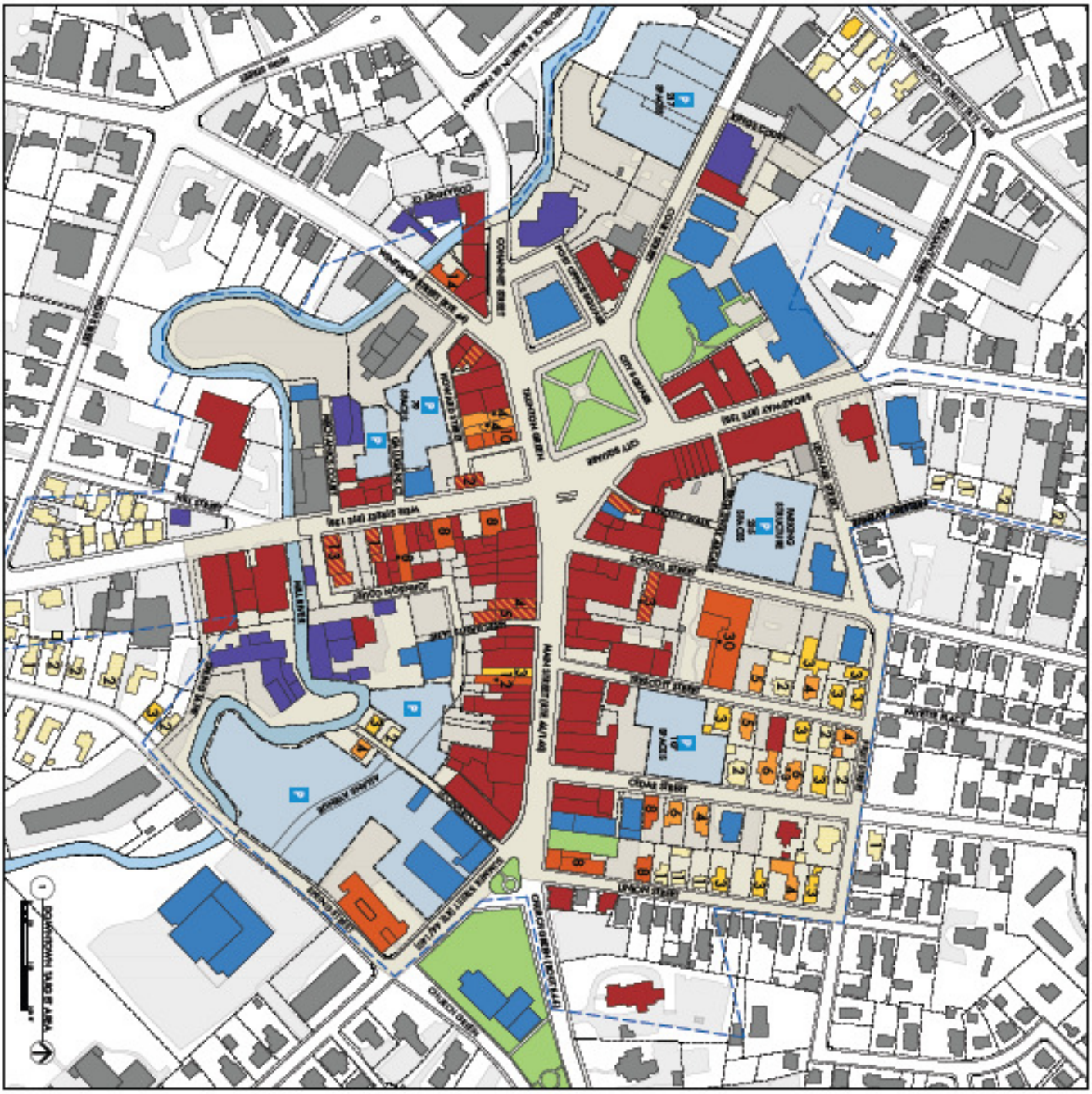
A healthy mix of sustainable housing development should concentrate on infill projects that create a higher density residential neighborhood. General categories of downtown housing that exist in small cities include: upper-floor units, townhouses, apartment or condominium building, live/work units, and loft units. The process of incorporating housing into the downtown mix will involve an assessment of demand and supply within each housing-type category.

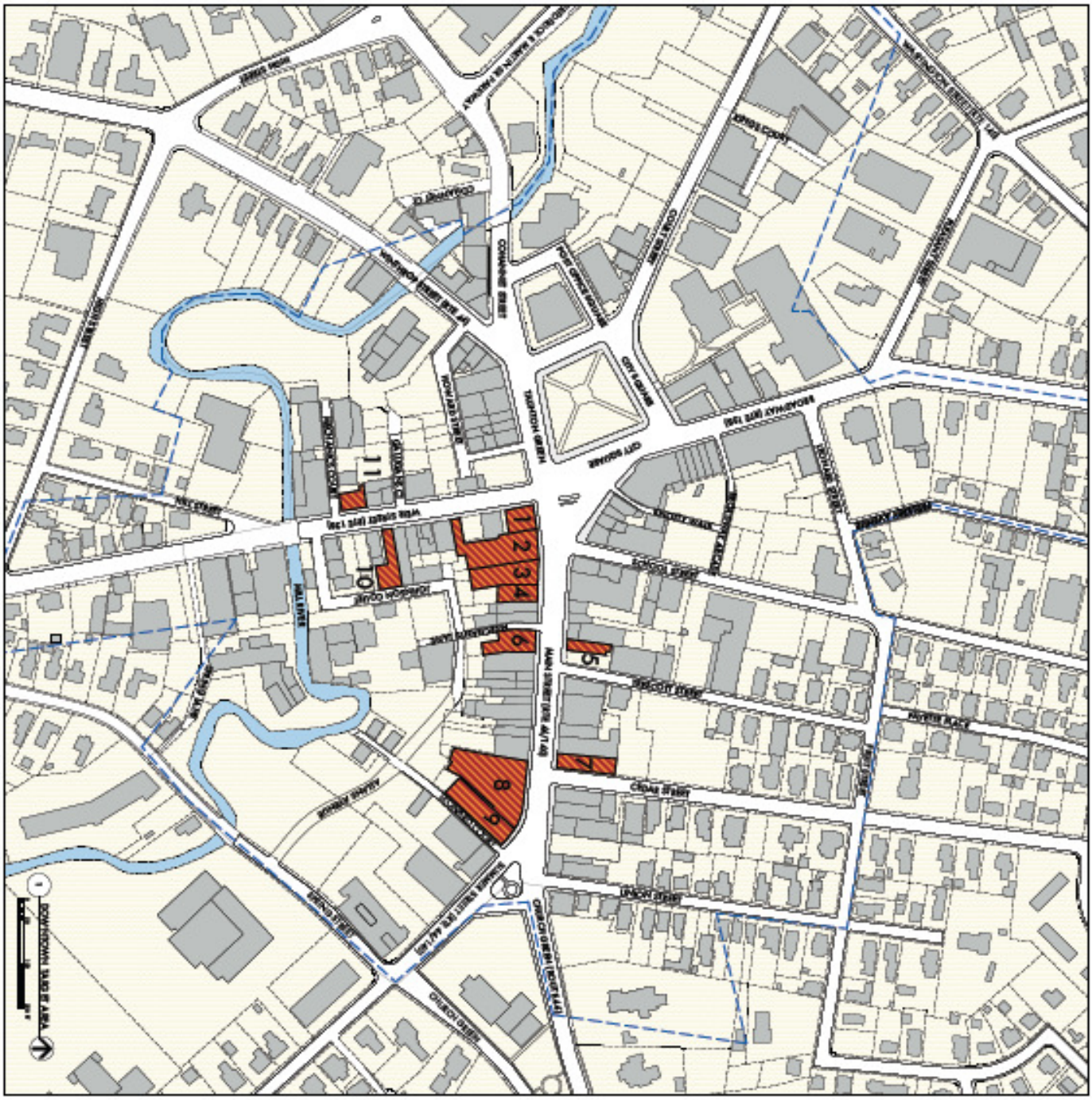
The needs and preferences of specific market segments as they relate to downtown housing need to be taken into account in downtown Taunton's housing development. Growing demographic segments in Taunton and segments most inclined toward downtown living (downtown workers, singles and couples without children) need to be included in downtown housing opportunities.

Need for a Sustainable "Main Street" Downtown Redevelopment Approach:

Housing/mixed use development in the downtown will assist in stimulating retail and commercial development

While downtown business district revitalization can be addressed in many ways, a sustainable "Main Street" approach to redevelopment is essential. The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage economic development, within the context of historic preservation and mixed-use development that is appropriate to the downtown market place. The approach advocates a return to rebuilding of commercial districts based on the downtown's traditional assets: unique architecture, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community. Creating additional housing in the downtown "Main Street" is a sustainable redevelopment measure, creating a neighborhood environment where residents can live, work, shop and connect.
Both the public and private sectors of the community must be involved and committed to a sustainable Main Street redevelopment program. Permitting of redevelopment projects must allow for flexibility of adaptive reuse of historic structures. Each sector has an important role to play in the redevelopment agenda.


BUILDING USE &
HOUSING INVENTORY
LEGEND
1 - 3 STORY RESIDENTIAL
4 - 7 STORY RESIDENTIAL
8 OR MORE STORY RESIDENTIAL
MIXED USE - COMMERCIAL / RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL
INDUSTRIAL
MANUFACTURING / INDUSTRIAL
OPEN SPACE
CHURCH OR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION
PARKING LOT
PARKING GARAGE
VACANT LOT
HISTORICAL
MAIN STREET (RTE 44/138)
WEST STREET (RTE 138)
SCHOOL STREET
WEST BROADWAY
COURT STREET
CITY SQUARE
TAUNTON GREEN
COHANNET STREET
POST OFFICE SQUARE
WASHINGTON STREET
HOPEWELL STREET
WEST STREET
HIGH STREET
MILL STREET
WEST SQUARE
CHURCH STREET
SOUTH STREET
PLEASANT STREET
CHESTNUT STREET
WEST BROADWAY (RTE 138)
BROADWAY (RTE 138)
SOUTH MAIN STREET (RTE 44/138)
SOUTH MAIN STREET (RTE 44/138)
DOWNTOWN TAUNTON STUDY AREA


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
Main Street (US 44/1 4a)
Weir Street (US 138)
Broadway (US 138)
Cohannet Street
Taunton Green
City Square
City Hall
Post Office Square
Court Street
Cedar Street
Church Street
Union Street
Mill River
Mason Street
Weir Street
Dean Street
Winter Street
Spring Street
Pleasant Street
Tremont Street
Cross Street
Church Green
Orchard Street
Hodges Street
Hoppin Street
Leonard Street
Washington Street
Jefferson Court
Mill Street
Cohannet Street
Tremont Street
Cedar Street
Union Street

V. Parking and Pedestrian Analysis – Main Street Lot

Main Street Lot - Existing Conditions:

The "Allan's Avenue" Parking Lot, behind City Hall, with access to Main Street and Weir Street, is the largest municipal parking lot in the downtown area. The lot holds approximately 300 parking spaces and has a wide spectrum of users, including municipal employees, retail shoppers, as well as private users. As evidenced by the Existing Conditions map, the lot has both vehicular and pedestrian circulation issues that make it both inefficient and confusing. Some of the existing condition issues are as follows:

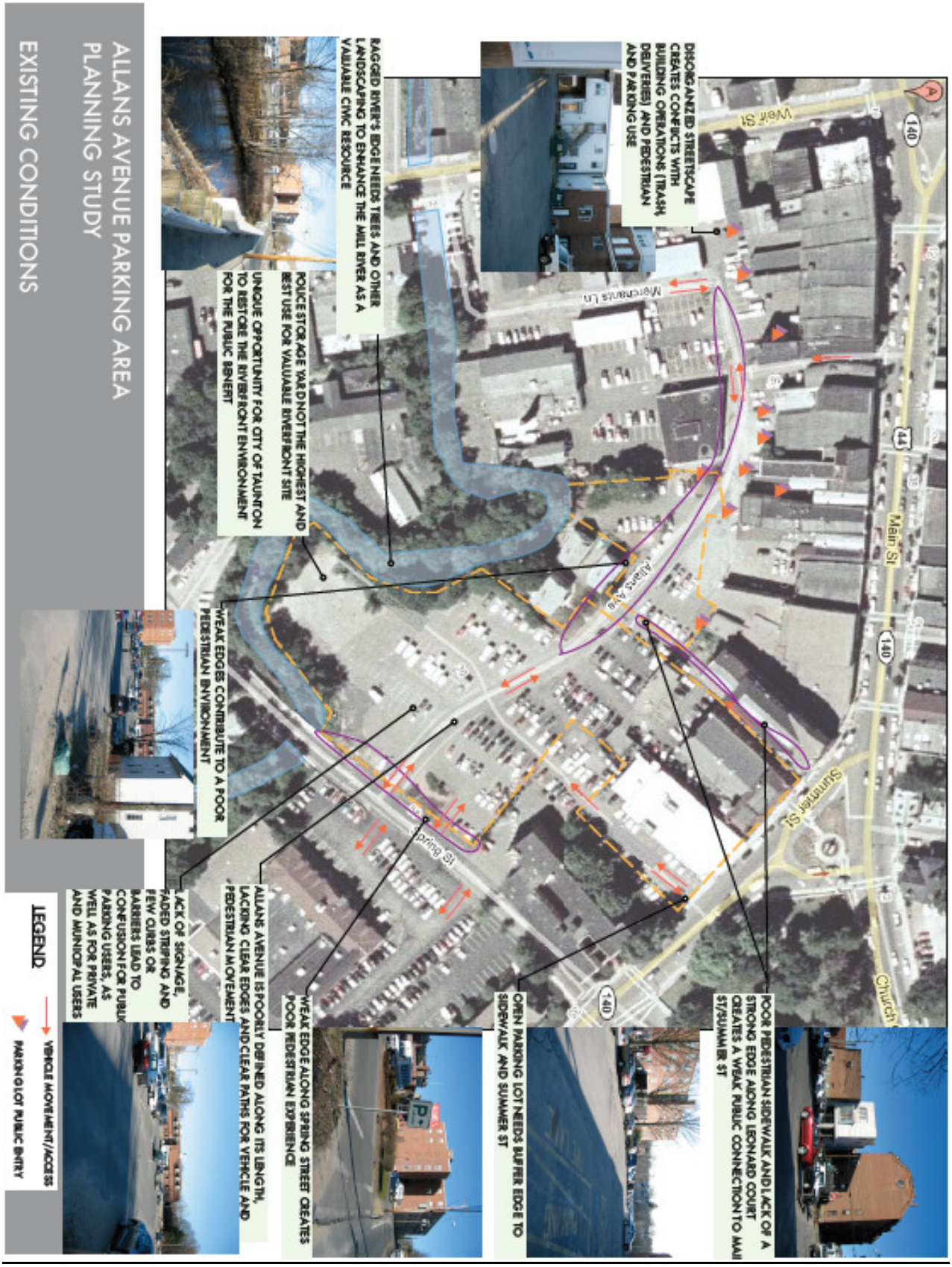
- Disorganized vehicular routes, or "streetscapes" create conflict with building operations and pedestrian and parking use
- The Mill River, which borders the lot, has a ragged river edge and is not enhanced as a valuable civic resource
- The Police Storage Yard abutting the Mill River is not the highest and best use for area
- No clear or defined pedestrian routes contribute to a poor if non-existent pedestrian environment
- Lack of signage, faded striping and few curbs or barriers lead to confusion for public parking users, as well as for private and municipal users
- Weak "edge" or streetscape along Spring Street creates poor parking lot entrance and poor pedestrian experience
- Open parking lot needs buffer edge sidewalk and Summer Street
- Leonard Court has poor pedestrian sidewalk and lack of a strong edge creating a weak public connection to Main Street/Summer Street

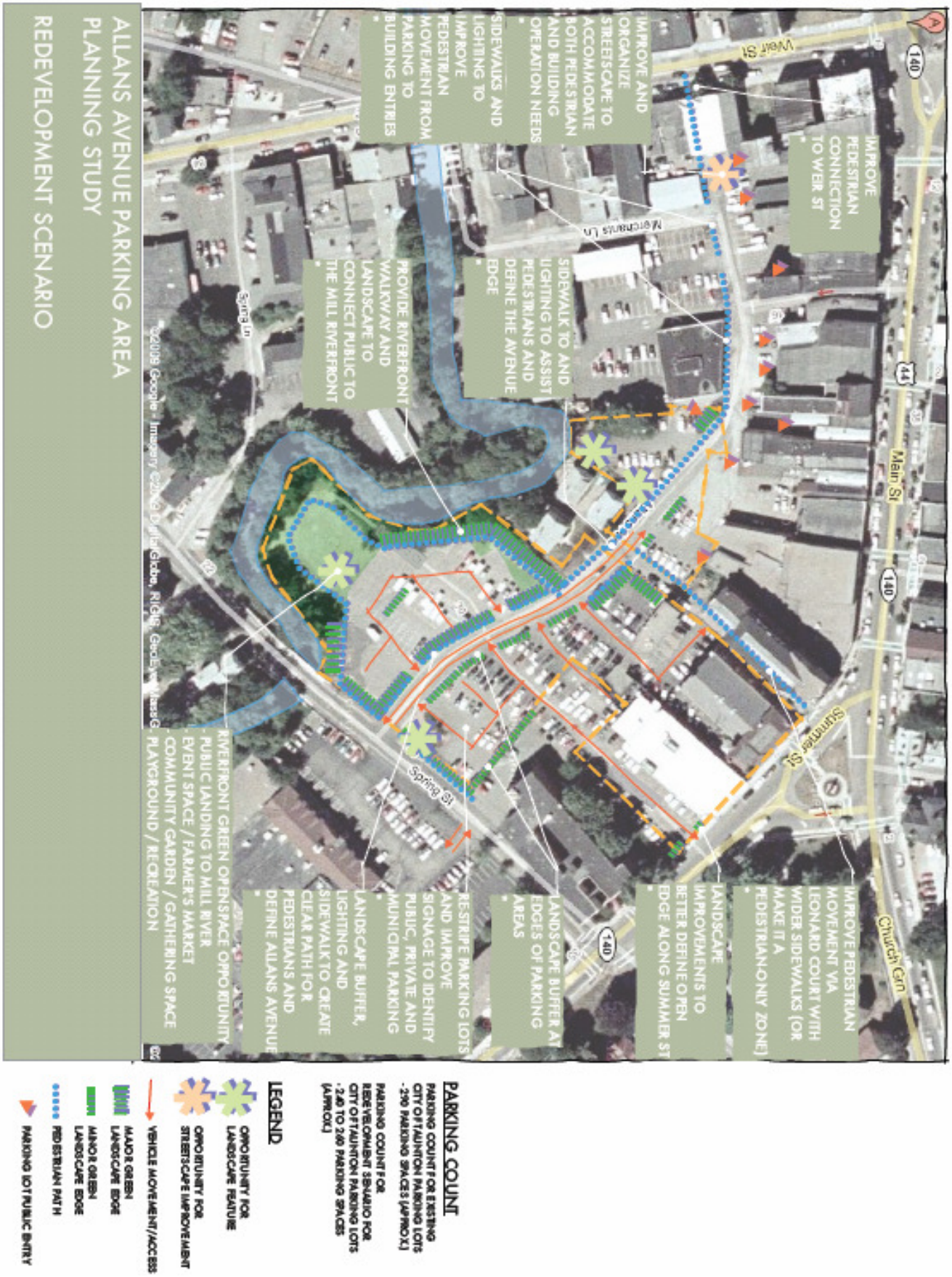
Main Street Lot - Conceptual Redevelopment:

Through analysis of existing conditions and interviews with stakeholders a conceptual redevelopment scenario was developed for the Main Street/Allans Avenue Parking lot. The redevelopment plan seeks to incorporate the following:

- Improve pedestrian connection to Weir Street by closing vehicular traffic exiting through "tunnel" via Allans Avenue.
- Improve and organize streetscape behind Main Street buildings and their rear entrances to accommodate both pedestrian and building operation needs
- Incorporate sidewalks and lighting to improve pedestrian movement from parking to building entries.
- Provide riverfront walkway and landscape to connect public to the Mill Riverfront area.
- Build sidewalks and lighting along Allens Avenue to assist pedestrians and define the Avenue edge.
- Improve pedestrian movement via Leonard Court with wider sidewalks with the possibility of having it a pedestrian only zone.

- Re-stripe parking lots and improve signage to identify public, private and municipal parking.
- Define edges of different parking areas with a landscape buffer
- Create riverfront open space opportunity at bend in Mill River for an event space such as outdoor theater and farmers market.


ALLANS AVENUE PARKING AREA
PLANNING STUDY
EXISTING CONDITIONS
DISORGANIZED STREETSCAPE CREATES CONFLICTS WITH BUILDING OPERATIONS (TRASH, DELIVERIES) AND PEDESTRIAN AND PARKING USE
RAGGED RIVER'S EDGE NEEDS TREES AND OTHER LANDSCAPING TO ENHANCE THE MILL RIVER AS A VALUABLE CIVIC RESOURCE
POLICE STORAGE YARD NOT THE HIGHEST AND BEST USE FOR VALUABLE RIVERFRONT SITE
UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR CITY OF TAUNTON TO RESTORE THE RIVERFRONT ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT
WEAK EDGES CONTRIBUTE TO A POOR PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT
LACK OF SIGNAGE, FADED STRIPING AND FEW CURBS OR BARRIERS LEAD TO CONFUSION FOR PUBLIC PARKING USERS, AS WELL AS FOR PRIVATE AND MUNICIPAL USERS
ALLANS AVENUE IS POORLY DEFINED ALONG ITS LENGTH, LACKING CLEAR EDGES AND CLEAR PATHS FOR VEHICLE AND PEDESTRIAN MOVEMENT
WEAK EDGE ALONG SPRING STREET CREATES POOR PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE
OPEN PARKING LOT NEEDS BUFFER EDGE TO SIDEWALK AND SUMMER ST
POOR PEDESTRIAN SIDEWALK AND LACK OF A STRONG EDGE ALONG LEONARD COURT CREATES A WEAK PUBLIC CONNECTION TO MAIN ST/SUMMER ST
LEGEND
VEHICLE MOVEMENT/ACCESS
PARKING LOT PUBLIC ENTRY
Main St
Summer St
Spring St
Church St
Allans Ave
Mercantile Ln
Weir St
140
44


ALLANS AVENUE PARKING AREA
PLANNING STUDY
REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIO
IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION TO WEIR ST
IMPROVE AND ORGANIZE STREETSCAPE TO ACCOMMODATE BOTH PEDESTRIAN AND BUILDING OPERATION NEEDS
SIDEWALKS AND LIGHTING TO IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN MOVEMENT FROM PARKING TO BUILDING ENTRIES
SIDEWALK TO AND LIGHTING TO ASSIST PEDESTRIANS AND DEFINE THE AVENUE EDGE
PROVIDE RIVERFRONT WALKWAY AND LANDSCAPE TO CONNECT PUBLIC TO THE MILL RIVERFRONT
IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN MOVEMENT VIA LEONARD COURT WITH WIDER SIDEWALKS (OR MAKE IT A PEDESTRIAN-ONLY ZONE)
LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS TO BETTER DEFINE OPEN EDGE ALONG SUMMER ST
LANDSCAPE BUFFER AT EDGES OF PARKING AREAS
RESTRIPE PARKING LOTS AND IMPROVE SIGNAGE TO IDENTIFY PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND MUNICIPAL PARKING
LANDSCAPE BUFFER, LIGHTING AND SIDEWALK TO CREATE CLEAR PATH FOR PEDESTRIANS AND DEFINE ALLANS AVENUE
RIVERFRONT GREEN OPENSPACE OPPORTUNITY
PUBLIC LANDING TO MILL RIVER
EVENT SPACE / FARMER'S MARKET
COMMUNITY GARDEN / GATHERING SPACE
PLAYGROUND / RECREATION
PARKING COUNT
PARKING COUNT FOR EXISTING CITY OF TAUNTON PARKING LOTS - 290 PARKING SPACES (APPROX.)
PARKING COUNT FOR REDEVELOPMENT SENARIO FOR CITY OF TAUNTON PARKING LOTS - 240 TO 260 PARKING SPACES (APPROX.)
LEGEND
OPPORTUNITY FOR LANDSCAPE FEATURE
OPPORTUNITY FOR STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENT
VEHICLE MOVEMENT/ACCESS
MAJOR GREEN LANDSCAPE EDGE
MINOR GREEN LANDSCAPE EDGE
PEDESTRIAN PATH
PARKING LOT PUBLIC ENTRY
Weir St
Main St
Church Grn
Summer St
Spring St
Spring Ln
Merchants Ln
140
44
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VI. The Union Block Reuse Study

12-19 Main Street
21-25 Main Street
1 & 22 Weir Street

Union Block Study, Historical Significance: The Union Block, 3-37 Main Street, was built in 1860, a year after a great fire had destroyed 25 frame stores and residences on the south side of Main Street. Its erection occurred at the beginning of the most intense construction boom in the history of the city driven by Taunton's rise to prominence as an industrial and commercial center. Its design incorporated innovative concepts of real estate development devised to accommodate the social and physical requirements of an expanding economy and population.

The Union Block introduced the concept of semi-fireproof construction and demonstrated the practicality of the business block over development of small, independent, individual, commercial buildings. It was financed by the corporate effort of twelve Taunton businessmen, each of whom occupied a storefront. Diverse enterprises housed in the Union Block have included furniture, clothing and drug stores as well as a photography studio. Among the most prominent businesses that have occupied space in the block have been Pierce Hardware Company and Colby's Clothing Store. Early tenants of the upper floors included: the Young Men's Library and Reading Room, Oak Hall, Good Samaritan Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellow, McFarland's Hair Cutting Rooms, a coffin show room, and the studio of O. J. Pierce, artist and teacher of drawing.

The Union Block is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing structure to Taunton Green Historic District. Despite some alterations to storefronts and fenestration, the Union Block stands among the most impressive commercial buildings along Main Street and remains a fine example of early Victorian Italianate architecture. It presents a commanding prominence when approaching the central business district from the north (Broadway, Route 138).

Historic Rehabilitation Issues: Rehabilitation issues regarding the utilization of historic preservation tax credits include the proposed demolitions and reconstructions to the rear of the buildings and changes in the floor plans to span across originally separated (fire-walled) sections of the block. Mitigating circumstances in favor of the proposed plans are the historic evolution and modifications to construction at the rear of the buildings, already compromised floor plans on all levels and the final analysis that economic survival of the block requires practical reuse of the upper floors and

economies of scale only possible through the integration of previously separated sections of the edifice.

Existing Conditions

13-19 Main Street and 22 Weir Street is an occupied large, two to three story commercial building with mass-masonry bearing walls and dimensional lumber framed floor and roof construction with interior beams and columns at the longer spans. Due to a grade change the Basement level at the rear of the buildings is at grade, in effect adding another story at the rear.

25 Main Street is an occupied large three story commercial building with mass-masonry bearing walls and dimensional lumber framed floor and roof construction with interior beams and columns at the longer spans.

As the Union Block was originally built for commercial purposes, the floor plates are very large and deep. Much of the quality of the original storefront remains or has been renovated along the ground floor of Main Street. While the elegant windows on the upper floors are large and regularly spaced on the Main and Weir Street facades the natural light is diminished in the middle of the deep floor plates. In contrast to the uniform front façade, the rear facades are characterized by a variety of massing heights, building planes and fenestration patterns, the result of “back of the house” functions and various additions over time.

Structural Repairs

The necessary repairs as described in the Structural Reports for all addresses, dated 4/28/09, with a Summary Report, dated 7/23/09, are typical of masonry buildings of the era and do not appear to present any insurmountable issues for the renovation plan.

The buildings once reconfigured, repaired and reinforced (some items are of an urgent nature) will be structurally suitable for a mixed use development consisting of residential and commercial uses.

Design Approach for Adaptive Re-Use to Residential

The primary design challenges in adapting the Union Block for residential use are working with the deep floor plates and limited number of windows/frontage at the facades. With windows available at only one end of a unit, most of the existing spaces are too deep for good quality residential use.

The proposed design response is to carve out an inner section of the building at 13 Main Street towards the rear to create a courtyard space that provides for a significant increase in exterior wall and windows, while decreasing the problematic depth of the units. An even deeper “cut” has been made above the first floor level at the very center of the building to allow for more windows and units in what is currently the “dark middle” portion of the floor plates. The First Floor at this middle area remains for commercial use and provides a good location for a green roof above, which several units look onto. The courtyard facilitates many additional livable units with good solar orientation, improved ventilation and views toward green space at grade or roof level.

Unit size and location have been determined as a result of maintaining existing masonry bearing walls, existing window locations and new egress stairs and corridors. Most units have access to an elevator via new connecting corridors running through several buildings. The development contains a pleasant mix of units sizes (duplexes and flats) with some units benefiting from private roof decks on the upper floors as a result of the courtyard widening on the upper floor.

The proposed design will include bringing the buildings up to the 7th Edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code, including requirements for handicap access, energy efficiency, fire separation, egress and structural reinforcement.

Financial Feasibility Analysis:

The financial analysis was based on The Narrow Gates Union Block Residential Redevelopment Plan dated 7/6/09. This reuse option has a total of 32 units, with 6 studios, 12 one-bedroom, and 14 two-bedroom units. The plan incorporates 19,760 SF of commercial office space.

The Housing Needs Analysis concludes that there is an unmet need for “working class” affordable rental housing in downtown Taunton. Seventy-eight percent of the Union Block units have proposed rents structured under the rent restrictions set by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. This allows rents to be set under market rents in the geographic area, thus more affordable to those of moderate household income.

In order for a change of use to residential or business, extensive renovation would need to take place at an approximate cost of $175,420 per residential unit. Based on a reuse plan that includes 25, 26 and 27 Main Street, the total structural area for renovation is 78,994 SF, with an additional 3,144SF of new construction. The total construction cost is estimated at $6,970,292. On a project of this scale, General Development Costs and other project expenses would add an additional $ 1.5 million.

The initial feasibility analysis (see attachment) shows potential project costs and sources of funds. With the use of typical financing available for historic affordable tax credit projects, the analysis shows that a mixed-use scenario with approximately 75% residential and 25% commercial/office is financially viable. Operating income and expenses were based on similar projects of this size and scope and the rents dictated by the Taunton-Mansfield-Norton HUD Metro Fair Market Rent Area.

Basement
Scale: 1" = 30'-0"
Floor 1
Scale: 1" = 30'-0"
Floor 2
Scale: 1" = 30'-0"
Floor 3
Scale: 1" = 30'-0"
MAIN STREET
WEIR STREET
Mechanical/Storage
Trash Room
Leasing
Green Roof Below
Residential Storage
Residential Entry
Residential Lobby
Commercial Retail
Residential Entry
Residential Entry
Residential Entry

LEGEND

- DEMOLITION
- NEW CONSTRUCTION
- REHAB
- NOT IN PROJECT

SCOPE OF WORK (SQ. FT.)

DEMO	NEW	REHAB
10,000	3,144	80,242*

DEVELOPMENT PROFORMA - SOURCES/USES OF FUNDS
AUGUST, 2009

USES OF FUNDS		**Commercial**	**Residential**	**Combined**
Acquisition		$200,000	$1,200,000	**$1,400,000**
Direct Construction		$795,506	$6,174,786	**$6,970,292**
General Development Costs		$186,313	$1,344,818	**$1,531,131**
Other Project Expenses (Lease Up * Capitalized Reserves and Fee)		$118,182	$866,738	**$984,920**
Total Development Cost		**$1,300,001**	**$9,586,342**	**$10,886,343**
SOURCES OF FUNDS				
Debt Financing		$1,300,000	$1,050,000	**$2,350,000**
Grant Financing				
State HOME/HSF		$0	$750,000	**$750,000**
State Affordable Housing Trust Fund		$0	$1,000,000	**$1,000,000**
Local HOME		$0	$300,000	**$300,000**
CDBG		$0	$150,000	**$150,000**
Equity Financing				
Developer's Equity: Low Income Housing Tax Credit Syndication		$0	$3,937,106	**$3,937,106**
Developer's Equity : Historic Tax Credit Syndication		$0	$1,599,237	**$1,599,237**
Developer's Equity: Massachusetts Historic Tax Credit Certification		$0	$800,000	**$800,000**
Total Sources of Funds		$1,300,000	$9,586,343	**$10,886,343**
Gap in Financing		$0	$0	0.00%
RESIDENTIAL UNITS	Studio	0	6	
	1-BR	0	12	
	2-BR	0	9	
	2-BR/TH	0	5	
	3-BR	0	0	
	Building	**0**	**32**	
Common Area/Commercial	**SF**	**18,318**	**23,334**	**41652.00**
OPERATING				
Income		$173,180	$344,856	**$518,036**
Vacancy and Expenses		$30,307	$230,314	**$260,621**
Net Operating Income		$257,416	$114,542	**$371,958**
Debt Service		$103,787	$83,828	**$187,615**
Net Cash Flow		$39,086	$30,714	**$69,800**

VII. The Leonard Block Reuse Study

Historical Significance: The Leonard Block, 105-111 Main Street, was constructed adjacent to City Hall in 1870 by prominent local businessman George Leonard, on a site previously occupied by the house of Major Joseph B. and George I. Leonard. It stands on the northwest corner of Meeting House Common or Church Green, which has been the continuous focus of local government and worship in Taunton from the community's earliest settlement.

The Leonard Block is one of the business blocks introduced as a new concept in commercial development with the construction in 1860 of the Union Block at 3-37 Main Street in Taunton. Utilization of this new type of mercantile construction expanded after the Civil War as merchants saw the ability to return higher profits on the new type of structure. Capitalizing on the booming economy, businessmen demolished older buildings to replace them with larger stores. The Leonard Block and the Cohannet Block (56 Taunton Green), both erected in the same year in Second Empire style, also interrupted the preference for Italiante design in local commercial construction.

The Leonard Block accommodated the grocery store of its owner. At various times the property housed a furniture manufacturer (1872-1890); a gymnasium (fourth floor, 1875); armory, (fourth floor, 1896-1914); newspaper office, (Taunton Evening News, 1897-1916); a bowling alley (fourth floor, 1896-1900) and a movie theater (second and third floors, Star Theater, 1911-1929). Residential units added to the business block remained occupied until January 2006 when the building was condemned. The last significant business to operate in the building closed in the mid 1984. Various plans and efforts to renovate the historic property since the 1980s, however, have fallen short of success in attracting a developer.

Historic Rehabilitation Issues: Despite alterations to storefronts and general deterioration which diminish its current appearance, the Leonard Block stands among the most impressive commercial buildings along Main Street and remains a fine example of highly-detailed, Second Empire commercial architecture. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing structure to Church Green Historic District and is subject to local design review as part of Church Green Local Historic District. The Leonard Block's prominent situation, adapted to the curve of the street and separated from City Hall only by a narrow alley, captures attention when approaching the central business district from the east (Dean Street/Church Green, Route 44).

Rehabilitation issues relative to the utilization of historic preservation tax credits include

the potential needs: to subdivide or otherwise rework the interior theater space to accommodate alternative uses; to modify existing, two-story windows to allow an added floor level, and to create new window openings to make functional currently un-fenestrated areas. Mitigating circumstances in favor of the proposed plans in part depend on the type of housing planned in residential uses and the obvious chronic underutilization and blighted condition of the property. Failures, even during more favorable economic times, of previously-proposed redevelopment plans demonstrate that economic survival of the block requires more practical, market-oriented uses of the upper floors.

Existing Conditions

The Leonard Block (aka Star Theater) at 107 Main Street is a large four story commercial building with mass-masonry bearing walls and dimensional lumber framed floor and roof construction, including of a mansard style top floor. The Leonard Block floor plate is long and narrow and at one time housed a 2 story theatre space on the second and third floors with the theater facing north and an addition to the south over a large archway. Due the sloping grade the Basement level is at grade at the rear of the building, effectively creating a 5-6 story structure at the rear. It is assumed that the ground floor and other upper floors not used as support space for the theatre were used as commercial space (retail and office).

The facades have a strong presence in the Second Empire style facing Main Street and to a lesser extent, Leonard Court, featuring a rhythm of large 2 story arched windows facing Leonard Court at the theatre levels and a rhythm of well portioned windows with decorative lintels facing Main Street and wrapping the corner. The mansarded top floor is in need of significant repair, but consist of elegant dormers and polychromatic slate roofing. Another striking characteristic of the building is the prominent three story oriel window facing Leonard Court, but also visible from main Street.

Structural Repairs

The structure was only observed from the exterior, but the necessary repairs as described in the Structural Reports for all addresses, dated 4/28/09, with a Summary Report, dated 7/23/09, are typical of masonry buildings of the era and do not appear to present any insurmountable issues for the renovation plan.

The buildings, once reconfigured, repaired and reinforced (some items are of an urgent nature) will be structurally suitable for an all commercial use (Option A) or for a mixed use development consisting of residential and commercial uses (Option B).

Leonard Block Reuse Options

For the Downtown Development Study, we studied the feasibility of two different mixed-use options; one with a significant residential component and one with a large office or educational component. Both options include a “Downtown Event Center”.

Option A: Design Approach for Adaptive Re-Use to Commercial Use (Office and Downtown Event Center)

Commercial: 5,842 NSF
Office: 20,220 NSF
Downtown Event Center: 3,844 NSF* (see programming/rental info below)
The Event Center in Option A uses the former two-story Star Theater space on the second floor. The interior of the space would be gutted.

Potential Office Users:

- Educational Classrooms – "Downtown Campus"
- Non-Profit Offices with shared services
- Municipal Offices
- Professional Offices

Though currently vacant, the Leonard Block had previously been used as a theatre and the character of the second and third floors remain, including the third floor balcony level. The architectural qualities of this past use lend themselves well to the proposed use of a new Downtown Event Center. The two-story space and large arched windows facing Leonard Court will provide a distinct eloquence to the variety of uses planned for the Event Center.

The remainder of building would contain office space (Floor 1-4) and commercial retail space at street level (Basement and Floor 1). The floor plates work well for providing daylight for open office space and the design offers a variety of sizes for tenants. Commercial retail use at grade anticipates the continuing growth of Downtown Taunton as reflected in the new Courthouse and the redevelopment of the Union Block and Leonard Block.

The proposed design will include bringing the buildings up to the 7th Edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code, including requirements for handicap access, energy efficiency, fire separation, egress and structural reinforcement.

Option B: Approach for Adaptive Re-Use to Mixed Use (Residential and Downtown Event Center)

Commercial: 5,842 NSF

Downtown Event Center: 3,741 NSF* (see programming/rental info below)

Residential: 21,485 NSF

Studios	2	
One-Bdrm	4	
Two-Bdrm	5	
Three-Bdrm	5	
Total		16 Units

This design option also includes a Downtown Event Center, but takes advantage of the Center being at the first floor with an Entry Lobby facing directly onto Main Street for easy access and high visibility. Though only a single story space, the overall square footage of the space has been significantly increased in comparison the Option A. The remaining lower level commercial space is entered off of Leonard Court through the existing grand archway and anticipates increased foot traffic from the proposed redevelopment of the Allans Avenue area to the south of Main Street.

Sixteen units of housing (a mix of Studios, 1 BR's, 2 BR's and 3 BR's) have been proposed for the upper floors with the existing theatre balcony level floor infilled (Floor 3). Unit size has been configured to work with the existing historic fenestration, resulting in spacious units off a common corridor with elevator access to all levels

The proposed design will include bringing the buildings up to the 7th Edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code, including requirements for handicap access, energy efficiency, fire separation, egress and structural reinforcement.

Downtown State College Campus:

During the civic engagement process, the desire for secondary-education classrooms or campus in Downtown Taunton was voiced often. Bristol Community College is considering expanding into downtown Taunown to provide a daytime college environment; currently they provide classes at Taunton High in the evening only. The Gateway development team met with Kathy Garganta, Dean of the Attleboro and Taunton Campuses for Bristol Community College (BCC) to discuss a "vision" for a downtown campus. Ms. Garganta reviewed BCC's existing curriculum in Taunton and the success of their new campus in Downtown Attleboro for BCC and Bridgewater State College. She expressed the large need the Taunton area has for expanded community college programming.

It was determined that a community college campus would require approximately 50,000 SF, preferably in one building, but could be buildings in close proximity. Program uses would require:

- Minimum 6 classrooms
- Computer Lab
- Science Lab
- Lounge area
- Book store

The campus would require approximately 200 parking spaces, which could be non-dedicated, but would need to be in close proximity to the building(s).

The Leonard Block Option A plan could potentially house approximately 30,000 SF of space for a downtown college center, with other potential space in commercial buildings in close proximity.

Downtown Arts and Cultural Center:

A center for the arts is critical as a means of mobilizing creative entrepreneurship, attracting downtown residents, and leveraging investment. Cities with proactive investment strategies have focused on creative infrastructure initiatives that cultivate sense of place. Currently, there is no venue downtown for the arts and education and no large-capacity meeting or assembly spaces. Throughout the civic engagement for the study, there was a strong message that there is a clear and long standing need for a large meeting and function space downtown. The Downtown Event Center will serve as the hub for arts, culture and education in Taunton. It will support the needs of public, private and non-profit organizations in the Greater Taunton area and will be one of the central focuses downtown. The Center will allow programming throughout the day and evening with a diverse program of events.

The Center will be designed as a flexible space with seating that can be set up in a conference or assembly setting, as a more "ballroom" space for private functions such as weddings, as an educational setting for seminars, or as a informal theater setting with a stage area. The Center at capacity can seat approximately 300 estimating 10 SF per person. The Center will have a commercial kitchen area for catered events and a state of the art media center with audio-visual equipment.

Potential Uses/Programming

User/Program	User Type	Example	Rental Rate	Times per Month	Total Rental Month
Workshops/Conferences	Private and Non-Profit	Regional Organizations	$200	4	$800
Dance and Music Recital Space	Private and Non-Profit	SE MA Festival Chorus, dance recitals, Taunton Civic Chorus	$150	2	$300
Annual Meetings/Board Room Meetings	Non-Profit	Local non-profits,	$150	4	$600
Municipal Meetings	City of Taunton	Conservation, Planning Board	$100	4	$400
Fundraisers	Non-Profits	Mayors Ball, Lights On	$150	1	$150
Private Functions/Parties	Private Individuals/Groups	Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, etc.	$250	4	$1,000
Classroom/Lectures	Community Colleges	BCC, Bridgewater	$100	5	$500
Theater Space	Non-Profits	Star Player Productions, School Theater	$150	1	$150
Private Assembly Room	Annual Meetings,	Banks, Corporations	$200	2	$400

	Functions				
Arts and Humanities	Non-Profit	Art Shows	$100	1	$100
Film Presentations	Open to Public	Vintage and Arts	By ticket	1	$100
		Total:		29	$4,500

OFFICE / COMMERCIAL / EVENT CENTER
LEGEND
COMMERCIAL
OFFICE
DOWNTOWN EVENT CENTER
CIRCULATION
NET SQUARE FOOTAGE BREAKDOWN (APPROX.)
COMMERCIAL: 5,842 NSF
OFFICE: 20,220 NSF
DOWNTOWN EVENT CENTER: 3,844 NSF
GROSS BUILDING SF: 41,115 GSF
Office Space
Downtown Event Center
Commercial/Retail Space
Commercial Space
Building Mechanical/Storage
MAIN STREET
LEONARD COURT

RESIDENTIAL / COMMERCIAL / EVENT CENTER
LEGEND
RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL
DOWNTOWN EVENT CENTER
CIRCULATION
NET SQUARE FOOTAGE BREAKDOWN (APPROX.)
COMMERCIAL: 3,783 NSF
DOWNTOWN EVENT CENTER: 5,746 NSF
RESIDENTIAL: 21,142 NSF
STUDIOS 2
ONE-BDRM 4
TWO-BDRM 5
THREE-BDRM 5
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL 16 UNITS
GROSS BUILDING SF 42,570 GSF
MAIN STREET
LINCOLN COURT
Entry Lobby
Downtown Event Center
Commercial Space
Building Mechanical/Storage

VIII. Potential Sources of Funding

There are a variety of "tools" available from local, state and federal sources for historic, housing, and commercial renovation projects. The financial proformas completed for both the Union Block and the Leonard Block (see attachments) include the following sources of financing:

State and Federal Historic Tax Credits: This Historic Tax Credit program gives tax incentives to promote historic preservation and community revitalization. The amount of credit equals 20% of the qualifying costs of the rehabilitation. The building has to be certified as a historic structure by the National Park Service in order to be eligible for the program.

Low Income Housing Tax Credits: The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC or Tax Credit) program was created as an alternate method of funding housing for low- and moderate-income households, and has been in operation since 1987. These tax credits are then used to leverage private capital into new construction or acquisition and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
The tax credits are determined by the development costs, and are used by the owner. However, often, because of IRS regulations and program restrictions, the owner of the property will not be able to use all of the tax credits, and therefore, many LIHTC properties are owned by limited partnership groups that are put together by syndicators. In this manner, a variety of companies and private investors participate within the LIHTC program, investing in housing development and receiving credit against their federal tax liability in return.
Tax Credits must be used for new construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition and rehabilitation. The tax credit units are both rent restricted and occupied by individuals whose income is 60 percent or less of area median gross income.

State Affordable Housing Grants (AHTF, HSF, HOME): There are several state grants available through DHCD to support the creation of affordable housing. These include HOME, Housing Stabilization Funds, and Affordable Housing Trust Funds. These grants are extremely competitive and an application must be submitted by the developer of the project to DHCD in a formal funding round.

Local Affordable Housing Grants (HOME, CDBG): Other forms of local grants to support the creation of affordable housing are HOME and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). CDBG and HOME funds are available through a competitive proposal process on a yearly basis.

New Market Tax Credits: Part of the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000, the New Markets Tax Credit Program are available through privately managed investment institutions, or Community Development Entities (CDEs). The CDEs, such as MHIC, make loans and capital investments in businesses in underserved areas. By making an investment in a CDE, an individual or corporate investor can receive a tax credit worth 39 percent (30 percent net present value) of the initial investment, distributed over 7

years, along with any anticipated return on their investment in the CDE. When combined with Historic Tax Credits, this can bring up to 37% equity into a renovation project.

IX. Partnership Opportunities

Coordinated Effort: Redevelopment of Downtown Taunton must be an ongoing coordinated effort between the City of Taunton, downtown property owners, and agencies connected to the downtown. Continuing a community engagement process is critical to ensure that redevelopment measures are in the best interest of the downtown. It is our recommendation that a ***Downtown Redevelopment Committee*** be formed to continue the dialogue for future implementation of various projects and to build upon and promote the overall vision for revitalization of the downtown. We suggest that designees from among the following entities be included in the Downtown Committee, among others:

- Heart of Taunton
- The Neighborhood Corporation
- Office of Economic and Community Development
- Taunton Redevelopment Authority
- City Council
- Building Department
- Office of Senator Pacheco
- Office of Congressman Frank
- Bristol Community College/Bridgewater State College

The Downtown Redevelopment Committee should meet on a regular basis and provide update reports to the Mayor.

Project Development Teams: Assembling strong project development teams is necessary to tackle the complicated process of mixed-use and housing development. Architectural and engineering, construction, financing, marketing, and property management are the skills required for a team to move forward with a historic mixed-use renovation project.

As a result of the Downtown Taunton Study Project, the Neighborhood Corporation, in coordination with the Heart of Taunton, and property owners of the Union Block, will be forming a Union Block Project Development Team to prepare for the second phase of the predevelopment work required to move the Union Block Reuse Plan to a level to apply for funding applications.

X. Next-Steps

Union Block:

- Continue to create a public-private ownership and development partnership arrangement, a "Union Block Project Development Team"

- Prepare Predevelopment Phase II scope of work and budget and obtain necessary predevelopment financing

- Continue residential and market financial analysis in relation to financing/funding sources available

- Complete environmental assessment scope of work including hazardous materials identification

- Obtain legal advice on the best method for property transaction

- Contact State agencies such as MHIC, CEDAC, the LIFE Initiative and Mass Housing Partnership for possible predevelopment for further architectural and environmental studies and for technical assistance on facilitating the second phase of the reuse analysis

- Submit Part I and Part II to the Massachusetts Historical Commission to list property on the National Register of Historic Places for eligibility for state and federal historic tax credits

- Prepare a demolition analysis and estimated demolition cost

- Investigate green rehabilitation strategies and possible grant sources available

- Prepare Special Permit package and submit to the City Design Review Board

- Prepare "One Stop" submittal package to the MA Department of Housing and Community Development for the winter 2009/2010 round.

Leonard Block:

- Create a "Downtown Redevelopment Committee" comprised of city, private and non-profit members to meet on a regular basis to pursue redevelopment objectives for downtown, including the future reuse of the Leonard Block

- Secure the building in order to meet health and safety codes

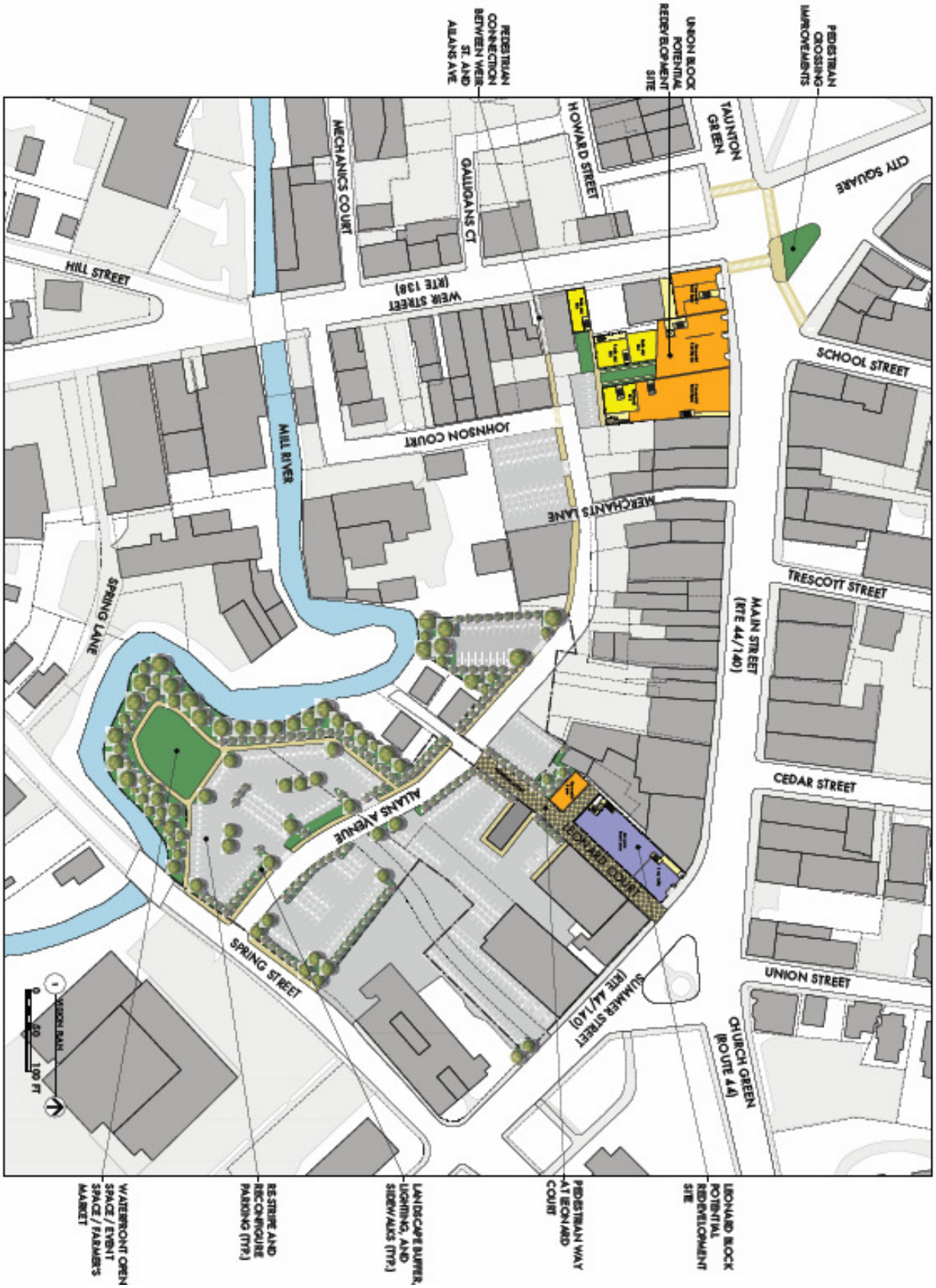
- Continue exploring and visioning for a downtown community college campus

- Continue market analysis on viable reuse options

- Contact State agencies such as DHCD, MHIC, CEDAC, and the LIFE Initiative for possible predevelopment financing for further architectural and environmental studies and for technical assistance on facilitating the reuse analysis

- Continue to investigate the utilization of New Market Tax Credits

- Contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission of the use of historic tax credits



VISION PLAN – DOWNTOWN TAUNTON