

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 waterfront 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**

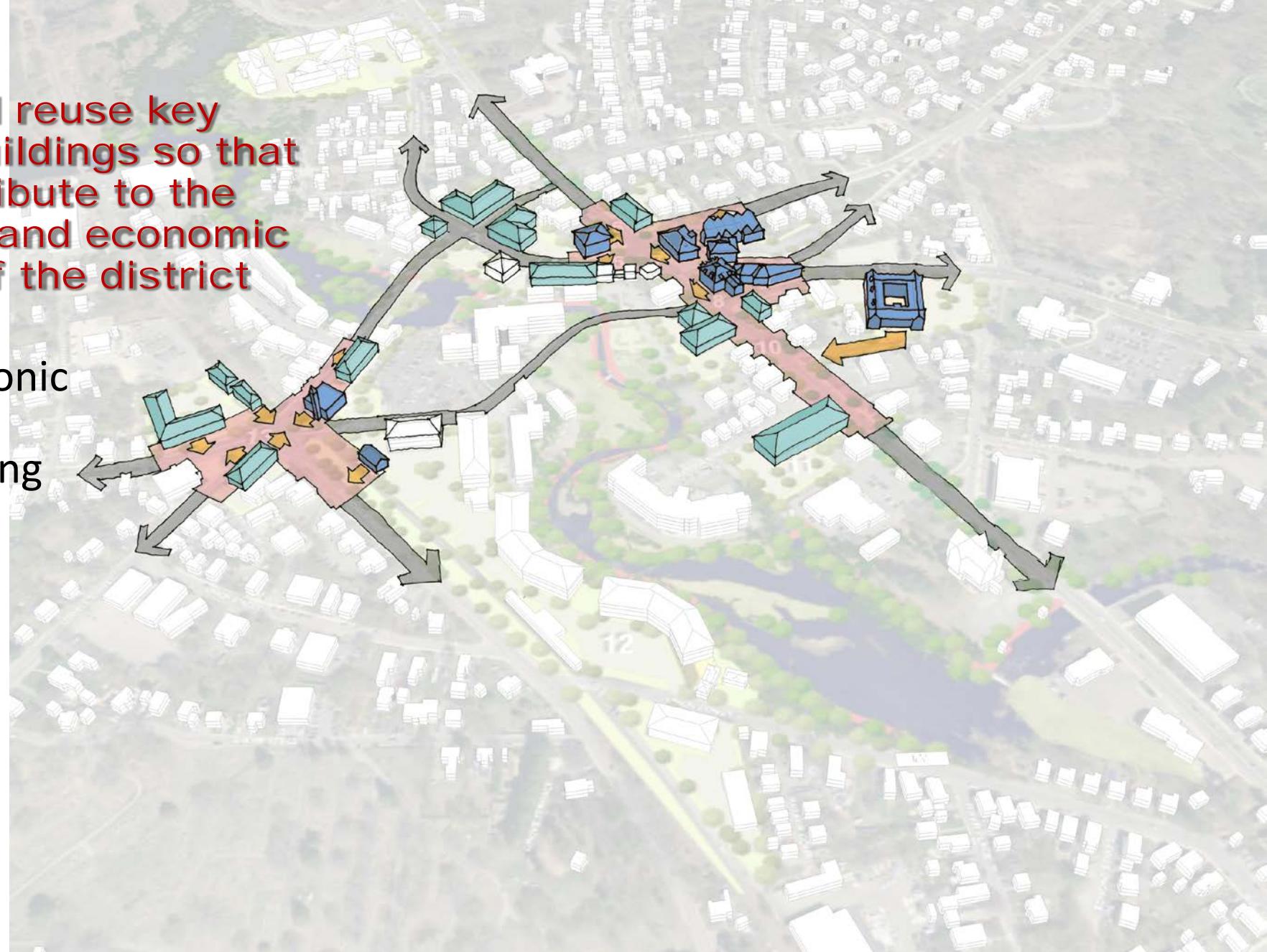
- New residential/mixed use growth
- Create new public and commercial spaces



# 2

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

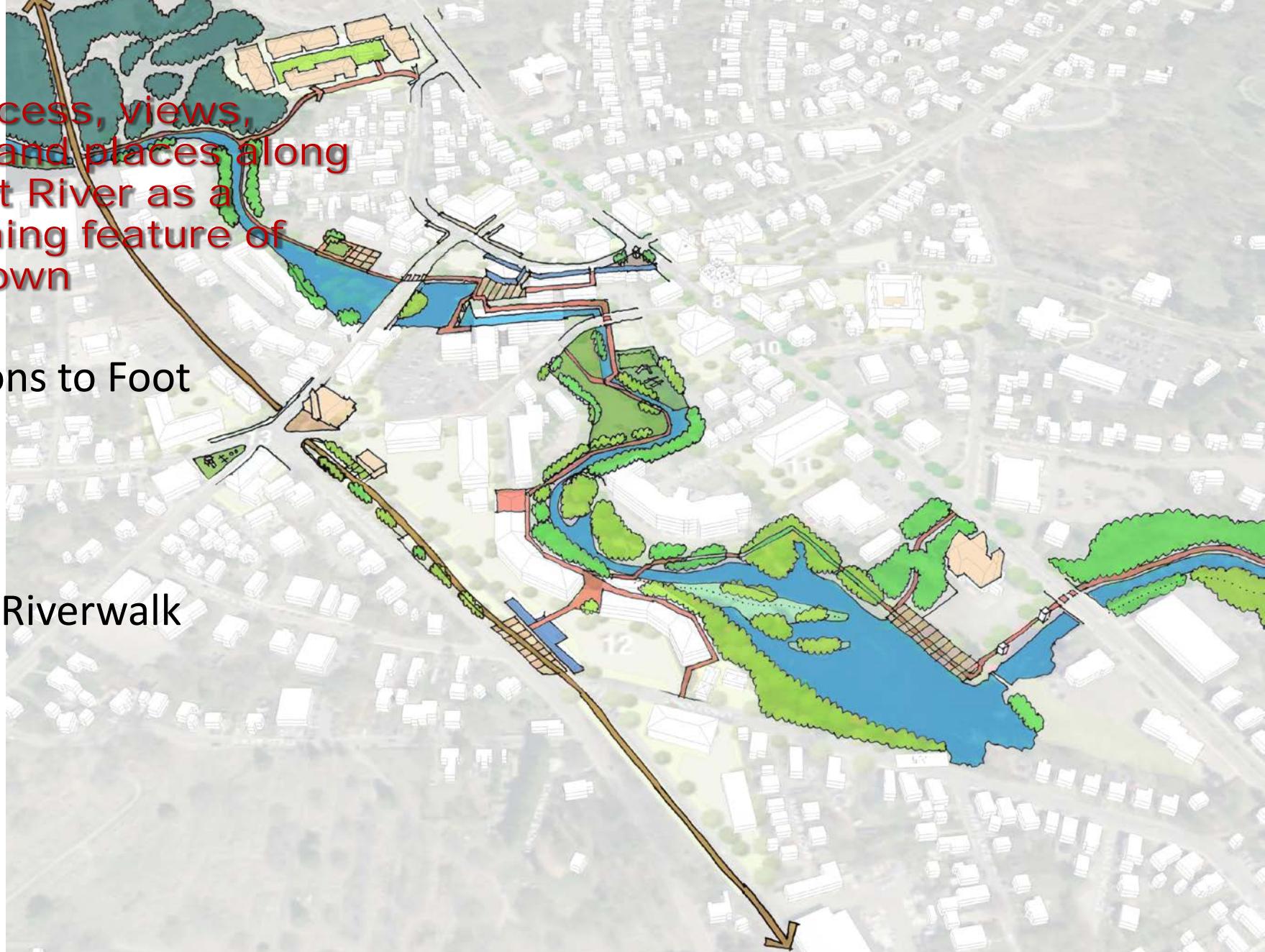
- Red Tavern & Masonic
- Odd Fellows Building
- 1859 House
- Page Building



# 3

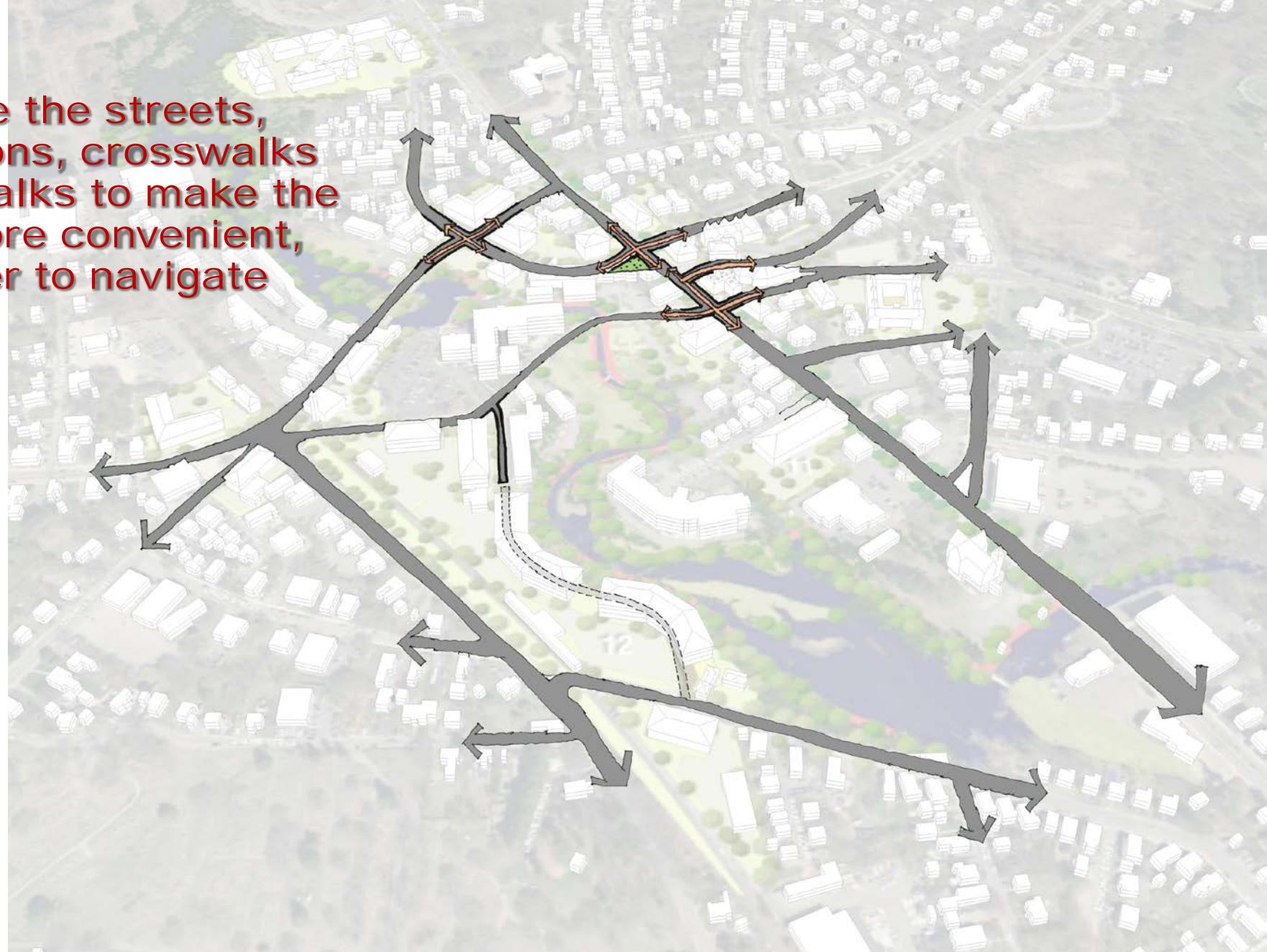
Provide access, views, amenities and places along the Spicket River as a distinguishing feature of the downtown

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



# 4

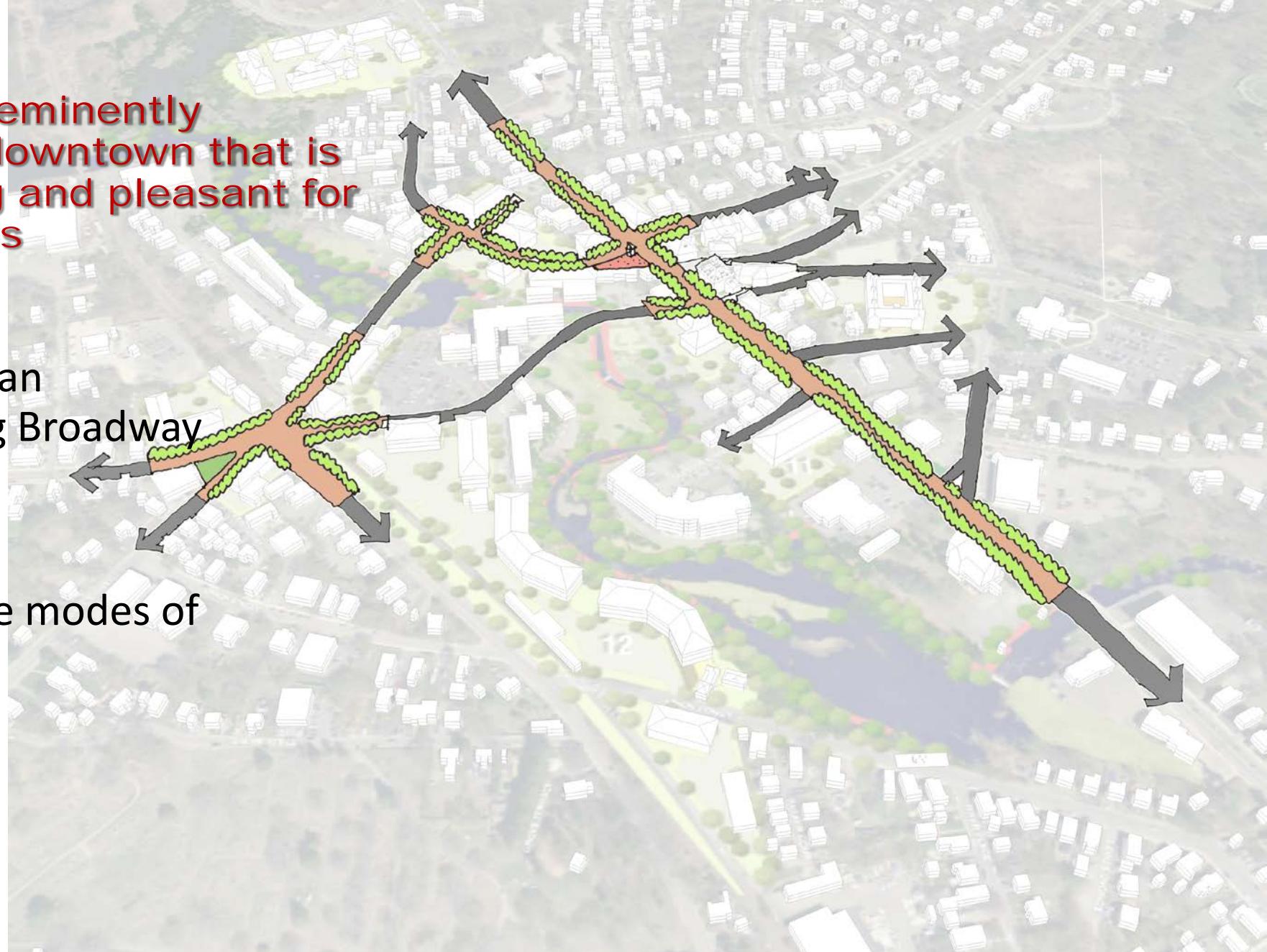
Reorganize the streets, intersections, crosswalks and sidewalks to make the district more convenient, safe, easier to navigate



# 5

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

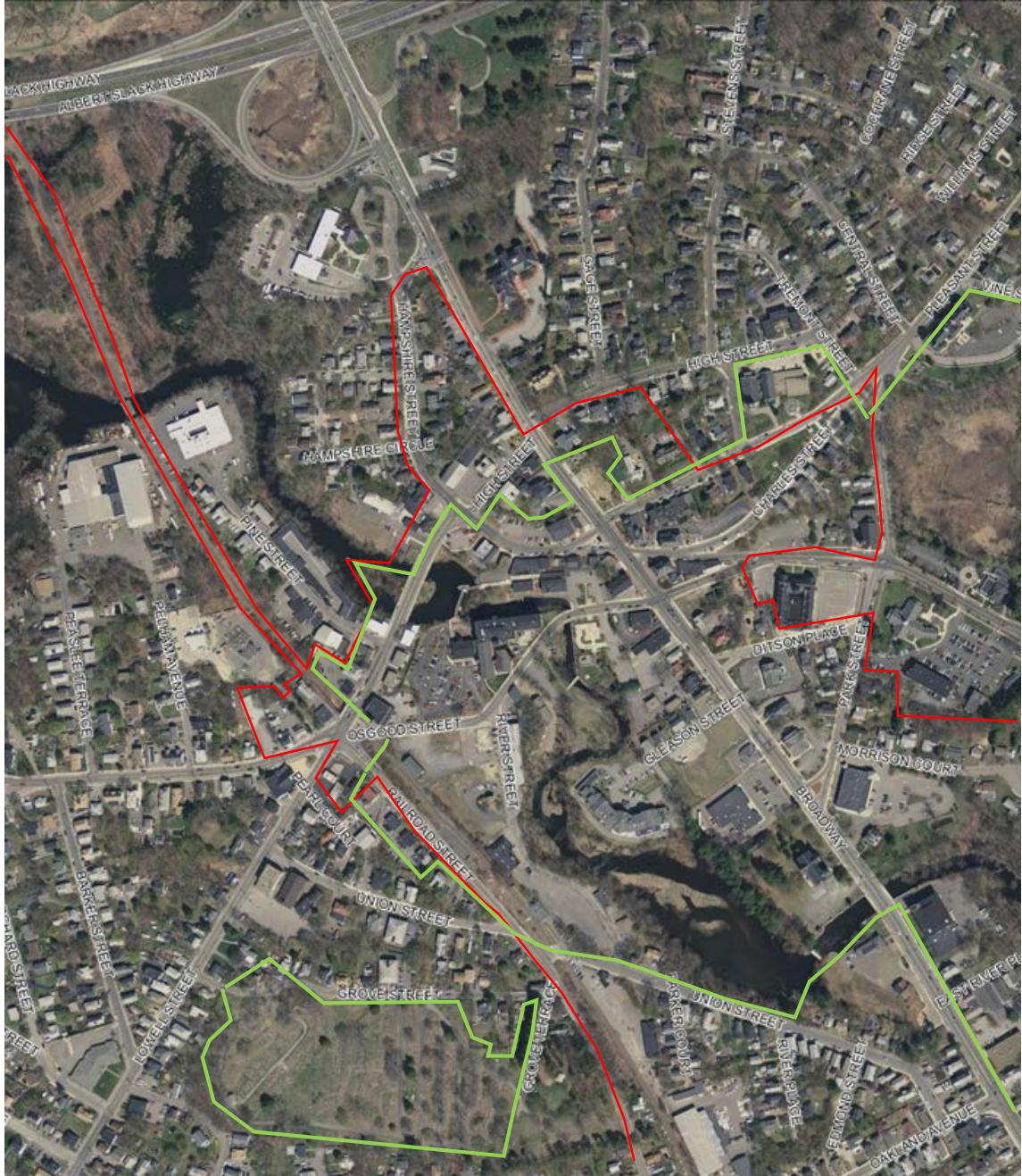
- Improved pedestrian environment along Broadway
- Complete Streets
- Encourage multiple modes of access



# 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)**

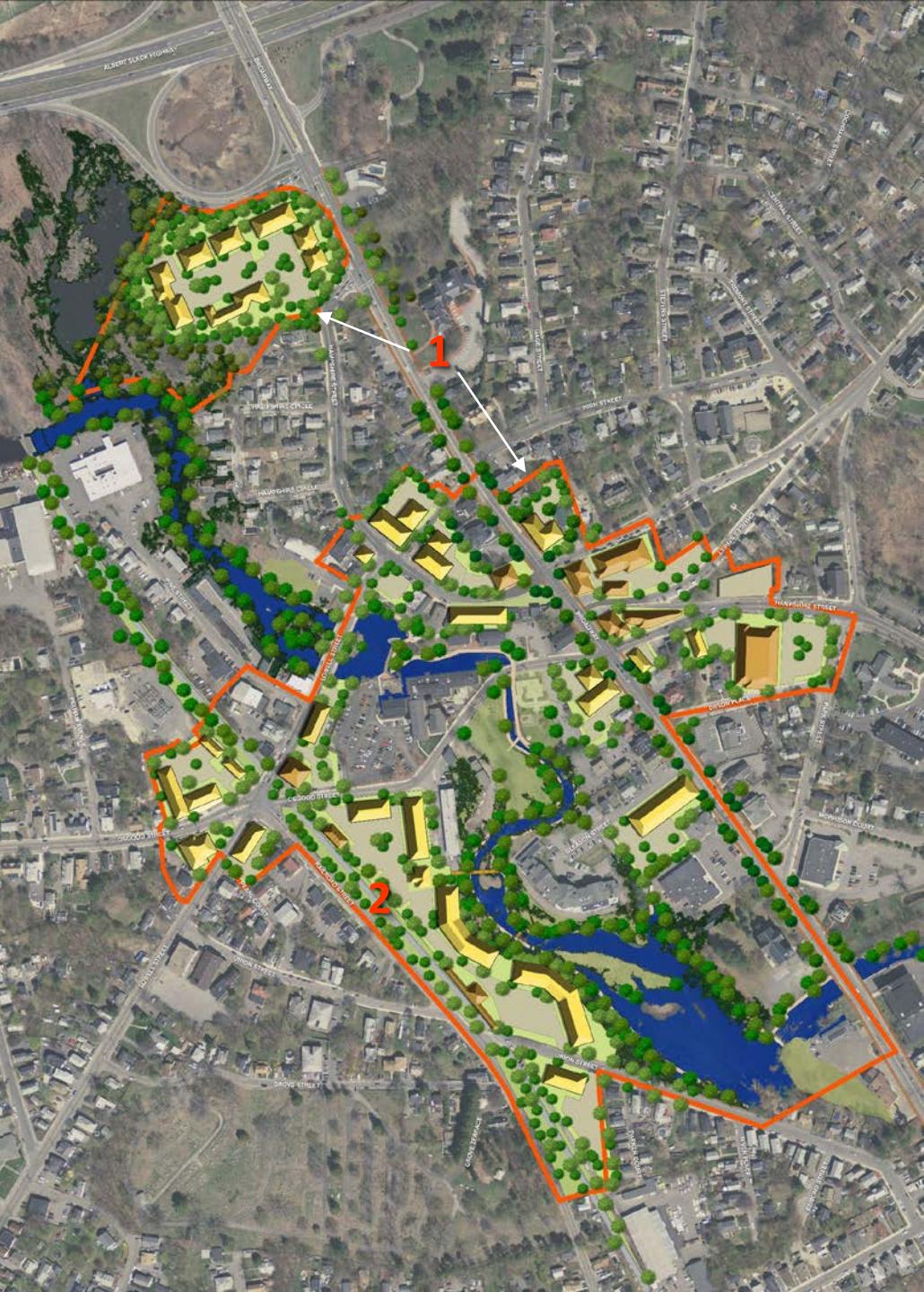
The new rail trail along Railroad Street will create places for bicycling and walking, along with landscaped areas and supporting services.

- **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)**

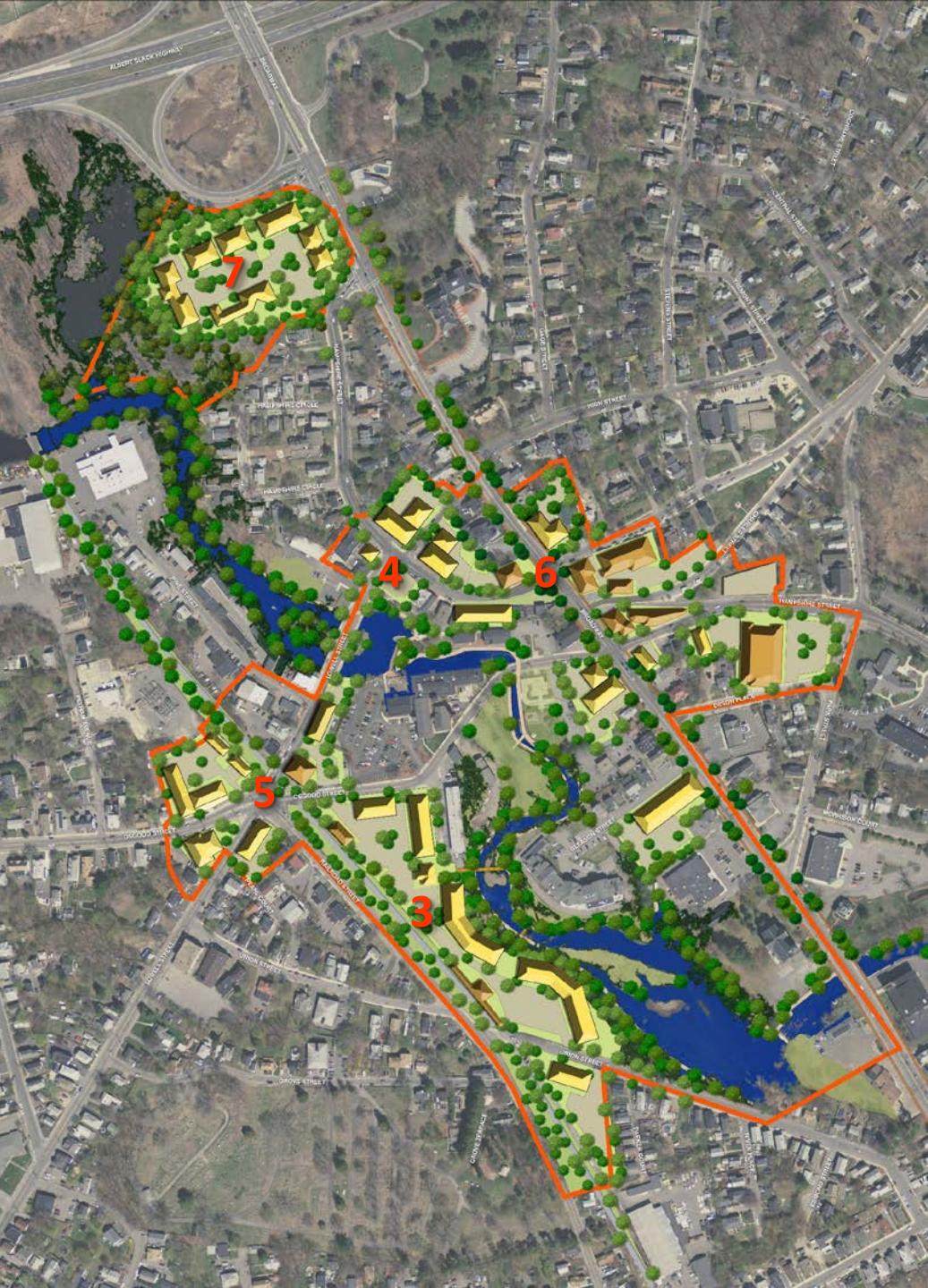
The edges of the Square have significant opportunities for renovation and adaptive reuse of existing historic buildings, new buildings on underutilized properties, and realignment of the streets to create a broad public space while retaining parking spaces in the center of the Downtown.

- **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**

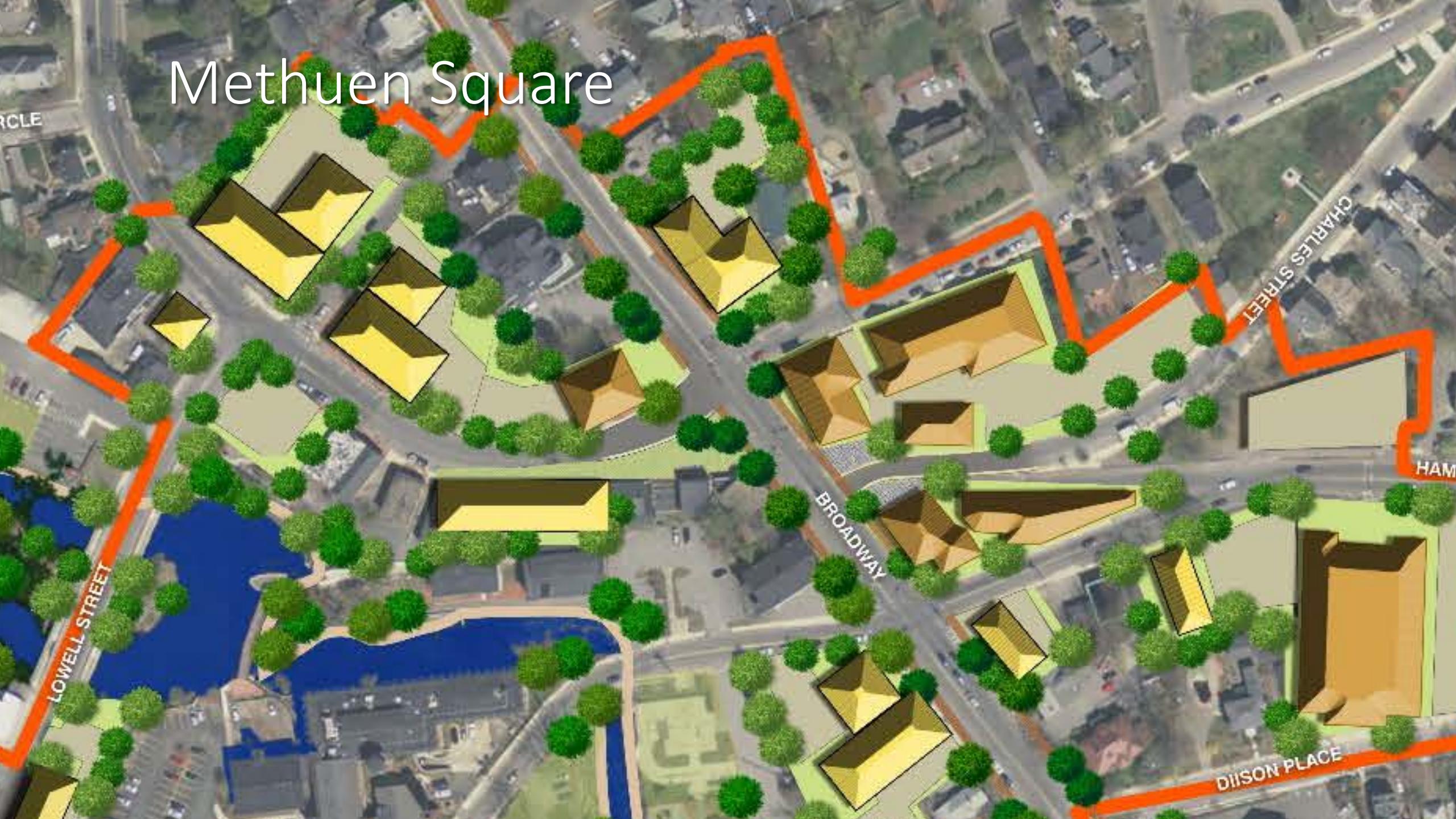


- **Riverfront Access and Open Space**



- **Parking**

# Methuen Square



# Methuen Square



# Riverside



# 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



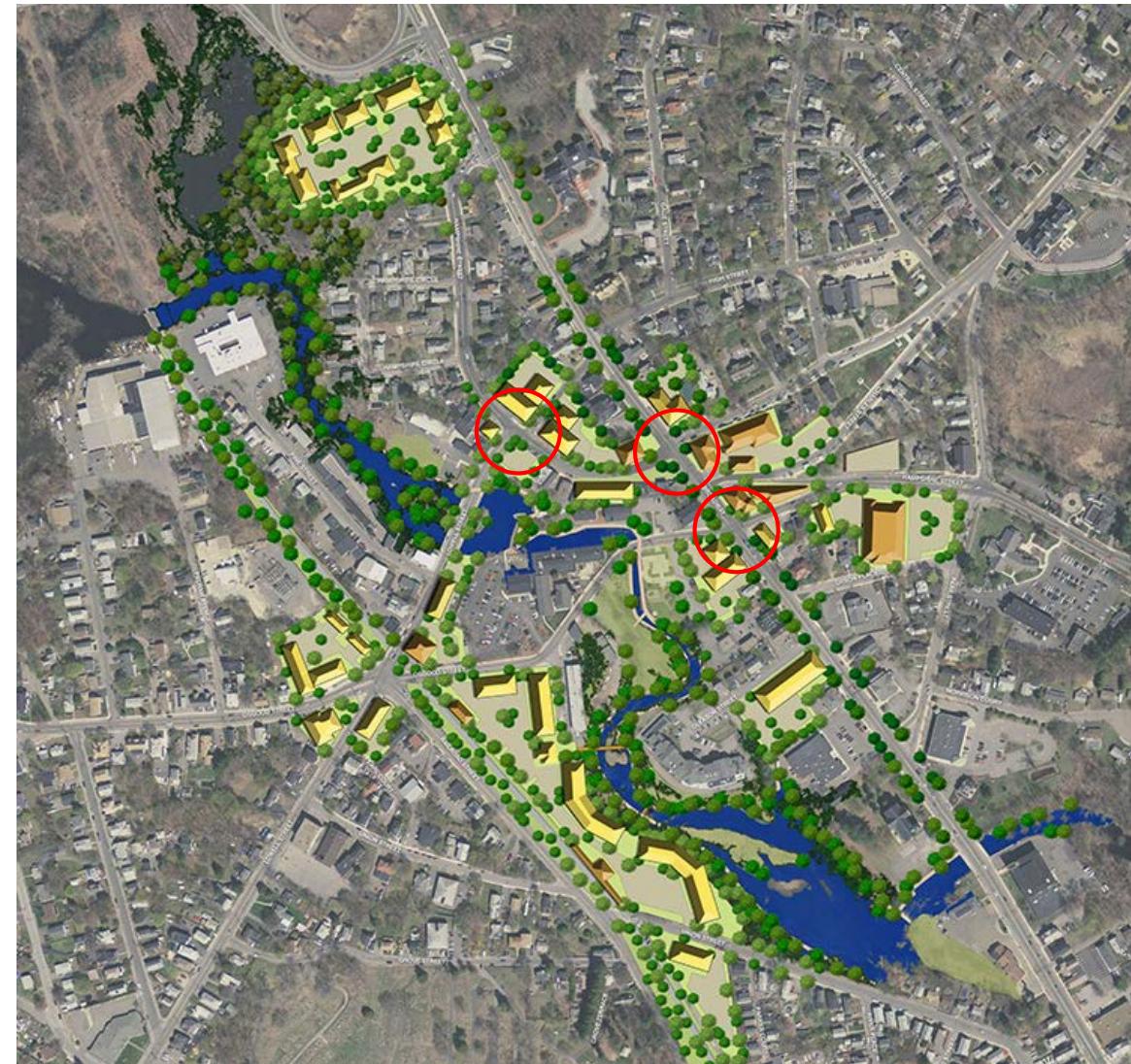
# Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse

- 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

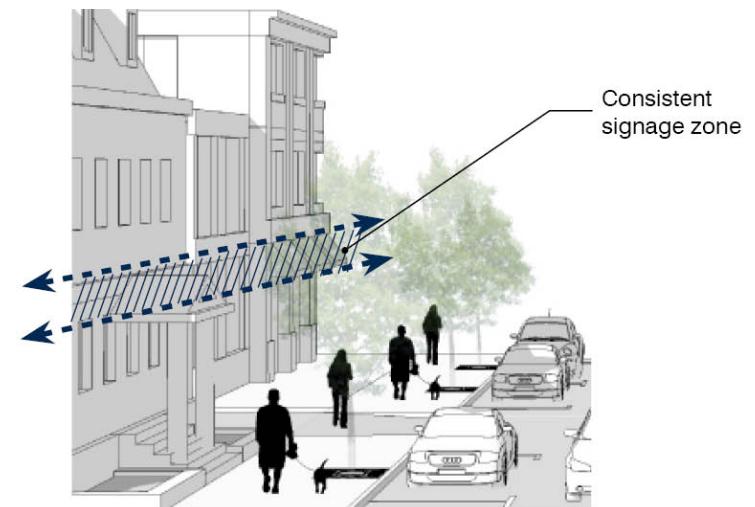
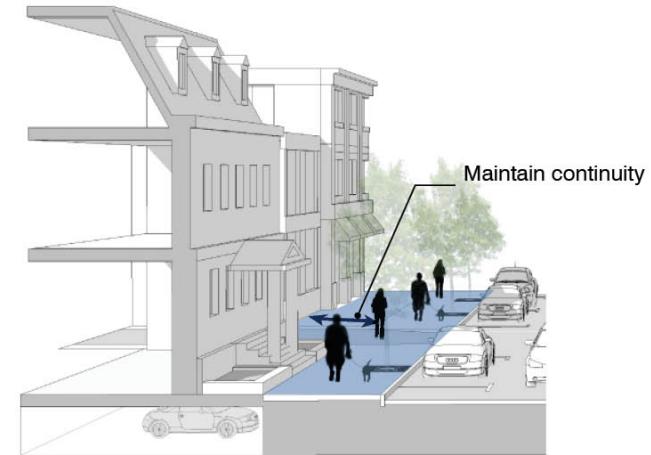
- Greater allowable density to facilitate the creation of smart growth housing opportunities
- Relaxed dimensional regulations
- Allowance of reduced or shared parking where appropriate
- Affordability component for residential projects



# 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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