

Action Plan for Downtown Methuen

Department of Economic
& Community Development

City of Methuen

Stephen N. Zanni, Mayor

Prepared by

Harriman: *Planning and Design*

Briefing Presentation | February 16, 2017



Agenda

1. Framing the Vision
2. Plan Components
3. How Do We Achieve This?
4. Putting it All Together:
Public Benefits



Photo: 2017 MDA Geospatial Services, Inc.

1. Framing the Vision

- Downtown Vision (2014)
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Action Framework of Five Planning Principles
- Methuen Downtown Today
- Action Plan



Photo: 2017 MDA Geospatial

Downtown Vision

- In the Fall of 2014, Mayor Stephen Zanni initiated the **Downtown Visioning Committee** and tasked the committee to create a new vision for the Downtown.
- Mission: “To develop and **implement bold and innovative strategies to establish Downtown Methuen** – with its convenient location and unique historic character – as a **vibrant mixed-use district providing exciting opportunities for new and existing dining, shopping, residential and cultural opportunities.**”
- Building upon this mission and the vision that has emerged, **this Action Plan outlines the next steps** and opportunities for the future of Downtown Methuen.



Downtown Vision

- A **complete, mixed-use downtown with fully utilized buildings and sites** filled with shops, services, restaurants, businesses and places to live suited to the 21st century
- A downtown **that retains its historic identity and restores the distinctive architecture** of the past, while adding **attractive new buildings and uses**
- A downtown that is a **civic destination** because of the quality of the public uses and events that are held here
- A **walkable downtown built around the river**, with its riverfront walks, parks, paths and vantage points along the way
- A district of Methuen that is **easy to drive to, from and through** with a well-organized **parking spaces distributed throughout the area**



Challenges

- **Underutilized land and buildings** with many vacancies leading to sites and structures that are in visibly poor condition
- **Oddly shaped and small parcels** that make redevelopment very difficult to accomplish
- **Steep slopes** that make building expensive and access difficult for vehicles and pedestrians
- A **tangled network of narrow streets and angled intersections** that are poorly suited to vehicular circulation
- **Lack of a “critical mass” of complementary uses** including relatively little residential uses that add vitality and value
- A **negative civic and market image**



Opportunities

- **Outstanding historic buildings and resources** that distinguish Methuen's past and will serve to distinguish its future
- A **picturesque river and its green edges** that will serve a new economic and civic role as a focus of amenities, views, trails and spaces
- **Municipally owned land and facilities** that can be used to spur new development, provide parking, and provide civic uses that are key to success
- **Superb regional access** that makes the downtown a competitive place for businesses and residences
- **Available land and building space at relatively low cost** that can be converted into new uses and attract investments



Action Framework (Five Planning Principles)

1



2



3



4



5



1

Support and attract a set of complementary uses that will complete a full, vital, and contemporary downtown

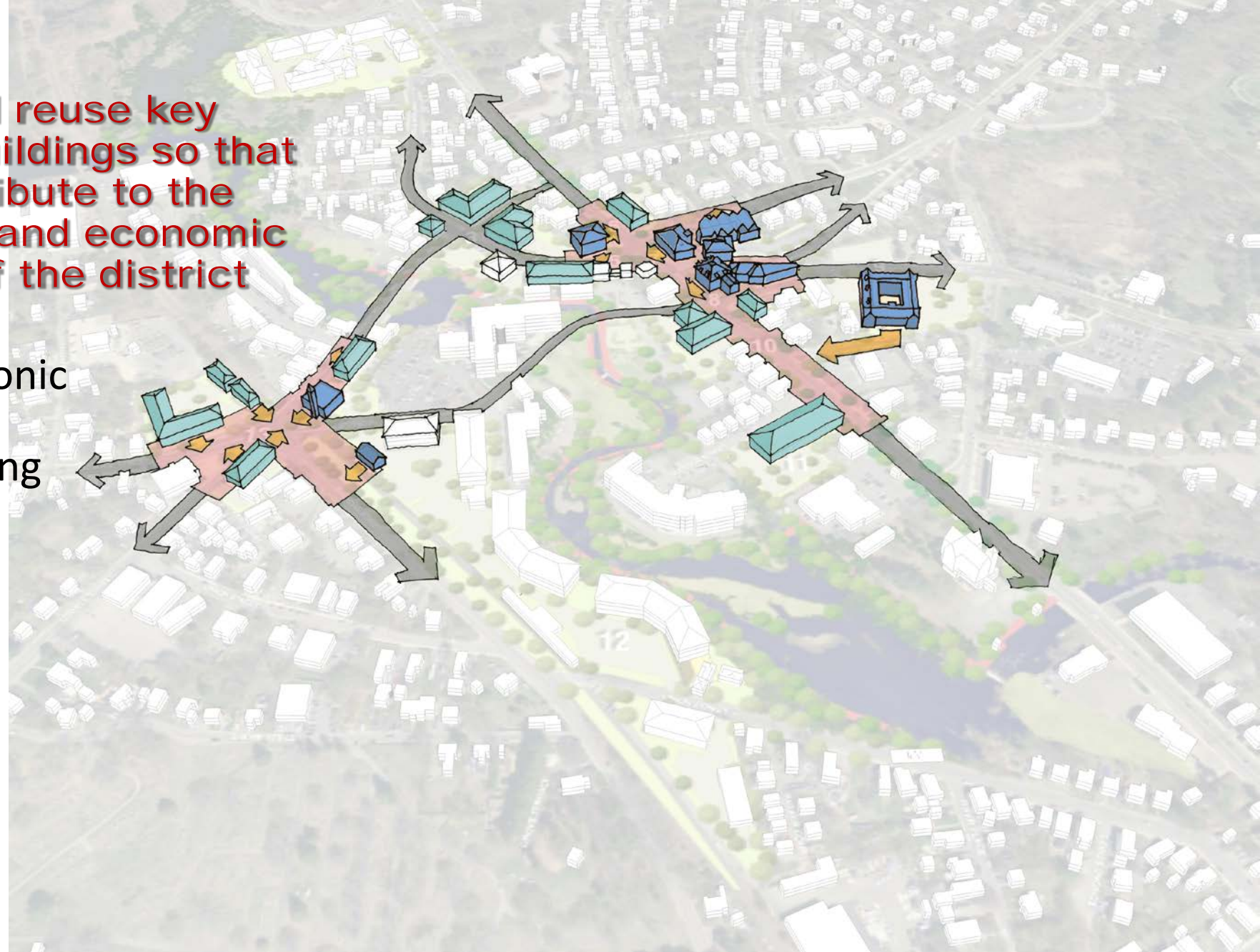
- New residential/mixed use growth
- Create new public and commercial spaces



2

Retain and reuse key historic buildings so that they contribute to the character and economic success of the district

- Red Tavern & Masonic
- Odd Fellows Building
- 1859 House
- Page Building



3

Provide access, views, amenities and places along the Spicket River as a distinguishing feature of the downtown

- Improve Connections to Foot Bridge
- Rail Trail
- Utilize Appleyard + Riverwalk Park Spaces



4

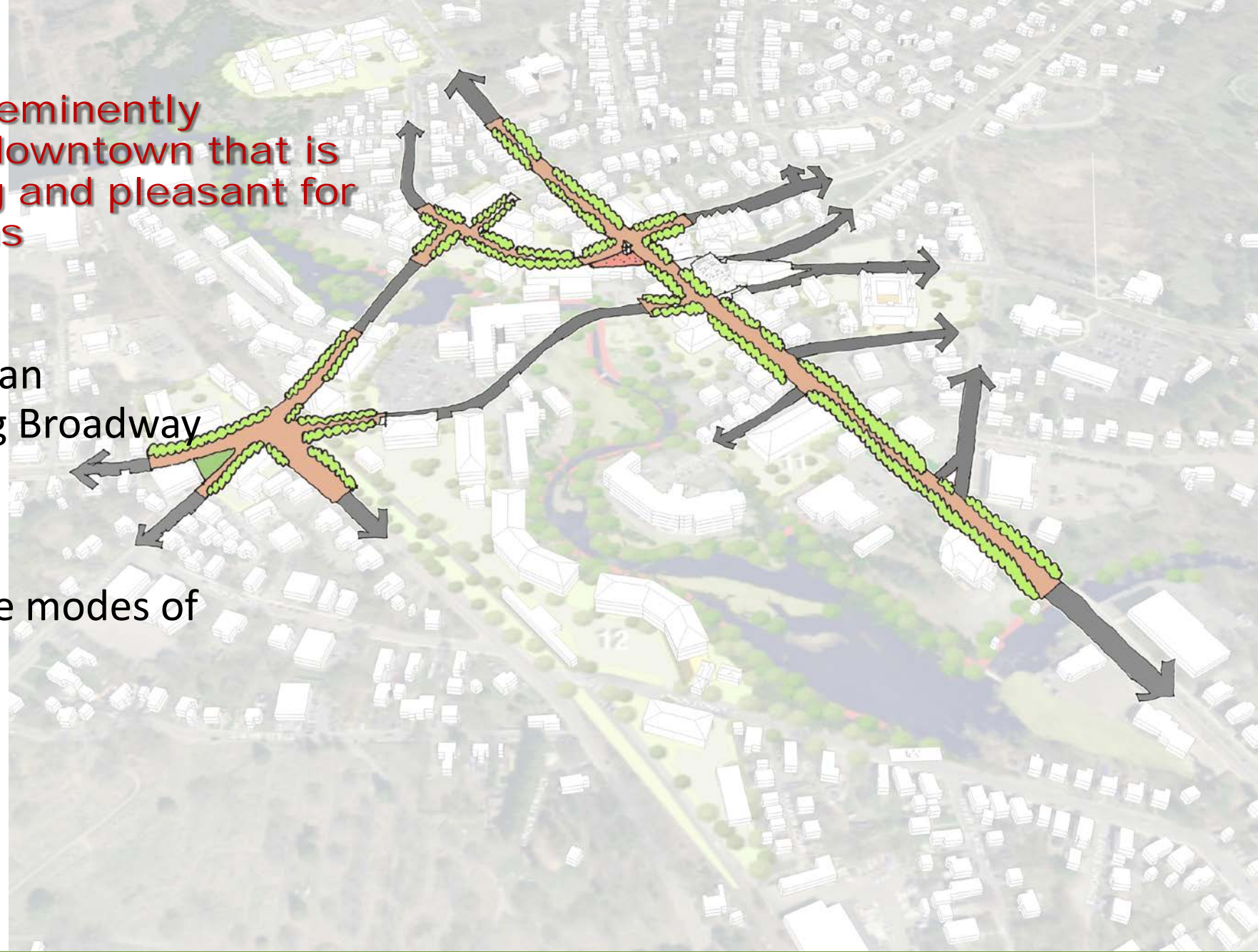
Reorganize the streets, intersections, crosswalks and sidewalks to make the district more convenient, safe, easier to navigate



5

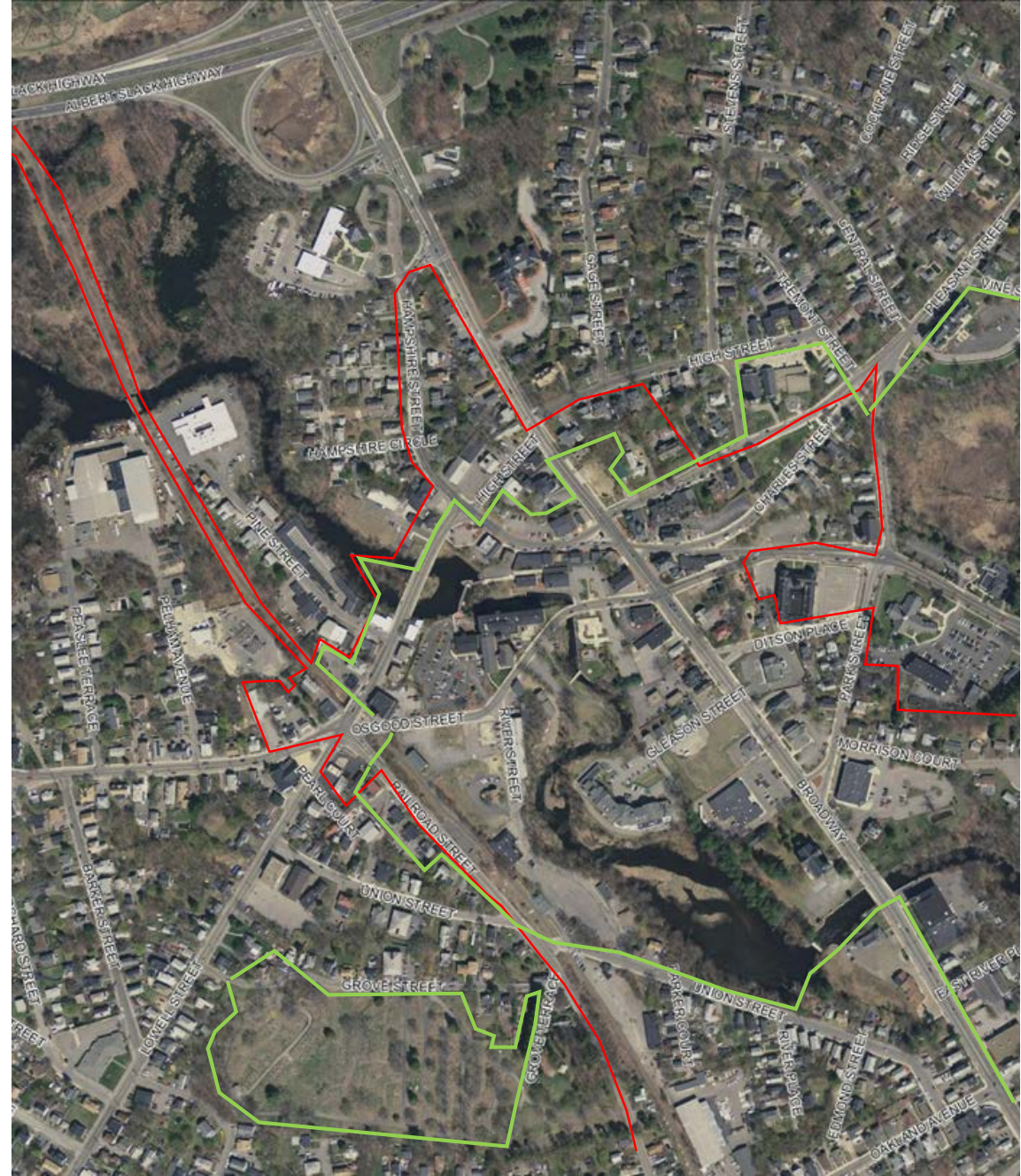
Create an eminently walkable downtown that is interesting and pleasant for pedestrians

- Improved pedestrian environment along Broadway
- Complete Streets
- Encourage multiple modes of access



Methuen Downtown Today

1. Historic District
2. Central Business District Zoning
3. Spicket River



Existing Downtown Aerial

Action Plan

- **Updated Zoning (1)**

New Smart Growth zoning and design guidelines will establish the basis for mixed-use development, and the redevelopment of underutilized properties.

- **Street, Circulation, and Placemaking Improvements**

Changes to the realignment of some street intersections will add public open space, retaining parking, and reducing congestion.

- **Riverwalk and Open Space**

Enhanced and expanded riverfront promenades will enhance connectivity within the Downtown and create new opportunities for recreation.

- **Methuen Rail Trail (2)**

The new rail trail along Railroad Street will create places for bicycling and walking, along with landscaped areas and supporting services.

- **Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse**

New Smart Growth zoning and design guidelines will support the rehabilitation, renovation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings and resources.

- **Mixed-Use Redevelopment**

New Smart Growth zoning and design guidelines will promote mixed-use redevelopment of vacant and underutilized parcels in the Downtown.



Action Plan

- **Riverside (3)**

Potential mixed-use redevelopment of vacant sites and adaptive reuse of existing historic buildings can convert underutilized land to frame the river.

- **Four Corners (4)**

Potential mixed-use redevelopment of prominent sites and parcels can be envisioned near the intersection of Lowell and Hampshire Streets.

- **Five Corners (5)**

There are potential investment opportunities for redeveloping parcels near the intersection of Lowell, Railroad, Osgood, and Pelham Streets.

- **Methuen Square (6)**

The edges of the Square have significant opportunities for renovation and adaptive reuse of existing historic buildings, new buildings on underutilized properties, and realignment of the streets to create a broad public space while retaining parking spaces in the center of the Downtown.

- **Municipal Properties (7)**

Several municipal properties have long term potential for private sector redevelopment if the City relocates existing uses through its own facility reinvestment.

- **Parking Improvements**

There are many opportunities to consolidate and optimize public parking on-street and in public parking lots.



2. Plan Components

- **Placemaking and Economic Development**

Methuen Square

Riverside

Four Corners



- **Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse**

- **Circulation and Streetscape**

- **Riverfront Access and Open Space**

- **Parking**



Methuen Square



RCLE

CHARLES STREET

HAM

LOWELL STREET

BROADWAY

DIISON PLACE

Methuen Square



Riverside



OSGOOD STREET

OSGOOD STREET

GLEASON STREET

MORRISON COURT

LOWELL STREET

PEARL COURT

RAILROAD STREET

UNION STREET

GROVE STREET

UNION STREET

GROVE TERRACE

PARKER COURT

RIVER PLACE

EDMOND STREET

Riverside



Four Corners



Four Corners



Historic Preservation and the Downtown

- Key buildings cannot be reasonably replaced with new construction
- The City and the historic preservation advocates need to find methods to support pragmatic reuse and redevelopment of buildings
- The Historic District Commission can play a positive role in the next phases of downtown revitalization



Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse

- List of potential locations and structures that could be preservation priorities
 - Red Tavern
 - Masonic Lodge
 - Odd Fellows Building
 - Charles Street
 - Page Building
 - Old Town Hall
 - 1859 House
 - Central School
 - Nevins House
 - Fire Station



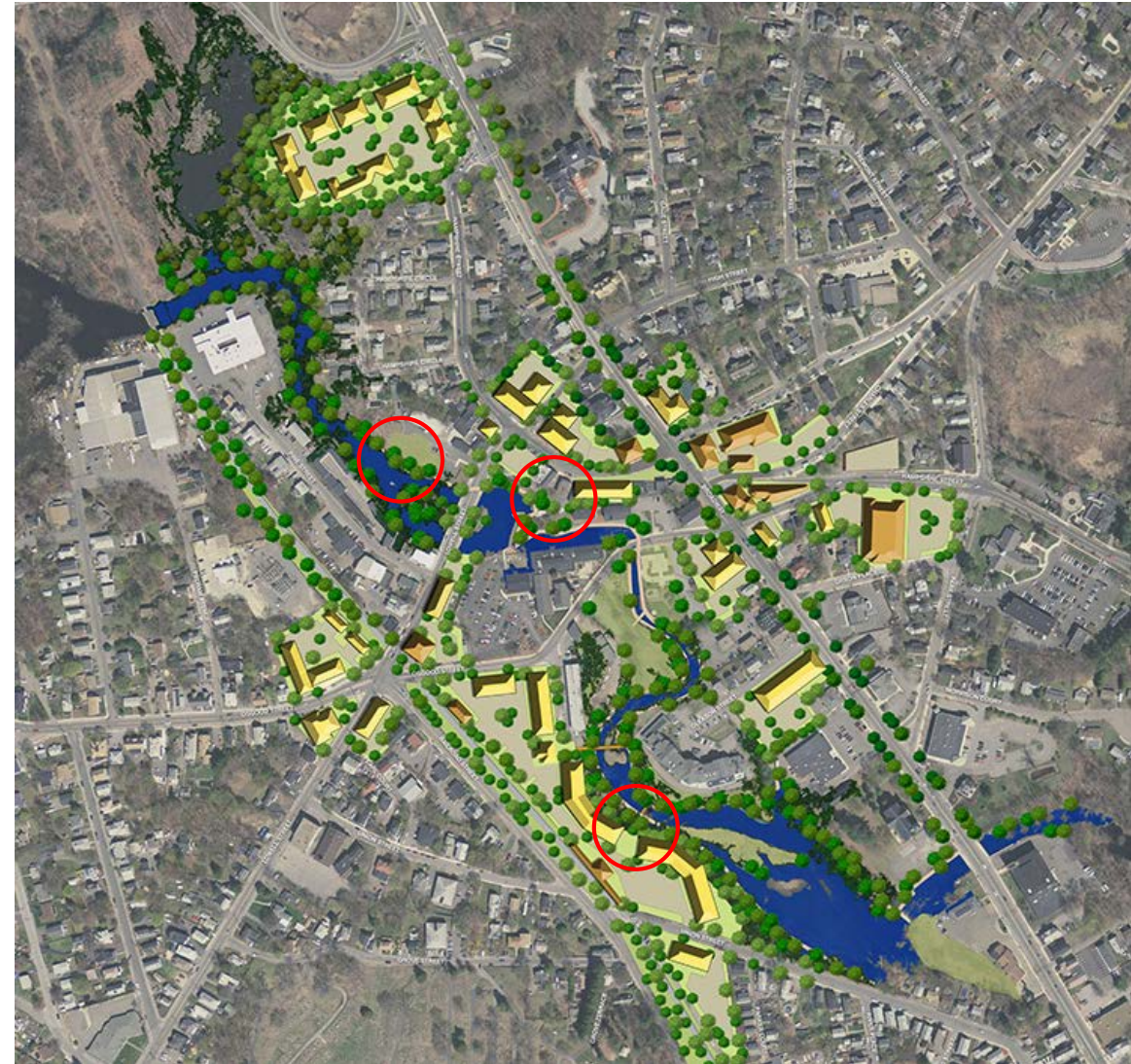
Circulation and Streetscape

- Massworks Funding 2017
- Reintroduction of two way traffic where possible
- Realignment and simplifications of key intersections along Broadway
- Circulation and signalization improvements



Riverfront Access and Open Space

- Footbridge connection improvements
- Links between existing parks
- Additional vantage points
- Interpretive trail



Parking

- Enhancement and expansion of public parking lots
- Reorganization of on street parking
- Shared parking for multiple properties
- Municipal parking lots to support new development



3. How Do We Achieve This?

- New Zoning (Smart Growth Overlay District)
- Design Guidelines to Make Future Development Compatible with the Existing Downtown Character
- Other Initiatives and Actions



Zoning

The Role of New Downtown Zoning

- Establishes the basis for mixed use development
- Provides for appropriate new investment in residential uses which are a fundamental part of contemporary downtowns
- Provides appropriate guidance to promote downtown densities
- Promotes potential state funding assistance for projects and improvements in the downtown



Zoning

Benefits of Chapter 40R Zoning

- Streamlined permitting process: as-of-right, subject to Plan Approval and application of Design Guidelines
- Availability of waivers in the interests of design flexibility and overall project quality
- More rigorous appeal threshold
- Zoning incentive and density bonus payments from the Commonwealth



Zoning

Key Refinements from Current Zoning

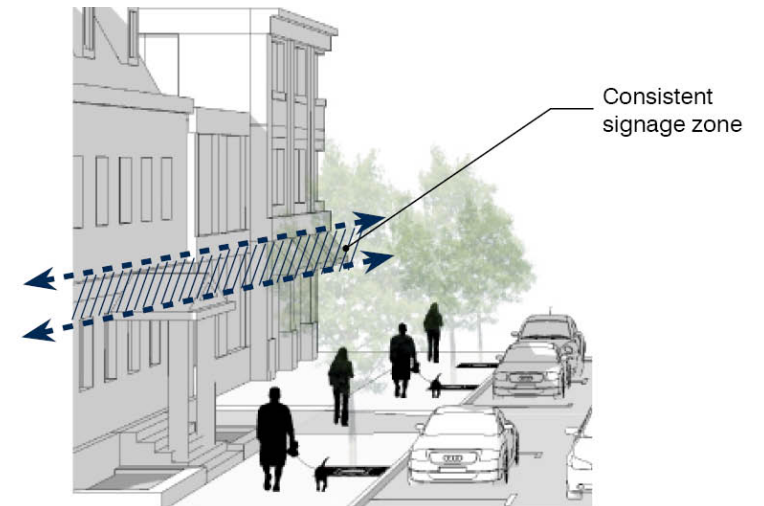
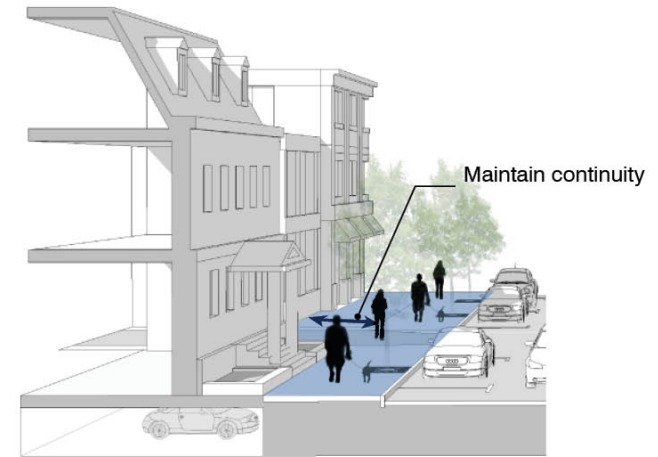
- Greater allowable density to facilitate the creation of smart growth housing opportunities
- Relaxed dimensional regulations
- Allowance of reduced or shared parking where appropriate
- Affordability component for residential projects



Design Guidelines and Review

The Role of Design Guidelines

- Establish expectations and purposes associated with appropriate design for a downtown setting
- Specifically address new construction so that it will contribute to a coherent downtown and be compatible with the historic resources
- Support a successful commercial and retail environment
- Diminish the visual impact of parking lots



Additional Tools and Actions

- Massworks Funding 2017
- CDBG Funding 2017-2018
- New Streetlights 2017
- Rail Trail - \$2 Million Investment
- RFP for Municipal Sites
- BID
- Placemaking Grants



4. Putting it All Together

Community and Economic Benefits

- **Up to 600 new residential units** (450 in new construction and 150 in renovated historic buildings)
- **Up to 80,000 sq. ft. of retail/ commercial space** (60,000 in new construction + 20,000 in renovated historic buildings)
- **Up to 1/2 mile of new Riverfront walks**
- **Up to 1/4 mile of Methuen Rail Trail** within the Downtown area (over 1 mile within the City boundaries & 2.2 Miles from Salem, NH to Lawrence MA)
- Public Spaces
- Parking Enhancements



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