

# DOWNTOWN METHUEN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## Final Report and Recommendations



May 2004

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## I. A VISION AND PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN METHUEN

The City of Methuen's 1994 Downtown Revitalization Strategy presented a vision of the downtown as a place –



*... teeming with activities that would bring people from all over. The successful Downtown Methuen would have the image of being a friendly, clean and safe place that is service-driven, attractive and accessible. Above all, Downtown would have the image of being very, very busy.<sup>1</sup>*

This vision continues to underlie the City's efforts to improve and enhance the Methuen Square area, along with several basic objectives that have guided planning efforts to date:

- Support existing businesses in their efforts to enhance their properties and succeed in their downtown locations;
- Attract new retail, office, and mixed residential/commercial uses to the downtown, particularly to blighted locations;
- Ensure public infrastructure meets the needs of downtown users and enhances the landscape wherever possible;
- Promote high quality development, storefront and signage design; and
- Take advantage of natural and cultural assets to attract people and business to downtown.

Business owners, residents, and City officials all envision a future in which downtown will attract shoppers who will walk its streets, patronize a number of locally-owned small businesses, and have several dining choices. In addition, new office spaces will be filled with employees who will have nearby options for lunch and who will be able to conveniently complete a variety of errands during the course of a work day. This vision does not picture downtown Methuen as a major tourist destination comparable to places like Newburyport or

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<sup>1</sup> *Downtown Methuen Market Analysis & Revitalization Strategy*, McCabe Enterprises, p. 4.

Portsmouth NH, nor does it aim to compete with larger retail centers such as the Loop; instead, it is focused on creating a mix of uses, located in a convenient, aesthetically-pleasing environment, that combine to achieve a vibrant, self-sustaining gathering place for Methuen residents, business owners, and visitors.

Downtown Methuen has unique assets that have not yet been fully capitalized. The Spicket River and its falls, the network of open spaces (including Riverwalk Park, Grey Court State Park, and the playing fields), and the rich inventory of historic structures all should be linked together, physically and in the public mindset, to create a sense of place that will support the central business district's retail, office, and restaurant uses.

The purpose of this **Downtown Methuen Development Plan** is to update recent planning efforts and present a coordinated strategy for the revitalization of the downtown area. The report assemble information about land use and economic conditions in the downtown and surrounding area, reviews the context for revitalization, and presents recommendations for policies and strategies that will help coordinate the many individual public and private projects to achieve a clear and distinctive image that will attract visitors and shoppers and spur investment.

Key to this approach is a series of perspective visions of the downtown that illustrate strategic decisions that the City must make in the short term to achieve long-term success.

## II. PROJECT SCOPE AND STUDY AREA

Since the mid-1990's, when Gaunt Square received its trademark clock tower as part of a larger transportation improvement project, the City and its downtown businesses have been working to revitalize the downtown area. Substantial progress towards achieving its vision is evident, though downtown continues to lack the complement of elements required to attract enough activity to qualify as a destination spot. Incremental changes, while having positive impact, have not been completed as part of a coordinated, comprehensive plan. As a result, major efforts run the risk of being perceived as piecemeal and intermittent, and without a vision to ground them.

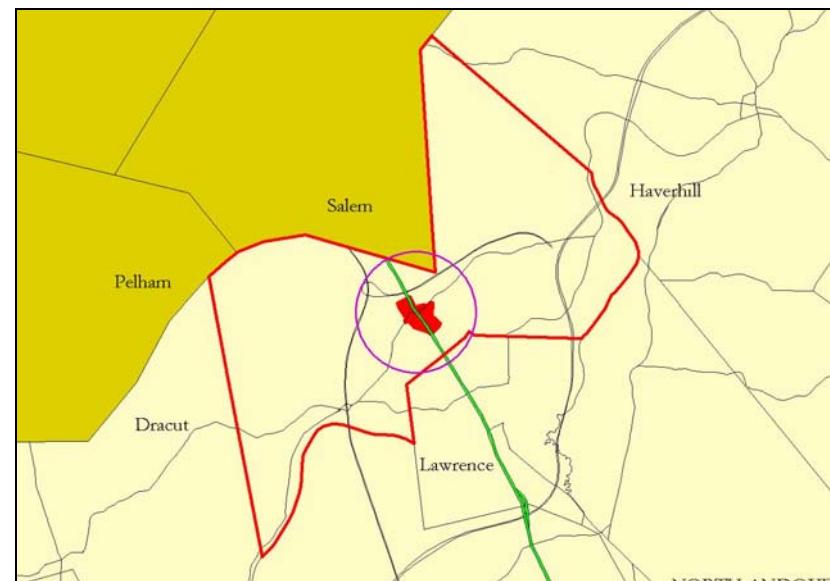
The City of Methuen seeks to build upon its recent revitalization efforts in its downtown area to explore the possibility of transforming this place into a *pedestrian-oriented destination*. To this end the City has solicited consulting assistance in determining the best approach for implementing the vision articulated in 1994 of downtown Methuen as a place "*teeming with activities that would bring people from all over ... a friendly, clean and safe place that is service-driven, attractive and accessible.*"<sup>2</sup>

Since previous studies have done a good job at outlining market issues, façade improvements, and business development strategies, the City has requested this plan to provide a compelling vision for the overall downtown, plus specific, prioritized implementation steps to achieve this goal.

Figure 1 shows the downtown area in its regional context, and Figure 2 shows the boundaries of the study area (outlined in red) as defined by the Downtown Steering Committee. The study area

was defined in such a way as to focus the planning effort on a limited area; thus, certain properties that are considered part of "downtown" may be omitted in this approach.

**Figure 1: Downtown Methuen in Regional Context**



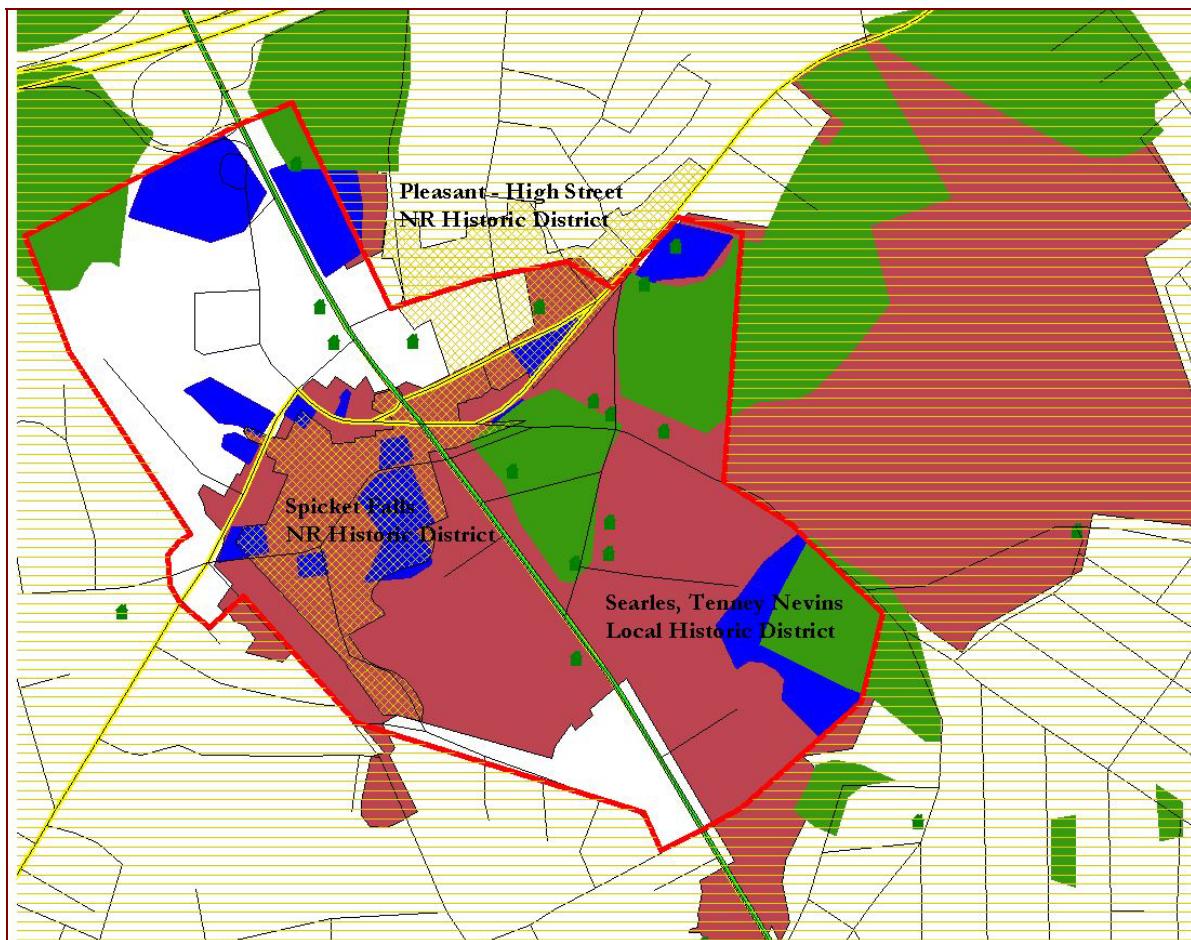
\*one mile distance from Hampshire/Broadway intersection noted in purple.

The downtown study area encompasses approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  square mile, or 155 acres. Beginning atop Broadway at the Nevins Memorial Library, the area's boundary extends clockwise to include City Hall and Grey Court, east on Lawrence Street to include the playing fields, with the southern boundary at the intersection of Broadway and Oakland, then heading north along Union and Railroad Streets to the Five Corners intersection (Pelham-Railroad-Lowell-Osgood Streets), and north along the rail corridor to the bird sanctuary land behind the Police Station.

<sup>2</sup> *Downtown Methuen Market Analysis & Revitalization Strategy*, McCabe Enterprises, p. 4.

Downtown Methuen is home to three historic districts and numerous historically-significant structures. In addition, approximately 15% of the study area (not including open water) is used as open space/park land (in green below), and about 15% of the overall area is owned by the City (seen in blue below). The combination of historic structures and significant natural resources provide downtown with unique attractions, and the local historic district's regulatory oversight plus the degree of municipal ownership offer substantial opportunity to influence the future face of downtown.

**Figure 2: Downtown Methuen's Historic Districts**



### III. LAND USE PROFILE

The study area encompasses a mix of uses from residential to business to recreational to industrial. Just under 250 parcels are contained within the area that measure approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  square mile in area. Downtown is a small piece of Methuen (23 square miles), located at the crossroads of Broadway and Hampshire Street. Massachusetts Highway Department traffic counts on Route 28 (Broadway), south of its intersection with Route 213, indicate that 12,000 to 18,000 vehicles travel here per day.

**Figure 3: Land Uses in Downtown Methuen**

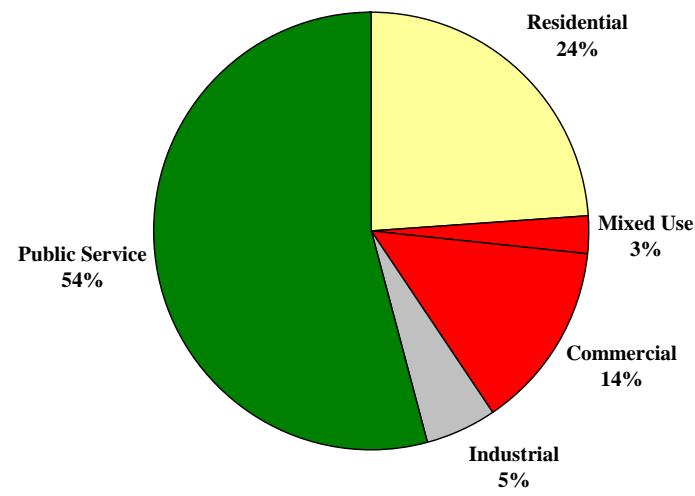


KEY:

Red = Commercial

Green = Open space, park land, recreational, institutional

**Figure 4: Downtown Land Use Distribution**



Gray = Industrial

Yellow = Residential

Figure 3 roughly delineates land uses in downtown according to the Methuen assessing classifications, and Figure 4 shows the percentage distribution of these land uses. Public services uses, including city and state-owned properties and non-profit uses comprise over 50% of total uses by acreage. Residential and commercial/industrial/mixed use parcels each occupy 24% and 22% respectively.

Table 1 summarizes the assessing information related to the approximately 250 parcels contained within the study area. Again, the study area is just 0.9% of Methuen's overall area. Detailed parcel information is presented in Appendix B.

Table 1: Downtown Land Use Profile

CURRENT LAND USE PROFILE			DEVELOPMENT DATA						VALUATION DATA			
CURRENT LAND USE	LAND USE CODE	NO. OF PARCELS	AREA (ACRES)		FLOOR AREA		TOTAL VALUATION			AVERAGE VALUATION		
			TOTAL	AVERAGE	TOTAL	AVERAGE FAR	LAND	BUILDING	TOTAL (LAND+BLDG.)	LAND (PER PARCEL)	LAND (PER ACRE)	BUILDING
<b>Residential Land Uses</b>												
Single Family	101	56	10.29	0.18	109,661	0.24	\$3,364,200	\$6,845,600	\$10,209,800	\$60,075	\$326,958	\$122,243
Condominium	102	2	0.00	0.00	2,603		\$0	\$247,800	\$247,800	\$0	\$123,900	
Two Family	104	35	6.44	0.18	92,815	0.33	\$2,005,000	\$4,861,880	\$6,866,880	\$57,286	\$311,289	\$138,911
Three Family	105	10	1.71	0.17	34,280	0.46	\$558,100	\$1,836,000	\$2,394,100	\$55,810	\$326,491	\$183,600
Accessory Land	106	2	3.91	1.95	-	0.00	\$502,400	\$0	\$502,400	\$251,200	\$128,559	\$0
Apts-4-8 units	111	17	5.11	0.30	80,056	0.36	\$1,090,800	\$3,572,600	\$4,663,400	\$64,165	\$213,494	\$210,153
Apts- 8 plus	112	1	2.56	2.56	119,425	1.07	\$376,200	\$8,493,200	\$8,869,400	\$376,200	\$147,032	\$8,493,200
Developable Residential Land	130	2	0.47	0.24	-	0.00	\$89,700	\$0	\$89,700	\$44,850	\$190,843	\$0
Potentially Devel. Residential Land	131	1	0.13	0.13	-	0.00	\$27,600	\$0	\$27,600	\$27,600	\$210,929	\$0
Undevelopable Residential Land	132	5	1.11	0.22	-	0.00	\$46,900	\$0	\$46,900	\$9,380	\$42,129	\$0
<b>Total Residential Properties</b>		131	31.73	0.24	438,840		\$8,060,900	\$25,857,080	\$33,917,980	\$61,534	\$254,049	
<b>Commercial Land Uses</b>												
Nursing Home	304	1	0.49	0.49	11,984	0.56	\$100,800	\$395,400	\$496,200	\$100,800	\$205,882	\$395,400
Storage, Warehouses	316	3	1.09	0.36	12,269	0.26	\$191,600	\$254,800	\$446,400	\$63,867	\$175,392	\$84,933
Facilities providing building materials	321	1	0.43	0.43	14,500	0.77	\$92,200	\$347,500	\$439,700	\$92,200	\$212,130	\$347,500
Small Retail & Service (<10,000 sq ft)	325	13	3.82	0.29	69,571	0.42	\$923,700	\$3,417,200	\$4,340,900	\$71,054	\$241,902	\$262,862
Eating & Drinking Estab.	326	6	1.75	0.29	39,490	0.52	\$421,500	\$1,829,600	\$2,251,100	\$70,250	\$240,415	\$304,933
Auto Repair	332	5	1.96	0.39	19,332	0.23	\$324,500	\$446,200	\$770,700	\$64,900	\$165,142	\$89,240
Parking Lots	337	11	1.89	0.17	-	0.00	\$436,100	\$0	\$436,100	\$39,645	\$230,704	\$0
General Office Bldg	340	14	3.18	0.23	76,705	0.55	\$918,600	\$3,604,700	\$4,523,300	\$65,614	\$288,533	\$257,479
Bank	341	1	0.20	0.20	14,691	1.73	\$39,300	\$1,433,800	\$1,473,100	\$39,300	\$201,404	\$1,433,800
Postal Service	350	1	0.49	0.49	4,472	0.21	\$100,900	\$140,300	\$241,200	\$100,900	\$205,708	\$140,300
Developable Commercial Land	390	3	1.03	0.34	-	0.00	\$196,900	\$0	\$196,900	\$65,633	\$191,703	\$0
Undevelopable Commercial Land	392	3	2.14	0.71	-	0.00	\$95,700	\$0	\$95,700	\$31,900	\$44,671	\$0
<b>Total Commercial Property</b>		62	18.43	0.30	263,014		\$3,841,800	\$11,869,500	\$15,711,300	\$61,965	\$207,863	
<b>Industrial Land Uses</b>												
Buildings for Manufacturing	400	5	6.46	1.29	93,941	0.33	\$785,600	\$1,670,200	\$2,455,800	\$157,120	\$121,645	\$334,040
Warehouses to Store Manuf. Products	401	1	0.18	0.18	5,850	0.73	\$31,600	\$66,900	\$98,500	\$31,600	\$172,536	\$66,900
Land Used as part of Manufacturing	403	1	0.12	0.12	-	0.00	\$26,200	\$0	\$26,200	\$26,200	\$211,341	\$0
<b>Total Industrial Property</b>		7	6.77	0.97	99,791		\$843,400	\$1,737,100	\$2,580,500	\$120,486	\$124,666	
<b>Public Service Land Uses</b>												
Commonwealth of Mass	901	3	27.45	9.15	3,706	0.00	\$292,600	\$365,700	\$658,300	\$97,533	\$10,659	\$121,900
Municipalities	903	21	33.73	1.61	128,331	0.09	\$2,422,100	\$7,169,100	\$9,591,200	\$115,338	\$71,803	\$341,386
Charitable Organizations	905	6	5.19	0.87	30,066	0.13	\$518,400	\$1,677,300	\$2,195,700	\$86,400	\$99,798	\$279,550
Churches, Synagogues and Temples	906	5	5.90	1.18	80,349	0.31	\$326,400	\$4,287,300	\$4,613,700	\$65,280	\$55,304	\$857,460
<b>Total Public Properties</b>		35	72.28	2.07	242,452		\$3,559,500	\$13,499,400	\$17,058,900	\$101,700	\$49,247	
<b>Multiple-Use Property</b>												
Primarily Residential w/ Commer.	013	2	0.36	0.18	6,796	0.44	\$125,600	\$307,700	\$433,300	\$62,800	\$350,623	\$153,850
Primarily Commercial w/ Resident.	031	12	3.61	0.30	65,383	0.42	\$823,400	\$2,986,900	\$3,810,300	\$68,617	\$228,238	\$248,908
<b>Total Multiple-Use Properties</b>		14	3.97	0.28	72,179		\$949,000	\$3,294,600	\$4,243,600	\$67,786	\$239,293	
<b>Totals for Land Use Classes</b>		249	133.22	0.54	1,116,276		\$17,254,600	\$56,257,680	\$73,512,280	\$69,296	\$129,518	\$105,149,072
<b>Grand Totals</b>		249	133.22	0.54	1,116,276		\$17,254,600	\$56,257,680	\$73,512,280	\$69,296	\$129,518	\$105,149,072

## IV. ECONOMIC CLIMATE

### Overview

The economy of downtown Methuen is driven by services, including the broad “service sector” and services provided by financial, insurance and real estate (“F.I.R.E.”) firms. Retail sales constitute a third important sector in the study area. Compared to the surrounding area, the downtown economy is strong as a service center, and is in proportion with the region in retailing.

Downtown Methuen competes with Salem, New Hampshire for retail sales and other sections of Methuen – notably the former Methuen Mall, now reinvented as “The Loop” – for retail and entertainment spending. Direct competition with these areas is one-sided against the Downtown, as New Hampshire does not impose a sales tax and the Loop is an impressive aggregation of apparel and shoe stores along with a 20 screen cinema.

Recent trends and available opportunities indicate that the downtown niche appears to be as a service center, and its future growth lies in services, including amusement and recreation as well as more traditional office-rooted industries, such as business services, legal services and finance, insurance and real estate services. Recommended physical development is focused on implementation and reinforcement of the Riverfront strategy upon which downtown should continue to build. They are designed to encourage foot traffic and to take advantage of downtown’s architectural and natural assets. We arrive at these conclusions through interviews, by examining available development opportunities in the downtown, and through analyzing the overall economy of Downtown Methuen in relationship to a five mile radius that surrounds it.

Our findings suggest that future economic development in the downtown area target area is most likely to succeed if it provides space for service industries or support services for these industries. The findings are reported below in two parts:

1. An economic profile of the target study area of downtown Methuen; and
2. A comparison of the downtown economy with the economy with a five-mile radius from the center of downtown.<sup>3</sup>

### Economic Profile of Downtown Methuen

The target study area of downtown Methuen hosts nearly 2,000 jobs, of which more than 1,500 are in 179 private sector establishments. The “service” sector includes business, legal and professional services; personal services; “industrial” services such as auto repair; amusement and recreation establishments; health, education and social services; membership organizations; and other service oriented establishments. In addition, financial, insurance and real estate services (listed under the acronym F.I.R.E.) are prominent in downtown Methuen.

- Together, the Service and FIRE sectors account for 59% of private sector establishments in downtown, support 66% of private sector jobs and 68% of business sales generated in the area.
- Excluding FIRE businesses, 48% of establishments and 54% of employment in the study area are in the service sector.

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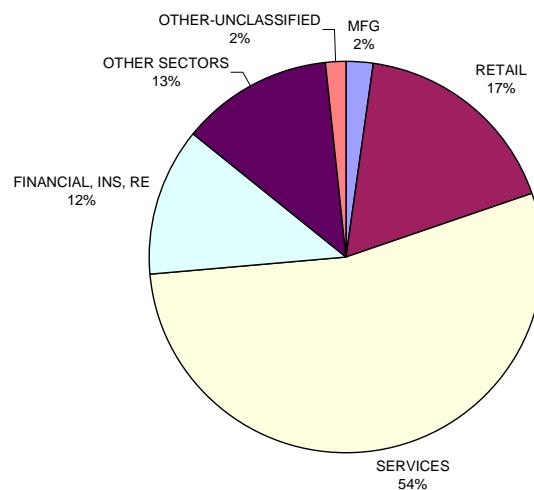
<sup>3</sup> Most data in this section are based on Claritas, Inc., first quarter, 2003

- 11% of establishments and 12% of the area's jobs are in the FIRE sector. However, these financial, insurance and real estate establishments generate 23% of the area's business sales.
- Retailing (including restaurants) is the second largest sector in the downtown, accounting for 17% of its employment and about 14% of its business sales.
- Eighteen of the 19 businesses in downtown that have 20 or more workers are in the service, FIRE and retail sectors (the other is a utility).

Table 2 illustrates the proportion of private sector employment by industry in downtown Methuen. As seen, the Services, F.I.R.E and Retail sectors account for over 80% of the area's employment base, and also accounts for more than 80% of business sales.

Another way to look at the role of services in the downtown is to focus on high-wage service industries, including business services, professional services, legal services and the FIRE sector. Companies in these industries generally require higher educational attainment (at least in management) than other services and generate higher income. As shown in Table 1, these services are responsible for about 26% of the downtown employment, and generate 38% of business sales in the area.

**Figure 5: Downtown Methuen Private Sector Employment by Sector**



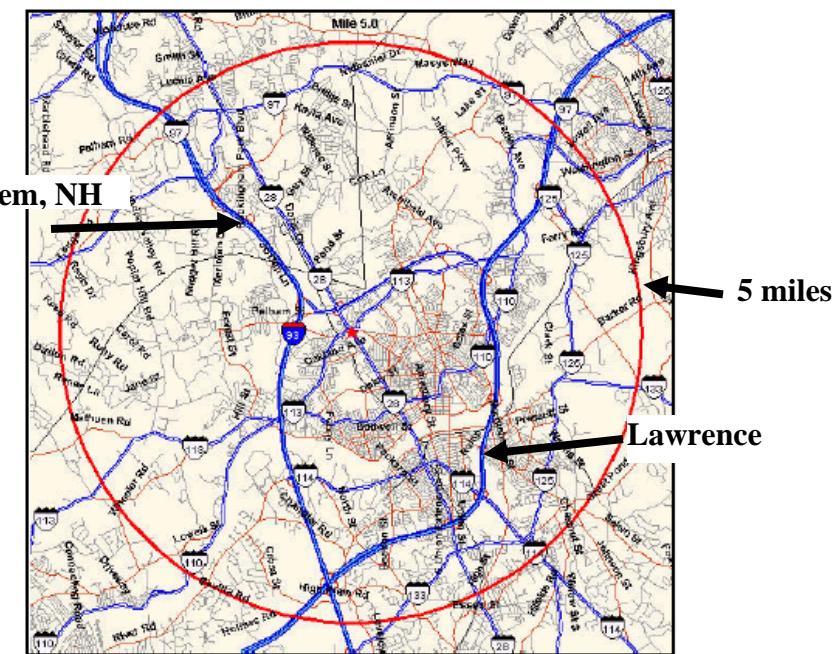
**Table 2: Importance of Prominent Service Industries in Downtown Methuen Economy**

<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Establishments</b>		<b>Employment</b>		<b>Business Sales (millions)</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Business, professional & legal services and FIRE	54	30%	400	26%	\$68.7	38%
Remainder of the Service Sector	51	28%	612	40%	\$53.5	30%
Rest of the Downtown Economy	74	41%	516	34%	\$58.0	32%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1528</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>180.2</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Claritas. Calculations by EDR Group.*

## Downtown Economy in Relation to Nearby Areas

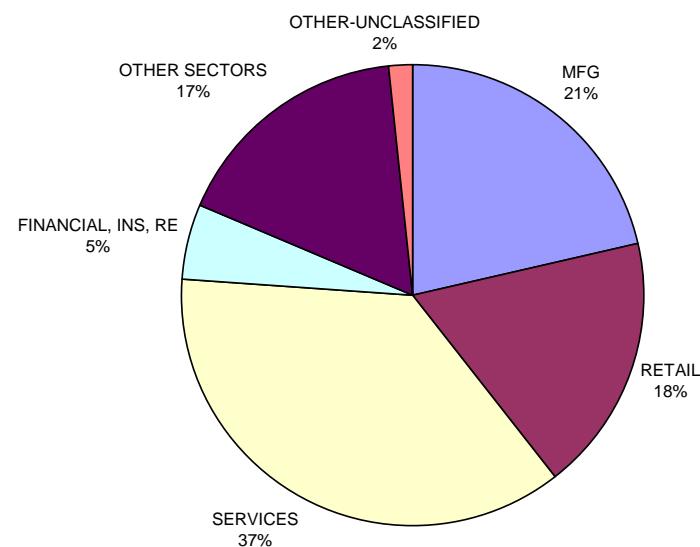
Comparing the downtown with the wider area reinforces the conclusion that downtown Methuen has a strong service sector. A five-mile radius from the intersection of Broadway (Route 28) and Ditson Place, the approximate center of downtown Methuen, includes the retail strip in Salem, New Hampshire and downtown Lawrence. Salem is the northern edge of this region, and the region's eastern boundary bisects Haverhill and North Andover. The southern edge of the five-mile radius passes through Andover and portions of Dracut and Pelham, NH are on its western edge. Figure 6 illustrates the region.

**Figure 6: Region Five Miles from Downtown Methuen**

*Source: Claritas, Inc.*

Within five miles of the study area, we find almost 7,000 private sector establishments that support more than 100,000 jobs and generate over \$11.6 billion in business sales. The major strength of the five-mile area compared to downtown Methuen is that manufacturing establishments account for 21% of the region's employment, which is twice the national average,<sup>4</sup> compared to 2% in downtown. In addition, the region includes a smattering of agriculture and significant number of agriculture service establishments. However, services, including finance, insurance and real estate firms, which account for 66% of employment downtown, represent 42% within the five-mile region. Figure 7 presents the sector composition of employment in the five-mile radius.

**Figure 7: Private Sector Employment by Percent – Five-Mile Radius from Downtown Study Area**



<sup>4</sup> The Bureau of Economic Affairs reports 2001 manufacturing employment at 10.2% of nation employment totals

Businesses in downtown Methuen on average are smaller than within the five mile radius, with a mean size of 15 compared to 9 in the downtown, and 14% of establishments in the five mile radius employ 20 or more, compared to 11% in downtown Methuen. This difference is largely due to the presence of manufacturing companies, which average 50 employees per establishment. For example, the famous Malden Mills plant is on the Lawrence/Methuen line, but similar manufacturers are not in the downtown. Similarly, the region is dotted with other textile and apparel companies, plastics and technology firms. Retail establishment are also larger in the region than in downtown Methuen owing to local malls (including the Loop, which is Methuen's largest taxpayer) and particularly to the retail strip in Salem NH. Retail establishments in Methuen, as well as other Massachusetts communities near New Hampshire, have a difficult time competing for retail customers for big-ticket items that are subject to the Commonwealth's sales tax. Clothing and food items, not subject to the sales tax, provide a more level playing field for Methuen companies.

For services and FIRE sectors, however, size of establishment and sales per employee in downtown compare very favorably to the five-mile region. As shown in Table 3, the ratio of sales to employee downtown exceeds the regional averages in these sectors. Moreover, while the average establishment size in these sectors is 10% to 40% smaller downtown than in the wider region,<sup>5</sup> the ratio of firms with 20 or more employees in both sectors is larger downtown than in the wider area.

<sup>5</sup> Differences of 10 employees to 11 for services, and 10 to 14 in the F.I.R.E. sector.

**Table 3: Characteristics of Establishments Downtown and Within a Five Mile Radius by Sector**

Sector	Employment per Establishment		Sales Per Employee		Percent of Establishments with at least 20 Employees	
	Downtown	5 Mile Radius	Downtown	5 Mile Radius	Downtown	5 Mile Radius
All Industries	9	15	\$ 117,932	\$108,682	11%	14%
Manufacturing	5	50	\$ 87,879	\$ 74,260	0%	39%
Retailing	8	12	\$ 93,258	\$123,787	9%	14%
Services	10	14	\$ 98,182	\$ 86,889	14%	12%
FIRE	10	11	\$ 220,321	\$213,229	16%	8%
Other Sectors	6	14	\$ 157,292	\$161,429	3%	12%

*Source:* Claritas. Calculations by EDR Group. Table does not include establishments that are not classified by sector.

Proportionally, the downtown Methuen study area accounts for 1.4% of private sector employment and 1.5% of business sales found in the five-mile radius. In addition 2% of all establishments with 20 or more employees in the wider region are found downtown. If each sector in downtown performed as expected, roughly one and one-half percent of employment and business sales of the region should be represented in the downtown. Sectors in the study area with a higher ratio of employment and/or business sales are strong and are out performing the region as a whole. Conversely, sectors showing less than their “expected share” are weaker industries at this time.

A comparison of the downtown economy with the wider region (Table 4) shows that the services and FIRE sectors in the downtown significantly outperform the region in both employment, business sales and in the proportion of establishments with 20 or more workers. The story is different in retailing, in which downtown Methuen accounts for the expected 1.4% of employment in the region, but only 1% of sales. The big-ticket items are sold in malls and shopping centers found elsewhere in the region.

**Table 4: Proportion of Downtown Methuen Economy with a Five-Mile Radius by Sector**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Percent Establishments</b>	<b>Percent Employment</b>	<b>Percent Business Sales</b>	<b>Percent Establishments with 20 or more Employees</b>
<b>All Industries</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
Manufacturing	1.5%	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%
Retailing	2.2%	1.4%	1.0%	1.3%
Services	3.0%	2.1%	2.4%	3.4%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	3.6%	3.2%	3.3%	7.0%

*Source: Claritas. Calculations by EDR Group. Table does not include establishments that are not classified by sector.*

The relative strength of services in downtown Methuen is further seen when “high-end” services are compared with those in the surrounding five-mile area. The high revenue generating services discussed above, business services, professional services and legal services, along with FIRE, show much higher relative strength downtown than in the five miles region.

Table 5 profiles the major service sectors in the economy of the five-mile radius. Note that due to the relative strong presence of manufacturing in the area outside of downtown Methuen, 58% of employment and 60% of business sales are in sectors other than services and FIRE. In downtown, the corresponding ratios are 34% and 32% respectively (see Table 2, above).

The economic strength of downtown Methuen rests on its major service industries, as shown in Table 6. Business, professional &

legal services and financial and real estate related services are much stronger in the downtown economy than in the economy within the five-mile circle. The presence of these industries in the downtown economy is more than 80% stronger than the five-mile area when defined by relative employment and sales, and 50% stronger when defined by relative number of establishments.

The presence of other services is also stronger in the target area than its surrounding five miles in terms of relative employment and business sales. While the relative prominence of services in the study area is due in part to the relatively strong manufacturing base in the surrounding region, downtown Methuen has clearly established a strong base in the service economy that could be exploited to foster for additional economic growth.

**Table 5: Profile of Prominent Service Industries within 5 Miles of Downtown Methuen**

<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Establishments</b>		<b>Employment</b>		<b>Business Sales (millions)</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Business, professional & legal services and FIRE	1,412	20%	15,344	14%	\$2,493.5	21%
Remainder of the Service Sector	1,970	28%	29,755	28%	\$2,164.3	19%
Rest of the Economy	3,586	51%	61,899	58%	\$6,971	60%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6968</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>106,998</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11,628.8</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Claritas. Calculations by EDR Group. Totals may not add due to rounding.*

**Table 6: Relative Presence of Prominent Service Industries, Other Services, and Other Industries in the Downtown Study Area and a Surrounding 5 mile Radius**

		<b>Establishments</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Business Sales</b>
Percent of: Business, professional & legal services and FIRE				
	Downtown	<b>30%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>38%</b>
	Five Mile Radius	20%	14%	21%
Remainder of the Service Sector				
	Downtown	<b>28%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>30%</b>
	Five Mile Radius	28%	28%	19%
Rest of Economy				
	Downtown	<b>41%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>
	Five Mile Radius	51%	58%	60%

*Source: Claritas. Calculations by EDR Group*

## V. ZONING

Most of the Study Area is located within the Central Business District (CBD). Adjacent zones include General Residence (RG), Conservancy (CN), Limited Business (LB), and Neighborhood Business (NB).

According to the Methuen Zoning Ordinance, the CBD “includes retail, service, office and residential uses. The CBD is intended to reinforce the area known as Gaunt Square. It is the intent of the ordinance that the CBD be a place of diversity and a mixture of uses, provided public health and safety are protected.”

### Summary of Primary Uses

The Central Business District use regulations are tailored to promote business use. In general, existing land uses tend to reflect these regulations with a couple of noteworthy exceptions: single and two-family use is not allowed in the CBD, nor is mixed-use<sup>6</sup>. The following summary uses general categories of use as defined in Methuen’s zoning ordinance – more detail on specific uses contained within these groupings can be found in the ordinance.

#### *Residential –*

Only multifamily, apartments, attached units, assisted living and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) are allowed by special permit. Nursing homes are allowed. Single family and two-family are not allowed.

#### *Public/Semi Public Uses –*

Most allowed. A Special Permit is required for day care center, philanthropic institution, wireless antenna and public buildings w/storage yards.

#### *Hospital Uses –*

Most not allowed. One exception is for clinic or diagnostic treatment facility use, which is allowed.

#### *Clubs, Cemeteries, Race Tracks –*

Health clubs are allowed, and other recreation-based clubs allowed via special permit.

#### *Retail, Services, and Office Uses –*

Most uses in this category are allowed by right or by special permit; notably, mixed use is not allowed.

#### *Automotive and General Business –*

Most uses in this category are allowed by right or by special permit, including commercial and municipal parking.

## Dimensional Regulations and Parking Requirements

The CBD district allows the greatest density of all Methuen’s zoning districts. Designed to encourage development and to recognize that historic development patterns often do not reflect newer zoning codes, the CDB requires a minimum lot size of just 4,000 s.f., and lots less than this size, if they pre-date the ordinance, can also be developed with site plan review approval. Frontage of 40 feet is required, but front (0’), side (15’), and rear (30’) yard requirements can be waived to zero with site plan approval. Maximum building coverage is 40%, maximum height is 40 feet, and there is no open space requirement.

The zoning ordinance deliberately provides for flexibility with regard to required parking in the CBD. Section VII A-3 details

<sup>6</sup> Mixed-use is not permitted per the Table of Uses; however, Section XI D-4B indicates that “An application for a Mixed Use Development shall be allowed in the CBD and the BL.”

the procedure by which the Community Development Board may waive up to 20% of the required parking via special permit, and off site parking is allowed within 500 feet of a use, subject to conditions (undefined).

## Zoning Observations

On the whole, CBD regulations seem to enable their intended goal – to allow businesses flexibility in site development and use, and to allow for a fairly dense pattern of development.

The flexibility of CBD zoning, however, is dependent upon a great deal of discretion in design decisions in the special permit process, administered by the Zoning and Community Development Boards. As a result, it is extremely important that the ordinance provide clear guidance to these decision makers with regard to the details of what might constitute desirable development, worthy of receiving a special permit or site plan approval.

Following is a summary of issues where the ordinance might benefit from revision – specific recommendations for revision will be discussed in a later chapter.

- **Mixed use** is typically a key component of vibrant urban spaces, and it is unclear as to whether mixed uses are allowed in the CBD. The Table of Use (Section V-D) lists “Building containing mixed commercial and residential uses” as not permitted in the CBD (or any other zone except LB). Section XI-4B, Special Permits/Mixed Use Developments, states “An application for mixed use development shall be allowed in the CBD, and BL zoning districts.” Consideration of whether mixed use could contribute

to the further revitalization of downtown will be thoroughly explored as this study progresses.

- The 0' front yard setback is, according to the Table of Dimensional Regulations (Section VI-D), allowed subject to footnote 7 which reads “The side and rear setback requirements in a Central Business District may, subject to site plan approval, be zero.” In Section XII, Site Plan Approval, projects subject to site plan approval include those located in the CBD that request reduced front yard setback to zero. The following issues arise:
  - It appears as though there is no “by right” front yard setback requirement (unless any setback *except* zero is acceptable as the minimum required). This would mean that all projects in the CBD must receive site plan approval.
  - Footnote 7 references only side and rear yard setbacks, not front.
  - Section XII, Site Plan Approval, XII-B-3 refers to a reduction of front yard setback to zero, but there is no minimum requirement in the Table from which to be reduced.
  - In order to promote a pedestrian-oriented environment, a **maximum** front yard setback might be considered. This could be especially important for businesses along Broadway, where parking in the front yards should be prohibited.
  - The side and rear yard setbacks, per the Table of Dimensional Regulations, may be reduced to zero with site plan approval. Yet, Section XII, Site Plan Approval, makes no mention of side or rear setbacks being eligible for reduction. It makes no provision for a smaller reduction (i.e. from 10 to 5 feet).

- If having zero setbacks makes sense in certain instances, it might be likewise advisable to provide an option for **flexibility in lot coverage** (40% maximum) as well.
- **Site Plan Approval regulations** generally focus on submittal requirements and lack specificity with regard to desired site requirements, design and performance standards, etc. In addition, applicability is fairly limited – in the CBD for 0' setback request and for lots under 4,000 s.f., and all non-residential construction in excess of 5,000 s.f. The City might consider expanding the types of projects that require site plan approval to include all new construction and major renovations or expansions in the CBD. In addition, site planning standards or guidelines for development in the CBD should be incorporated into the zoning ordinance.
- **Parking requirements** indicate special exceptions may be made in the Central Business District via special permit. The ordinance allows up to 20% reduction in the required number of spaces, and also allows for off-site parking within 500 feet of the proposed use.

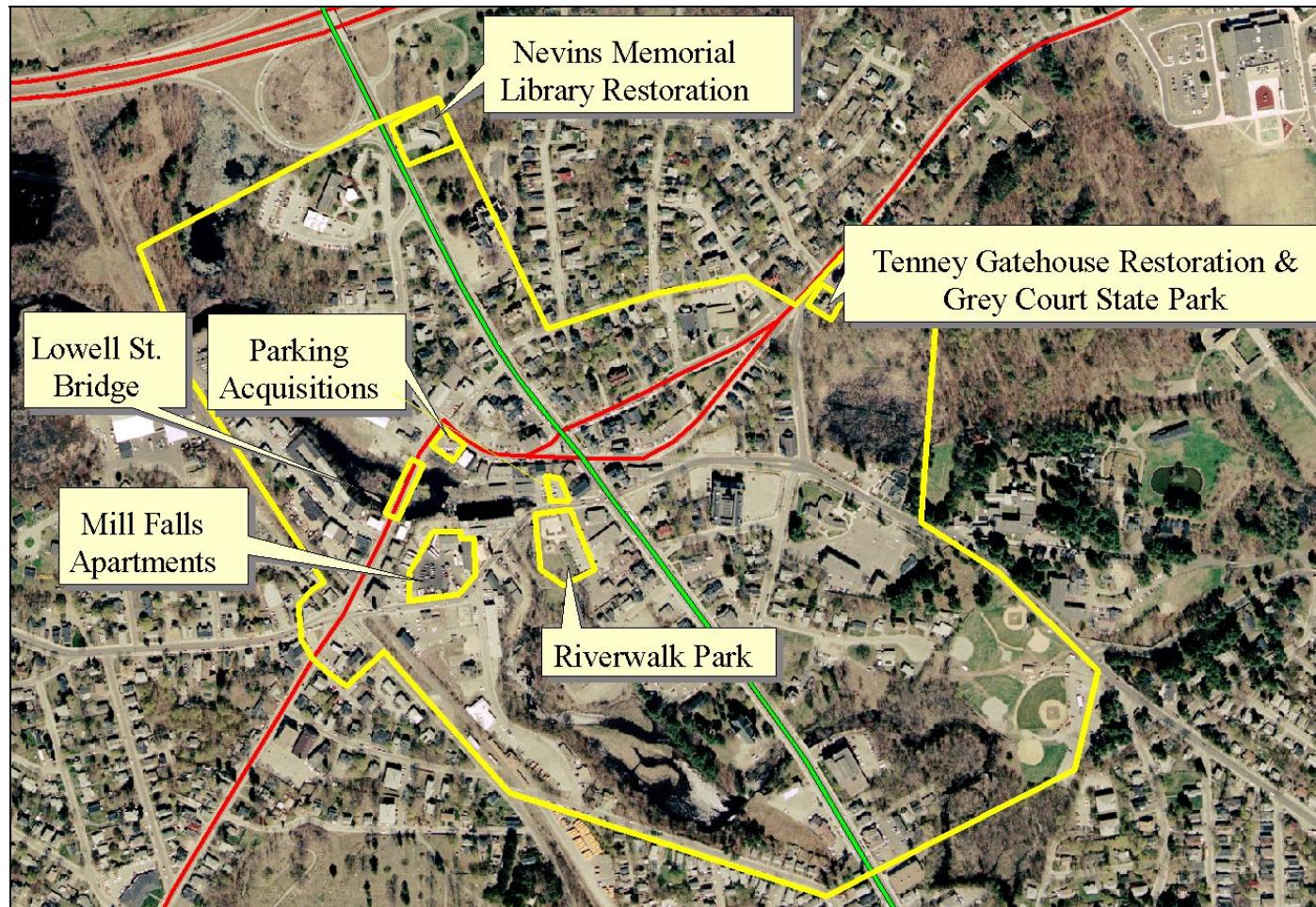
Convenient, available parking has long been an obstacle to development in downtown Methuen; the City has made substantial efforts to increase parking supply, and might consider providing further relief via its zoning requirements:

  - In many historic downtowns (including Newburyport, Salem, and Northhampton), public parking with a short distance of proposed non-residential uses is allowed to count towards fulfilling the requirement.
  - A donation/parking space to a parking fund that is used by the City to plan for future parking needs could be made to fulfill parking requirements.
  - The landscaping requirement for parking lots is minimal, only required for lots with more than 40 spaces, and only 5%; the CBD in particular might benefit from increased landscaping both in the interior of lots and at lot lines.
  - Consideration should be given to exempting changes in use that do not increase floor area from additional parking requirements.
  - In order to encourage harmonious architecture in its downtown, Northhampton, Massachusetts allows expansion of one-story structures to two stories without requiring addition parking. This might be appropriate for downtown Methuen.
  - Parking lots that serve business along Broadway should be located to the rear of the site whenever practicable.
- The **boundary of the Central Business District** may benefit from additional review. Appropriate dimensional controls for the Hampshire block, for example, could vary considerably from those that would complement the lower Broadway portion of the study area.
- **Signage regulations** for the CBD would benefit from special attention. Since signage can be either a significant contribution or detraction from the downtown aesthetic, sign requirements should be tailored to the future vision of downtown.

## VI. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS DOWNTOWN

In recent years, downtown Methuen has witnessed several improvements which, taken together, represent a significant and long-term revitalization effort. Following is a brief description of these changes, several of which are identified in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Recent Projects, Downtown Methuen**



## Nevins Memorial Library Restoration

Using a \$2 million grant from the MA Board of Library Commissioners, the Nevins Memorial Library completed a \$6.8 million restoration and addition project in 2002. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the library dates to 1883 and is built in the Romanesque Revival style of architecture. With an additional 22,000 s.f. built to complement the original 17,000 s.f. building, the restoration has attracted a 26% increase in circulation. The Library is a major destination atop Broadway, located just off of Route 213.



## Lowell Street, a.k.a. “Patriot’s” Bridge Reconstruction

Following its partial collapse necessitating its closure, the Lowell Street Bridge has re-opened as a \$2.2 million project to rebuild and improve this vital connection is complete. In addition to the replacement of two stone arches, the project added new sidewalks and fencing to the bridge. In September 2003 the bridge was dedicated to the memory of the Methuen victims of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy and renamed “Patriot’s Bridge.”



## Mill Falls Apartments

Completed in 2001, this project involved conversion of four mill buildings (c. 1826) into ninety-seven units of apartments, including a 40% affordability component. Frequently featured as a successful example of mixed-income housing development, Mill Falls likewise receives praise from historic preservation advocates and “smart growth” circles. Since Methuen’s zoning ordinance would have required the project to obtain several variances to receive a building permit, the developers filed a Chapter 40B application in the permitting process.



## Riverwalk Park

Through use of an Urban Self-Help grant administered by the State, the City was able to acquire this neglected riverfront site and develop a beautiful open space common and park. Just over 2 acres in size, this park features a, gazebo, playground, and walking trails.



## Parking Facilities

Methuen has increased the amount of available parking in the downtown through acquisition of convenient sites and development of surface lots. A small lot across from Riverwalk Park was developed in the 1990's. At present the City is converting a formerly vacant parcel at the corner of Lowell and Hampshire Streets into a 13-car landscaped lot. Plus, the City-owned small lot (approx. 9 spaces) that already exists on Hampshire near Andrews Travel is being repaved and landscaped.



## George Tenney Gate House

The Tenney Gatehouse is the last surviving structure of the historic 75-acre Tenney Estate. When threatened by deferred maintenance and neglect, several Methuen residents joined forces with the City, State, and the Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical High School to restore the gate house and preserve this important piece of Methuen's history. This elegant Queen Anne building, located just one block from Gaunt Square, is now home to the Methuen Historical Society and host to special events.



## Grey Court State Park

Owned by the State's Department of Environmental Management, the restoration of Grey Court, grounds of the former Tenney Estate, has made a dramatic improvement to the "backyard" of Methuen's City Hall. The overgrown, neglected site has been transformed to reflect its past beauty, with a wide variety of tree species and plantings, walking trails, rebuilt stone walls, and the stabilized ruins of the Tenney castle serving as a focal point and venue for special events. This summer the park hosted a Fourth of July concert, and was dubbed by Mayor Sharon Pollard as "Methuen's Tanglewood."



## Red Tavern Conversion to Offices

The historic Red Tavern restaurant closed in early 2003 as the property was sold to a real estate firm with plans to convert the restaurant use into office space. The Red Tavern has been a Methuen landmark for over 100 years, serving as a destination for local gatherings and events. Its future reuse will be a key opportunity for downtown revitalization efforts.



## Annual Festival of Trees

Since 1994, the annual Christmas Methuen Festival of Trees has been one of the City's most popular events, drawing residents and out of town visitors alike. Founded as a fund raising strategy to support restoration of the Tenney Gate House and other historic sites and structures, the Festival planned to host over 10,000 people last year, and has donated approximately \$325,000 to the Methuen Historical Society for preservation causes. Previously hosted in the downtown area, future Festivals are planned to be re-located to a site in West Methuen. While its continued contributions to Methuen's historic preservation projects will support the revitalization of downtown's historic buildings, the loss of so many visitors to the downtown, albeit for an annual affair, may be felt by local merchants.



## Methuen Cooperative Bank

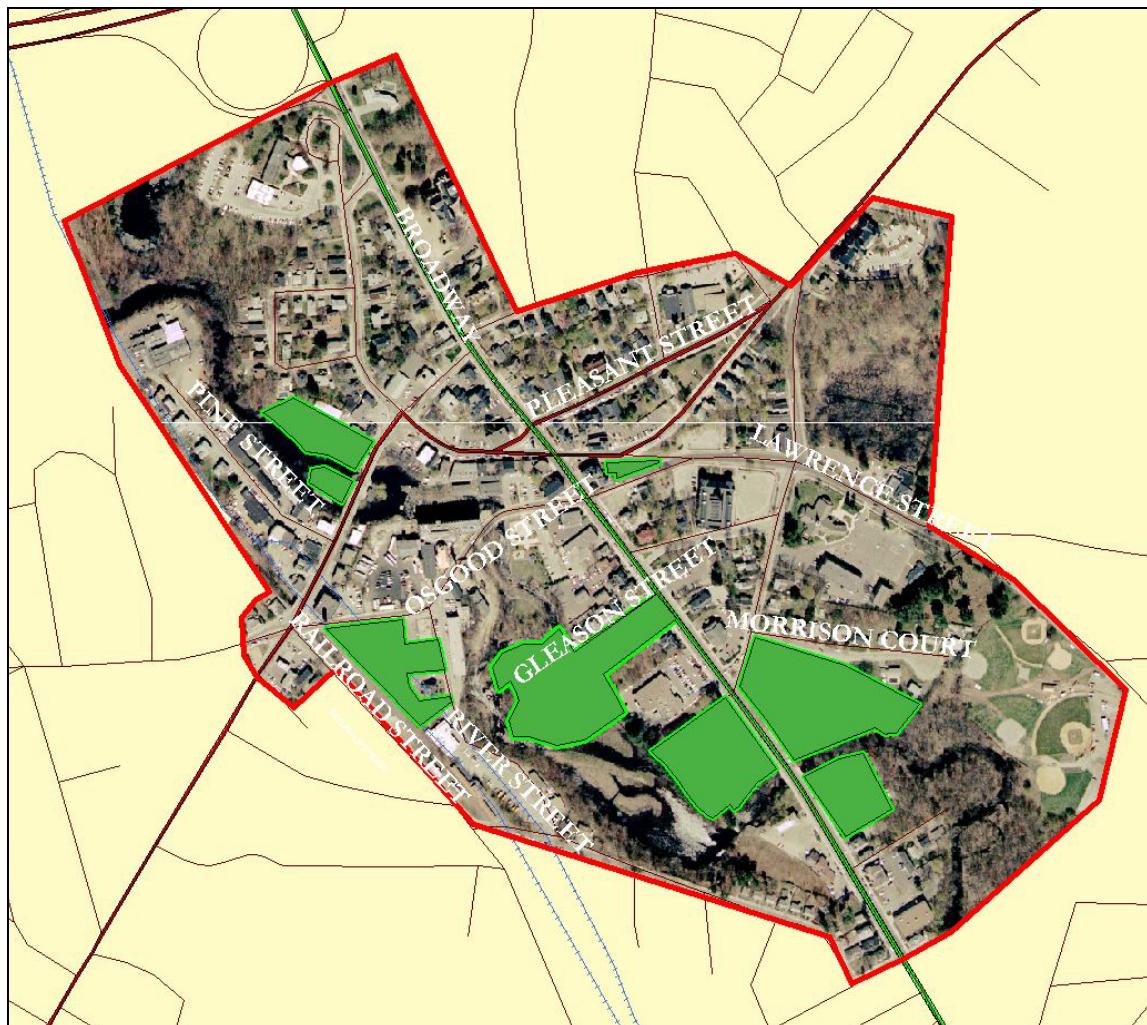
Established on Broadway since 1964, the Methuen Cooperative Bank constructed a new, expanded facility at 247 Broadway, adjacent to its former location, in 1998. The new structure complements the historic district, and is a good example of the quality that additional developments should involve.



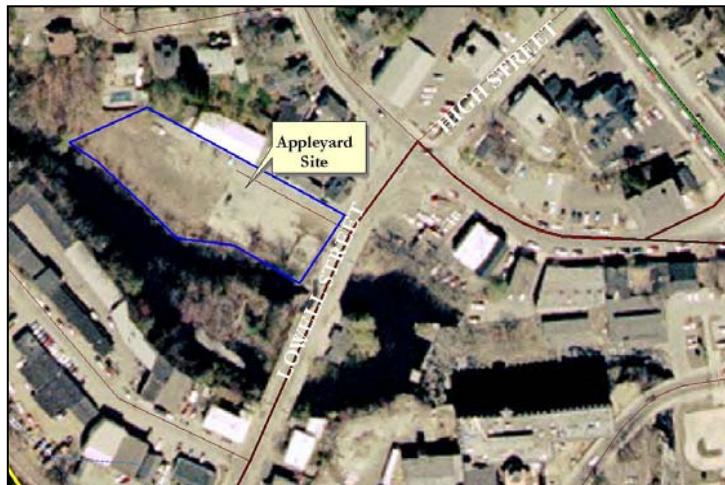
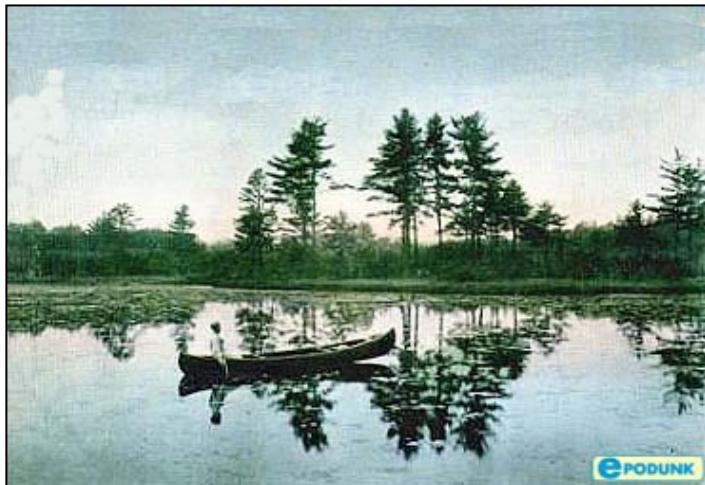
## VII. CURRENT PROJECTS AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

The City is actively working on projects that coincide with the development of this strategic plan, and some underused sites are currently being proposed for redevelopment. In total, these sites (outlined below) occupy just over 14 acres, or 9% of the study area.

**Figure 9: Key Sites**



## Spicket River Pedestrian Footbridge and Appleyard Site Improvements



The City is working with the Massachusetts Highway Department to launch a project that would build an approximately 150' long, 10' wide footbridge from the parking area behind the Mill Falls apartment complex over the river to Hampshire Street. This connection could prove to be a critical pedestrian link between Osgood Street and Hampshire, as well as a destination in and of itself for people to look out on the Spicket Falls.

The Appleyard site located on the banks of the Spicket River on the north side of Lowell Street adjacent to Munro Graphics, is now under the City's control, and is slated to be cleaned up using grant funds targeted for brownfields remediation. Prior to its recent business use, the Appleyard site once was home to a recreation area that included a boat house. The City is presently exploring the possibility of re-establishing canoe rentals at the site.

The Spicket River runs about 20 miles downstream from the Taylor Reservoir in North Salem NH to Methuen. The Salem, NH Conservation Commission has formed a subcommittee to promote the use of the river for community recreation in a natural environment such as canoeing, fishing, bird watching, and family adventure. Methuen should collaborate with Salem to identify opportunities for coordinated river tours.

In the longer term, further spin-off development might include commercial uses that would complement and support recreational use of the river, such as a restaurant, equipment sales and rentals, or a sporting goods store. Site planning for the Appleyard site should take these potential uses into account.

## Osgood/Charles/Lawrence Street Triangle



The two vacant buildings behind the Page building in the triangular site bounded by Osgood, Charles, and Lawrence Streets, have been temporarily used as local political campaign headquarters. These have been connected into a single structure with some 7000 square feet on two floors. This is the former site of Renaldo's restaurant. Two restaurants, including Renaldo's, have failed at this site, though reasons have been traced to staffing and management issues and not from poor market conditions. Indeed, the high point of Renaldo's operation provides evidence that a well-run establishment can succeed here.

The older of the two buildings is at the point where Osgood and Lawrence Streets intersect. This building has windows on both sides and its interior has been restored to some extent with exposed brick walls and beamed ceilings, and has served as an attractive dining room area, with about 2000 square feet. The newer building, originally a

hardware store, lacks windows and the interior is rough. There is a bar, an additional seating area, and two large areas that have served as kitchens here.

The building is currently for sale for \$445,000 and the owner will also entertain leasing it, and will consider any use, commercial or residential. The property is perceived to have no parking, although the front door of the older part of the building, which serves as the main dining room, is within 100 feet of a public parking lot which can accommodate 80 cars. In order to get to the restaurant from the lot, the busy, narrow Charles Street, which has no sidewalk, needs to be crossed. Although the premises are not licensed at present, the owner is confident that a liquor license can be secured.

The premises can serve as a good restaurant or brew pub. The structure would be an ideal location for an establishment that needs a lot of production space, such as a brew pub, bakery, or another establishment that produces food or beverages for consumption not only on the premises, but also for wholesale to other businesses. The building could also be converted to offices, but this would require heavy investment.

Either use requires improvements for pedestrian access from the diagonally-adjacent parking lot. The possibility of building sidewalks on the north side of Charles Street should be investigated. Additional consideration should be given to a diagonal pedestrian zebra crosswalk at the junction of Charles, Lawrence, and Osgood Streets, along with a stop sign here and a reduced speed limit on Charles Street.

## Methuen Assisted Living – Shear Metals Site Redevelopment, Gleason Street



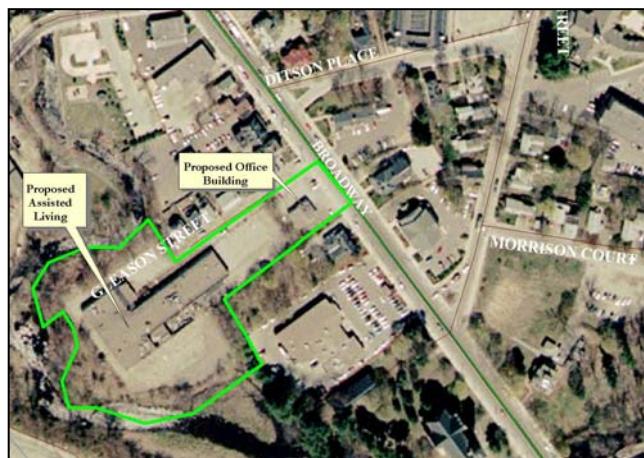
In September 2003, the City's Zoning Board approved plans to develop a 91-unit assisted living facility at the end of Gleason Street, on a long-vacant property that has a history of environmental contamination. The developer submitted his proposal under Chapter 40B, and will provide a minimum of 25% affordable units in the development. In addition, pursuant to a request from the Zoning Board of Appeals, the developer (David Spada, Ranger Properties) has agreed to provide an independent overseer to monitor cleanup of hazardous materials on the site.

The proposed structure will contain 65,000 s.f. in four stories, with 40 on-site parking spaces. According to its site plan, the building will face Gleason Street with a courtyard and semi-circle drive at its front entry. To the rear of the building will be a small, private outdoor courtyard that takes advantage of its close proximity to the Spicket River.

During the permitting process for this project, the City was able to negotiate an easement that will allow for a future riverside walkway, in accordance with the vision contained in this plan.

This project illustrates the choices that the City must address as it works to revitalize the downtown area. The river is a neglected resource that can provide a unifying focus for the downtown. As sites along the river are redeveloped, the City should strongly encourage, and where possible require, that these projects provide or enhance public access and contribute to environmental restoration. To this end, new buildings and paved areas should be set back from the river a distance sufficient to allow for vegetated buffers and pedestrian pathways along the river.

## Redevelopment of 254 Broadway



The same developer who is proposing the assisted living facility featured directly is also planning to redevelop the southwest corner of Gleason and Broadway into medical office space and ground floor retail.

Formerly a gas station and auto repair shop, this site measures roughly 1/3 of an acre, and remains home to the vacant structure seen to the left. A preliminary site plan dated 8/20/03 features a two-story structure, with each floor offering just over 11,000 s.f. of space. According to the site plan, 88 parking space would be required pursuant to the zoning ordinance, but 72 are provided on the plan.

According to City officials, Spada may also acquire the property (under office use) located at 248-250 Broadway, to further consolidate his proposed development, gain frontage on Broadway, and organize shared parking behind the properties. In any event, the residential structure at this location (c. 1900) should be preserved to maintain the connection it makes to other residentially-scaled buildings surrounding.

Redevelopment of this corner location could be an important piece of downtown's revitalization – an attractive structure and the vibrant use of this site fills the present void that exists in the streetscape, and will support surrounding businesses and uses. As this proposal is reviewed, the City should carefully examine the proposal for: quality of architectural design, an inviting entrance on Broadway, the quantity, layout, and function of the parking areas, lighting, and landscaping.

## Zapatos Aqui (former Leone's Furniture, Selden Worsted Mill) – 225 Broadway



Previously vacant for several years, this 52,000 s.f. mill building is located on the bank of the Spicket River. In June 2003 the Eagle Tribune reported that the building had sold for \$1.1 million and will be the future warehouse and operation center of Berkeley Shoe, the warehouse and wholesale business behind the successful Zapatos Aqui, located in Lawrence. Due to the building's prominent location at what may be a future gateway into downtown Methuen, this site will be a key component of future downtown revitalization efforts.

Owner Benny A. Espaillat has already begun making improvements to the building that complement the future vision of downtown – the windows along the front façade now allow passerby to see inside the building, and new landscaping presents an inviting entry onto Broadway.

The owner appreciates the uniqueness of the structure and its setting and recognizes its longer-term potential for higher uses than warehousing. In February of 2004, a ground floor retail outlet specializing in clothing for young people will be opened. There will be about 12,000 square feet of excess space on the dramatically sky lit third floor of the building which could be a restaurant from which functions, such as weddings at the Memorial Music Hall just across the street, could be serviced.

When the retail business takes off, there is potential for conversion of warehouse space into retail units, thus creating a unique shopping complex that could draw people to downtown Methuen. The three acre site could likely support parking requirements. In addition, while the site historically has been subject to flooding, flood gate controls installed upstream may have helped to solve this problem which would allow greater development of the site.

Alternatively, the building could be used for residential condominiums or for office space. It also has prospects for reuse by an institutional user, such as a medical clinic.

The city should try to secure public access to the Riverfront here for a pathway that continues the Riverwalk. This will provide the retail outlet store added visibility. Its owner has expressed interest in holding community events at the site.

## Methuen Memorial Music Hall



Methuen Memorial Music Hall, on the turret-flanked banks of the Spicket River just north of the Broadway Bridge, may be one of the least-exploited community resources in the region. Built expressly to house the E.F. Walker pipe organ, one of the world's largest organs, with over 6,000 pipes. The hall, which took ten years to build, is an attraction in itself, with a lavish baroque interior, patterned after the work of Sir Christopher Wren. At present, the facility accommodates about twenty-five events a year. It can be booked for weddings and other private functions.

The Music Hall property is a critical link for the Riverwalk. Increased public access at this location would give the facility added prominence and visibility, while reinforcing the City's downtown revitalization strategy.

The City should continue to work with the Board of Directors of the Music Hall to help to promote and increase the number of public events at the hall, and to integrate the facility more closely into the community. Broadening the program of the Music Hall may come together through a confluence of interests between the Hall and the City. The Music Hall is a non-profit corporation that is often in "fund raising mode" to maintain its organ and facility. Recently, the City gave the Hall a grant to provide access for disabled persons. The City and Hall might be able to negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement, with the city supporting grant applications (and providing grants when possible) and Music Hall expanding its concert offerings.

More publicly-accessible events, like the silent movies (with organ accompaniment) that now make the circuit there about twice a year, children's theater, musicals, popular music concerts, and open houses can be held in tandem with other downtown events.

The Board is willing to consider holding (non-organ) outdoor concerts during the summer months. The concept of holding an annual International Music Festival showcasing the Hall can be explored. Although the Music Hall's Board of Trustees has in the past, rejected proposals for public access through their property, discussions and negotiations to achieve a riverfront walkway here should continue. In the longer term, a suitable community-serving use might be found for the large, architecturally-interesting shed that flanks the site to the North.

## Former St. Monica Church's Site, 231 Broadway



Originally located at 231 Broadway, St. Monica's Church congregation outgrew its building and built a new facility at the corner of Lawrence and Park Streets. The original site was sold by the Archdiocese of Boston in 2000 to Paul Russell (Focal Point Properties), a Methuen resident and developer. The former rectory building is home to Russell's law offices.

Since the original church was razed and its site cleared, two proposals for the future use of the site have been discussed in the public realm: a new post office and an office building. Since this site is located near a potential gateway entry to the downtown, its successful reuse could figure prominently in the downtown's continued revitalization. Reuse of this site should assist the City in developing the Riverfront walkway for public access, while taking full advantage of its frontage along Broadway.

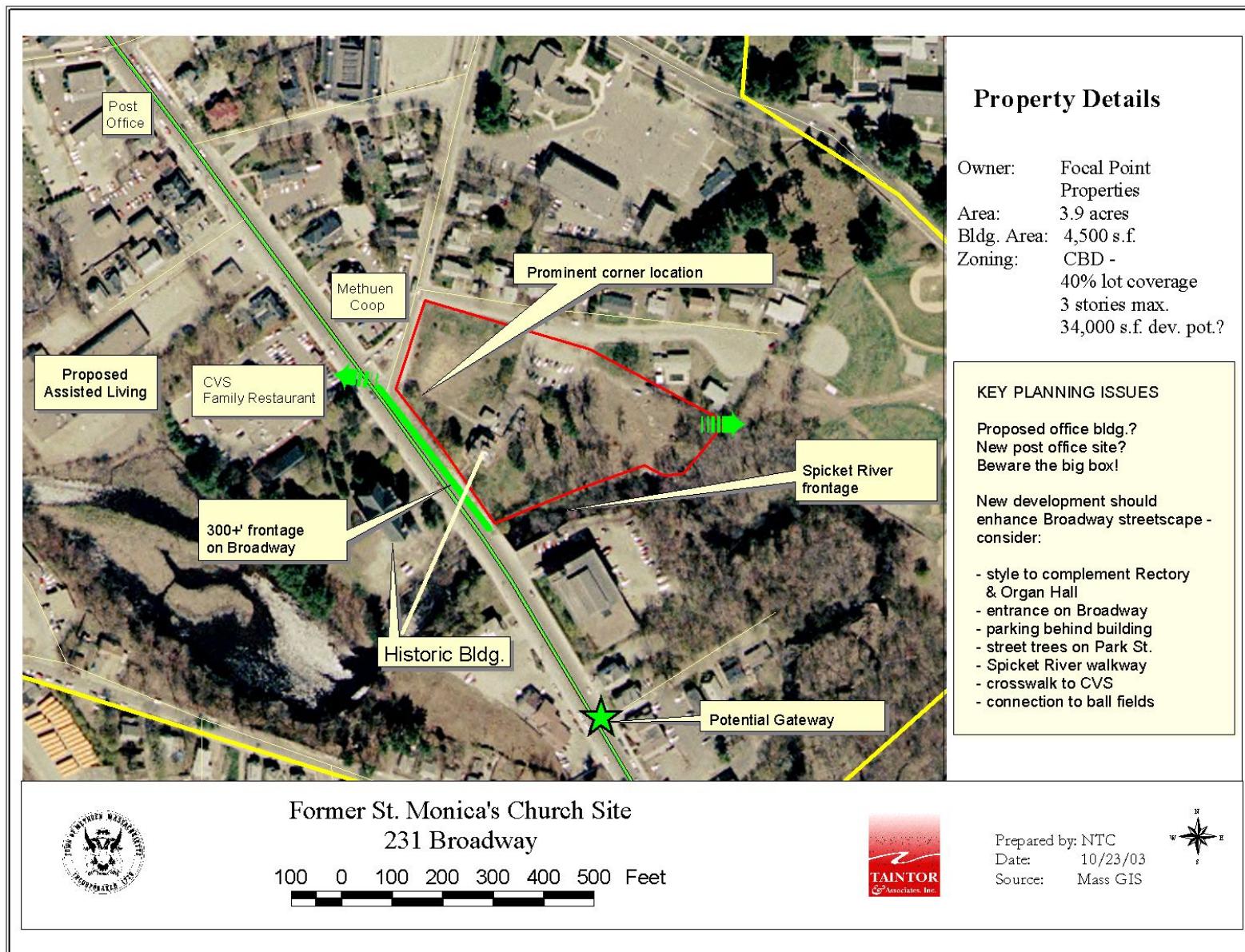
As shown in Figure 10, this site has approximately 4 acres of land adjacent to the Spicket River. A rough estimate of development potential, under existing CBD zoning, indicates this to be the most significant piece of available land in downtown, able to support in the area of 30,000 s.f. in new development.

A mixed use development would be particularly suitable for this location, where office or residential could occupy the second floor to a first floor retail use. This would require a multi-story structure that would complement the adjacent rectory and organ hall, add potential consumers (workers or residents), activate the Riverwalk, and maximize investment in the property.

While there are numerous precedents for national retailers to rent the ground floor of multi-story, mixed use buildings in established downtown settings, it is somewhat rarer for this to occur in new construction where the retailer-preferred mixed use setting would be located in side by side structures rather than multi-story ones. There is, however, precedent for new, multi-story, mixed use developments and this idea should be pursued by the City. A multi-story structure would not only complement the surroundings, but also allows for maximum use of the rear of the site for well-landscaped, surface parking.

Due to its corner location and largely undeveloped state, this site could be attractive to "box" retailers, fast food restaurants, or convenience stores. The City should make every effort to prevent this type of development.

Figure 10: Former St. Monica's Site – Key Planning Issues



## 58, 62, 66 Osgood Street



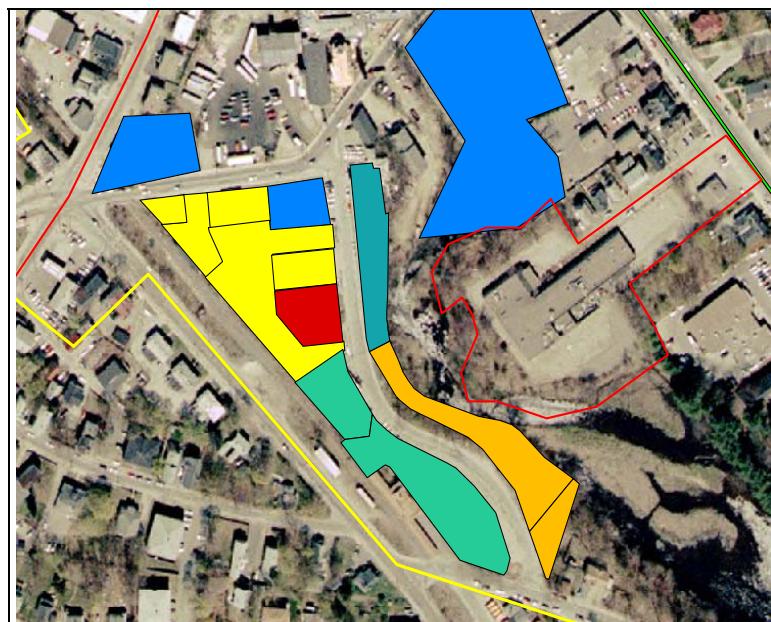
This strategically-located site is on a heavily-traveled Osgood Street, between Broadway and the Five Corners junction. The site accommodates a novel mix of upscale restaurants, retailing, services, construction contractors, and auto repairs shops, illustrating the potential of the site for almost any commercial activity.

In order to evaluate options for redevelopment or improvement of this site, we focus on the wider area between the River on the east, Osgood Street on the north, the Railroad Tracks on the west, and Union Street on the South. This is because impacts on all existing businesses within this relatively congested area must be considered in evaluating each option.



The site is blighted by conflicting land uses, by inefficient allocation of parking, and by the hodge-podge pattern of remaining buildings, many of which are historic structures and must be protected. The largest landholder (Pitochelli) at the site owns parcels totaling 1.3 acres near the Southwest corner of River Street and Osgood, with two tenants: Shadi's Restaurant & the Lawn Doctor. The latter occupies an historic warehouse building, constructed in 1895. Shadi's Restaurant occupies a formerly-residential structure built in 1950 (which is not a historic building, and does not need to be preserved). An upscale private dining club in the well-refurbished Tenney House (ca. 1865) abuts the site to the rear of these holdings, illustrating what is possible at this site.

**Figure 11: Ownership Pattern – Osgood Site**



The city owns a 0.26-acre parcel strategically located at the corner of River and Osgood Streets. This site is contaminated and, in its present state, can only be capped and used for parking. Further testing is necessary to establish costs of reclamation of this site for development.

Users adjacent to the site on the east side of River Street include an auto repair shop at 28 Osgood Street, Harvey's Signs at 30 Osgood Street, and a small multi-tenanted building at 28<sup>1/2</sup> Osgood Street accommodating a barber shop, a shoe repair, and a dance studio. These premises have little or no parking for either staff or the customers who visit the businesses here. They are presently using part of the city's lot for overflow parking and sometimes use the VFW's lot to the rear of Tenney House. The owner of Harvey's Sign has 6,000 square feet of surplus office space which he cannot rent because he has no parking for tenants.

In back of the site, in the area between the river, River Street, Railroad, and Union Streets, is the Riverside Auto Body shop at 9 River Street. This 0.8 acre site has approximately 400 feet of frontage on both the street and the river, and may soon be up for sale. The site has been cleaned of chemical wastes and could be suitable for commercial or residential development. Across from this is a VFW post with 1.4 acres, over an acre of which is devoted to weekend parking and is relatively deserted during most of the week. Although River Street here is not clearly marked, it is a busy route for access to the city's south and west sides.

Observations of transportation staff at MVPC are that there is some capacity available, but that traffic can get backed up at lights on Broadway. Increasing capacity on Osgood Street might require rephasing and retiming of signals at either end of Osgood. The project needs a traffic impact study.

## Reuse Alternatives

Redevelopment of this area could serve several objectives:

- Enhance traffic safety;
- Resolve parking problems;
- Treat an eyesore;
- Create a coherent building frontage on Osgood Street, from River Street to Five Corners;
- Get control of riverfront sites;
- Assemble a site of up to 4 acres for comprehensive development; and
- Enable the release of 6,000 square feet of office space without additional construction (i.e., additional parking would allow Harvey Signs to accommodate tenants).

There are a number of reuse alternatives for the site, depending on the level of public intervention that the city wants to pursue. One proposal is currently being considered by a private owner, and this option and two alternative strategies that would require varying levels of city involvement are described below..

Details regarding each option are provided below. Strengths and weaknesses of each option are discussed and implementation requirements and potential funding sources are identified.

### Option 1: Infill Development (Current Proposal)

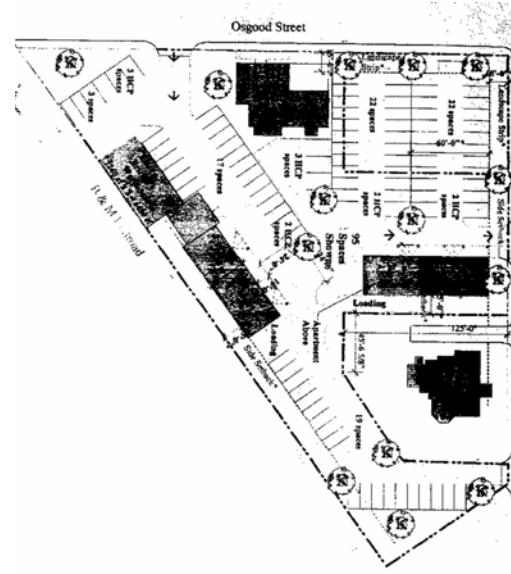
A plan has been proposed to retain all existing buildings within the area bounded by Osgood Street, River Street, the VFW post, and the B&M Railroad line, and to increase the total amount of development on the site through infill.

Two additional commercial buildings are proposed. Phase I would be a two-story structure in front of the Aurora club with

5,720 square feet of floor area. The proposed building is set back 150 feet from Osgood Street, in back of the city-owned lot. A second single story building with 2,875 square feet is proposed for Phase 2 at back of the Lawn Doctor Building.

This plan proposes to make use of the contaminated city-owned site at River and Osgood Street for parking for new tenants, which can accommodate an estimated 44 parking spaces. See Figure 12.

**Figure 12: Osgood Street Site – Current Proposal**



### Advantages

The main advantage of this proposal is that City involvement would be very limited. The City would have to relinquish the lot that it currently owns so that it could be incorporated into the proposed development, but no direct public funding or staff involvement would be required.

## Weaknesses/Constraints

The main problem with this proposal is its impact on the parking needs of businesses on the east side of River Street. In this regard, the proposed development would appear to create more problems than it solves.

- As previously noted, there are three buildings here with five firms, four of which have high volumes of customers. These premises have little or no deeded parking for either staff or customers and currently use the fringe of the city site – across River Street – for parking. This proposal does not consider the needs of these firms, and the proposed parking spaces would be insufficient to accommodate the needs of existing and new businesses.
- The piecemeal proposal would create 5,700 square feet of new commercial space by using the City lot for parking for new tenants. But if the lot were used for parking for existing businesses and tenants, 6,000 square feet of office space could be released in a historic mill building (Harvey Signs). Thus, the City's decision regarding the use of this lot for parking will either facilitate or obstruct redevelopment and reuse of existing space in the downtown.
- The proposal does not make use of the Osgood Street frontage because the city-owned lot is contaminated and the assumption is that it can only be used for parking. If it were cleaned, however, the property could be combined with the present site of Shadi's Restaurant, providing a 300 foot frontage site along Osgood Street.
- The proposal would do very little to revitalize downtown and to improve the image of the site.

## Option 2: Comprehensive Redevelopment

The entire area generally bounded by the River on the east, Osgood Street on the north, the Railroad tracks on the west, and by Union Street on the south is a candidate for comprehensive redevelopment. This would entail formation of an Urban Redevelopment Corporation to undertake site assembly, relocate existing businesses, and sell the site and buildings to private developers who would refurbish existing structures and redevelop underused parts of the site.

All together, the 3.7 acres here are under eight different ownerships. The total assessed value of the parcels within the potential redevelopment site is \$2.12 million. The largest individual property owner holds 1.3 acres and the VFW post holds 1.4 acres just south of the Aurora Club.

The city could form a redevelopment authority under Chapter 121B to assemble the site. It might be more appropriate to advertise for a private developer to undertake the redevelopment process under Chapter 121A, the Urban Redevelopment Corporations law. This statute gives private developers public sector powers to assemble sites, relocate occupants, and undertake redevelopment of blighted areas. Private developers receive limited subsidy from tax-exempt bond financing, tax credits, and tax abatement, and in some cases, CDBG funds.

The site is not a blank slate. There are at least three historic buildings here (the Lawn Doctor, Aurora Club, and Harvey Sign) which are protected from demolition. The need to retain these buildings pose challenges in site design and layout.

The city owns a 0.26 acre parcel strategically located at the corner of River and Osgood Streets. This site is contaminated

and, in its present state, can only be capped and used for parking. Further testing is necessary to establish costs of reclamation of this site for development. One of the larger parcels is the 0.8 acre site of Riverside Motors which is on the River. The owner wants to go out of business and sell the site, which is currently on the market for \$350,000. The site's owner says that it has been cleaned of chemical wastes.

The site could be developed as a retail village with convenience goods and services and offices on the upper stories. The success of the mixed range of businesses currently located here has demonstrated the market for retail, services, and offices here. There are also prospects for residential development near the river at the back of the site, near Union Street. This part of the development should tie in with the newly-renovated train station which is now occupied by a labor union.

### **Advantages**

This option holds the largest potential for a well-coordinated development that can take advantage of the waterfront, make connections to it from the adjacent properties, and develop a parking plan that would make most efficient use of land resources while maximizing the potential for shared spaces.

### **Constraints/Weaknesses**

- Existing businesses would be displaced.
- Capacity of site to accommodate development is limited by configuration and need to accommodate four existing historic buildings.
- Potentially long and difficult process of site assembly.

### **Option 3: Incremental Improvement**

This calls for the city to assume a low profile in resolution of the parking and access problems of the site. The city could make available its 0.26 acre holding for parking for the businesses at the corner of River and Osgood Streets, allowing the release of 6,000 square feet of excess office space at Harvey's Signs.

Attempts would be made to negotiate shared parking arrangements with users to the rear of the site.

This option is probably the most realistic of the three. It calls for gradual improvement of the operating environment at the site and the solution of problems with a minimum of disruption of existing activities. The city could conduct an analysis of parking needs of existing businesses, including those on the East side of River Street. The study should also address problems resulting from the dangerous intersection of Osgood and River Streets, where efforts to retain parking spaces for existing businesses have resulted in dangerous access conditions.

If the city contributes the use of its 0.26 acre lot for parking here, it will create an estimated 44 parking spaces and help alleviate shortages for existing activities at the site. Tenants or building owners could lease parking spaces from the city. The city, however, will have to set priorities for the parking spaces (or develop a system for sharing) between existing businesses and tenants attracted by the new development. The additional parking would enable Harvey's Signs to release an extra 6,000 square feet of office space. Efforts should be made to work with the VFW Post for weekday access to some of their parking, possibly for staff (rather than for customers) of the public-serving businesses at the front of the site. The Post has over an acre of parking which is fully used only on weekends.

A higher and better use for the City's site, which enjoys a 150 foot frontage on Osgood Street, would be a retail and convenience service development, with some offices on the upper floors. If combined with the Shadi's Restaurant site, immediately to the West, a frontage of 300 feet on Osgood Street could result. The design would tie in with the existing buildings historic buildings. Parking could be provided in a courtyard lot behind the new structure. This arrangement would contribute to the revitalization of downtown by filling in a key frontage. The costs of treatment of the contaminated site have not yet been established, but studies should be undertaken to do this in the near future.

As the site transitions upscale, refurbishment of the historic warehouse would add to the luster of the area's redevelopment. When the windows are unboarded, the building could be suitable for retail or office use.

The city is encouraged to purchase the 0.8 acre site that is currently for sale at 9 River Street, which is now an auto body shop. This is a key riverfront parcel with prospects for reuse as high end entertainment, office, or residential use. Shared parking

arrangements with the VFW post could enhance the viability of this site for commercial development. A mix of day and night time activities at the site could maximize parking efficiency. At a minimum, this site should be re-zoned so to restrict incongruent uses (including continuation of auto repair uses) from being located on the waterfront.

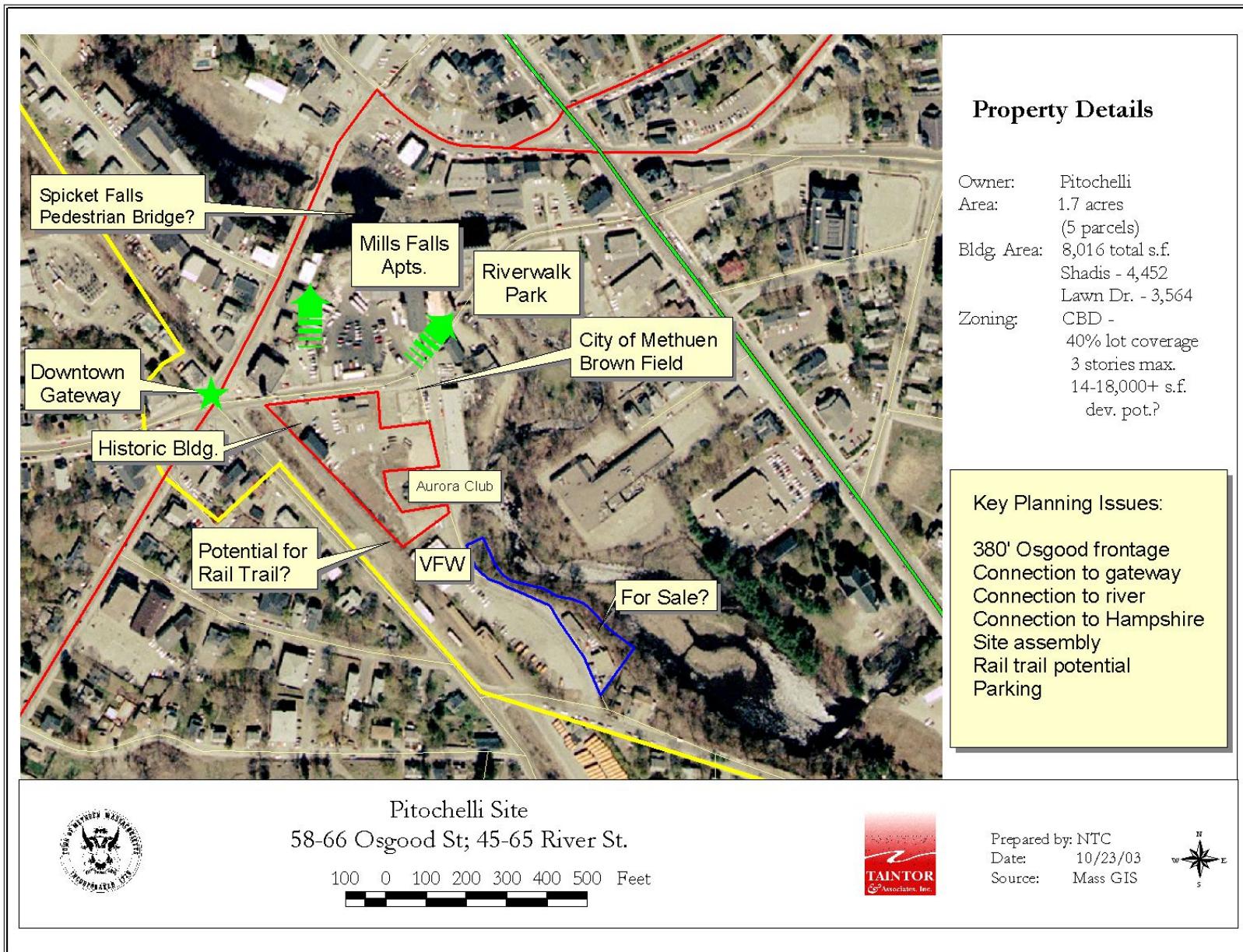
### **Advantages**

This proposal calls for a public/private partnership in determining the future of this land, protects existing businesses, and offers good potential for optimal redevelopment without requiring large-scale investment by the City.

### **Weaknesses/Constraints**

- VFW cooperation with shared parking could be problematic.
- Uncertain clean-up costs for the city-owned parcel at 58 Osgood Street.

Figure 13: Pritchetti Site Planning Issues



## VIII. KEY PLANNING ISSUES

In thinking about how the City can best move forward with its revitalization efforts, we have summarized the key planning issues it needs to consider, and have organized them into two basic categories: physical environment/image, and the local economy. The City has and will continue to assume five primary roles in revitalizing downtown, as:

- a promoter of the overall vision for downtown;
- a property owner/developer;
- the lead regulatory authority;
- a funding source; and as
- a provider of political, organizational, and administrative support.

Obviously, the City is just one of the numerous entities involved in revitalization, and its role is likewise limited by numerous factors beyond its control (i.e., market conditions). Nevertheless, as this plan recommends the City take specific actions in advancing the downtown vision, it will consider all of the above-listed roles in order to identify how the City might best direct and maximize its influence.

### *Elements of Successful Downtowns*

Vibrant downtowns share a number of common elements that are the keys to their success. According to expert research in the field of downtown revitalization, they have:

- Storefront designs with exciting visual appeal;
- Traffic patterns that guide people to stores;
- A strategic tenant mix;

- An inviting, clean, secure shopping environment;
- Ample, close by parking;
- Regular, generous hours; and
- Strong marketing, advertising, and management

Each of these elements are considered here in the context of downtown Methuen.

### **1. Physical Environment/Image**

The City's recent efforts have focused on implementing downtown improvement projects. Most of these projects have relied upon the City's role as an owner and developer; it likewise has been a primary participant in supporting the efforts of state agencies, local businesses, and developers in making improvements. Direct investment of funding and official support allows the City to achieve high impact improvements in a timely manner, allows for maximum control over changes, and typically results in a quick, positive return on the investment.

City officials, business leaders, residents, and consultants are in unanimous agreement that downtown Methuen offers a host of unique resources that should attract people to the area. Lacking, however, has been a compelling vision that coordinates both private and public activities under one cohesive goal.

The downtown vision described as follows imagines Methuen's downtown organized around the theme of connectivity, with the Spicket River as a central attraction.

## 2. Riverfront Focus

“From New Hampshire comes the Spicket River, its volume increased from South Fond, in the western part of the town, and Mystic, near the centre. At Methuen village it has a wild and beautiful fall of 36 feet over a broken and precipitous ledge of slate rock.”

*From the Massachusetts Gazetteer, 1890*

The City should continue its efforts to create new opportunities for residents, workers, and visitors to enjoy the Spicket River waterfront. Top priority should be to complete projects that are already in progress such as the pedestrian bridge at Spicket Falls and the development of the Appleyard site for a recreational boat launch. The City should also make it a top priority to obtain easements along the river’s edge, with the vision of creating a continuous path from Riverwalk Park to the O’Neill Playground. As private investment occurs along the riverfront, the City should use its site plan review authority to shape an attractive river’s edge, and ideally, some businesses will begin to develop their structures to recognize dual fronts – one facing the river, the other the street. The City may also offer zoning incentives, contained in a riverfront overlay, that will encourage this transformation.

**Figure 14: Riverfront Properties**

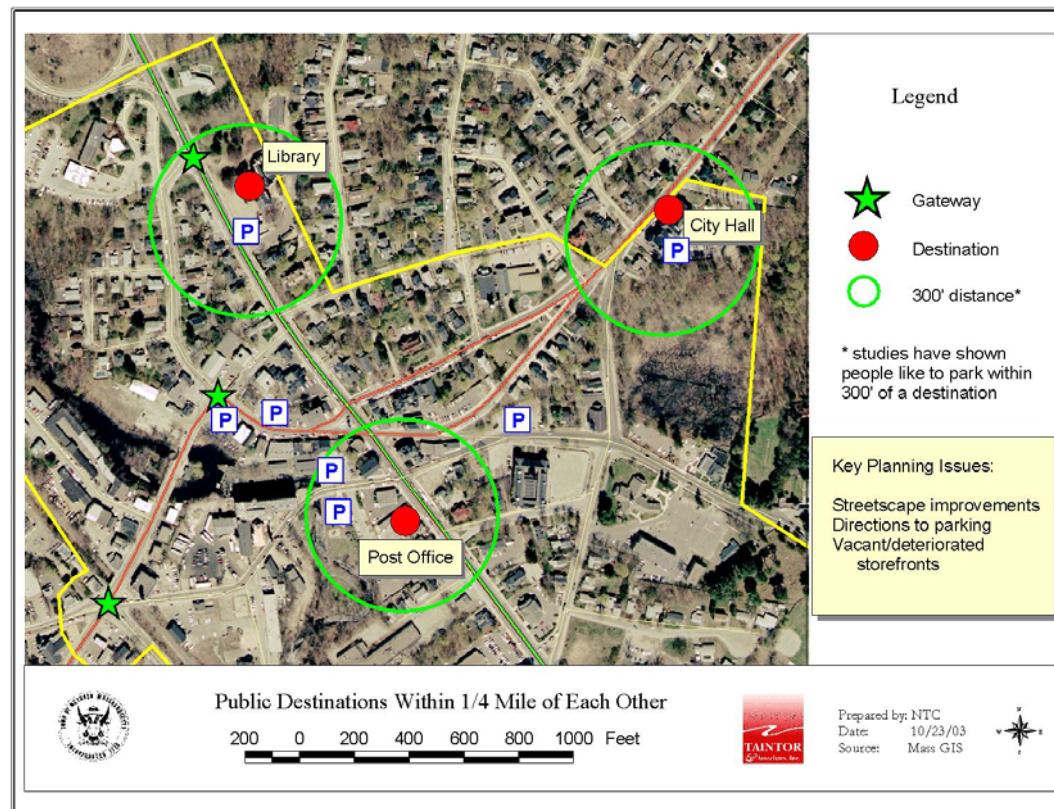


### 3. Destinations and Traffic Flow

Today, the top draws in downtown are reputed to be the post office and library. It is therefore very important to keep the post office downtown. With an average of close to 15,000 cars passing through Gaunt Square on Broadway each day, downtown enjoys a regular stream of potential customers, and can capitalize on the presence of these travelers by creating links between these heavily frequented destinations, and by encouraging new businesses to support longer stays in the area.

Downtown is also the location of several significant historic structures and open spaces, and is home to the Memorial Music Hall. An effort to connect these sites, both physically and in image, should be made. Just as the Festival of Trees made downtown the annual host of thousands of visitors, events like this September's "Wall Walk" sponsored by the Walk n' Mass Volkssport Club and New Balance can help to create an identity for downtown.

**Figure 15: Downtown Public Destinations**



#### 4. Gateways

In order to solidify the image of downtown as a place in people's minds, an effort to distinguish the landscape at the edges of downtown is essential. At least three natural entrances currently exist: a "southern" gateway on Broadway, at the Spicket River bridge, a "western" gateway at the Five Corners intersection, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the corner of Lowell and Hampshire Streets.<sup>7</sup>

The southern/Broadway gateway had recently been improved as the Zapatos Aqui renovations have progressed. Additional improvements in this area include the addition of a riverfront walkway that appears on Broadway just after the bridge, with a highly-visible crosswalk and other features such as additional trees lining the streetscape.

A major opportunity for the southern gateway exists at the former St. Monica's site property. New development at this location should fill the frontage on Broadway with construction that respects the historic building to the immediate south (the rectory) and the Organ Hall across the street.

The western gateway at Five Corners can be significantly improved by the addition of safe, visible pedestrian crosswalks, trees, and landscaping. Looking east from Lowell Street to its intersection with Hampshire, the view of street currently terminates at the parking lot for Rochibaud Hardware. In the

future, a landscaped buffer along the lot should be encouraged to enhance this important entry to downtown.



<sup>7</sup> A fourth, northern gateway exists at the intersection of Broadway and Hampshire Street. However, its location at the crest of a hill provides definition and a sense of entry, and therefore, no specific treatment of this gateway is needed.

## 5. Deteriorated and Vacant Sites

“A major impediment to the smooth circulation of shoppers through a retail district is the ‘dead’ space of empty storefronts or non-retail storefronts like offices or branches of a bank. A frontage of 30 feet without retail is often enough to cause shoppers to stop.”

*Robert Gibbs, Gibbs Planning Group*

There are several places in the downtown streetscape where vacant or empty sites, storefronts, or unattractive facades discourage pedestrians from walking beyond their intended destination. The Hampshire block, on its northern side, is a good example of this, where 2 parking areas adjacent to the street cause discontinuity in the landscape. Other examples include the lot at the southeast corner of Osgood and Broadway, and the abandoned gas station at Gleason Street.

**Figure 16: Hampshire Block – northern side**



**Figure 17: Vacant site - Broadway and Gleason**



**Figure 18: Vacant site - Broadway & Osgood**



## 6. Streets, Sidewalks, and Pedestrian Streetscape

Methuen needn't look beyond its downtown for examples of streetscapes that are attractive to pedestrian traffic and those that repel it. The City has done an excellent job of improving the immediate Gaunt Square area with brick sidewalks and pedestrian-scaled lighting fixtures, and the sidewalk leading to the Library is, even without business activity at its edge, a pleasant walk due to a mature landscaped buffer between the sidewalk and the roadway and a stone wall marking the other edge of the path.



## 7. Storefronts & Signage

In 1996, the City commissioned the Design Partnership of Cambridge to prepare guidelines to improve the appearance of storefronts and signage throughout the downtown. In addition, the City has used grant money to match owner-financing to improve facades and provide new signs. The City should use its design guidelines, revive this grant program and aggressively market it to downtown owners as part of this comprehensive revitalization strategy.



## 8. Parking and Traffic

Parking and traffic are considered by many as a major weakness of downtown Methuen. Note, however, that this perception is not universally shared, and it has been pointed out that people found places to park when Ronaldo's was a major draw to the downtown. Nonetheless, parking at The Loop, the retail strip of Salem, New Hampshire and other malls and shopping centers is more convenient than Downtown. As seen in Figure 15, however, there are now several convenient parking areas that can be used by downtown visitors.

## 9. Destinations/Promotion of Events

In the recent past, Downtown Methuen had two major draws that no longer exist, downtown festivals and a destination restaurant. The Festival of Trees used to be held in the middle of the downtown square, in conjunction with the Red Tavern and Masonic Hall during the week of Thanksgiving. The festival would pack the Downtown for a week, generating sales at local restaurants and creating additional retail opportunities. The festival is still in Methuen, but has been moved out of downtown.<sup>8</sup> In addition, an annual Harvest Festival would transform downtown into a pedestrian mall. Downtown Methuen is also capable of hosting "single" events. For example, an estimated 500 people attended a Livingston Taylor concert at Spicket Park. Capacity to plan and execute festivals is hard to maintain. The city has a Main Street program that was funding by state grants. Methuen lost funding for the program, and the harvest festival was discontinued.

Downtown Methuen also hosted a very popular Italian restaurant, Ronaldo's, which provided foot traffic on a more regular basis than occasional festivals or sporadic events. At its zenith,

Ronaldo's was routinely overflowing, which generated business for other eateries in the downtown and perhaps for some quick purchases as well. Ronaldo's lasted two to three years as an anchor of downtown restaurants. The reason for its closing is not clear. Ronaldo's claimed that they couldn't find labor – others think that quality may have gone down over time.

Though the restaurant went out of business, it seems to have demonstrated that a good draw restaurant could be a significant anchor to downtown. As seen with Ronaldo's, a restaurant that generates a lot of traffic with about a one-hour wait at peak time will send people who do not want to wait will to patronize other nearby eating establishments. A good niche restaurant could do well in downtown Methuen, but a chain establishment might have a difficult time competing with the many major chain restaurants in The Loop and other parts of the city.

## 10. Relationship with Salem and Lawrence

The Downtown Methuen study area is immediately south of Salem, NH, and north of Lawrence, MA. Both the retail strip of Salem and downtown Lawrence are within five miles of the Downtown Methuen study area. Big ticket retail chains pack Salem to take advantage of New Hampshire's lack of a sales tax. This is a competitive disadvantage for Downtown Methuen that the city can not affect, and has caused some cross-city animosity. Level competition is possible for restaurant and clothing dollars, however. New Hampshire charges taxes on restaurant bills, so Methuen can compete in this venue. Moreover, The Loop has thrived in part because there is no tax on movie theater tickets or clothing in Massachusetts.

As the city of Lawrence is becoming progressively more Hispanic, services and products sold downtown are becoming more oriented to Hispanic customers. Methuen is becoming an

<sup>8</sup> Red Tavern was the host site for the festival, and has been sold (converting to office space).

alternative to downtown Lawrence – projecting in part an image of downtown Lawrence as it used to be. According to some observations from Methuen, several former Lawrence retailers are now in Andover, but service businesses have relocated to Methuen.

From a market standpoint, two prime uses in the downtown are office space and entertainment - building on the attractions of the river and Music Hall. Office use is promising, as Broadway is developing a prime sub-regional office and service cluster.

There are some notable office vacancies, however, along Lower Broadway, including the former Coco Early/Eastpointe Mortgage company quarters on the west side of Broadway.

Restaurant, entertainment or sports clubs as night uses could share parking with offices, and general capacity can be increased with the pedestrian bridge. Broadway could likely accommodate the increased traffic that a restaurant or other entertainment establishments would generate.

## IX. VISION PLANS

The following future visions of downtown take some of the planning issues identified above and depict how Methuen can successfully transform its downtown into a vibrant place.

These visions for the revitalization of downtown Methuen focus on enhancing pedestrian connections throughout the area, and specifically pedestrian access to and along the Spicket River. In addition, downtown's image can be enhanced and made more coherent by strategic investments at key gateway locations that feature private developments that support active streetscapes, provide services that attract people to the downtown, and complement existing downtown anchors.

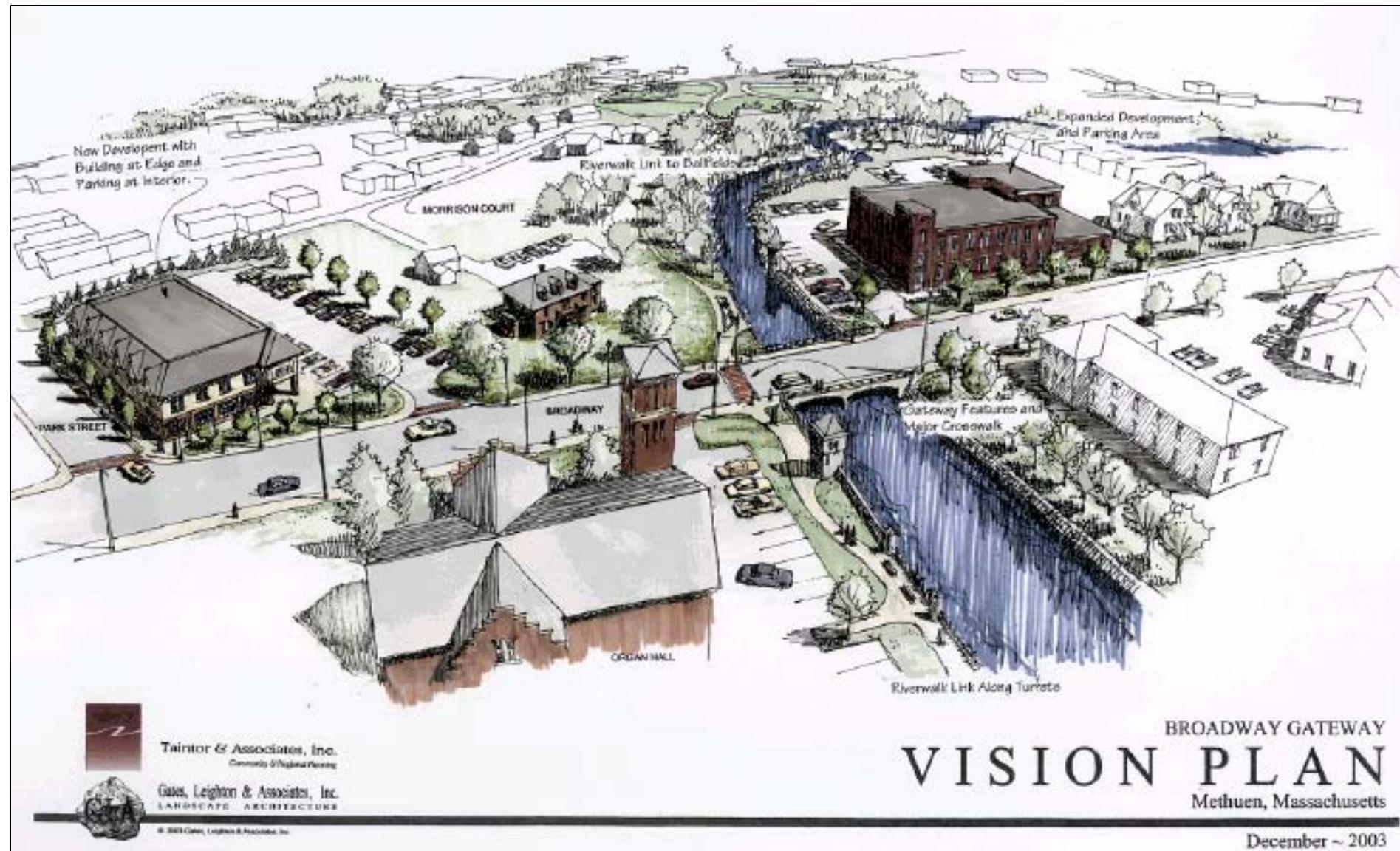
### Broadway Gateway

Building on the strong visual images of the Organ Hall and the Spicket River bridge, the Broadway Gateway is extremely important to enhancing the image and vitality of the downtown. New development at the former St. Monica's site and redevelopment of the Zapatos Aqui property have the potential to strengthen the street edge and bring new foot traffic to the southern edge of the downtown area.

The Vision Plan for the Broadway Gateway (Figure 19) shows how key elements of the downtown revitalization strategy could be implemented in this area as part of a coordinated plan:

- The Spicket Riverwalk should be extended across Broadway to provide a pedestrian connection from the downtown to the playfields to the east. Vegetated buffer areas should be provided between the river and adjacent parking areas.
- New buildings on the former St. Monica's site should be positioned along the street frontage, with parking set back behind the buildings or to the side, and surrounded by landscaping, in order to give a strong definition to the street edge. This site is large enough to support mixed use development, and a two-story building would complement adjacent structures. Retail use should occupy the first floor, with office space or residences located above.
- New development at the Zapatos Aqui site should be connected to the existing building, and expanded parking areas should be set back and buffered from the river's edge. As mentioned earlier in this report, the owner's thoughts about trying to use upper floors space in his building to capitalize on visitors to the Methuen Organ Hall events offer great potential for the downtown, and the City should assist additional development in this area.
- The City should install hardscape features to define the gateway. This should include a distinctive crosswalk for the Riverwalk. A "Welcome to Downtown Methuen" sign, or other entryway features (banners, plantings, etc.) would support this plan.

Figure 19: Vision Plan – Broadway Gateway

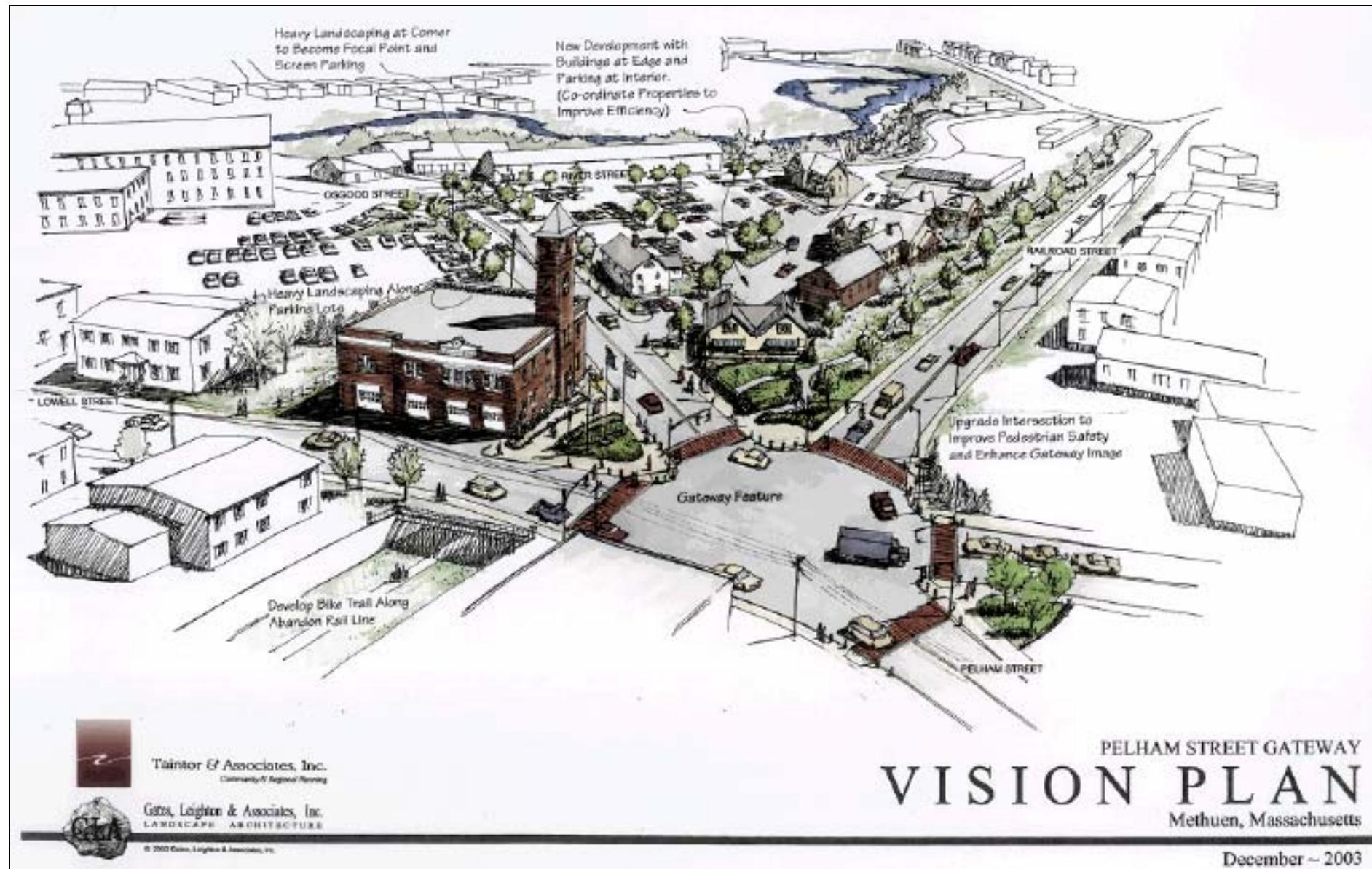


## Pelham Street Gateway

The second Vision Plan focuses on the creation of a gateway at the Five Corners intersection of Pelham, Lowell, Osgood, and Railroad Streets, combined with creation of a linear park and bike trail along the unused railroad line. The perspective view in Figure 20 illustrates the challenge of enhancing this area dominated by surface parking facilities. Heavy landscaping is recommended to help screen these parking areas and strengthen the street edges. Other features of this vision include:

- Building upon the distinctive architecture of the Fire Station with the addition of an attractive “gateway” feature that signifies an entry to downtown. Pictured in the vision is a landscaped, triangular island, with flagpoles and the Methuen Firefighters Memorial sculpture amid the plantings.
- Developing a tree-lined bicycle and walking trail along the unused railroad line along Railroad street
- New development along Osgood and River Streets that meets the street edge and places parking to the rear and sides of the structures. Integral to a preferred development pattern in this area is a cooperative approach to meeting parking demand. Several owners, including the City, should work together to develop an efficient parking layout where multiple uses could take advantage of the spaces. In addition, there may be potential for shared use of the Merrimack Mills parking, since parking demand typically associates with residential use is usually highest during evening and weekend hours, while retail and office use needs daytime parking.
- Several raised or otherwise distinctive crosswalks (brick, scored/tinted concrete, etc.) to improve the walkability of the Five Corners intersection. The addition of landscaping at the edges of the intersection and pedestrian-scaled lighting would dramatically improve what is at present, an auto-centric environment.

Figure 20: Vision Plan - Pelham Street Gateway



PELHAM STREET GATEWAY  
**VISION PLAN**  
Methuen, Massachusetts

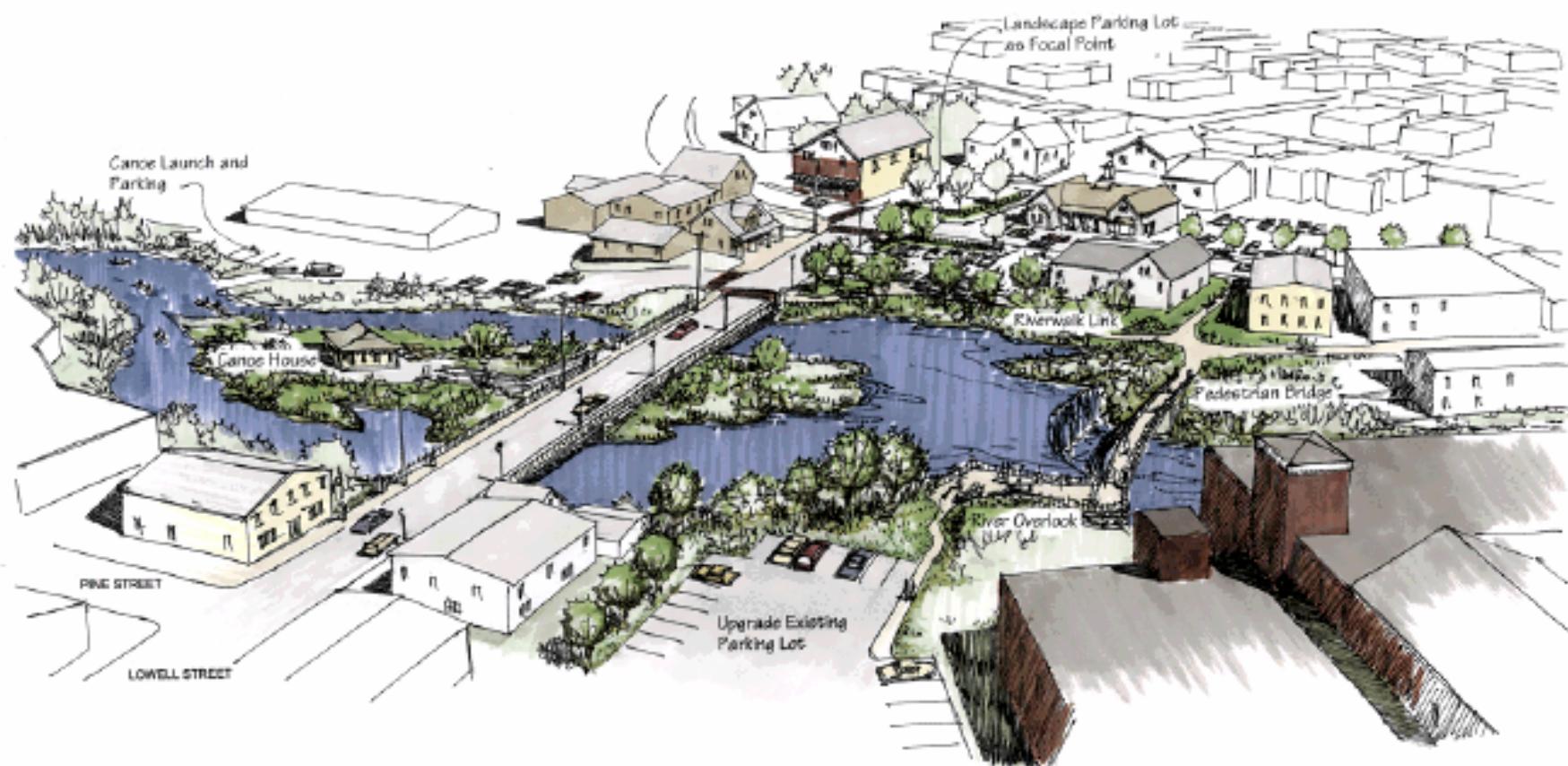
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## Extending the Riverwalk

The third Vision Plan focuses on the Lowell Street entrance to the downtown area, emphasizing the provision of multiple opportunities for pedestrians to access the river (Figure 21). This vision incorporates projects that are among the City's current plans: redevelopment of the Appleyard site for recreational use, the new parking lot on the corner of Lowell and Hampshire, and the pedestrian footbridge to be built over the Spicket Falls, connecting the rear of the Merrimack Mills site to Hampshire Street. It also features:

- A river overlook and sitting area on the west side of the footbridge.
- Upgrade of existing parking lots, including the lot at the intersection of Lowell and Hampshire where Robichaud's Hardware is located. This site may also support a new structure, which could act as a focal point for travelers heading east on Lowell Street.
- Landscaping of the parking lot at the intersection of Lowell and Hampshire Streets would enhance this entry into the downtown and could provide a secondary gateway (after the visitor has passed through the Five Corners gateway).
- A new canoe house and boat launch at the Appleyard site.
- A new passageway creating an attractive link from the footbridge to Hampshire Street.

Figure 21: Vision Plan – Extending the Riverwalk



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Community & Regional Planning

Gates, Leighton & Associates, Inc.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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EXTENDING THE RIVERWALK  
**VISION PLAN**  
Methuen, Massachusetts

December ~ 2003

## X. ACTION PLAN

A primary objective of the Downtown Development Plan is to create a clear “roadmap” that will give the City specific direction towards achieving the visions for downtown revitalization presented in this plan. For this reason, the recommended Action Plan strives to be precise with regard to actions and responsibilities.

We have categorized these actions according to what role the city will need to play in order to achieve results: as a **regulatory** agency, as a key organizer/management entity, or as a funding source/property owner/investor.

### Regulatory Actions (REG)

With the intent of providing both development incentives and regulatory controls, we recommend several changes to the Methuen Zoning Ordinance be made in order to encourage private development’s role in realizing this vision plan. In addition to direct investment in infrastructure, the City’s power to shape development through a “carrot and stick” approach to regulation can be a critical element in realizing this revitalization plan.

Methuen’s 1997 Economic Development plan observed that “Methuen’s Zoning Code is quite restrictive in numerous ways. Certain business uses are not allowed in any district of the town, and many uses require special permits...**Among the issues that need reconsideration are the restricted permitted uses in the town’s business zones.**” Methuen’s Land Use Plan advised “including in the Zoning Ordinance’s provisions relating to commercial and industrial development incentives such as bonuses that may be granted in exchange for such amenities and benefits as dedicated open space or the development of trails that link into the

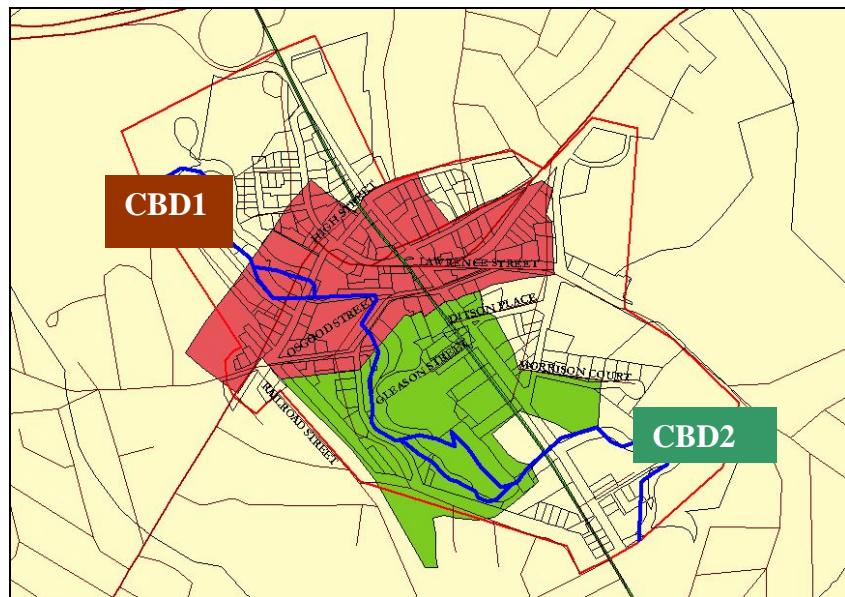
community wide network.” The following recommendations build upon these and other earlier observations, with specific proposed changes. It should be noted, however, that the City’s Community Development Board and City Council will need to dedicate themselves to the task of implementing these changes through the zoning change process – a task that will require public workshops and hearings, the scrutiny of legal counsel, and active participation of the downtown business community.

#### **REG-1: District Boundary/Map Changes: Split CBD into Two Districts; Create Riverfront Overlay**

We recommend splitting the CBD district in order to aggressively encourage appropriately-scaled redevelopment. Several factors ground this recommendation:

- The CBD district allows a fairly high density of development, but this pattern may not be appropriate for all areas within the boundaries that presently exist. The character of the area in the immediate vicinity of the clock tower, for example, is supportive of much greater density than the lower Broadway area. By splitting the district, the difference in character can be addressed through specific zoning controls; without a map change, the City is often forced to consider development on a site-by-site basis, through a relatively restrictive (and sometime redundant) permitting procedure.
- The existing 40% lot coverage limitation for buildings is incongruous with the dense development pattern near the clock tower, and makes many properties non-conforming as a result – at present, redevelopment typically requires a variance from this regulation in order to proceed. In order to remove the variance barrier, we recommend lot coverage be substantially increased to 90% or more, but do not feel this is a change that is appropriate for the entire CBD.
- A number of uses should be allowed as-of-right rather than requiring special permit; splitting the district, the City can

allow certain uses by right in one area while retaining special permit review in another.



The boundaries for the **CBD1** district would be drawn from the northern portion of the current CBD, including Broadway, Lowell, Osgood, Hampshire, and Charles Streets. Its southern boundary could be drawn just south of Osgood, to include the street's southern frontage lots (approx. 100 foot depth). We suggest the City continue to treat this Methuen Square area as the “heart” of downtown, and encourage redevelopment here to a much greater degree than it presently does. For example, this district might:

- Prohibit uses that are not consistent with a pedestrian-oriented downtown: warehouse, car rental, and any industrial use.
- Allow mixed uses by right (amend Table of Use, section V-1H)

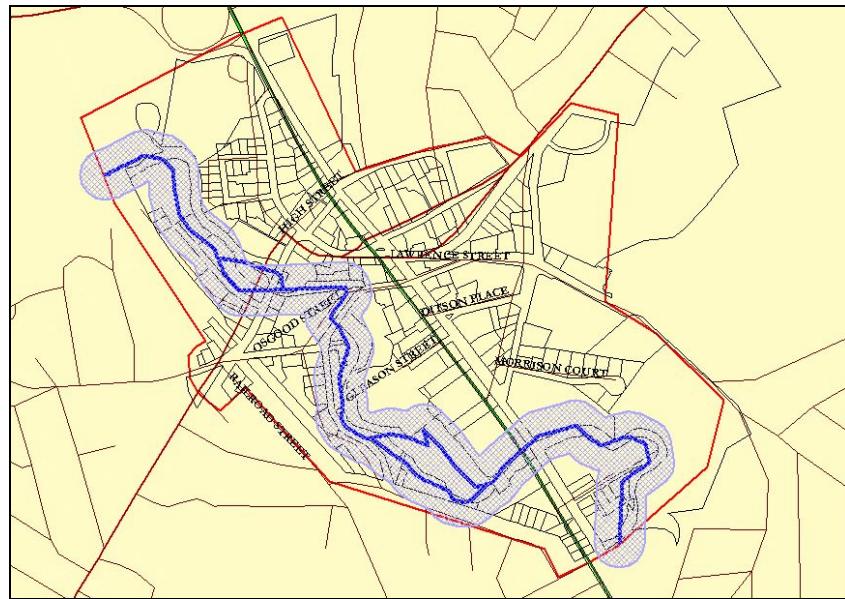
- Define and allow Bed and Breakfast or Inn use by right.
- Set a *maximum front yard setback* of 10 feet.
- Allow 90% building coverage.
- Decrease side yard setback to 5 feet and rear to 25 feet – continue policy to allow reductions to zero feet.

The **CBD2** district would extend from Osgood to the southern boundary of the current CBD. It would be less dense than the CBD, and slightly more review would be required for select uses. It would *differ* from CBD1 in the following ways:

- Allow 40% building coverage for single-story structures; 75% coverage allowed for multi-story structures.
- Require 20% minimum open space for lots over 10,000 s.f.
- Side and rear yard setbacks remain at 15 and 30 feet, reducible through site plan review and special permit.
- Require a 10 foot landscaped buffer around parking uses. (15 feet is currently required adjacent to the right of way).
- Require site plan review for all uses over 3,000 s.f.

A new **Riverfront Overlay District** could be drawn to encompass all properties within 150 feet of the river banks. The purpose of the overlay would be to offer incentives to develop a continuous walking path along the river, to encourage uses that take advantage of their riverfront orientation, and to ensure public access to the waterfront. In exchange for these public benefits, developers could be offered expanded as-of-right uses in the district, streamlined permitting (including expedited site plan review), increased density, a reduction in parking requirements, increased height/stories, etc.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The City’s Land Use Plan provides an explanation of the strategies various municipalities use to secure benefits through the permitting process. See “Final Recommendations” memo from Mark Bobrowski to the Methuen Project Committee, dated 5/27/97.

**Figure 22: Proposed Riverfront Overlay District**

### **REG-2: Amend Use Regulations to Allow Desired Uses by Right**

Some uses deemed desirable in this vision plan can be encouraged by simply allowing their development by right, and eliminating the requirement of a special permit for their development. On the whole, adjusting dimensional regulations as cited above will facilitate new uses to emerge.

**Mixed uses:** Amend the Table of Use Regulations (§ V-D) to permit buildings containing mixed commercial and residential uses in the Central Business District, provided that residential uses are restricted to upper floors.

**Hotel/Motel:** Methuen's Zoning Ordinance has no definition for lodging establishments that are generally smaller in scale than the typical "hotel/motel." As office and recreational uses

increase in the downtown, supportive uses such as inns or Bed and Breakfasts should be encouraged to locate downtown.

A number of communities where tourism is a key feature of the local economy contain definitions for a "bed and breakfast" use that contains a small number (1-5) of rooms available to guests. In addition, the ordinance may also want to provide a definition for a bed and breakfast inn which would be slightly larger (12-20 rooms). By providing these refined definitions, the City allows for these uses by right in the CBD, while preserving a special permit process for the hotel/motel use (which may have larger impacts).

### **REG-3: Revise Site Plan Review**

Section XII details site plan review requirements and procedures, but gives no direction with regard to performance standards. Typically, site plan review ordinances provide clear guidelines as to what will constitute an acceptable site plan. In addition to assisting property owners in understanding what is expected, staff and review board members can use guidelines to focus discussions and defend decisions. The following is taken from the *Design Review Manual*, a publication that Taintor & Associates, Inc. prepared for the JHC Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. The City will need to spend some time thinking through the variety of specifics of amending its ordinance – at a minimum, we recommend site plan review be broadened to apply to every project (except signage, and minor repair/maintenance jobs) in the CBD.

- **Landscaping & Paving:** Site plan guidelines can specify the amount and type of landscaping and paving throughout the proposed development. Trees, flowering plants, evergreens, and open grass areas should be designed to enhance the site and its building(s), relieve the expanse of paving in parking areas, screen uses from view, and contribute to the site's

microclimate (contributing to the site's shading, wind-breaking, air quality, and drainage functions). At present, the Zoning Ordinance requires minimal landscaping of parking lots over 40 spaces (Section VIII-3B-5).

Thought is often given to ensuring that the site will have a **four-season landscape**, and the variety of plantings selected should pay attention to blooming cycles. Trees may be required to line street frontage at spacing of 50' on center (or clustered, depending on the site), and are best planted after having reached a minimum caliper of 3 inches, placed in a adequately sized planting bed, and not directly under overhead wires. Low height shrubs and flowers can enhance vehicular entrances and exits without blocking site lines, and are good choice for plantings nearer to building walls. In an attempt to gain an adequate amount of landscaping, some ordinances require planting beds of certain sizes, occupied with trees, shrubs, and flowers, to run the entire length of all building facades visible from public ways.

From a site plan perspective, the amount of paving should be limited to the minimum required by access and parking. Typical site plan guidelines call for the landscaping of all parking areas, with planting beds and strips lining the outer boundary of the lot as well as being interspersed throughout. The desired amount of landscaped area may be expressed as a ratio to paved area (5 s.f./parking space), or require a minimum percentage of green space (i.e. 5% of the parking area). Perimeter landscaped buffers of specified widths may also be desired to separate uses.

- ***Circulation: vehicular and pedestrian:*** Site plans should reveal safe, coordinated ways for pedestrians and vehicles to move through the site. Access from parking areas to the building, as well as to and from the site to the street should be

carefully examined for potential conflicts. Curb cuts may be limited to minimum safe widths to better direct and control vehicular routes, and located to maximize sight lines for entering and exiting traffic.

- ***Drainage:*** While drainage issues may be better controlled under storm water management guidelines, site plan review offers an opportunity to check that proposed developments do not increase site runoff, and employ best practices in designing recharge methods and erosion and pollution control.
- ***Infrastructure Adequacy:*** Proposed development should be reviewed to ascertain that adequate public infrastructure is in place to service the new use. Regulations may seek the development's contribution towards necessary upgrades to meet its future needs.
- ***HVAC units, trash dumpster, outdoor storage, etc.:*** Attention should be paid to the appearance, noise, and odor related to these building accessories. Guidelines typically call for screening these uses, and located them away from where they may impact adjacent uses.
- ***Site Lighting:*** As with paving, guidelines for site lighting stress the need for safety, but often follow the motto of "less is more," once safety is adequately addressed. Casting light onto nearby properties is typically prohibited, and as a result, "cut off" fixtures are recommended, especially when lights are atop taller posts to maximize coverage. Pedestrian-scaled fixtures may be allowed to cast light in other than a strict downward fashion, with the understanding that their coverage will not extend to adjacent land.

#### **REG-4: Publicize Architectural Design Standards**

The Historic District Commission, which administers the local Searles Tenney Nevins district, has review over all visible changes that are proposed in the district. It effectively acts as the design review authority for both existing and new construction, thus **no additional architectural review is necessary** to move forward with the vision plan.

The Commission may, however, assist property owners in navigating through the review process through publishing illustrated guidelines that highlight appropriate treatments for historic structures as well as examples of inappropriate work. As with site plan review, downtown revitalization will be greatly aided as regulatory processes are made more clear and understandable wherever possible. Since the Commission's review authority is so broad, property owners seeking to initiate change in the downtown may avoid making improvements to their structures because they find the process of gaining HDC approval daunting – efforts to lessen owners' hesitancy will facilitate desirable improvements.

#### **REG-5: Enhance Off-Street Parking Requirements**

Regulations pertaining to the layout and appearance of parking spaces should be revised to conform with the vision plan. We find the current regulations pertaining to the number of spaces required, the off-site provision (Sect. VIII-B1b), and the acceptance of shared parking (Sect. VIIIC-1b) to be conducive to redevelopment.

In order to foster active streetscapes, parking in the front of buildings in the downtown should not be allowed. In addition, Section VIIIB-5 sets minimal requirements for parking lot landscaping. We recommend that the **construction of any lot over 10 spaces in the downtown receive a site plan permit**, whose guidelines may require:

- 7-10% landscaping
- installation of minimum 2.5" caliper street trees along public ways
- a variety of seasonal plantings
- pedestrian-scaled lighting fixtures.

#### **REG-6: Streamline Permitting**

At present, downtown owners seeking to redevelop their properties must receive a series of approvals before proceeding with their projects, likely having to appear before the Zoning Board, the Community Development Board, and the Historic District Commission prior to receiving approval for their proposal. Simplifying this process would expedite downtown revitalization.

Methuen should carefully revise its dimensional regulations to better suit existing development so that variances are not commonly needed – many of the recommendations herein will help achieve this goal, thereby reducing the number of proposals that require Zoning Board approval.

In addition, if the Historic District and Community Development Boards could coordinate their hearings, hold joint sessions, or perhaps assign a representative to attend each other's session, design review and site plan review could be streamlined. Since the HDC has the authority to review site issues, it is important that its opinion on these elements (landscaping, parking, lighting, etc.) is closely coordinated with site plan standards.

#### **Management Actions (MGMT)**

The City must continue to dedicate its attention and personnel resources to transform this downtown vision into reality. Methuen's Economic Development Director should spearhead

these efforts, in conjunction with the city's community development and planning staff.

#### **MGMT-1: Implementation Committee**

The City must identify, organize, and authorize an Implementation Committee to take responsibility for overseeing progress of this plan. In the past, the Methuen Downtown Association has spearheaded revitalization efforts; whether this group could be reconvened or a new group formed, the Committee must include public officials, business owners, and residents. Since the Community Development Board and the City Council are charged with implementing many of the proposed recommendations, a member from each should serve on this Committee.

At a minimum, the Committee should communicate the vision throughout the downtown, advocate for the initiatives described herein, support property owners and regulatory boards as they implement the plan, and provide an annual progress report to City leaders and the community.

#### **MGMT-2: Build Spicket River Partnerships**

As described elsewhere in this document, riverfront revitalization efforts should be coordinated with the Town of Salem and the City of Lawrence in order to maximize the possibilities for mutually-beneficial action. Perhaps a subcommittee of the Downtown Implementation group could be in charge of establishing these relationships.

#### **MGMT-3: Coordinate Promotional Events/Sponsor Community Recognition Programs**

The City and its Downtown Committee should work to strengthen relationships between downtown businesses and organizations, foster regular hours of operation among them, and

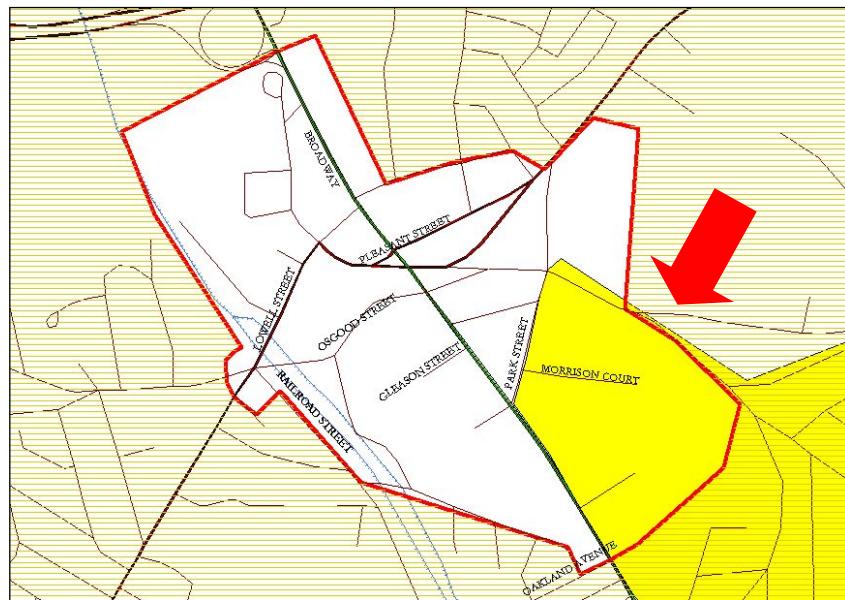
hold promotional events that will attract patrons and reinforce downtown as a destination.

In addition, the City could hold community dinners or luncheons that honor property owners, business operators, and non-profit leaders for civic contribution. Such public recognition will help further the downtown redevelopment agenda that relies on cooperation from leadership of the business/non-profit sectors. Annual historic preservation awards, Riverwalk celebrations, a "Taste of Methuen," "Turret Trot," etc. are opportunities to strengthen the identity of downtown Methuen and reward its key stakeholders for their efforts.

#### **MGMT-4: Publicize and Promote Funding Sources to Property and Business Owners**

On November 26, 2003 the state passed legislation (MGL Chapter 141, Section 22) to offer a **20% tax credit for rehabilitation of historic structures**. Coupled with the 20% federal tax credit already in place, this provides new incentive to property owners wanting to improve their buildings.

In addition, Census Tract 2524, which includes the southern portion of the study area, is eligible to benefit from the **New Markets Tax Credit** program, which offers individuals and corporations a **39% tax credit** for making equity investments in low income areas. Seen below, this area includes the Zapatos Aqui property, as well as the former St. Monica's site.

**Figure 23: Area Eligible for New Markets Tax Credit**

Through its Economic Development Director, the City should use these recent changes in legislation, in addition to the release of this plan, as an opportunity to publicize all funding resources to the downtown businesses. A letter itemizing resources such as the Economic Opportunity Area and its benefits, the possibility of Tax Increment Financing, MA Development financing, Brownfields grants/loans, CDBG funds, etc. should be distributed to all downtown owners.

#### **MGMT-5: Engage MVPC For Traffic And Parking Planning Services**

Methuen should take maximum advantage of technical services offered by the region's regional planning agency. The Commission is capable of conducting desktop studies for traffic and parking issues that can in turn be used to develop a coherent downtown transportation/parking strategy, and provide a technical base-line for specific projects that can lead to specific

and detailed project studies. Specific objectives may be to undertake parking and traffic analyses for the Osgood Street area at Broadway and for the Five Corners.

#### **MGMT-6: Expand Adopt-a-Site ("traffic island") Program**

A quick and simple way to begin seeing improvements to the downtown could be through an adopt-a-site program.

Merchants, building owners, and other organizations would "adopt" an area downtown to care for on an annual basis. In return, the City would provide recognition for these efforts by allowing a small sign to be posted at the site.

A volunteer Adopt-a-Site Committee could work with the City's Planning and Public Works staff to identify appropriate locations for adoption.

#### **Investments (INV)**

##### **INV-1: Acquire Riverfront Easements & Construct Walkway**

The City should make a focused effort to acquire easements along the length of the Spicket to allow for the eventual construction of a continuous pathway. As with the Spada development on Gleason Street, some of these may be negotiated during the project approvals process, but easements should also be pursued on properties that do not have near-term, foreseeable redevelopment prospects. A revolving fund within the City can be created to enable volunteer contributions for easement purchase, and as sections of the walkway become available for construction, programs that would allow citizens to purchase and dedicate benches, lighting fixtures, barrels, trees, etc. could help towards the overall costs.

Several state grant programs might assist in obtaining easements and/or constructing the walkway. They include:

Land and Water Conservation Fund (DCR)  
DCS Self Help and Urban Self-Help Programs (DCR)  
Historic Landscapes Grant Programs (DCR)  
Riverways Small grants (DEM)  
TEA-21 – (MVPC)  
Greenways & Trails Demonstration Grants (DEM)  
Recreational Trails Program (DEM)  
CDBG funding (for qualified area near Zapatos Aqui)

**INV-2: Continue to Develop Appleyard Site for Recreational Use**

We recommend the City continue its work on the Appleyard site in order to bring timely completion to this project. Of all the direct investments described herein, this project has the most potential to make a substantial step towards realizing this vision in the short term. A public process, involving neighborhood representation, should begin immediately so that the boat launch and associated improvement can proceed pending the results of the environmental assessment.

**INV-3: CBDG Signage and Façade Improvement Program**

As with Economic Development financing programs, the City should continue to aggressively promote a matching grants program that helps to improve the appearance of downtown businesses. This type of program has experienced past success in Methuen, and is frequently at the heart of successful revitalization movements. The Historic District Commission should be very familiar with the details of this program and in the interest of simplifying the permitting process, may serve as the appropriate entity to award these grants and monitor their implementation.

**INV-4: Consider Offering Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and District Improvement Financing (DIF) To Support Development That Complements The Vision For Downtown**

The City has a powerful tool to attract desirable development through the use of TIF, which offers business owners an incremental tax exemption on their improvements for a period of 5-20 years. Although the City receives less immediate benefit from the increase in assessed value of the property, it reaps the longer-term benefit of investment in its local economy. Alternately, through the use of District Improvement Financing, the City could support desirable project by investing in infrastructure improvements that will be financed by future tax revenues from the project..

**INV-5: Coordinate And Implement Streetscape Improvements In Conjunction With Redevelopment Projects**

The City should continue to work closely with private developers to improve public streetscapes and amenities as new projects are constructed. The treatment of Methuen Square, in terms of lighting, sidewalk materials, benches, trees, and the like sets a good example for consistent, high quality improvements that can tie the downtown together. As necessary, the City should solicit contributions and/or grants to provide sufficient funding to implement these improvements.

## XI. IMPLEMENTATION TABLE

The following table prioritizes recommendations, assigns responsibilities, gives a brief description of proposed action steps, and provides an estimate for task completion.

#	Strategy	Action Steps	Priority (1-3)	Time table	Responsibility
REG-3/ REG-5	Revise Site Plan Review regulations/ Enhance off-street parking requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Form Subcommittee of the Community Development Board; invite Council representative(s) to work on committee</li> <li>➤ Assemble examples of Site Plan review regulations from other communities</li> <li>➤ Draft new regulations</li> <li>➤ Hold joint public hearing with the City Council</li> <li>➤ Adopt new regulation</li> </ul>	1	Fall 2004	Planning Department/ Community Development Board/ City Council
MGMT-1	Form Implementation Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mayoral appointment</li> <li>➤ Set regular calendar of meetings</li> </ul>	1	June 2004	Mayor/ Implementation Committee
REG-1	District Boundary/Map Changes: Split CBD into Two Districts; Create Riverfront Overlay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Form Subcommittee of the Community Development Board; invite Council representative(s) to work on committee</li> <li>➤ Draft new regulations</li> <li>➤ Hold joint public hearing with the City Council</li> <li>➤ Adopt new regulation</li> </ul>	1	2005	Planning Department/ Community Development Board/ City Council
INV-1	Acquire Easements and Construct Walkway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify riverfront property owners and obtain contact information</li> <li>➤ Contact riverfront property owners to inform them of the City's vision</li> <li>➤ Apply for planning grants to prepare schematic designs of the walkway; identify location</li> <li>➤ Obtain necessary easements</li> <li>➤ Construct the walkway</li> </ul>	1	June 2004	Planning Department
			1	July 2004	Mayor/Planning Department
			1	2004-2005	Planning Department
			1	2004-2008	Mayor/City Council/Planning Department
			1	2004-2010	Planning Department/ private owners

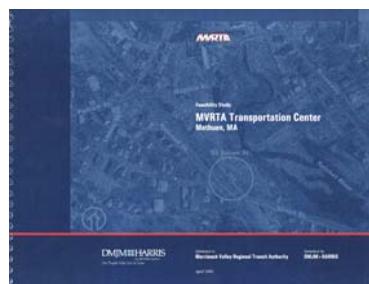
#	Strategy	Action Steps	Priority (1-3)	Time table	Responsibility
MGMT-2	Build Spicket River Partnerships	➤ Appoint contact person(s) from Implementation Committee	1	Summer 2004	Implementation Committee
		➤ Coordinate Spicket River cleanup day	1	Spring 2005	Implementation Committee
		➤ Develop on-going communication	1	On-going	Implementation Committee
INV-2	Continue to Develop Appleyard Site for Recreational Use	➤ Compete environmental assessment	1	2004	City's contractor
		➤ Hold public meeting to report results of assessment and define next steps	1	2004	Planning Department
		➤ Engage designer to complete design process (including neighborhood meetings)	1	2004	Planning Department
		➤ Apply for grant funding for improvements	1	2005	Planning Department
		➤ Complete construction of boat launch	1	2006-06	Planning Department
		➤ Work with partners to provide additional programming (e.g. guided tours)	1	2005-	Planning Department/Implementation Committee
REG-2	Amend Use Regulations to Allow Desired Uses by Right	➤ Draft zoning change ➤ Hold Public Hearing(s) ➤ Amend ordinance	2	Fall 2004	Planning Department/ Community Development Board/ City Council
MGMT-	Expand Adopt a Site Program	➤ Identify sites for adoption	2	Summer 2004	Implementation Committee, Planning Department, DPW
		➤ Contact other communities to obtain program guidelines; develop Methuen Adopt A Site program, including formation of an Adopt a Site Committee	2	Fall 2004	Implementation Committee, Planning Department
		➤ Invite downtown owners and tenants, and other community groups, to adopt sites	2	Spring 2005	Adopt A Site Committee
MGMT-4	Publicize and Promote Funding Sources to Property and Business Owners	➤ Develop and mail letter/brochure of funding sources; contact owners by phone to confirm receipt	2	2004	Economic Development Director
INV-3	CBDG Signage and Façade Improvement Program	➤ Identify funding for program ➤ Announce program to owners and tenants ➤ Implement program	2	2005	Community Development Department/ Economic Development Director
REG-4	Publicize Architectural Design Standards	➤ Contact other commissions, gather materials, develop illustrated standards, publicize/distribute downtown	2	2004-2005	Historic District Commission

#	Strategy	Action Steps	Priority (1-3)	Time table	Responsibility
MGMT-3	Coordinate Promotional Events/Sponsor Community Recognition Programs	➤ Identify partners & funding ➤ Contact merchants ➤ Sponsor events	2	2004-	Implementation Committee/ Merrimack Valley Chamber/ Mayor's Office
REG-6	Streamline Permitting	➤ Hold joint session to discuss potential improvements	3	2004-2006	Community Development Board/ Historic District Commission/ Planning Department/ City Council
INV-4	Consider Offering Tax Increment Financing (TIF)/use District Improvement Financing (DIF) to Developments That Complement The Vision For Downtown	➤ Contact State Office of Business Development to gather successful examples of TIFs/DIFs ➤ Analyze TIF/DIF feasibility on a case by case basis	3	2004-	Mayor/ Economic Development Director/ City Council
INV-5	Coordinate And Implement Streetscape Improvements In Conjunction With Redevelopment Projects	➤ Establish system for private contributions to public streetscape projects ➤ Set guidelines for streetscape improvements ➤ Coordinate projects as needed	3	On-going	Planning Department/ Public Works
MGMT-5	Engage MVPC For Traffic And Parking Planning Services	➤ Contact MVPC as needed	3	as needed	Planning Department

## APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF RELEVANT PAST STUDIES

Over the past two decades, the City of Methuen has enlisted the assistance of several consultants as it pursues revitalization efforts in its downtown area. Each effort has moved thinking about the downtown further, and several have inspired a number of the aforementioned projects. Following is a brief description of these reports, in reverse chronological order, highlighting information that continues to be relevant for downtown revitalization.

### **MVRTA Transportation Center Feasibility Study**



The Methuen Rail Depot, located at the intersection of Railroad and Union Streets, is a historic (1908) structure listed on the MA Register of Historic Places. Vacant for a number of years, the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) conducted this feasibility study to determine if this site might be a suitable location for reuse as a transportation center and other civic space to serve the downtown area. The MVRTA owns the inactive rail corridor (the Manchester and Lawrence branch) adjacent to the depot.

In 2001 the Surface Transportation Board abandoned an exclusive freight easement along the rail corridor, and as a result, future rail use is authorized via the MBTA. To date, the MBTA has not indicated any plans for resumption of service of the line. This study speculates, however, that the resolution of regional transportation issues may rely upon providing additional commuter rail options, which may make this property a valuable, strategic location in the future.

**DMJM & Harris**  
**55 Union Street**

**2002**

Through a planning process that involved City officials, the MVRTA, and the consultants, the preferred building reuse is a historical museum in conjunction with transit operation (bus service). Highest and best use identified in an appraisal was office space. The design concept combines exterior restoration and interior renovation of the 2,190 s.f. structure, with site improvements, for a total project cost estimated at \$1.5 million.

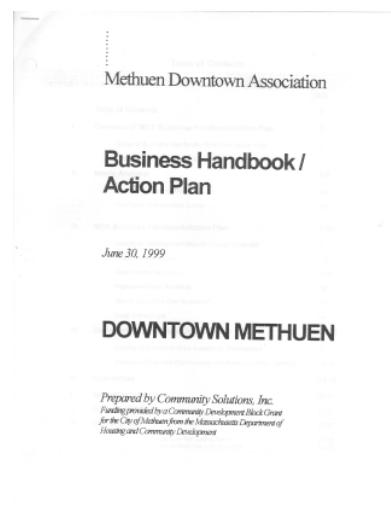
Since completion of this study, a private developer has leased (bought?) the building and is fitting the space for labor union use. Nevertheless, this effort outlines a couple of key issues that remain relevant:

- The historic structure is part of downtown's architectural legacy and can, if restored, contribute to the area's character; and
- Reuse of the rail corridor, as a train or pedestrian/bicycle link, can be a significant connection to downtown resources.

## Business Handbook/ Action Plan

### Community Solutions

1999



Prepared for the Methuen Downtown Association (MDA) and funded by the City's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), the primary goal of the Business Handbook/Action Plan was to follow up on the 1996 McCabe study (description following) and provide specific action steps to achieve its recommendations. The planning process involved in this effort included development of a "Stakeholders Questionnaire" which was completed during 14 interviews.

When asked which areas of downtown need to be developed and what types of businesses should be attracted there, stakeholders noted Osgood Street, the vacant lots near Shadi's and across from the post office, the Apple Yard, St. Monica's, Shear Metals, the train depot and others. Significantly, there was frequent mention that **"more focus be placed on the Spicket River, and that there be a restaurant or café facing the water. Existing businesses, such as the Family Restaurant on Broadway, could turn their focus towards the water..."**

The action plan suggests several specific implementation steps for the MDA and the City's consideration:

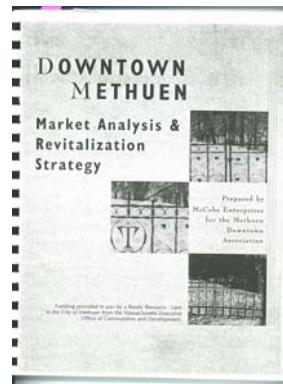
#### Recommendations:

1. Establish Business Dev. Committee within MDA
2. Develop annual budget for MDA
3. Develop downtown theme and boundaries (history & natural resources, contests)
4. Re-establish close partnership w/City Hall (jt. Marketing of public events, coupons, etc.)
5. Build upon natural and historic resources (kiosks, brochures, Main St., walkways)
6. Complete developable site surveys
7. Increase MDA visibility (newsletter, web, banners, etc.)
8. Strengthen MDA web page
9. Network to attract business downtown (service contracts, seminars, awards)
10. Investigate Business Improvement District opportunity

#### Business Opportunities:

- New offices - priority
- Existing space should be more "tenant ready"
- Restaurant and food-related, target young families
- Service
- Convenience
- Retail and services
- Café, takeout, bookstore

## Downtown Methuen – Market Analysis & Revitalization Strategy



*McCabe Enterprises*  
1996

Funded by a Ready Resource grant, this is a substantial study that includes a thorough market analysis, business inventory, and analysis of trade demand. The planning process included a charrette attended by 80 people, a mailed business survey, and intercept surveys of people using the downtown. Also included is an inventory of downtown businesses by location, characterized by SIC code.

**This study is the most comprehensive work the City has among its downtown resources, and the majority of its content remains relevant.**

The overall strategy recommended for revitalization consists of a 5-step approach:

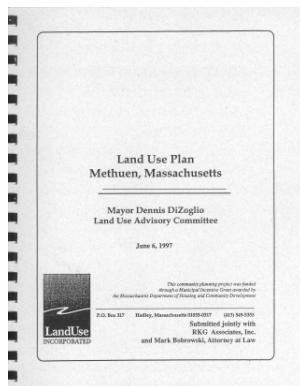
1. Attraction – Make the downtown a destination by marketing it as a district. Provide more stores and better connections between places. **“downtown has unique assets that need to be capitalized on, namely the Spicket River and the Falls.”**
2. Increase consumer expenditures **by increasing time spent downtown.** Increase the number of businesses, encourage cross business promotions, train sales people in sales, etc.
3. Restaurants can give Methuen a competitive advantage by increasing the amount of time people spend downtown and attracting more office uses. **“The top five desired businesses Methuen residents want downtown are all food-related.”**
4. Increase the number of people working downtown **by aggressively recruiting small and medium professional offices.** Make existing upper story and mill space more tenant ready. Existing business services (printer, computer service, post office) are attractive to office use.
5. **The addition of a convenience store** could add traffic and business in downtown. It should be **“carefully sited and designed, so that it will be an asset to the district, and not merely another single destination stop.”**

**In general, the plan recommends developing an identity for downtown and creating a sense of place there. The focal area should be Hampshire Street, Osgood and River Streets, and Broadway from Spicket River to High Street.**

## Land Use Plan

*Land Use Inc. w/ RKG & Mark Bobrowski*

1997



Another excellent study, this plan considers land use in the entire City, focusing on downtown only in part.

Funded by a Municipal Incentive Grant (MIG), the purpose of this plan was to provide the City with a framework for decision making with regard to land use in order to produce a “mutually supportive balance among residences, commerce and industry, and natural resource systems.”

This study conducted a build out analysis that concluded Methuen’s residential land will be built out by 2006 and this will have a moderately negative impact on the City’s fiscal affairs. It concludes that the maximum growth-related municipal deficit will reach approximately \$1.4 million at residential build out, but that this will decrease as commercial build out progresses.

The plan’s three main recommended strategies are:

1. Set the stage for and foster the expansion of Methuen’s economic base.
2. Emphasize open space and natural/cultural resource preservation as major growth management tools
3. Carefully monitor and enforce the concept of diverse residential settings with distinctive characters that each support the sense of neighborhood pride.

**“Pro-business and pro-historic preservation”** strategies are for the downtown, in order to achieve and maintain vibrancy.

## Methuen Economic Development Plan

*Cecil & Rizvi with RKG*

1996



Funded by a grant from the Executive Office of Community Development (EOCD), this plan looks to grow Methuen's economy by analyzing the local and regional economies, and developing a vision for economic development. The planning process involved a mailed survey to over 400 businesses (76 respondents), two workshops, and a third presentation meeting.

Six goals emerged from discussion with residents, business owners, and other stakeholders – each are supported by several specific strategies:

- Support for new and existing businesses
- Land resources
- Developing a Positive Image
- Strengthen Retail Use
- Promote Economic Opportunities
- Focus on Quality of Life

Recommendation related to downtown revitalization suggest a **“Main Street” approach** involving cooperative marketing and promotions, organizing common hours of operation, and hosting of special events. In addition, creating a **“clear, simple, and affordable process for expansion and new development,”** marketing vacant properties, and developing a “business friendly” reputation are also among the plan’s final recommendations.

## Downtown Methuen Design Guidelines and Implementation Manual



### *Design Partnership*

1996/97

### Downtown Methuen Development Plan

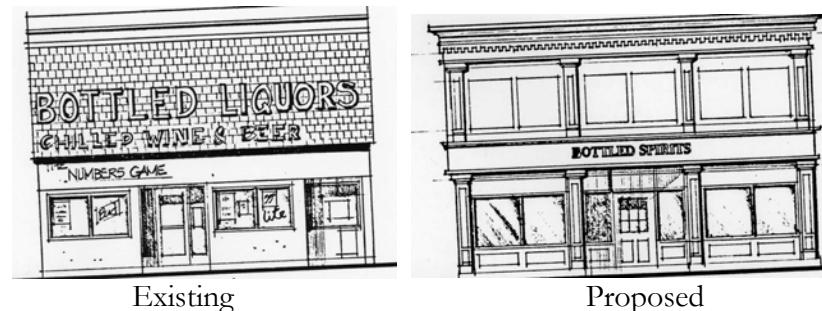
*Harrington Company*

1983

This study contains existing and proposed facades for many of the storefronts on Hampshire, Osgood, and Broadway (near clock tower). Individual businesses receive “facelifts,” but there is no attempt to create a vision for downtown as a whole. It appears as though this effort was aimed at beginning a design guidelines for use in the downtown district.

An Appendix to this report contains the **Methuen Sign Guide** – regulations for use by the Historical Commission in evaluating signage proposals.

34 Hampshire Street



Another comprehensive look at downtown Methuen, this report contains an inventory of downtown businesses and the entire national register nomination form for the historic district. While certainly eclipsed by the 1996 McCabe study, this report provides a good history to the issue of developing “downtown Methuen.” Like studies to follow, it maintains **“Downtown Methuen has in its immediate area a number of dramatic natural and manmade features, the development and utilization of which would enhance the CBD’s image as the focal point of the community.”**

The objectives of the report remain valid:

- **Expansion of parking** facilities in proximity to main arteries;
- Expansion of pre-dominantly **commercial use in under or not utilized buildings**;
- Access to and recreational enhancement of the **Spicket River**; and
- A **cohesive streetscape** which allows and **invites pedestrian flow** throughout the downtown.

**Methuen Square  
Parking Study**

Conducted by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) at the request of Town officials, this survey of parking in Gaunt Square is based upon two days of field work observing the nature of parking use in the downtown.

*MVPC  
1989*

The resulting analysis identified **mid-day on Hampshire St. to be the main problem**, and suggested better signage, shorter time limits, and **better connection to Osgood St.** as possible solutions.

**APPENDIX B: DOWNTOWN PARCEL INFORMATION**