

Easthampton Downtown Strategic Plan

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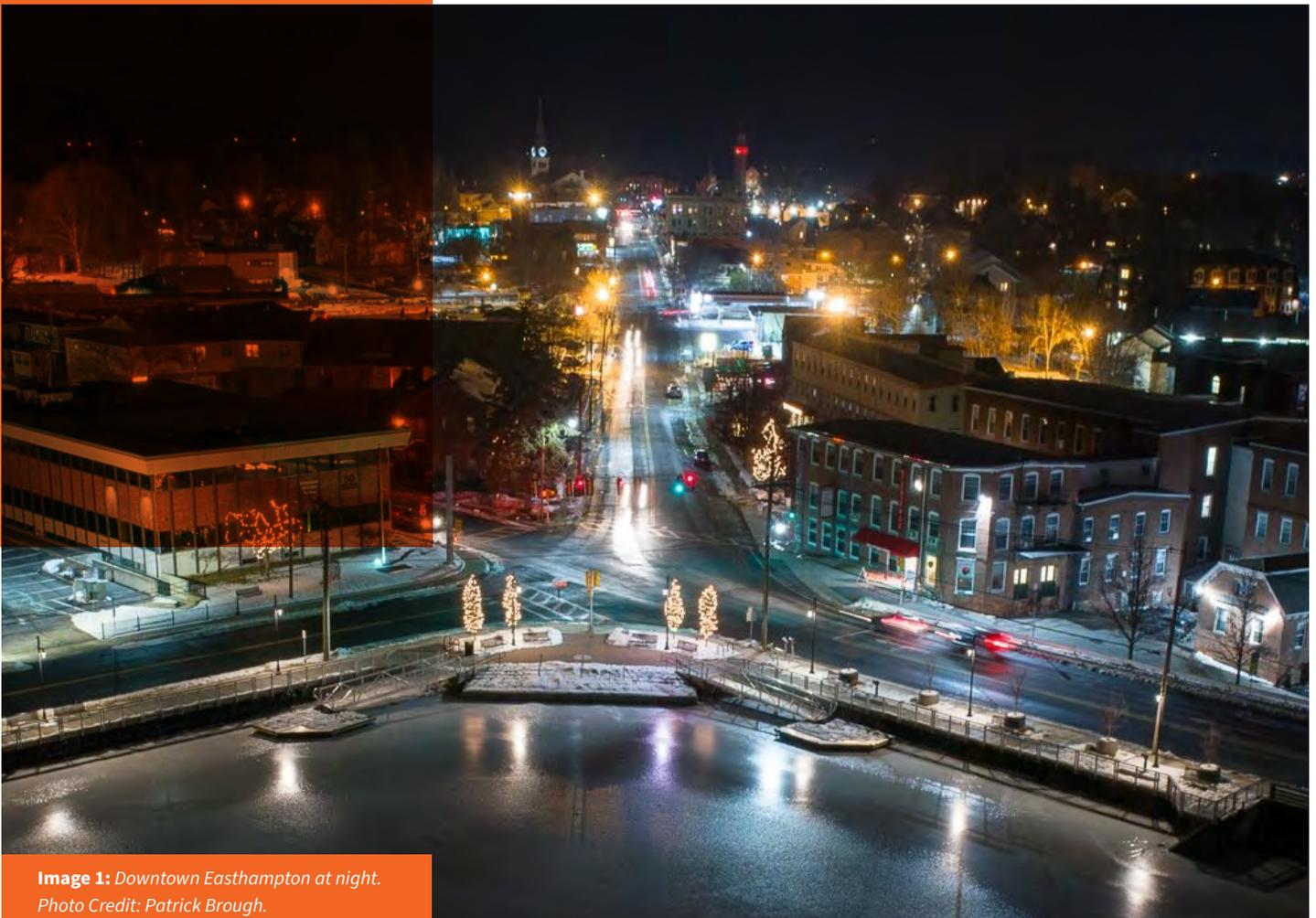


Image 1: Downtown Easthampton at night.
Photo Credit: Patrick Brough.

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March 2020

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Funding

This project was funded by a \$50,000 Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grant (FY2018) and a \$15,000 match from the City's Zoning Incentive Fund.

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1 Introduction and Background



Image 2: A mural on Cottage Street captures the creativity and vibrancy of the Easthampton community.

In May 2018, the City of Easthampton voted in favor of consolidating its 3 downtown Elementary Schools, currently the oldest operating school buildings in Massachusetts, into a new state-of-the-art pre-k through 8 school on the current White Brook Middle School site. This opens up a unique opportunity as 3 large City-owned parcels of prime downtown real estate become available in the next few years.

Recognizing the immense opportunities at hand and the potential challenges that could arise, the City proactively kicked off a Downtown Strategic Plan to gather data and community input to analyze and synthesize into a set of recommendations for implementing the community's vision for the future of their city.

The City of Easthampton has been working to promote and support the revitalization of its historic Downtown. Beginning with the 2008 City's Master Plan, followed by a series of planning studies, zoning updates, infrastructure improvements, and private developments, the Downtown area has been a focus of multiple planning and design initiatives that have contributed to the enhancement of its urban design character and quality of living.

These qualities were curated by progressive planning, community engagement and

implementation efforts led by the City. Despite these successes, the challenges with redevelopment, walkability, and parking have continued to constrain the quality of life and potential for economic growth.

The Easthampton Downtown Strategic Plan fits into a larger planning effort with the intent to review and assess current progress while supporting the ongoing planning efforts by integrating them into a coordinated vision and strategy. The Downtown Strategic Plan also identifies new opportunities for economic growth and community development given market trends and potential updates to existing plans and regulations.

Amid all this change and progress, is a vibrant, creative community growing increasingly more visible as a regional destination in Western Massachusetts. The walkable, diverse downtown is thriving with a mix of uses and creates a true central gathering place for the City.

Downtown Easthampton is home to a wide range of businesses from small businesses along Cottage Street to large convenience shopping along Union Street. Nashawannuck Pond serves as an open space anchor for the Downtown with a new Boardwalk, nearby parks, and connections to the Manhan Rail Trail. The restaurants and businesses along Cottage Street enhance the Downtown with nighttime activities, and CitySpace's long-term lease of Old Town Hall is planned to provide a cultural and entertainment anchor for the community. The Manhan Rail Trail connects Downtown with the Pleasant Street Mills

and surrounding communities, which have become home to many artists, businesses, and cultural activities. The Downtown serves as the civic center of Easthampton with City Hall and other municipal functions clustered close by. Downtown Easthampton is also transected by several major routes that traverse the region, amplifying the town's visibility as a destination to people traveling through by car. All of these qualities have allowed the Downtown to thrive.

The purpose of the Downtown Strategic Plan is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the Downtown and establish strategies that address these challenges and leverage opportunities to enhance economic development and quality of life for everyone.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) funded this Study through the Planning Assistance Grant Program with matching funds from the City's Zoning Incentive Fund. Mayor LaChapelle appointed the Sounding Board – a group composed of business owners, residents, and elected officials to oversee the this planning study. City Planner Jeff Bagg acted as the City's Project Manager and lead contact. The City hired the Harriman team comprised of Harriman, RKG Associates, and Tighe and Bond as the consultant team for the project.

Jeff Bagg, Director of Planning, Jamie Webb, Assistant Planner, and other staff of the City, provided invaluable assistance throughout the project.

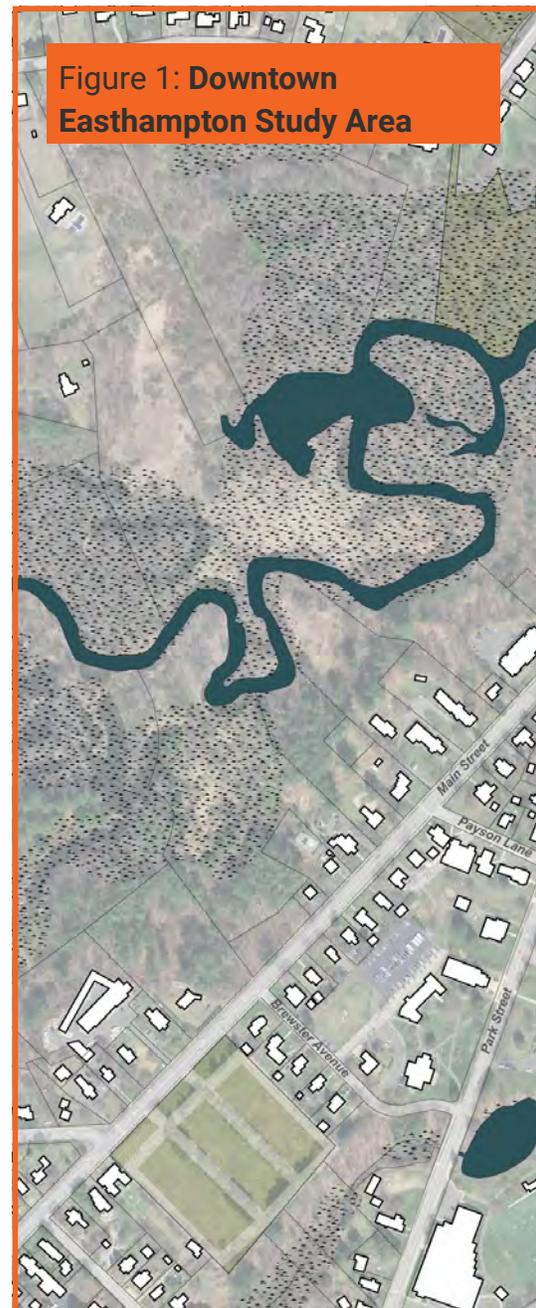


Image 3: Aerial footage showing downtown Easthampton from Union Street looking down Liberty Street. Photo Credit: Patrick Brough.

The planning effort was conducted over the period of one year. The study analyzed the existing conditions, developed different conceptual alternatives, and developed final plan recommendations with input from the community and the Sounding Board for the implementation of a community-driven vision for the future of the downtown area.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographical extent and location of the Downtown study area.

The overall purpose of this Strategic Plan is to coordinate, gather, and synthesize a wide range of community input into a cohesive and innovative strategic plan for the downtown area's economic growth, sustainability, and future needs.





2 Strategic Plan Goals



Image 4: Participants look at various options for several key areas downtown at the second public workshop.

The following goals have been compiled from the review and preliminary assessment of data and relevant documents, as well as input from the Sounding Board, the Planning Department, and the community members and stakeholders who participated in the public engagement process.



Re-use Committee and RFP

Establish a School Re-use Committee to oversee the creation of a Request for Proposals and the selection of responses.



Economic Development

Develop a coordinated vision for the Downtown to enhance economic development opportunities



Municipal Assets

Address redevelopment opportunities and reuse of the municipal assets (Center/Pepin School and Maple Elementary) for their future role in creating a vibrant downtown



Revitalization

Improve the Union Street and Cottage Street corridor as a vibrant commercial district and a creative heart of the community



Shared Parking

Examine opportunities for shared parking to reduce paved surfaces and promote walkability and density



Smart Growth

Investigate 40R District zoning to provide impetus to private investment in the Downtown



Implementation

Provide a coordinated implementation strategy

Maintaining the Momentum of Reinvestment

- State funding has created incentives for recent reinvestment in the Downtown and surrounding mill redevelopments.
- By initiating this process of creating a Downtown Strategic Plan, the City is taking a proactive approach to unlocking future investments.
- A clear and engaging plan will direct the use of public funds and private investments to generate positive outcomes for the future of the City of Easthampton.
- Community Engagement should focus on bringing all the stakeholders to the table, including small business owners, residents, and other users of the downtown.
- The basis for the vision for the Downtown and related implementation strategies will be direction and consensus from the community process, while including a clear and predictable path for private investments.

Leveraging Cultural Capital for Placemaking

- Arts and culture have flourished in Easthampton due to the sustained efforts of the City from 2005 onwards.
- Easthampton City Arts, the recent designation of the Cottage Street Cultural District, and ongoing arts programming and cultural events have created enthusiasm and provided visibility for the Easthampton Downtown and surrounding Mills District.
- A strong community around arts and culture attracts new and creative small businesses and residents who add their contributions to the area.
- Leveraging this cultural capital for placemaking can further encourage revitalization that improves the quality of life for all the residents.
- This enthusiasm promotes revitalization which can help strengthen communities and drive social change.
- The City can boost the revitalization by unlocking creative infill developments or new investments, investing in public infrastructure and open space improvements, strengthening connections and removing hurdles.

Clearing Hurdles to Magnify Opportunities

- Uncertainty and inaction can impede growth in thriving downtowns. If the opportunities are not clarified and untangled in time, the interest in investment recedes or finds other opportunities stagnating economic development.
- Revitalization requires creating synergies and building confidence between different stakeholder groups, including property owners, tenants, residents, and users. The city can act as a facilitator between different stakeholder groups ensuring that shared agreements do not reduce the utility and function of the private property and preserve private rights.
- Educating stakeholders on the benefits, creating mechanisms and tools for shared arrangements and mediating for unified community vision can unlock opportunities and create a clear path for future investment.

Objective Evaluation to Build Community Consensus

- Following the decision to re-purpose the school buildings, the City of Easthampton must now determine how to best take advantage of the building and site for other uses.



Image 5: *The Manhan Rail Trail.*

3 Existing Conditions Analysis

- Downtown Character
- Land Use
- Parcel Evaluation
- Parking
- Parking Utilization
- Susceptibility to Change
- Summary of Market Analysis

The planning of the Downtown Easthampton requires an overall understanding of the existing conditions and trends in ownership patterns, land use, economics, development, traffic, parking and many other factors.



Image 6: The view of the new boardwalk (completed 2015) from Nashawannuk Pond. Photo credit: Patrick Brough

3.1 Downtown Character

This context for planning consists of both opportunities and potential barriers that must be considered for successful implementation of the community's vision. This existing condition analysis underlines some of the important observations that emerged as part of the research phase of the project.

The review and analysis of existing conditions in the Downtown Easthampton study area is organized in the following categories:

1. Downtown Character
2. Land Use
3. Parcel Evaluation
4. Parking
5. Parking Utilization
6. Susceptibility to Change
7. Summary of Market Analysis

Downtown Character

The Downtown study area can be characterized as a long commercial and mixed-use corridor that extends along Main, Union, and Cottage Streets, from Main Street Park in the north to the intersection of Cottage, Clark, and Holyoke in the south. The location of the Pleasant St. Mills was not studied as part of the downtown area, but is in close proximity to the study area and accessible by the rail trail from Union Street and situated within the same zoning district. The potential for incorporating it into an element of the downtown was outside of the scope of this plan, but should be considered in future studies.

Built form and streetscape vary along the corridor, from traditional urban center with closely organized commercial uses and storefronts that encourage and support walking to a quasi-suburban character punctuated with alternating big-box stores/strip mall land uses and large parking lots. This quasi-suburban character is a function of the prevalent large footprint building types that serve today's chain businesses. Large parking lots organized facing the street and breaking the continuity of active storefronts erode the pedestrian environment. Some of these areas lack any significant separation between cars and areas dedicated to pedestrians, other than the type of paving materials.

Three general areas/subareas could be identified along the corridor:

1-A traditional Downtown Core, extending along Main Street from Pleasant to Union Street, and continuing along Union, from Main Street to Chapman Avenue.

This area is characterized by old historic buildings, including architectural landmarks such as the old Town Hall (today's CitySpace) and the Easthampton Congregational Church. The design of these iconic landmarks is complemented by clusters of commercial buildings from the late 1800s, which contribute to the distinctive design character of the street with their renovated storefronts and outdoor café seating areas. The diverse cluster of uses in this area makes it a convenient location where you can park once to visit multiple places. Pepin and Center Elementary Schools are located on the periphery of this area. While the northern side of the Main Street shows a strong character with old historic buildings

and active uses, the southern side of Main Street is comprised of recent buildings with vacancies.

2-A growing Cultural District along Cottage Street, from Union Street to the intersection of Clark and Holyoke Streets.

This area has an attractive village character due to the narrow street right-of-way and the human scale of its commercial buildings (one- to two-stories high). Thoughtfully designed pedestrian-oriented signs further enhance an appropriate sense of scale and place. Since its designation as a Cultural District in 2012, the area has grown its arts programming and recognition as a regional cultural center. Renovated historic mills at the corner of Union and Cottage and the development of a waterfront promenade along Nashawannuck Pond contribute to the enhancement of the pedestrian character as a place for arts, shopping, and recreation. The Maple Street School is located on the periphery of this area.

3-The Manhan Rail Trail crosses Union Street at roughly the midpoint distance between Chapman Street and the Cottage Street intersection.

This segment of Union Street is the less distinctive and less pedestrian-friendly portion of the commercial corridor due to the predominance of car-oriented uses, which are set back from the street and have extensive parking areas along the sidewalk with scarce landscaping or visual buffer. While the Manhan bike trail has become an extraordinary asset for city-wide access and tourism, bicycle and pedestrian connections from the Trail to the Downtown Core and the Cultural District are currently poor and underserved.

There are proposed infrastructure improvements to reconstruct Union Street, currently in the final design stages. These improvements will be crucial to improve pedestrian safety along this stretch of Union Street connecting the entire Union Street area to the Manhan Rail Trail and other parts of the city. However, street reconstruction by itself may not be sufficient to create a coherent and attractive urban environment, unless the redevelopment of some of the largest properties with parking frontages introduces landscaping or storefronts to transform the existing sidewalks into a more pedestrian-friendly environment with active uses.

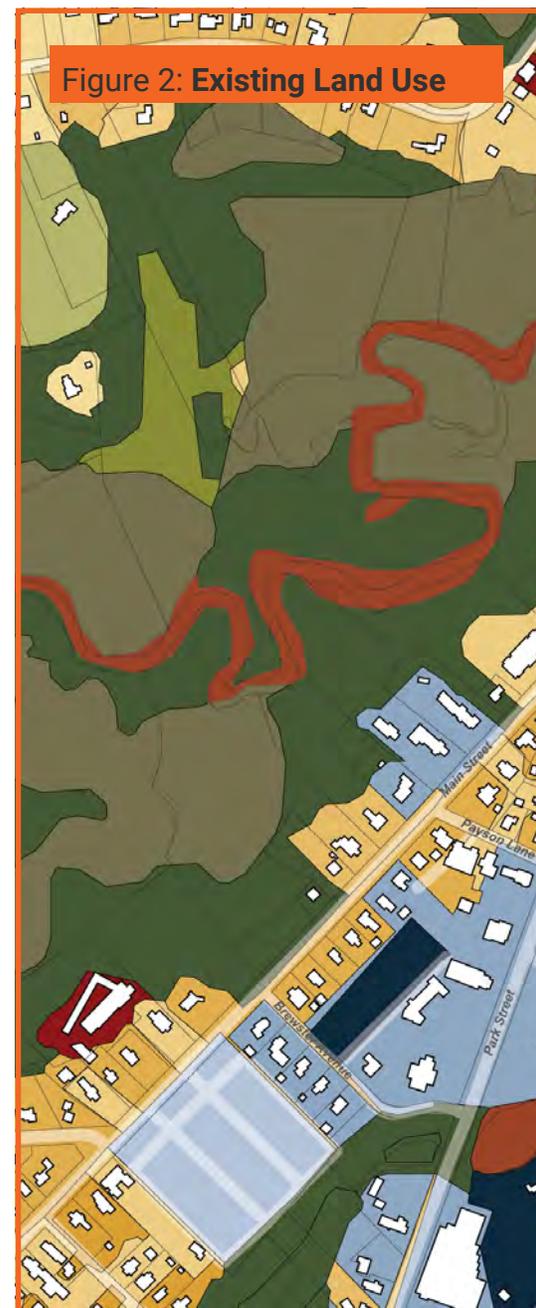
Land Use

Existing land use patterns are represented in Figure 2, with commercial uses generally shown in red, residential uses in yellow, institutional/public uses in a blue-gray color, and industrial uses or former mill buildings in creamy white. As the map shows, the majority of properties in the Downtown are commercial, although there are a few formerly industrial properties along Cottage Street (including renovated mill buildings that incorporate housing and institutional uses) and a few institutional/public properties along Main Street (including CitySpace, religious institutions, and elementary school buildings). Very small clusters of single-family, duplex and small multifamily dwellings are located along the periphery of the district.

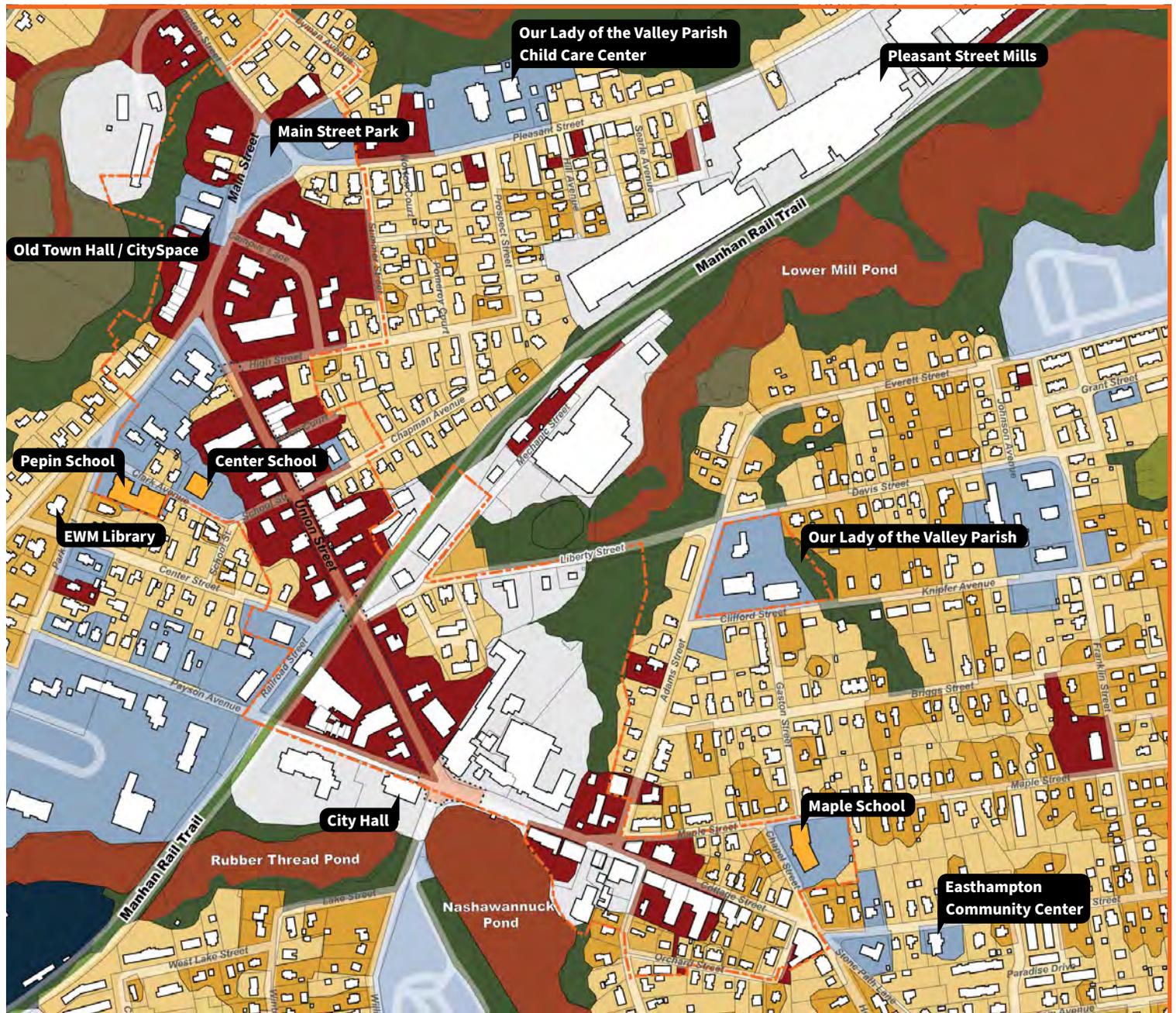
There are few residential or mixed-use buildings in the Downtown, generally consisting of redeveloped former industrial mills along Cottage Street. The Union Street



corridor is commercial in nature while the periphery of the Downtown Easthampton near the Cottage Street area has converted to mixed uses with small commercial offices on the ground floor and a mix of residential and commercial on the upper floors. With the Downtown Strategic Plan, it will be critical to define the periphery of the Downtown area as mixed uses so that they gradually transition into surrounding residential neighborhoods. An analysis of the current Smart Growth Overlay Zoning District (SGZD), which is primarily intended to promote mixed-use development and affordable housing, is provided in chapter 6 of this document.



3.2 Land Use

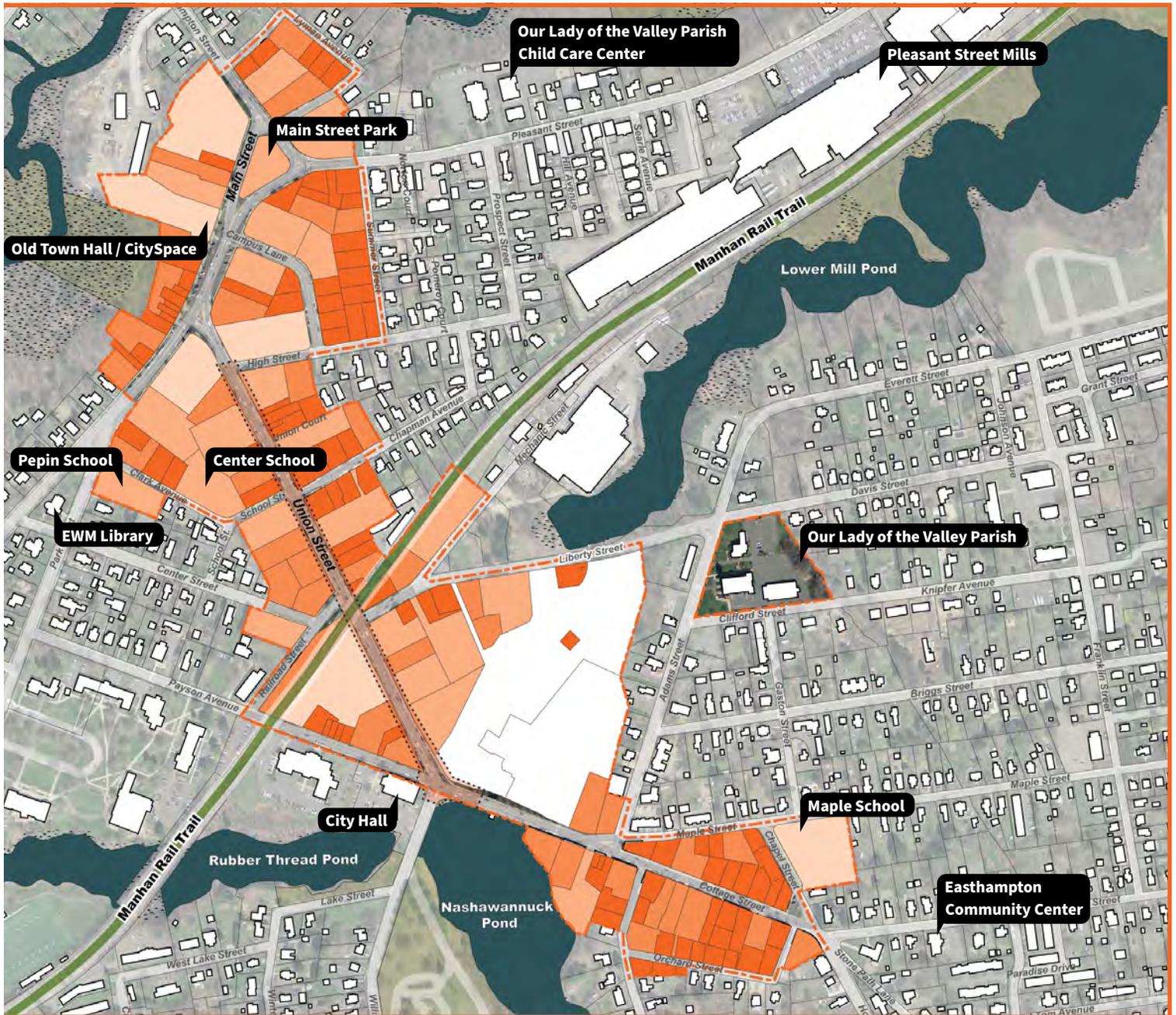


Parcel Evaluation

Downtown Easthampton has varying parcel sizes ranging from less than 10,000 SF to more than 4 Acres. The Cottage Street area is mainly comprised of small narrow parcels with individual property owners. This is reflected in the one- to two-story development patterns in this area. Maple Street Elementary is one of the larger parcels in this subarea. The Union Street corridor contains a mix of parcel sizes. The smaller parcels in the Union Street area have buildings fronting the street with active frontages, while the larger parcels have strip mall development patterns to accommodate the land uses and related parking requirements along the street. Larger parcels with underutilized uses or low rent-producing uses are most susceptible to change because of the financially feasible redevelopment potential. Smaller parcels with different owners are challenging to redevelop because of the lack of financial incentive to assemble the parcels and undertake redevelopment. Small parcels mainly transform with the reinvestment in the existing buildings with renovation and addition. The smaller parcels and buildings; however, contribute to the vibrancy and variety of uses in the Cottage, Upper Union, Main Street, and Mill areas. In addition to this development pattern, some of the medium to large parcels have active revenue-generating uses which may not change in the long term.



3.3 Parcel Evaluation



Parking

This section documents the existing parking conditions in Downtown Easthampton. Data collection efforts in the Summer of 2019 identified existing parking assets, their regulation, how they are used today, and the City's current parking management strategies.

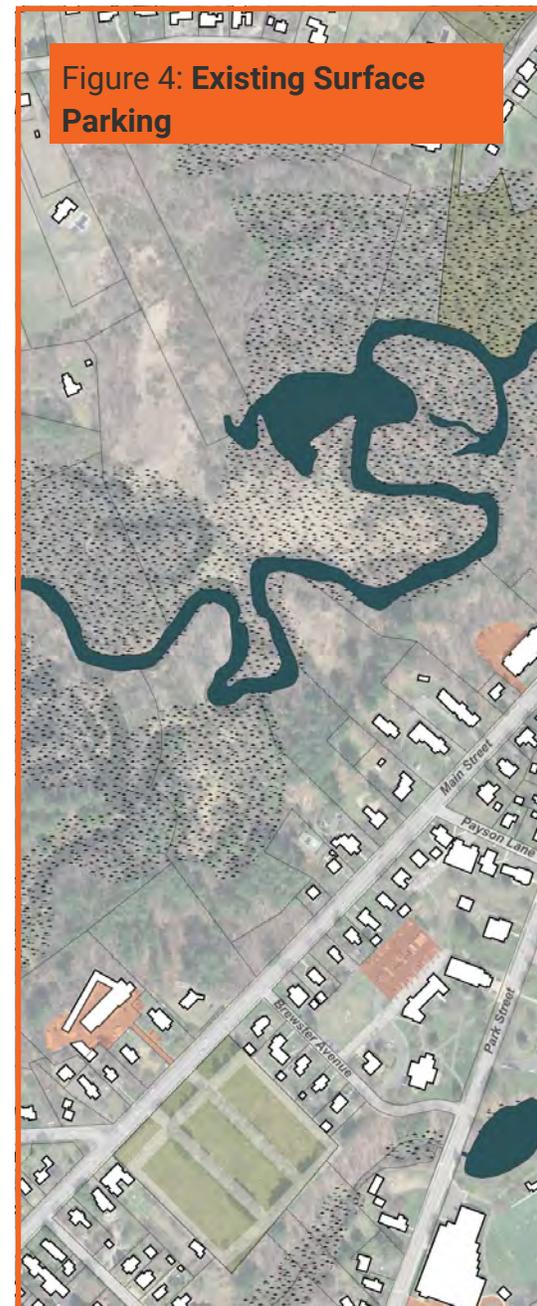
The Downtown Study Area was utilized to effectively measure parking usage. The study area encompasses many private lots serving local businesses, along with one municipal lot along Cottage Street. City Hall municipal parking is out of the Downtown Study Area but is included as a part of this parking analysis because of its close proximity to Downtown. Most businesses rely on the limited on-street parking or their own parking lot, but informal agreements exist to share parking between businesses to support those with limited on-site parking supply. On-street parking exists along Cottage Street, Union Street, and Main Street. Some of these parking spaces are clearly marked while in some other places the parking exists within a wide shoulder with unclear regulations.

There are several Transportation Improvement Projects (TIP) both recently completed and currently in the works for downtown Easthampton. In planning for upcoming improvements on Union Street, anticipated parking impacts were studied by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. of Worcester (vhb) - the firm hired by the City to carry out the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, completed in 2017. Their analysis found that along Union Street there are 65 existing on-street parking spaces, but 8 of them are considered illegal because they are too close

to crosswalks, driveways, or intersections. As part of the Union St. TIP, the number of on-street parking spaces would be reduced to 35.

Based on the field inventory conducted in May 2019, there are approximately 2000 parking spaces in the Downtown Easthampton study area overall. As shown in Figure 6, the vast majority of the parking supply (86%) is off-street/permit-designated parking (parking for an apartment or business that is restricted to designated users like tenants and employees) - approximately 671 Spaces, and Off-Street Non-Residential parking (Business parking including customer parking) - approximately 1225 Spaces.

Some businesses and owners of these Off-Street Non-Residential parking informally allow other patrons to park without penalty. There are approximately 118 spaces in the two Off-Street Public/Undesignated lots including 92 spaces in the City Hall lot and 26 spaces in the Cottage Street Public Parking lot. In addition to these Off-Street parking spaces, there are approximately 213 On-Street spaces. The distribution of the On-Street spaces is shown in Figure 4. On-street parking supply is marked along Cottage Street, Union Street, and Main Street, but may need periodic maintenance and regular enforcement, and consideration of posted lime limits and regulation changes.



3.4 Parking



Table 1: Total Parking within Selected Area

	Spaces Available	
Off-Street Parking	Permit / Designated Parking	±671
	Non-Residential Parking	± 1,225
	Public / Undesignated Parking	±118
	Total	± 2,014
On-Street Parking	1 Hour Parking	± 200
	15 Minute Parking	± 8
	No Regulation	± 5
	Total	± 213
Total Parking Available		± 2,227

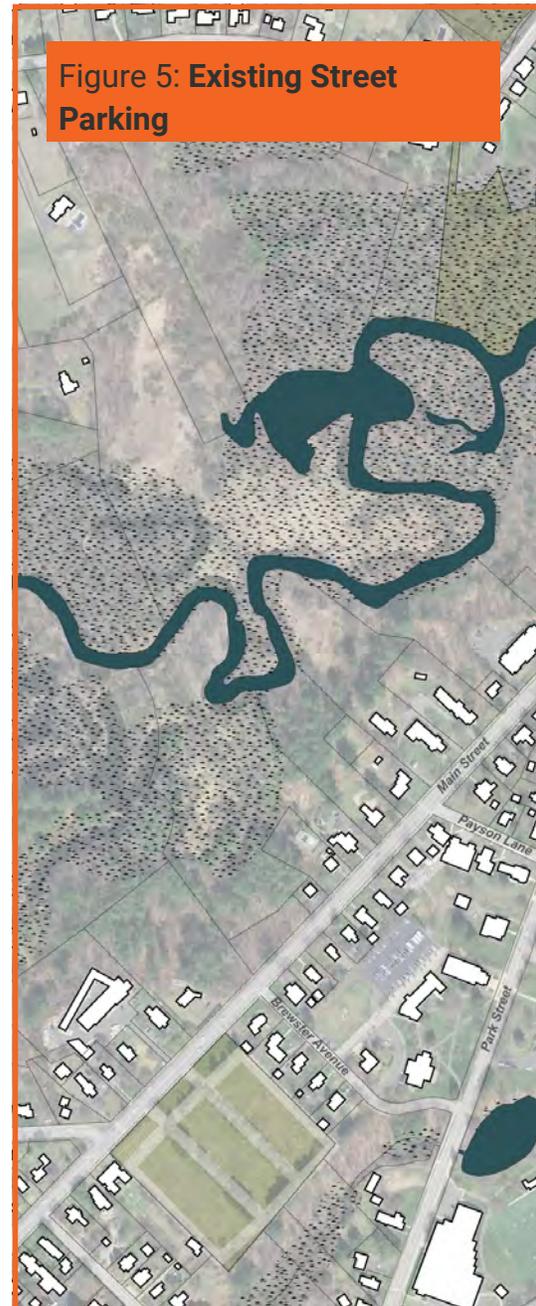


Figure 5: Existing Street Parking



Image 7: The parking lot at the corner of Chapel Street and Maple Street.



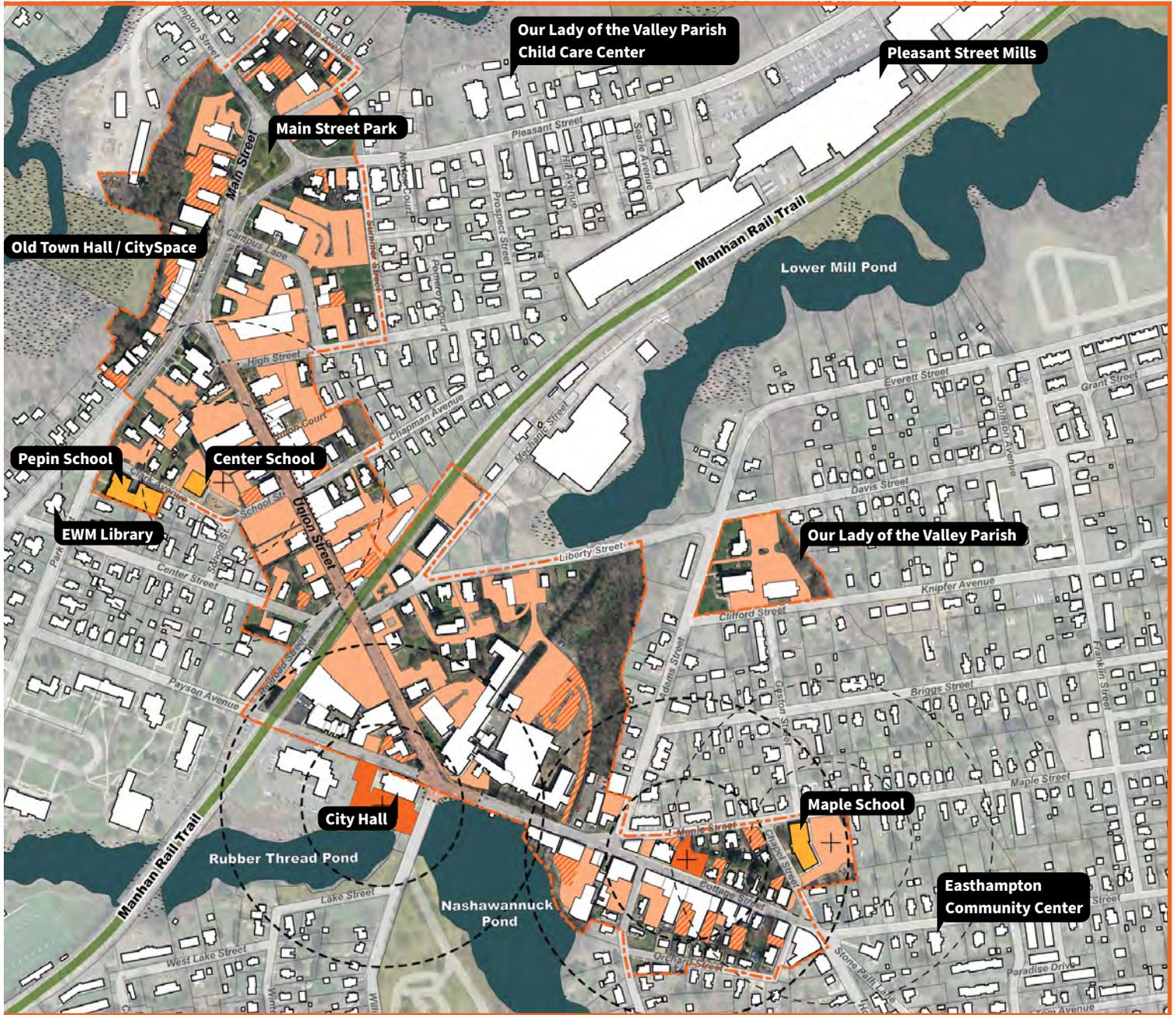
Potential Parking Inventory

Public Parking = Off-street public or undesignated parking.

Business Parking = Off-street permit or designated parking (parking for an apartment or business that is restricted to designated users such as tenants or employees.)

Private Parking = Off-street; non-residential (business parking that allows customer parking.)





Parking Utilization

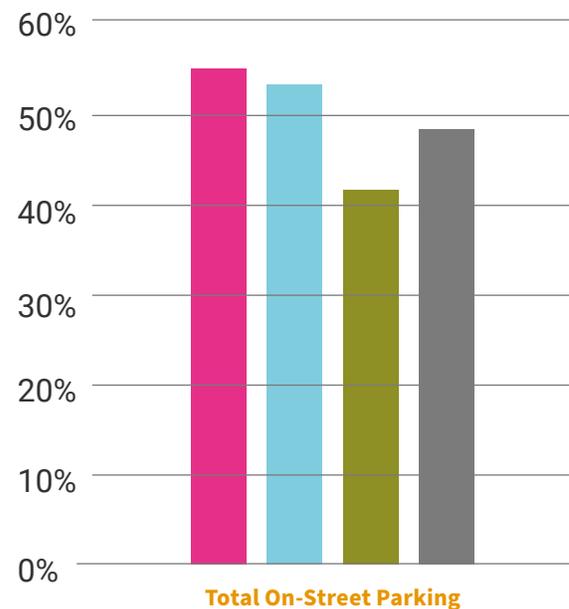
Although parking utilization was not included in the scope of the planning study, the team conducted a parking occupancy count for the area shown designated in Figure 7. This parking occupancy count was conducted on a weekday afternoon during lunch time between 12 – 1.30 PM when the school year was in session. This informal analysis provides a preliminary idea about the occupancy of the off-street and on-street spaces in the core area of the Downtown along Union Street where the business

owners had expressed concerns that there is no parking available for their patrons during the lunch time when residents flock to Downtown restaurants along Union and Cottage Streets. Preliminary parking occupancy counts suggest that parking utilization is between 35-50%. Parking utilization of 0-80% is usually viewed as underutilized. Any parking resource that consistently performs at this level during peak-demand periods can be viewed as having excess capacity.



Table 2: Parking Utilization

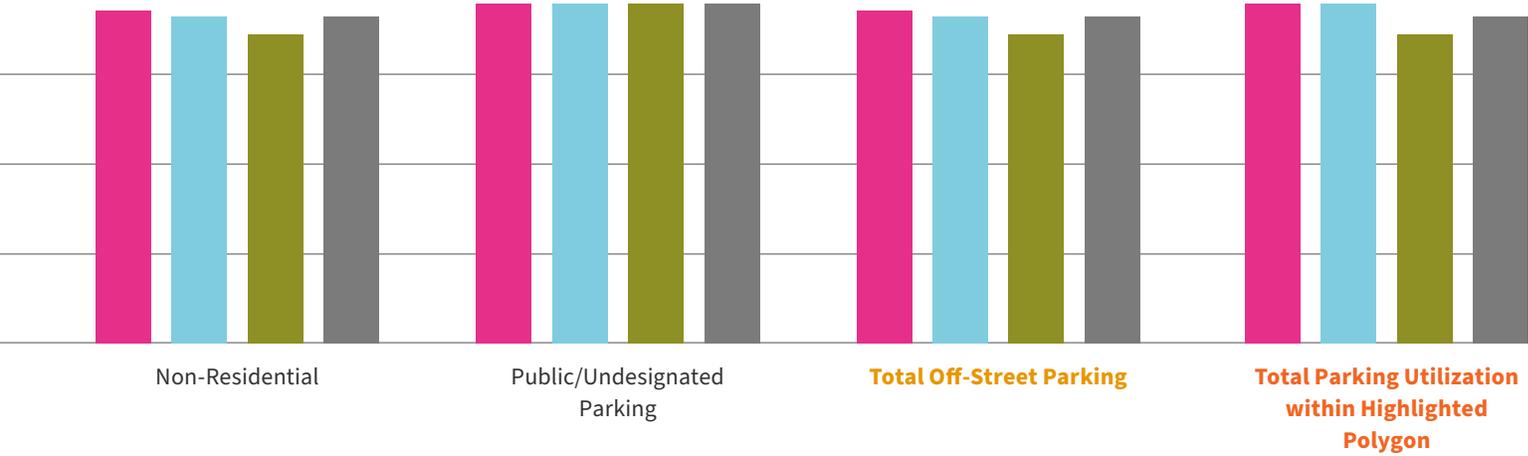
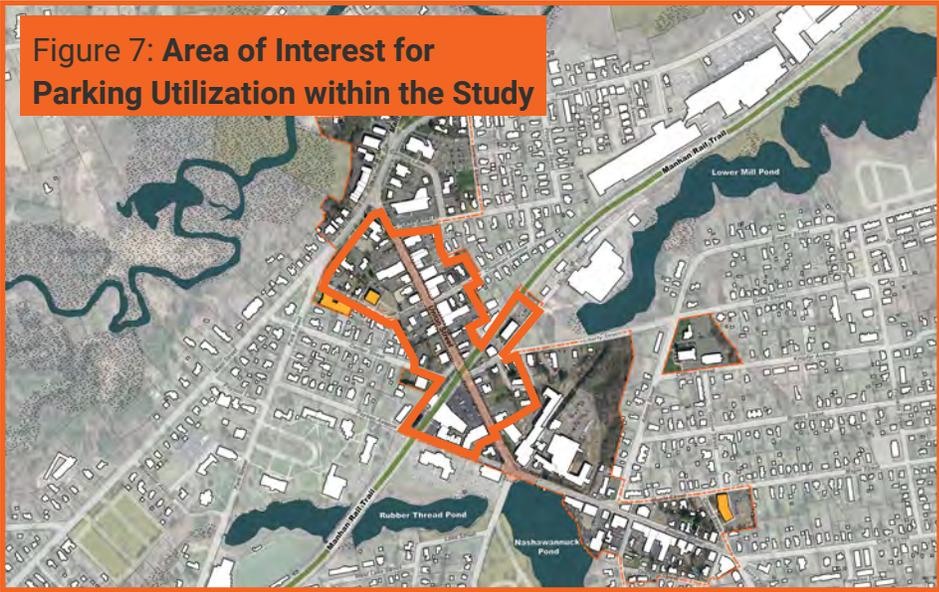
	Location	Supply	12:00	12:45	1:30	Average
On-Street Parking	Total On-Street Parking	66	55%	53%	41%	49%
Off-Street Parking	Non-Residential	660	37%	36%	34%	36%
	Public / Undesignated Parking	26	38%	38%	38%	38%
	Total Off-Street Parking	686	37%	36%	34%	36%
	Total Parking Utilization within Highlighted Polygon	752	38%	38%	34%	37%



3.5 Parking Utilization



Image 8: Public parking lot on Cottage Street.



Susceptibility to Change

Downtown areas, like cities in general, are always changing. This change is represented by the redevelopment of the underutilized properties to their highest and best use influenced by the existing market conditions. Properties with low rent uses compared to their ability to attract high rent uses under prevailing market conditions are considered underutilized. Properties may also be considered underutilized if they have functionally obsolete buildings requiring investment over the cost of new construction. Also, properties are underutilized when they have not exhausted their full potential as permitted under current regulations.

These underutilized or vacant properties are most susceptible to change if the prevailing regulations are aligned to spur their redevelopment. Redevelopment of underutilized properties occurs when the owner or the investor can make a marginal profit on their investment in building redevelopment without incurring undue risk. Identifying which properties are most susceptible to change is critical to bring positive change to downtown or a district as the city can coordinate the investment in public improvements with these potential future redevelopments. Coordinated public improvements and realigned regulations can catalyze redevelopment and maximize benefits by enabling change where it is most feasible in the near term. Hence assessing which properties may change is a useful visualization tool to start identifying revitalization opportunities.

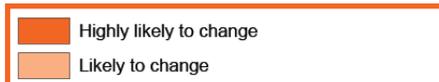
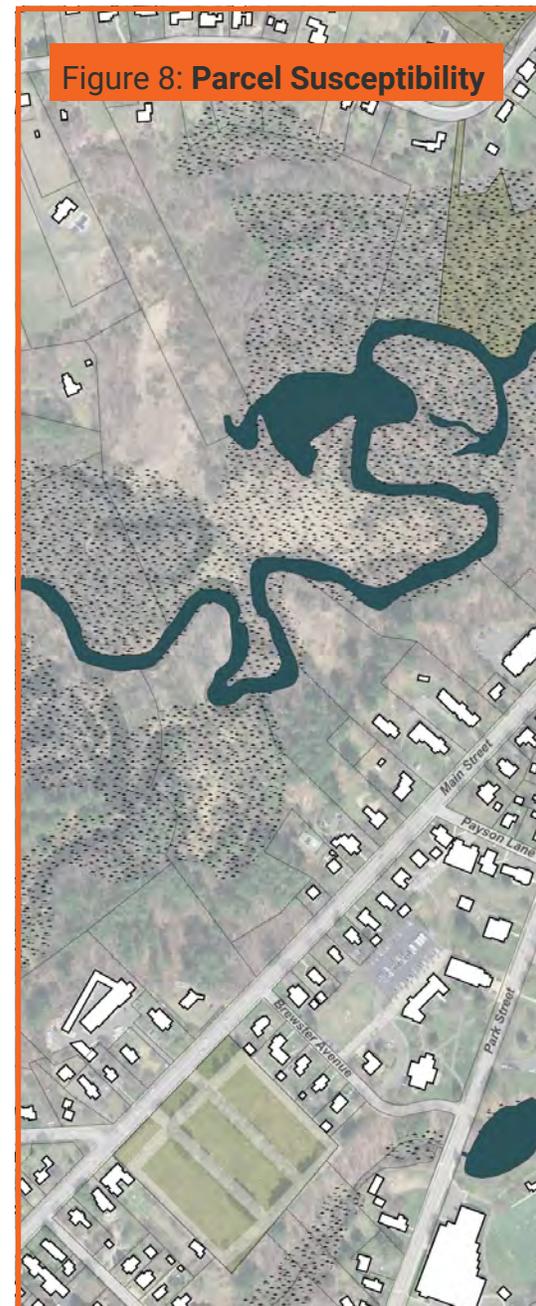


Figure 8 illustrates our assessment of the parcels most susceptible to change in the Downtown study area based on anticipated use changes (e.g. proposed move of elementary schools to a new facility by 2022), the relative proportion of parking area to building area (e.g. extensive parcels with large parking lots that could possibly be redeveloped or built over), and other information available.

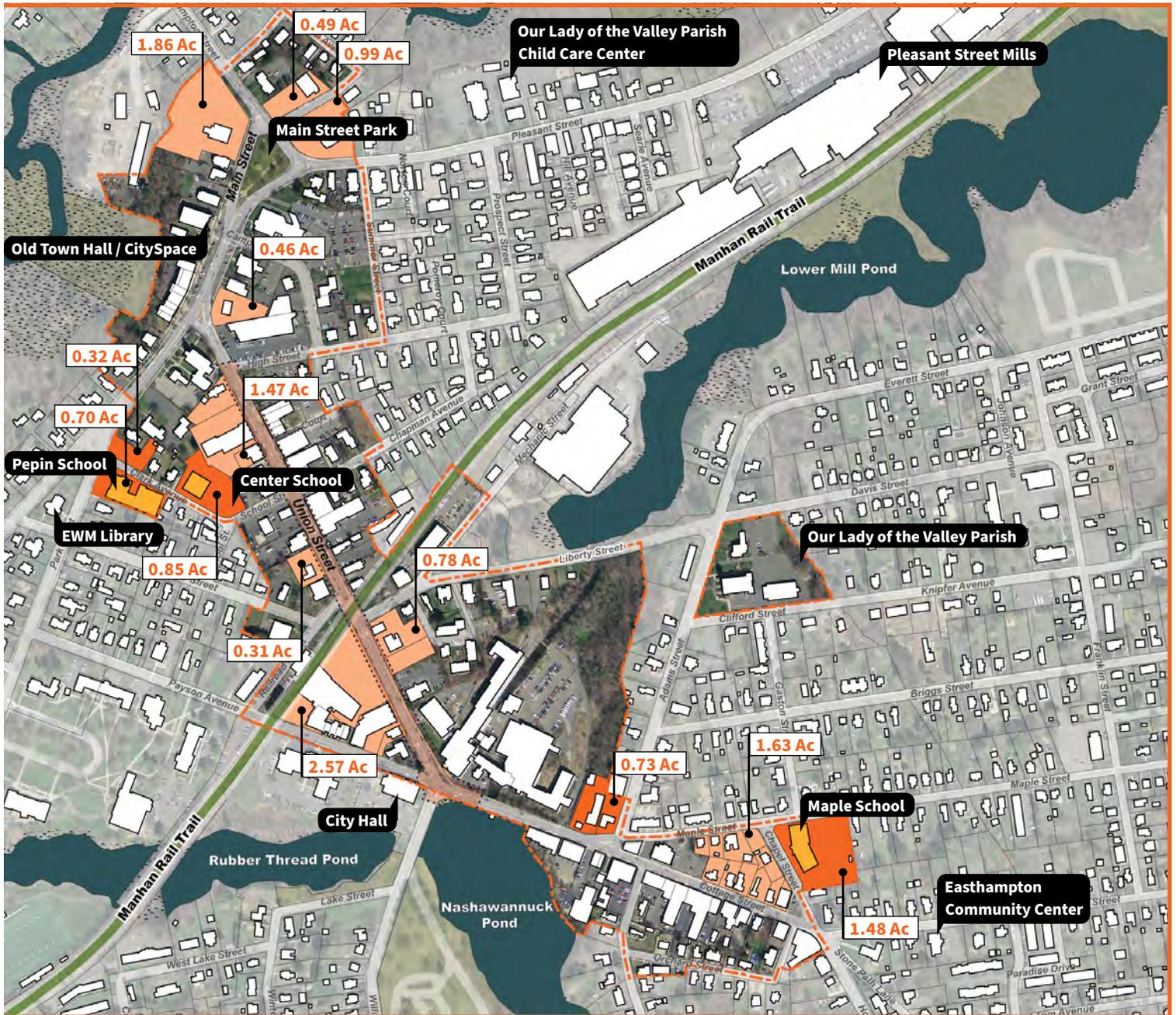
There are a few parcels anticipated to change in the next 3 to 5 years. These include Pepin, Center, and Maple Street School properties, and a proposed mixed-use development at 47-49 Cottage Street (shown in dark orange on Figure 8).

A few other parcels might have an opportunity to change if economic and real estate market conditions become supportive of mixed-use redevelopment. These may include commercial properties with large parking lots that could be transformed by adding new buildings while maintaining commercial uses and parking at the ground level (shown in dark orange). It should be noted that no redevelopment plans have been proposed for these parcels. This is a planning level assessment indicating that these large parcels could yield an attractive return on investment for prospective developers.

The great majority of existing parcels do not appear to be poised to change significantly beyond periodic maintenance and upgrades allowed as-of-right under current zoning (shown in light orange).



3.6 Susceptibility to Change



3.7 Summary of Market Analysis

RKG Associates was retained by Harriman, in partnership with the City of Easthampton, Massachusetts, to complete an economic and market analysis of the downtown area along Main Street, Union Street, and Cottage Street (the “study area”).

This deliverable consists of an analysis of existing demographic and economic conditions for Easthampton, and the market conditions for a variety of uses in the study area. This report includes an analysis of broad demographic and economic trends, a review of real estate development trends in Easthampton, and summaries of the market potential for residential and commercial uses in the study area.

To read the full market analysis report, see appendix.

Key Findings

Easthampton’s Downtown has a unique and wide ranging business mix. Visitors to Downtown can shop, eat, drink, view art, catch a live music show, grab a cup of coffee, grocery shop, and do banking all within a short walking distance. Restaurant and retail choices are eclectic and diverse.

The Downtown has three primary retail and business corridors, each with their own unique mix of businesses. Main Street, Union Street, and Cottage Street have each curated their own flavors of business types and food and beverage choices. This was not necessarily planned but evolved over time organically and incrementally to create a varied and interesting downtown environment. The Pleasant Street Mills on the periphery of the downtown study area contribute to the vibrancy of downtown Easthampton as well by offering a unique mix of uses and fostering a community of artists.

Traditional mixed-use buildings with first floor commercial and upper story residential are driving almost \$13 million in assessed value which is more than all the stand alone retail in the Downtown study area. Mixed-use development is also accomplishing that value on 50 percent less acreage than the retail parcels and has double the amount of square footage compared to retail. These buildings are helping to create the smaller scale and more dense development pattern that helps create the walkable downtown fabric most people have grown to appreciate.

The demographic composition of Easthampton continues to change, with population remaining stable but changing in age, race/ethnicity, and income composition. The population is growing older, and at a rapid pace creating opportunities to introduce new housing types and build a new market of retirees with expendable income.

Easthampton’s median household income increased at a faster pace than Hampshire County, growing by nearly 10 percent between 2012 and 2017. As wages continue to improve, residents will have more ability to spend money at Downtown businesses and potentially provide a market for new downtown ownership and/or rental housing options.

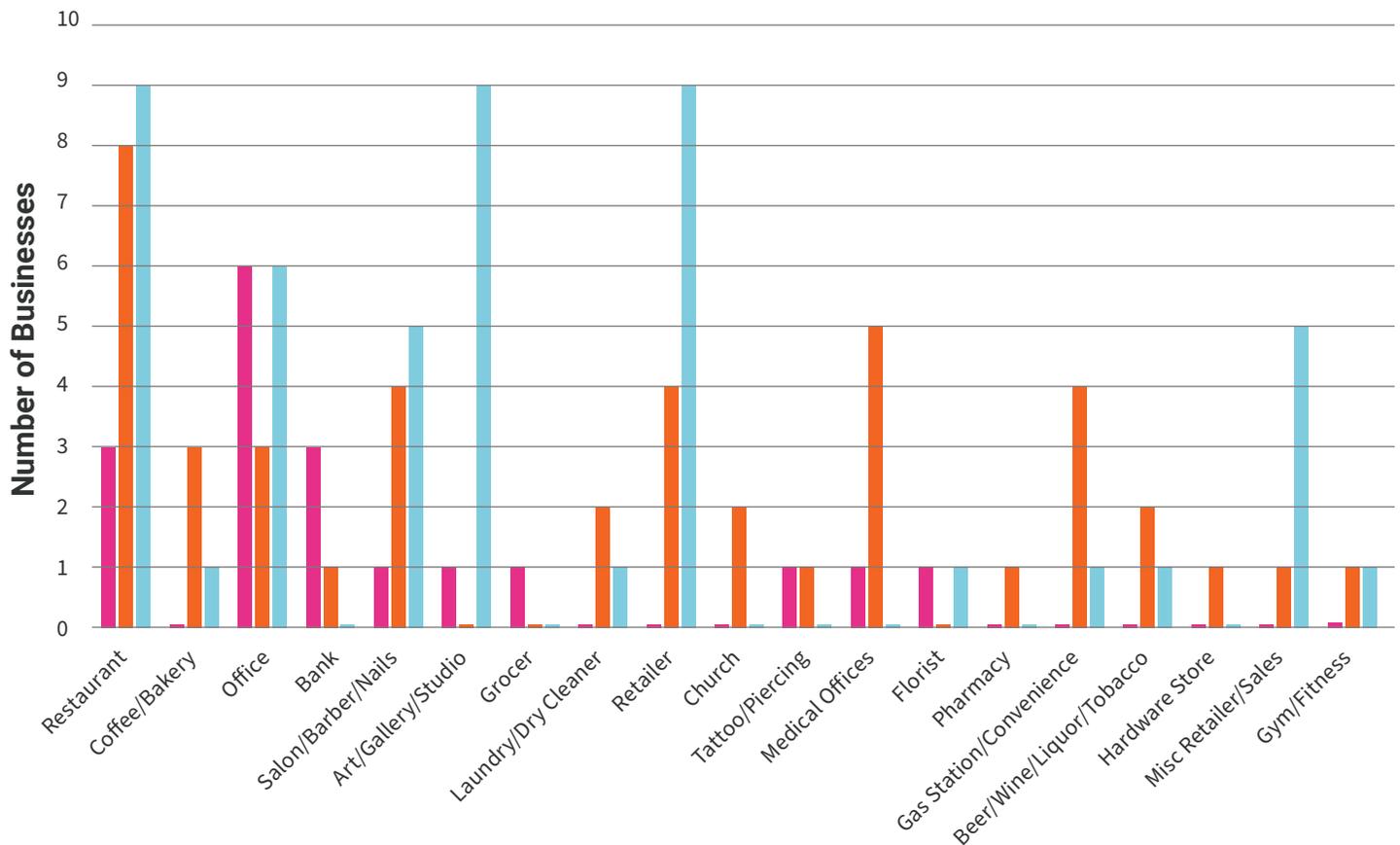
Employment is projected to continue to increase, albeit at a fairly slow pace over the next ten years. A 15 percent increase in employment by 2028 is projected to create jobs in several sectors that could benefit the Downtown area. These include Real Estate, Art and Entertainment, Professional Services, and Health Care sectors. These employment increases across the city could provide upwards of 10,000 square feet of additional office space needs over the next ten years.

Within a three-mile radius of Downtown Easthampton there is the potential to capture an additional 36,000 square feet of retail space within the existing business composition or by adding new businesses in the city. If businesses in the city can capture a percentage of retail and restaurant spending currently leaving Easthampton’s market, there is the potential

■ Main Street
■ Union Street
■ Cottage Street



Figure 9: Downtown Business Mix by Corridor



support more retail space within the restaurant, office supply/gift, clothing, shoes, home furnishing, and general merchandise sectors.

Demographic and economic shifts in Easthampton’s population may provide a robust market for ownership housing options that may not exist in

the city today. Household projections for Easthampton over the next five years show a growth of approximately 58 new households. Given the shift toward an older demographic and wealthier households, it is likely new households (and some existing ones) will have a propensity to purchase homes. Seniors in Easthampton or in the region may be looking to downsize to a

smaller home with far less maintenance responsibilities. Products such as managed multifamily condominiums or rental units could provide options for both the older and younger demographic looking to live or stay in Easthampton. These product types would also fit well within the Downtown context as part of a mixed-use building or a standalone residential complex.

4 Community Engagement

- Process
- Community Workshops
- Summary of Community Feedback
- Stakeholder Interviews

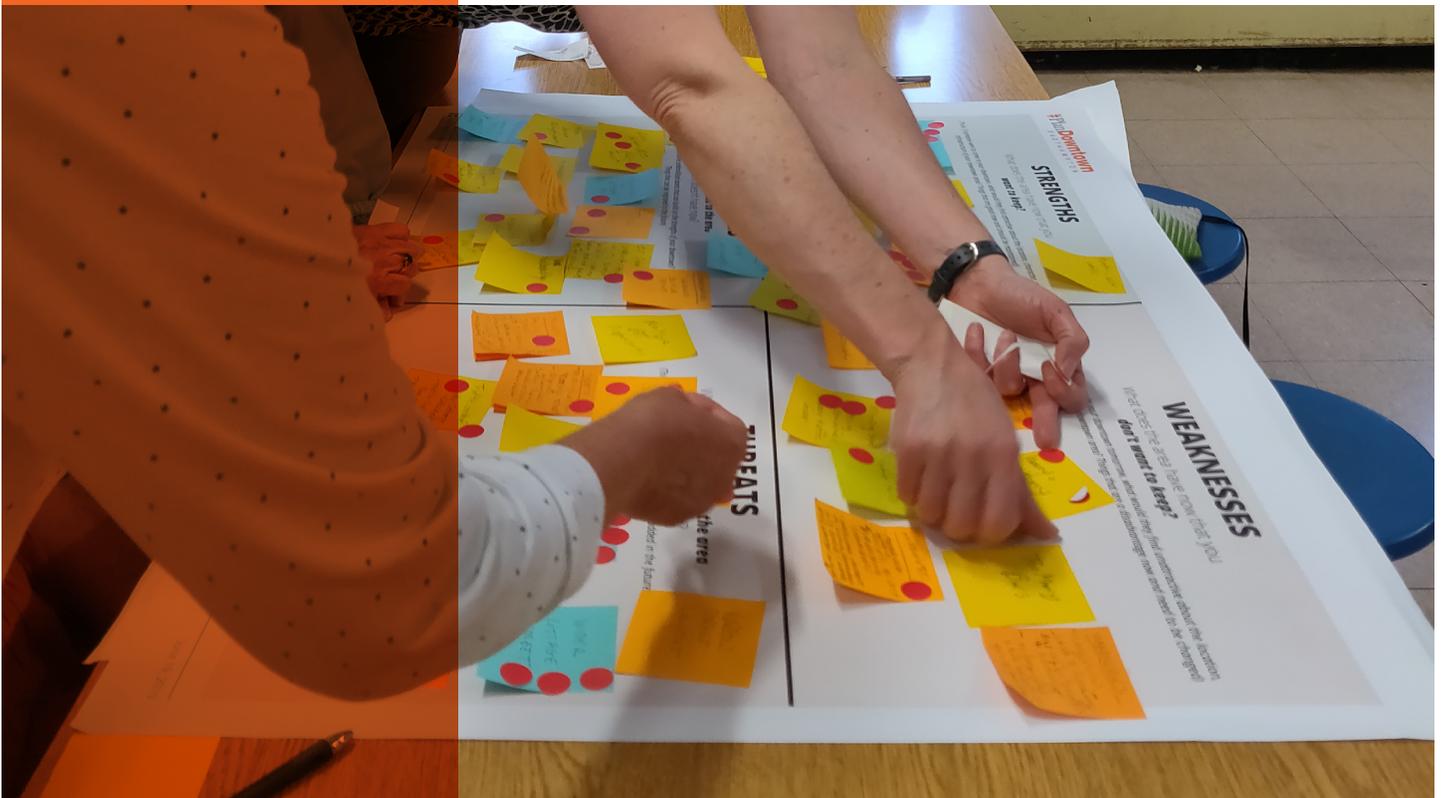


Image 9: Participants conduct a “SWOT Analysis” to identify the downtown area’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats at the first public workshop.

4.1 Process

Community engagement was a key aspect of the Downtown Easthampton Strategic Planning Process. In addition to working closely with the City planning department, a group of critical stakeholders comprised of representatives from City Council, the Planning Board, the Easthampton Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC), the Chamber of Commerce, business owners, downtown residents, and residents-at large, were assembled to form a Sounding Board to guide the process and provide input along the way. A series of three community workshops were held in June, July, and October to gather feedback. Engagement was also conducted via online platforms through the creation and maintenance of a dedicated website (<https://plandowntown-easthampton.com/>) for the purpose of sharing workshop materials and posting project updates.

By taking a diverse approach to community outreach and engagement, the planning team was able to gather valuable feedback and data from a broad sector of the Easthampton community. It is crucial to the success of downtown Easthampton that community members experience a high degree of agency and involvement throughout the duration of the planning and development process. The community engagement element of the Strategic Plan for Downtown Easthampton laid the groundwork for continued community involvement and ensured that the vision and goals laid out in this plan reflect community aspirations.

Easthampton is fortunate to be home to a highly active and civically-engaged citizenry. The public workshops saw tremendous turn-out, with 100 people signing in at the first workshop in June, 55 attending the second workshop in July, and 97 turning out for the final open house/workshop in October.

The Downtown Easthampton Strategic Plan is the result of close collaboration among the planning team, the City planning department, the Sounding Board, and the community. This chapter of the report provides an overview of the methods used and results gathered from public workshops and stakeholder interviews. A complete record of results and feedback collected during the workshops are presented in the Appendix.



Image 10: A focus group at the first public workshop brainstorm and prioritize the criteria they would like the City to use to evaluate proposals for the 3 school properties.

4.2 Community Workshops

The planning team engaged the community at critical junctures of the planning process to gather feedback. This engagement took the form of three public workshops held over the course of the planning process. These workshops provided an opportunity for the community to provide feedback on important aspects of the plan. The three workshops were held in the Pepin School Cafetorium and in the Easthampton High School.

Workshop #1 Opportunities and Challenges

The first workshop held in June focused on understanding the opportunities, strengths, weaknesses and threats facing Downtown. This workshop provided an opportunity to the community to express their vision



Image 11: Participants brainstorm downtown Easthampton's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats at the first public workshop.

and aspirations for downtown as well as identify perceived challenges. The second part of the workshop specifically focused on understanding the desired uses for the 3 school properties and the reasoning driving these desired uses. The team sought input on the desired criteria for the evaluation of the future uses of the school properties. After suggesting the criteria, the community was asked to prioritize these by voting with sticker dots.

The discussion about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats provided the planning team with a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges for the community in the Downtown area. The workshop provided feedback on what is already working in Downtown and aspects that need improvement. Desired uses and criteria provided a critical perspective from the community as to what uses they would like to see implemented on the 3 school properties in the future. Discussion about the criteria helped define the factors that should be considered while evaluating the future school reuse. The dot exercise provided clarification to the planning team about the hierarchy of importance among the factors against which the community would like to see future school building reuse evaluated.

Workshop #2 Development Scenario Options

The second public workshop sought specific input from the community about different scenario options for the Downtown. The scenario options provided choices about different potential land

uses and the scale of redevelopment in four subareas of the Downtown. The scenario options built upon the strong existing characteristics and land uses of each subarea, with suggested improvements for open space, walkability and different land uses. The scenarios involved varying degrees of change/redevelopment to understand the community's appetite for change on various underutilized parcels.

The feedback from the second workshop provided the planning team with the preferred choices for land uses in different subareas. With their extensive experience of the Downtown, the participants were able to identify new land uses that will be complementary to the existing character of the subareas.

Workshop #3 Draft Recommendations

The third workshop focused on draft recommendations for the downtown and the subareas. These recommendations were developed based on the feedback received from the second workshop and further refinement of the preferred scenarios. The community was asked to provide their feedback by prioritizing the draft recommendations and if there were any aspects that the planning team missed in the recommendations. The prioritization of the draft recommendations was conducted with a dot exercise where each participant was provided with a set number of dots to place on the recommendations that they felt should be prioritized for early implementation. The community expressed clear priorities through this exercise and emphasized pedestrian and open space-



Image 12: Participants discuss the different options studied for one of the subareas at the second public workshop



Image 13: An attendee at the final public workshop explains the recommendations for the reuse of Maple Elementary School to a current student.

related recommendations as the highest priority. Additionally, community members expressed that the Maple Street Elementary School site should be considered to alleviate the parking challenges for the businesses on the Cottage Street.

Comment Cards

Comment cards were used at the workshops to capture any additional feedback that participants wanted to share.

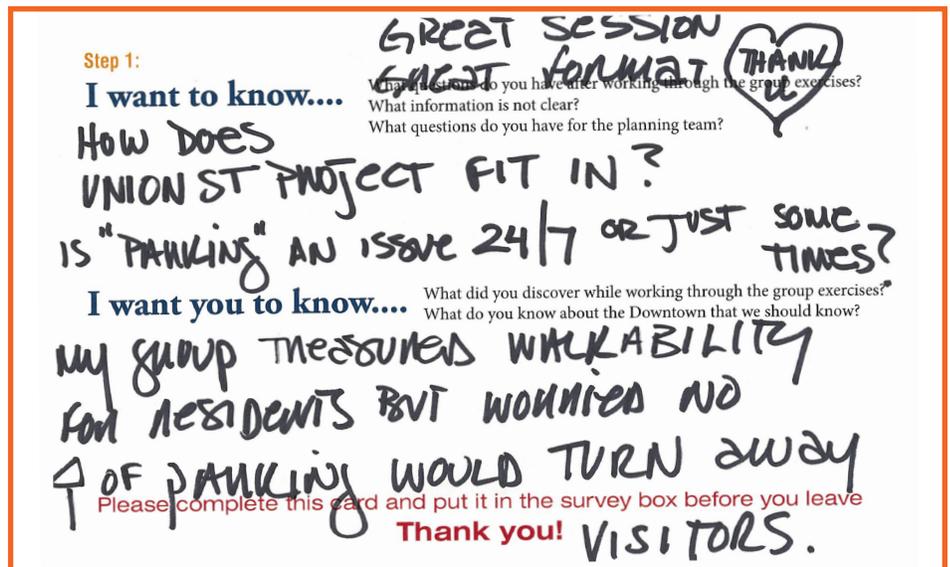


Image 14: A comment card received from the second public workshop

4.3 Summary of Community Feedback

The following word clouds represent the comments received during the public workshops and stakeholder interviews.

Strengths

- Pond and boardwalk/bike path, waterfront and Cottage Street
- Open space/community space
- Rail trail/bike path
- Historic buildings, old town hall improvements
- Arts, culture, and Cultural District



Figure 10: Strengths Word Cloud

Opportunities

- Increase walkability, bikeability, pedestrian safety
- Reuse of school buildings
- Renovation of Old Town Hall for a Theater Arts Performance Venue, film, dancing, movie theater, downtown art
- More affordable housing, including for young adults, students, and elders, senior living communities
- More green spaces, tables by the pond



Figure 11: Opportunities Word Cloud

Weaknesses

- Dangerous sidewalks and bikeways
- Vacant and rundown properties (e.g. Hurry and Scurry)
- There is heavy through-traffic that travels along Route 141 as a thoroughfare, without stopping to patronize local businesses
- Traffic congestion and limited parking
- Crosswalks need improvement, unsafe
- Poorly maintained roads and sidewalks



Figure 12: Weaknesses Word Cloud

Threats

- Big box stores, chain stores
- Gentrification, average people can't afford to live here
- Traffic bottleneck – only one main route through town
- Too many parking lots, parking displacing people
- Congestion on Cottage Street
- Overly focused on parking of cars at the expense of accessibility, walkability, and bike-ability of the downtown
- Wider Cottage Street
- Lack of affordable housing



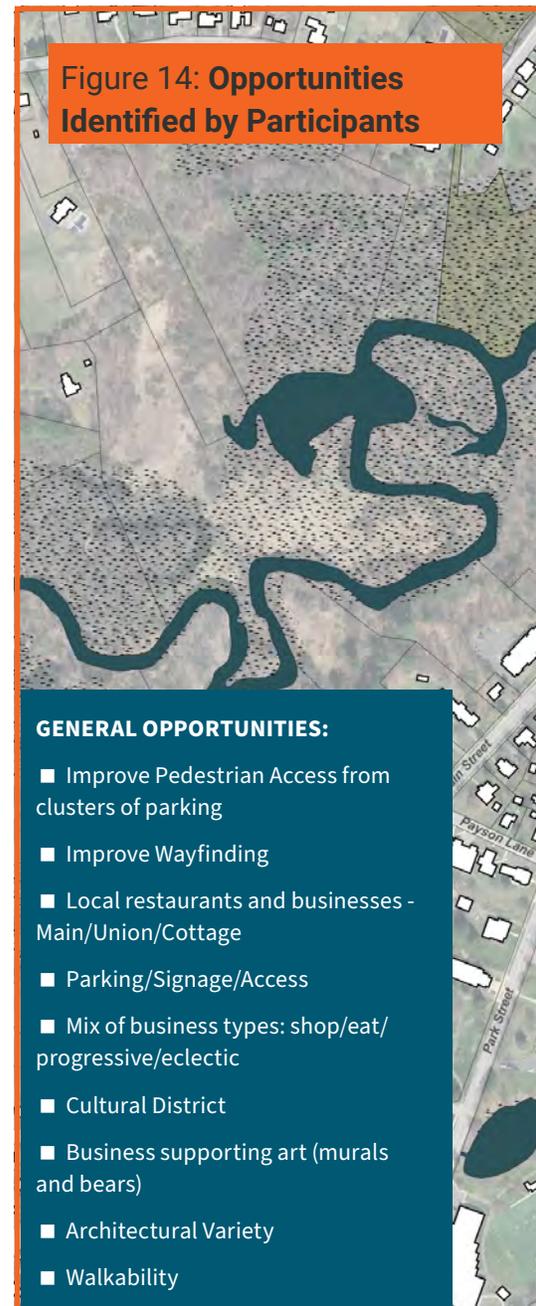
Figure 13: Threats Word Cloud

The following diagrams represent the opportunities and challenges for Downtown Easthampton based on the feedback received during the stakeholder interviews and community workshops. Some minor modifications have been made to comments to better capture accurate information.

OPPORTUNITIES

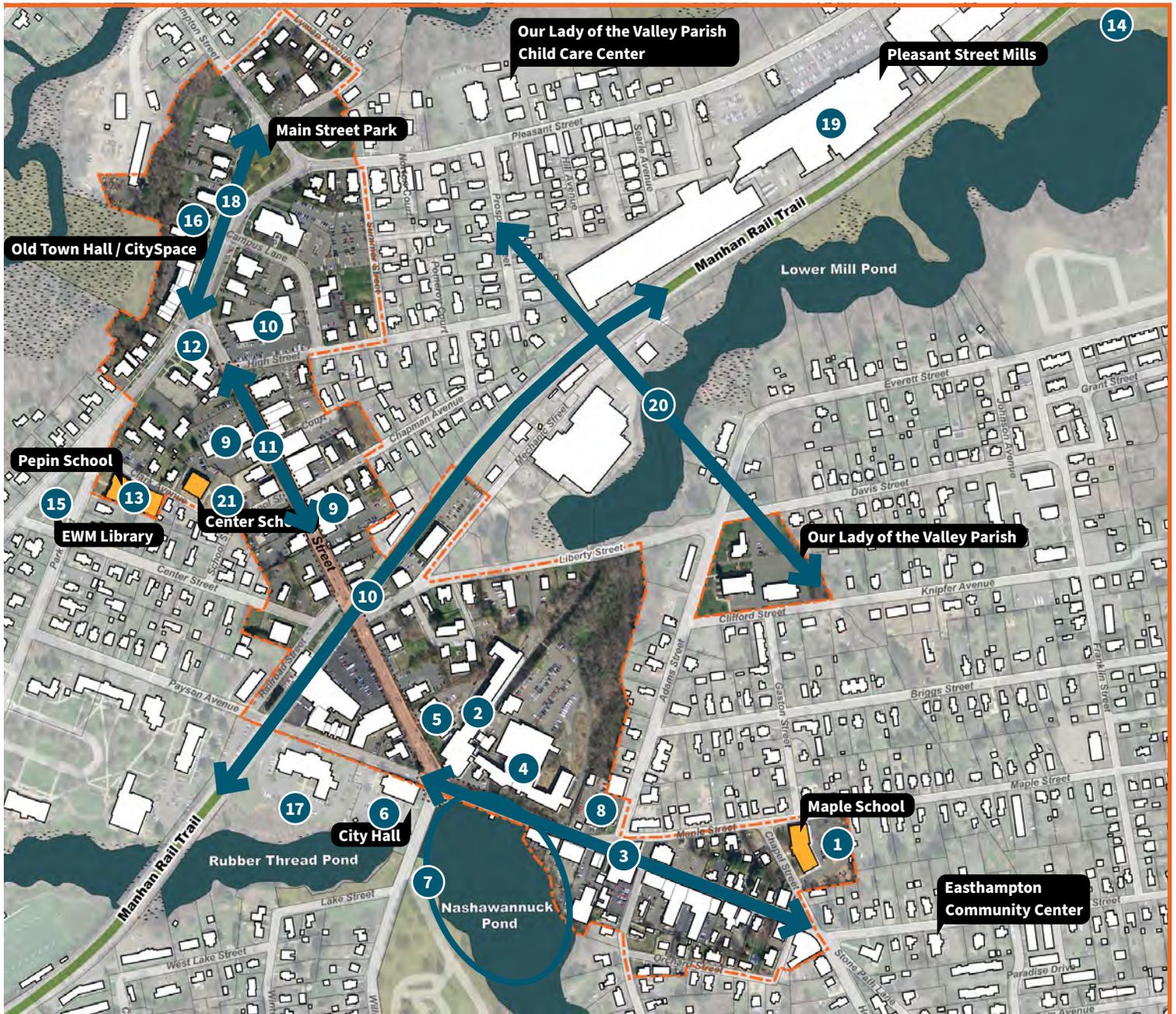
- 1 Neighborhood Amenity
Community Playground
Open Space/Green Space/Park
Shared Parking
Redevelopment/Housing
- 2 Cottage Street Studios
Open Studios
Riverside
Artist community
- 3 Cultural District
Food; Arts; Music
Developed Corridor
Concentration of Entertainment
Parking convenient for walking to a mix of stores
Improve pedestrian realm/walkability/safety
Shops
- 5 Professional Offices
- 6 Farmer's Market
Public Parking
- 7 Open Space
Pond
Boardwalk

- Picnic Area
Old Majestic Theater
- 8 New Affordable Housing and market-rate apartments
 - 9 Opportunity for Redevelopment
Variety of necessities on Union Street
Downtown Grocery Store
Hardware Store
 - 10 Opportunity to better utilize Manhan Trail and make more accessible
Connection to Downtown
 - 11 Commercial/Retail/Mixed Use Corridor
Historical
Practical
 - 12 Restaurants
Parking
 - 13 Visual Appeal
Future Library
Youth space - reuse gym
 - 14 Perfect area for recreation; playground (currently under-utilized)
Affordable Housing
 - 15 Library is an asset
Parking
 - 16 Parking
 - 17 Potential Green Space
 - 18 Improve pedestrian realm/walkability
Parking
 - 19 Diversify Housing
 - 20 Accessible Connection/Pedestrian Bridge
Connect to Mills
 - 21 Small Park



Workshop #1 Results

Exercise #1: Opportunities and Challenges



CHALLENGES

- 1 Snow Removal
Accessibility
- 2 Traffic Calming Needed
Pedestrian/Bicyclist Safety
- 3 Bicycles on Sidewalks
- 4 Make one-way? / Remove one side parking
Truck traffic through downtown is a problem
- 5 Increasing density around shops a challenge
Constrained Parking is a safety problem
Old residential could be redeveloped
Traffic
1st Floor Residential is not conducive to commerce or pedestrian realm
Should be one-way?
Remove parking?
Limited Walkability
Sidewalks in poor condition
- 6 Crosswalks Disappear in winter
Intersection is a problem
Rotary?
- 7 Lacking a neighborhood park
- 8 Crosswalks disappear in winter
Difficult to get to rail trail
No master plan
Safety Issue
- 9 Walking is a challenge
No access to rail trail from neighborhood
- 10 Walkability and bikability within the neighborhood; no feeder routes to the trails
- 10 Electric bikes on trail are too fast
- 11 Hurry Scurry = abandoned building
Severe Blight
Needs to be fixed up
- 12 Union "feels like a desert" - not walkable
Expand Wayfinding
Road surfaces need repair
- 13 Advertise Parking
- 14 Pedestrian and bicycle access to Nashawannuck Pond
- 15 Have to run to cross the street
No turn on red
- 16 Constrained Parking Needed
Lack of connectivity
Road surfaces need repair
Too Narrow
Impact of construction on businesses
Parking is a challenge
- 17 More mixed use/affordable housing/
senior housing - families and singles
Retain Arts
- 18 Library is too small
Library parking a challenge
Needs better space
- 19 Bank of America and Moriarty building are blighted (broken windows, mold)

Figure 15: Challenges Identified by Participants

- 20 Not being used, could be parking?
- 21 Very Dangerous
Acts as rotary, but is a challenge
- 22 Difficult to access bike path from Main Street
- 23 Prime Property underutilized
- 24 Bank entrance is a challenge
- 25 Rite Aid parking lot feels like a disconnected void
- 26 Dollar Store parking lot feels like a void

GENERAL CHALLENGES:

- Shop row disconnected from Union and Cottage
- From Cottage to Main to Rotary - the number of crosswalks adds to danger; needs a more strategic layout and construction to improve visibility and safety
- Lack of cohesion - Union/Cottage/Main
- Rail Trail accessibility from neighborhoods
- Streets are too narrow
- Sidewalks are difficult - not ADA compliant
- Maintain crosswalks in winter with snow removal

4.4 Stakeholder Interviews

Early in the planning process, the team conducted a series of stakeholder interviews to gather insight from key members of the community. Interview groups were essentially asked to provide a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis by commenting on their perspective of downtown Easthampton's assets, opportunities and strengths, what is not working, which uses are missing, and which uses are over-abundant. Interviewees included downtown business owners, residents, a traffic engineer, representatives from CitySpace, and the City Planner. The themes and related feedback listed in this section emerged from these conversations. These comments have been edited for the purposes of maintaining language consistency, but the intent of each remains intact. These comments reflect individual perceptions and opinions.

Assets

- The boardwalk/promenade along Nashawannuck Pond on Union Street
- The Manhan Bike trail is beneficial for businesses like ice cream and bagel shops
- A vibrant arts community which has raised the profile of the town
- The density of the downtown area is conducive to walkability, which benefits businesses by generating foot traffic
- The adaptive reuse of the mill building on Cottage Street
- The City has a fair permitting process
- Downtown Easthampton has become attractive as a regional destination

- Programs like City Space and Cultural Chaos support the creative community

Existing Land Uses

Existing mixed uses along Union Street, for example, include dry-cleaning, hardware, grocery, pharmacy and access to public open space via the Manhan Rail Trail.

- The Williston Northampton School is investigating the possibility of moving all of their dorms to the main campus, the properties the school owns on Main Street might become available for sale
- The Bank of America building is vacant and should find a new use
- The City should prioritize the creation of new event space, and should study the 2nd floor of Old Town Hall as a possible location.
- 'Restaurant row' on Main Street suffers from a lack of activity due to one-sided retail
- Rather than having one cohesive town center, downtown has many central nodes of commercial activity

Existing Market Conditions

- There is a high demand for apartments in downtown Easthampton
- Rent is increasing
- The climate is favorable toward businesses. Existing businesses are thriving and in turn attracting other businesses

Future Land Uses

- Housing is becoming scarce, there is a

need for more apartments, more affordable housing, and more senior housing

- The efforts of CitySpace to renovate and improve accessibility to the 2nd floor of Old Town Hall for a flexible performing arts and community space is generally met with support and enthusiasm from the community.
- The Library is interested in expanding to provide a fully accessible building with innovative programs and spaces, potentially reusing one of the school buildings
- The existing library could become a museum
- The gymnasium in Pepin should be preserved for community use
- There is an opportunity to activate Union Street for evening activity



Image 15: A Harriman facilitator explains the options for one of the study areas at the second public workshop.

Open Space

- There is a need for pocket parks and places to sit
- People use the school playgrounds over the weekends, but the quality of the playgrounds could be improved with the addition of greenspace
- Students, residents, and visitors use Manhan Trail to patronize the local coffee shop, ice cream shop, and restaurants

Pedestrian and Bicyclists

- Reducing curb cuts would improve pedestrian walkability
- There is a lack of connectivity between Cottage and Main Street, with pedestrian “dead zones” along Union
- Union and Cottage Street are a challenge for bicyclists due to the narrow right-of-way
- There is a need to improve walkability along Union Street
- Crossing near the Rotary (North Main Street) is a challenge
- There is a lack of sidewalks near the Library

Transportation and Access

- There is a need to balance infrastructure for bikes and cars
- The intersections at Union Street and Manhan Trail, Cottage Street, Chapel Street, Holyoke Street, and Stone Path, and at the Rotary, prove challenging to all modes of transportation



Image 16: A workshop participant votes on their top priority recommendations at the final public Open House

Parking

- There is a need for better communication of the Union Street reconstruction project, and a concern about losing street parking spaces
- Parking restrictions and snow removal in the winter put a major constraint on businesses along Cottage Street
- Improving wayfinding and signage for public parking lots would go a long way in alleviating some of the parking challenges downtown
- Any new parking management program should account for seniors and others who do not use smartphones
- There are many informal parking agreements currently in place. Many people park at Big E's and walk to other destinations nearby.
- Some feel that a parking garage may be necessary, and could be located at Center School
- The parking lot at the church is underutilized
- Residents on side streets have concerns about increasing density and activity downtown
- The parking lot on Cottage Street needs to be made larger

5 School Property Reuse Analysis

- School Building Evaluation
- Community Feedback and School Reuse Criteria
- School Reuse Scenarios
- Next Steps

The School Property Reuse Analysis is presented here to understand the potential of the different school properties for community desired uses after the current school uses are consolidated to the new building.



Image 17: Neil A Pepin Elementary School from Park Street.

School Property Assessments

Beginning to vision and plan for the potential re-use of the three elementary school properties is integral to the future of the downtown area. Each has unique characteristics and exploration of potential re-use will require longer-term and intensive planning activities. Based on the vote on May 23, 2018 - to fund the construction of a new school - the three properties will likely become surplus City-owned property within the next four years. While not immediate, the potential for these properties to be catalysts for reinvestment presents real and unique opportunities. The City clearly identified and anticipated this potential in an Education goal in the 2008 Master Plan:

Upon construction of a new elementary school, find creative reuses for present elementary schools that will not be a drain on the city's operating budget

Inspect and evaluate each building for possible reuse, disposal, or sale.

The location of the three sites is perfectly in line with the concepts and desires of the Commonwealth's Traditional Neighborhood Development and Sustainability Principle to "concentrate development and mix uses", and both are located within the existing 40R District.

The goals for this analysis are as follows:

1. Develop criteria based on the community feedback which could be utilized by the City to evaluate the future proposals for the school properties.
2. Analyze the potential of the buildings and properties for different community desired uses.
3. Based on the community feedback, provide recommendations for each of the sites that preserve the public interest based on community feedback.
4. Provide next steps to set up the process for the disposition of the school properties.

This section is divided into following topics:

1. School Building Evaluation: This section presents the existing condition evaluation of the three school properties.
2. Community Feedback and School Reuse Criteria: This section describes the community engagement process and the feedback related to development of the school reuse criteria.
3. School Reuse Scenarios: This section presents different school building reuse scenarios developed based on the community desired uses to understand their feasibility.



Image 18: Pepin School Site.



Image 19: Center School Site.



Image 20: Maple School Site.

5.1 School Building Evaluation

This existing conditions evaluation for the three school buildings are primarily based on the Evaluation of the Existing Conditions conducted as a part of the Maple Elementary School Preliminary Design Program for the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and Easthampton Public Schools in December 2016. As a part of this study, the planning team conducted a site walk to familiarize themselves with the existing building conditions. Due to the limited scope of this study, the planning team has used the extensive and in-depth existing condition evaluation findings of the MSBA study as a basis for analyzing the School Reuse Scenarios. The following summary factsheets based on the MSBA study are presented as a background for the further analysis presented in this section.

Center Elementary School

- Building footprint: 5,559 SF
- Building area: 16,677 SF
- Lot size: 0.85 acres

Building:

- Constructed: 1902
- Building historically important, but not listed
- Brick bearing wall construction and wood framing
- Significant changes to the building are likely to trigger complete building code upgrades, including the Energy Code, accessibility improvements, other changes
- The 3-story building is organized with a central core and broad corridors serving the flanking classrooms on the exterior walls; it is not an efficient layout for most uses because of the extent of circulation space, but the floors are relatively small and have windows on all sides.
- There is a substantial attic space that might be renovated and used under some scenarios

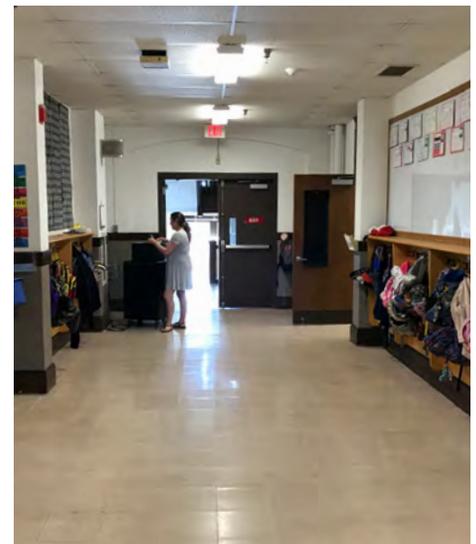
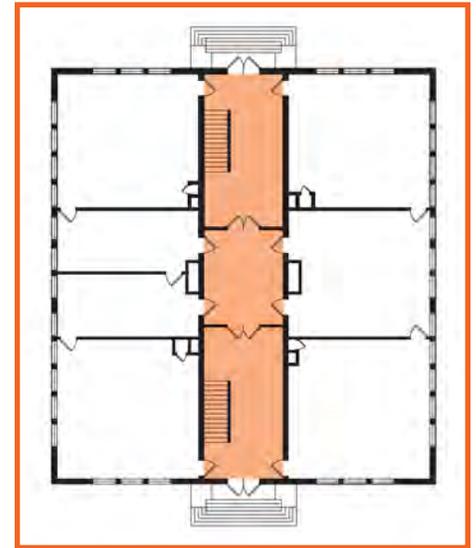
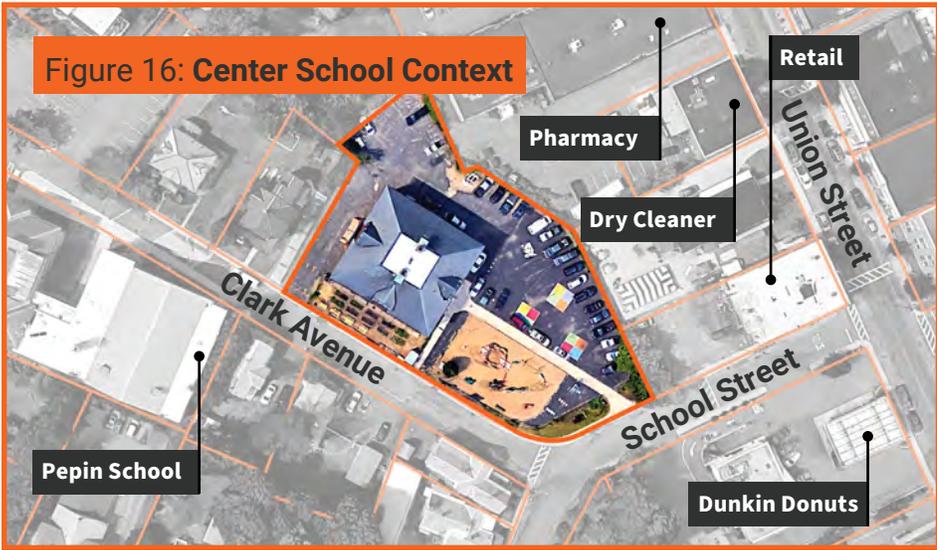


Image 21: The hallway inside Center Elementary School.



Site:

- It is near commercial uses along Union Street
- The site building consists of the school building, a parking area and building access and the playground.
- Parking spaces may be available for building uses in the future.
- Community has expressed desire to maintain a portion of the site as a public open space potentially at the location of the playground.
- A portion of the site shares fences with the parking lots of the surrounding commercial properties. Removal of the fence and laying out the parking spaces can potentially create a shared parking lot with the adjacent property owners. A portion of the shared parking will have to be retained for the future use in the school building.



Image 22: Center Elementary School Yard.

Pepin Elementary School

- Building footprint: 16,507 SF
- Building area: 49,058 SF
- Lot size: 0.7 acres and 0.31 acres lots separated by
- Clark Avenue

Building:

- Constructed: 1912, renovations 1989
- Building historically important, but not listed
- Steel frame, masonry bearing wall construction, wood framing
- Significant changes to the building would trigger complete building code upgrades, including the Energy Code, accessibility improvements, other changes
- Gymnasium at ground level
- Large cafeteria/assembly area on second level
- Has varying floor levels that do not align throughout the building
- The 3-story building with significant attic spaces and is composed of two major elements and a connector. Floor levels are not aligned between the two major elements and the floor plans and interior circulation are complex and not efficient for most uses.
- Some of the spaces lack significant daylight

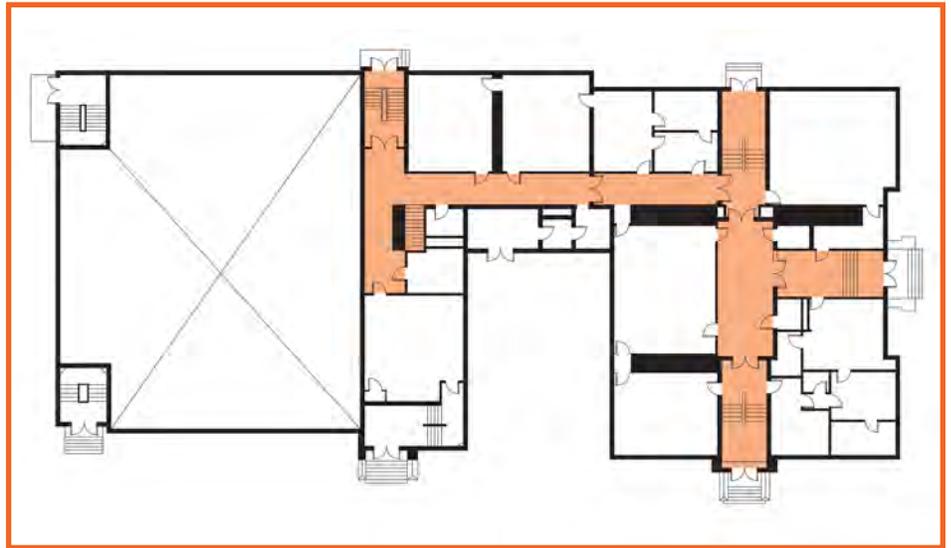


Image 23: The gymnasium inside Pepin Elementary School.



Image 24: The cafeteria inside Pepin Elementary School.

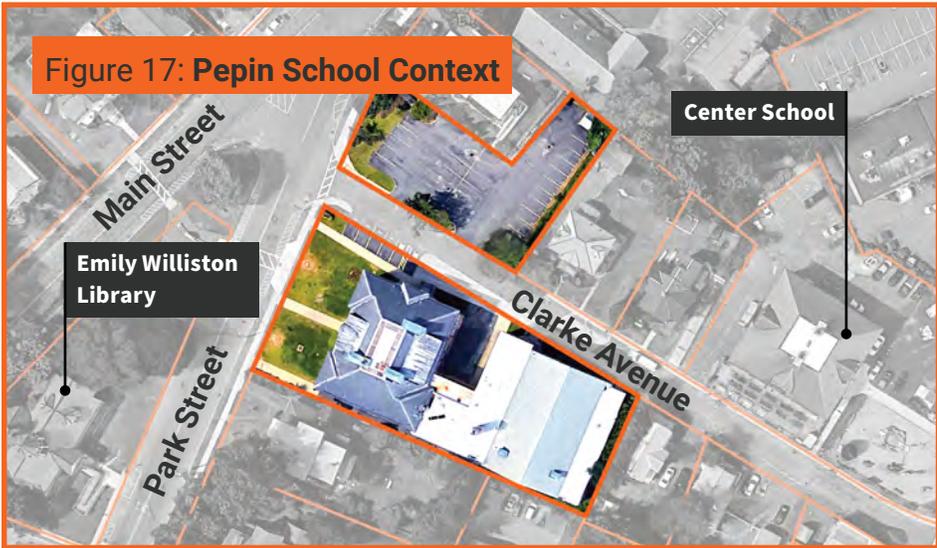


Figure 17: Pepin School Context

Site:

- The site is divided in two parts with 0.7-acre portion accommodates the building and the 0.31-acre contains staff parking. These two school lots are separated by the Clark Avenue. Section of the Clark Avenue in front of the school building is currently closed to the public traffic and hence acts as a pedestrian circulation area around the school connecting Pepin with the Center Elementary School.

- The site offers opportunities for parking in the staff parking lots and head in parking spaces next to the building (approximately 34 spaces)

- It is near commercial and institutional uses along Main Street like current Emily Williston Memorial Library.

- The architectural character along Park Street and front yard contribute to the downtown civic environment



Image 25: The exterior facade of Pepin Elementary School.

Maple Elementary School

- Building footprint: 12,335 SF
- Building area: 37,233 SF
- Lot size: 1.48 acres

Building:

- Constructed: 1896
- Historically important, but not listed
- Brick bearing wall construction
- Significant changes to the building are likely to trigger complete building code upgrades, including the Energy Code, accessibility improvements, other changes
- The 3-story building is organized with a central core and broad corridors serving the flanking classrooms on the exterior walls; it is not an efficient layout for most uses because of the extent of circulation space

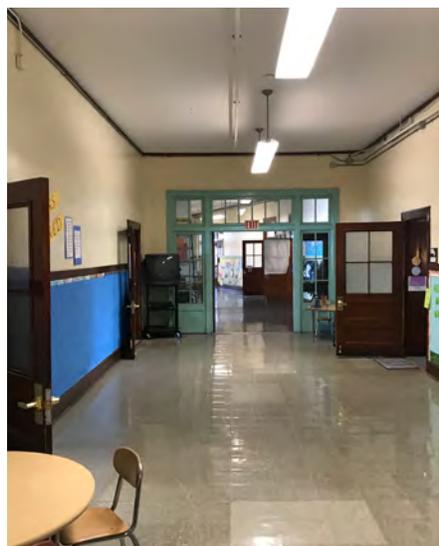
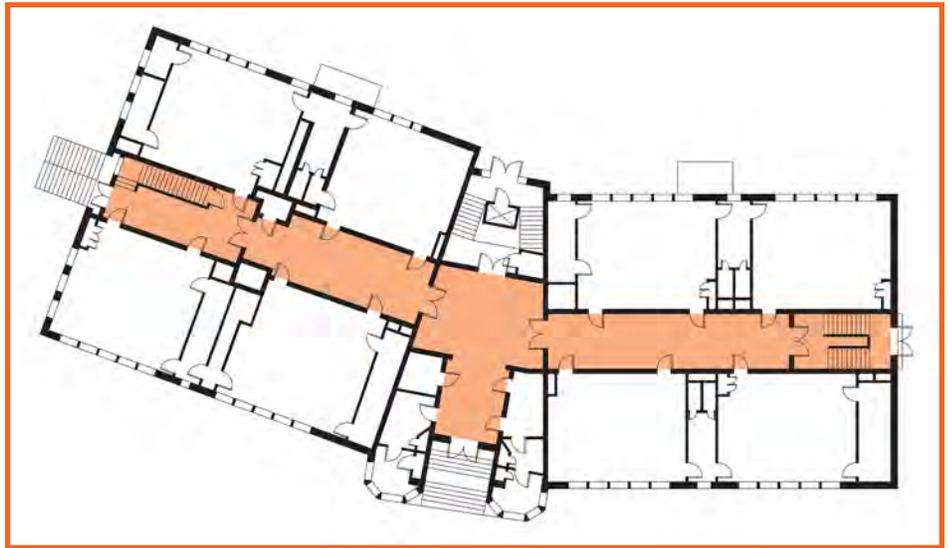


Image 26: Maple Elementary School Hallway.

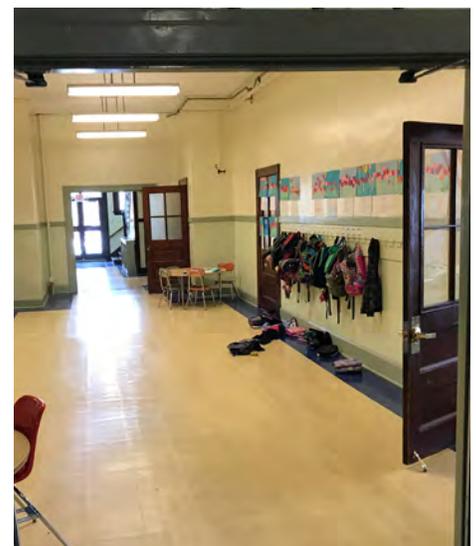


Image 27: Maple Elementary School Hallway.



Site:

- It is near commercial uses along Cottage Street
- Site has a frontage on the Chapel Street adjacent to the Cottage Street businesses and the on the Maple Street which is residential in character.
- Site layout with the building located close to Chapel Street and parking tucked towards the interior of the site is an ideal layout to create active street front and pedestrian friendly environment.
- The site offers opportunities for parking (approximately 75 spaces) and/or open space



Image 28: Maple Elementary School from Chapel Street.

5.2 Community Feedback and School Reuse Criteria

The future of the three schools will be determined by the City after the existing school functions move to the new school building in early 2021. This study lays the foundation for the reuse of the buildings to ensure that the initial planning functions in concert with the overall downtown planning strategy. The three school buildings and their sites are located within the downtown context and have their own distinct challenges and opportunities. Reuse of former school buildings and sites has historically been accomplished for a wide variety of new purposes in other communities including the implementation of single-use and mixed-use combinations ranging from housing, senior housing, or professional offices, to community amenities like arts centers, libraries, and museums. Some reuse precedents have also included provisions for public parking. The City does not require any of the buildings for municipal use, which opens up these buildings for sale or lease through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

To ensure that the any future reuse of the buildings and the sites is in keeping with the community desires and incorporates public amenities, the City can establish design standards, guidelines, use requirements, and other conditions that will govern the redevelopment and reuse of the former schools. The City can establish criteria that will govern the reuse solicitation and subsequent reuse decision. In similar communities, criteria have addressed public priorities such as:

- Reducing or eliminating municipal costs and maintenance
- Providing for active uses contributing to downtown vitality
- Retaining historic features and architecture
- Maximizing long term tax revenues
- Maximizing sale or lease revenues
- Providing for a mix of incomes
- Limiting the amount of uses that would generate parking demand
- Providing public benefits such as improved open space.

The following section describes the criteria development process, the feedback received, and the draft criteria for the City's consideration.

This report is not the final step. The City must continue to refine the most desirable outcome through the RFP process.

Process

During the first public meeting, the planning team sought feedback from the community about the desired uses for the school properties, and which factors should be prioritized to evaluate the future uses.

This activity depicted maps of the 3 schools and provided the prompts, "it would be great if Center became...because...", "it would be great if Pepin became...because...", "it would be great if Maple became...because..." Once participants had discussed with their groups and filled in the boards, they were provided sticker dots and asked to vote on the prioritization of proposed uses.

The community desires for the three schools are listed on the following pages with our analysis of the related ownership patterns for each of the uses. It is important to understand the ownership patterns of these uses as the City has expressed that they would like to avoid the burden of additional operation, maintenance, and building renovation expenses on the City's finances. In that case, the City may have to establish a public-private partnership with private or non-profit entities to attract the community-desired uses. In such a partnership, the City can contribute the building and associated land with a guarantee from the private or a non-profit partner that financial responsibility will not revert back to the City in the future.

Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 list desired uses identified by participants at the first public workshop for each of the three schools and the related ownership patterns. Please note these uses are not listed in order of priority.

Table 3: Center School Site Desired Uses



Image 29: Center School Site.

DESIRED USE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	NON-PROFIT
Affordable Housing		Y	Y
Artist's Co-op Housing			Y
Parking	Y		
Private Sale		Y	
Mixed-Income Housing		Y	
Senior Housing		Y	
Market (Like Faneuil Hall)	Y	Y	Y
Municipal Use	Y		
Museum	Y		Y
Senior Center	Y		Y
Food Hall (Like Haymarket)	Y		Y
Hotel - Bed & Breakfast		Y	
Park/Playground for K-8	Y		
Urgent Care Center		Y	
Educational/School Extension	Y		
Library	Y		Y
Mixed Use		Y	
Incubator/Co-working	Y		Y
Boarding School		Y	
Maker Space with Tools	Y		Y
Retail		Y	

Table 4: Pepin School Site Desired Uses



Image 30: *Pepin School Site.*

DESIRED USE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	NON-PROFIT
Intergenerational Health and Wellness Center or Community Center with Gym Access	Y		Y
Housing		Y	
Vocational School/Maker's Space	Y		Y
After School Program	Y		
Winter Farmer's Market	Y		Y
Incubator Spaces/Co-working Spaces	Y		Y
Rentable Community Space	Y		Y
Indoor Athletic Space	Y		Y
Culinary Space		Y	Y
Maintain Community Ownership	Y		
Senior Center	Y		
Library	Y		Y
Intergenerational Mutual Learning Center	Y		Y
Artist Live-Work Space		Y	Y
Emergency Shelter	Y		Y

Table 5: Maple School Site Desired Uses



Image 31: *Maple School Site.*

DESIRED USE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	NON-PROFIT
Parking	Y		
Affordable Mixed-Income Housing	Y	Y	
Playground/Open Space/Pulaski Park/Community Gardens	Y		
Library			Y
Artist Live/Work		Y	Y
Boutique Hotel		Y	
Mixed-Use			
Educational Use	Y		
Club/Restaurant		Y	
Senior Center	Y		Y
Museum	Y		Y
Business Incubator Space	Y		Y
Solar on Roof	Y		Y
Performance Space	Y		Y
Small Theater		Y	

Figure 19: Prioritization of School Reuse Criteria

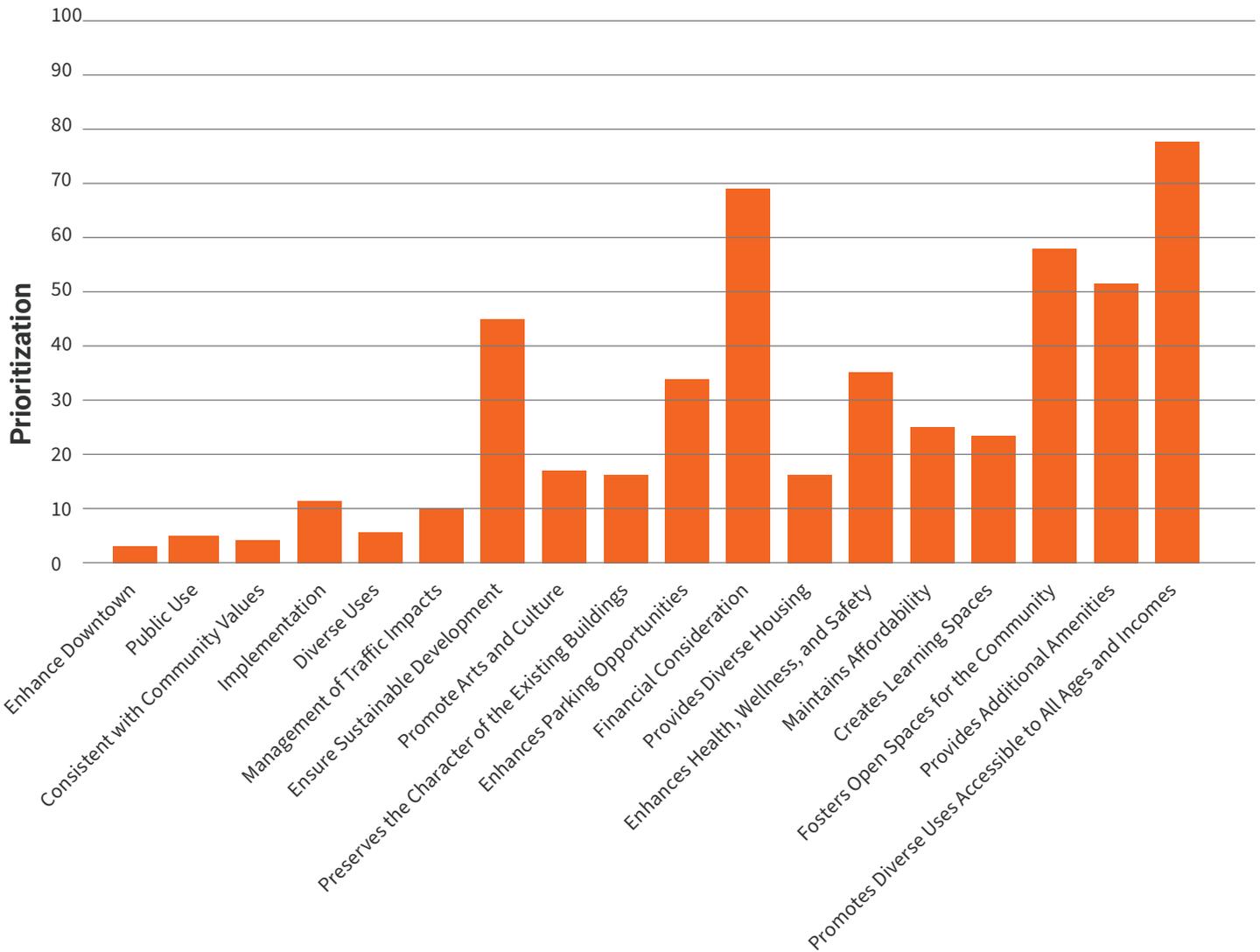
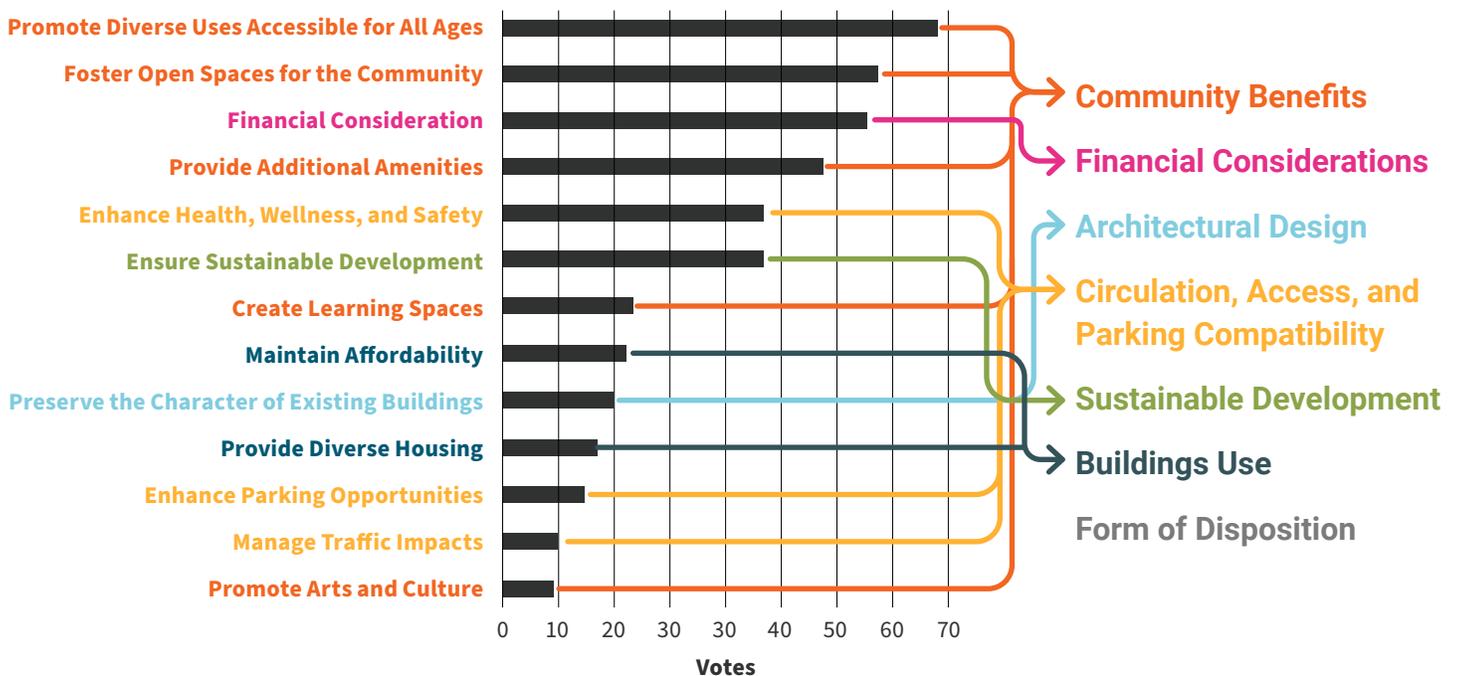


Figure 20: Incorporation of Community Feedback into Reuse Criteria



The final workshop exercise simply asked the groups to “help us define criteria that will prioritize desired uses.” This was the starting point for developing the evaluation criteria for future RFP submissions. Essentially what was being asked is which factors in determining the new uses for the school are most important and which trade-offs or compromises are deemed acceptable. After brainstorming criteria, participants again voted on priorities with sticker dots. The brainstorming yielded a total of 119 criteria comments which the planning team recategorized into 14 broad themes based

on the similarities between them. The votes were counted for each of these categories to understand the highest priorities.

Community Benefits with Spaces accessible to all ages from teens, youth to seniors and across all income groups, Additional Amenities, Open Spaces and Learning Spaces for the Community, and Potential of the Schools to Increase Tax Base were some of the highest voted criteria for future reuse.

The following graph represents the different criteria and the community preferences as voted by the participants.

Building Reuse Criteria

Based on the public feedback regarding different criteria, the planning team developed the following matrix for the City's and the future school reuse committee's consideration. The future School Reuse Committee can use these criteria to evaluate the proposals received by potential proponents.

The criteria are based on the 14 different themes identified during the first Public Workshop held on June 19th, 2019. The criteria address future building use, financial and economic considerations, building design, parking, access and site improvements, compatibility with surrounding uses, sustainable design considerations, and disposition process.

Priority Factors

The draft priority factors are weighted based on the average priority level voted on by Sounding Board members.

Sounding Board members ranked the priorities from 5 (high relative priority) to 1 (low relative priority) based on their participation in the planning and the community engagement process. A ranking of zero (0) occurred if the Sounding Board found that the criteria should not be used in the decision-making. A few members did rank some of the priorities as zero. In addition, some members provided no ranking for some of the priority factors. These blank rankings were excluded from the calculation of the averages.

Application Methodology:

The criteria provided above include averages of the Sounding Board member's priority factor weights. The criteria were developed with the feedback from the community for all three schools. Given the unique context of each school property within the downtown area, the planning team recommends the City reconstructs the weightages for the three different schools separately. Developing three different school-specific weightages for the criteria will allow the School Reuse Committee to incorporate important location-specific factors for individual sites.

The evaluation criteria includes a column for the Proposal Evaluation Score to be filled out by the individual committee members based on their proposal evaluation. The Proposal Evaluation Score is based on a linear unipolar three-point scale from 0 to 2 with the following defined levels/response categories.

Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)

- 0** = Proposal is non-responsive to the criteria
- 1** = Proposal is somewhat responsive to the criteria
- 2** = Proposal is fully responsive to the criteria

The defined levels are restricted to three-points to reduce ambiguity and elicit clear opinions from the committee members in the proposal evaluation process. The response category level "1" is provided for the committee members to express neutral or moderate opinions in their evaluation. Category level of "0" should be used if the proposal does not satisfy the said criteria. The Proposal Evaluation Score should be multiplied with the Priority Factor weights to produce a score for the individual criteria topic. The sum of these individual scores will provide a proposal score for individual Committee members. The average of the total scores of committee members will provide the overall ranking score for each individual proposal.

★ 0 = Proposal is **non-responsive** to the criteria

1 = Proposal is **somewhat responsive** to the criteria

2 = Proposal is **fully responsive** to the criteria

Table 6: School Reuse Criteria

ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
1a	Community Benefits	Intergenerational Use	Provides direct civic benefit through its function or activities for Easthampton residents of all ages	This criterion allows for potential civic uses to be incorporated in the building	3.44	
1b		Seniors	Provides direct civic benefit through its function or activities for seniors	Additional bonus points for uses that benefit seniors	3.44	
1c		Arts and culture	Provides direct civic benefit through its function or activities for Easthampton artists community	Additional bonus points for uses that benefit arts and culture in Easthampton	3.33	
1d		Young residents	Provides direct civic benefit through its function or activities for younger residents	Additional bonus points for uses that benefit teens	2.78	
1e		Payment for on-site or off-site improvements	Provides indirect civic benefits through off-site or on-site improvements or additional funding for activities that benefit Easthampton residents	This criterion allows for the new owner to fund off-site improvements or provide direct funding for civic uses at other locations	3.75	
1f		Enhanced tax revenue	The reuse of the building provides indirect community benefits through enhanced tax revenues	Provides for the uses that will add to the City's tax revenues - like commercial uses, for-profit uses, senior housing	3.67	
1g		Public open space dedication or easement	Provides direct civic benefits in the form of a park or a playground on the site for public use	Provision for a public open space in case the site is not re-parcelized with a public open space during the site disposition stage	3.67	

ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
1h		Public parking dedication or easement	Provides direct civic benefits in the form of X spaces of public parking on the site with adequate signage and wayfinding for public use	Provision for public parking in case the site is not re-parcelized with public parking during the site disposition stage	2.72	
2a	Financial Considerations	Economic benefits	Future use provides long-term positive economic benefits to the City	Redevelopment/reuse should result in long-term positive economic benefits for the City as a higher NPV of economic benefits	3.89	
2b		Comparative economic benefits	The higher value proposition for the reuse of the existing building will be preferred if other factors are equal	The highest financial value in the form of purchase price or long-term tax revenue, jobs created may be preferred if all other factors are equal	3.63	
2c		Redevelopment schedule	More rapid development and reuse will be preferred to reduce the holding costs and risks to the City	Redevelopment should be time-bound to reduce City's risk with changing market conditions and proponent's funding	3.00	
2d		Financial capability of the proponent to develop, operate, and maintain the use	The preferred reuse proponent must be financially sound and capable of accomplishing and maintaining the reuse that it proposes	Redevelopment / reuse proponent should have secured funding resources to complete the project and sustain the project through lease-up/occupancy stage	3.89	

ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
2e		Long-term viability	The new use will be a long-term occupant, and there is a limited risk that the City will be required to undertake a subsequent re-acquisition or disposition process	Redevelopment/reuse should be financially self-sustaining to reduce the risk of defunct/vacant buildings in Downtown and without recourse to City funding for operation and maintenance	4.00	
3a	Architectural Design	Preservation of existing architectural character	Building reuse preserves and enhances the existing architectural character of the building	Preference for uses that preserve that existing building	2.56	
3b		Compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood	Building reuse/redevelopment that is in keeping with the scale and character of the existing surrounding context	Preference for redevelopment uses that are architecturally compatible with the surrounding uses. This criterion allows for potential demolition of the existing school buildings if they are functionally obsolete for the proposed uses	3.33	
3c		Site improvements	Reuse or redevelopment of the buildings enhances the building perimeter for pedestrians and users	Preference for uses that enhance and improve the building perimeter including sidewalks, landscaping, improved pedestrian entrances	4.00	

ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
4a	Circulation, Access, and Parking	Parking	Adequate parking is provided for all uses on-site or with shared parking agreements with surrounding or adjacent property owners	Adequate parking for uses on site or with shared parking arrangements so existing parking infrastructure is not impacted	2.89	
4b		Future neighborhood connections	Redevelopment/reuse provides additional pedestrian connections through the site with public access paths to improve pedestrian connections to surrounding uses on adjacent lots	Incentive for proponents to incorporate connections to surrounding properties if appropriate	4.11	
4c		Pedestrian amenities	Redevelopment/reuse provides a safe, walkable pedestrian environment for all users with sidewalks, pedestrian routes, and lighting separated from vehicular circulation	Preference for safe, walkable sidewalks and pedestrian paths	4.00	
4d		Bicyclist amenities	Redevelopment/reuse provides adequate on-site facilities or improvements for bicyclists	Preference for Bicyclists with adequate bicycle infrastructure including bike paths, bike parking around the site if required	2.67	
4e		Parking signage	Clear demarcation and signage are provided for vehicular circulation including on-site parking, shared parking, and service vehicles access, loading, and unloading	Clear parking signage	3.11	

ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
4f		Signage and wayfinding	Signage will be provided indicating the public ways, pedestrian paths, public amenities, and open space	Clear signage	3.22	
4g		Future public benefits	The proponent will participate with the City and the surrounding property owners with any shared parking arrangements, public path easements, open space dedications, and other arrangements as brought forward by the City to allow the continued use of the sites before its redevelopment/reuse to the extent feasible	Ensuring that the proponent is open to reasonable future public benefit arrangements after the site is redeveloped	4.33	
5a	Compatibility	Zoning	The reuse/redevelopment will be compatible with zoning regulations in effect at the time of disposition	This criterion ensures that future use is consistent with the zoning. If the community-desired uses are not compatible with the current zoning, then the zoning will have to be changed before disposition	4.44	
5b		Traffic management	The reuse/redevelopment will not impose an activity level in terms of traffic that is any greater than when the building was in use as a school	Ensures that the new use does not generate additional traffic	2.89	

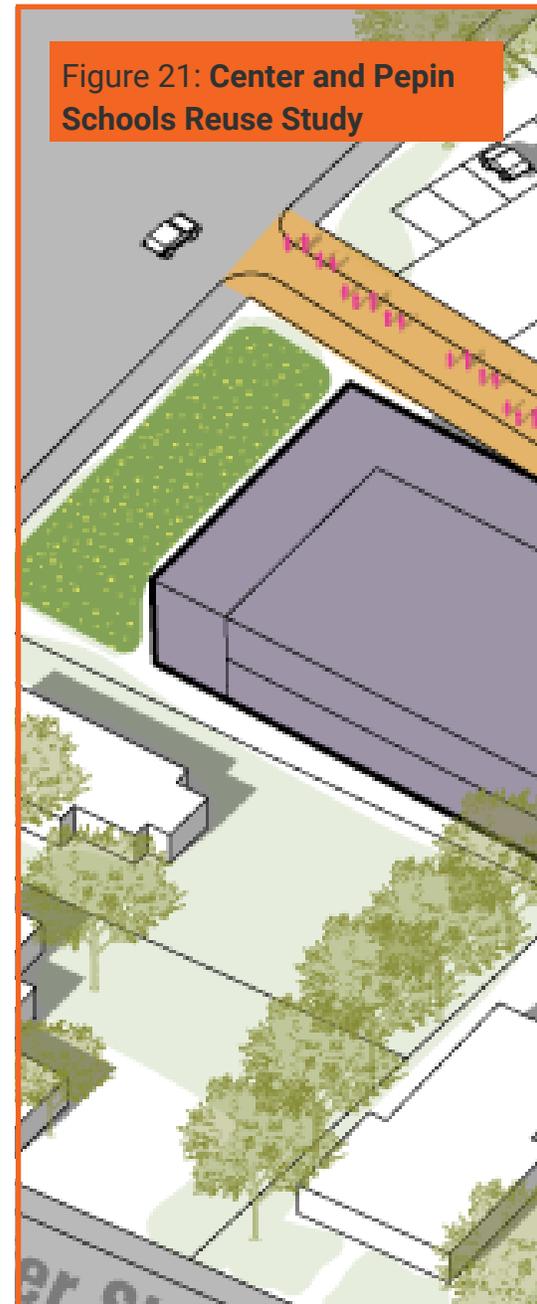
ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
5c		Night-time uses	The proposed use will not impose night-time activity that creates significant negative impacts or nuisance with the surrounding neighborhood	Ensures that the new use doesn't add night-time activity impacts	2.56	
5d		Day-time uses	The use will not result in daytime activities that are inconsistent with the surrounding neighborhood	Ensures that the new use doesn't add detrimental daytime activity impacts	2.33	
6a	Sustainable Development	Sustainable Design	Redevelopment/reuse of the site and building incorporates eco-friendly and sustainable design features	The building incorporates sustainable design features	3.63	
6b		LEED Certification	Redevelopment/reuse of the building will earn LEED Certification level of Silver and higher	Additional benefits if the building pursues LEED certification	3.25	
7a	Building Use	Diversity of housing types	The housing use proposed adds to the diversity of housing within the Downtown	This is to ensure that the housing use prioritizes seniors and younger demographic who would like to live closer to Downtown	3.94	
7b		Affordable housing	The housing use proposed includes 15% of units as affordable housing units	Ensures affordable housing at the same level as 40R Zoning requirement	3.33	

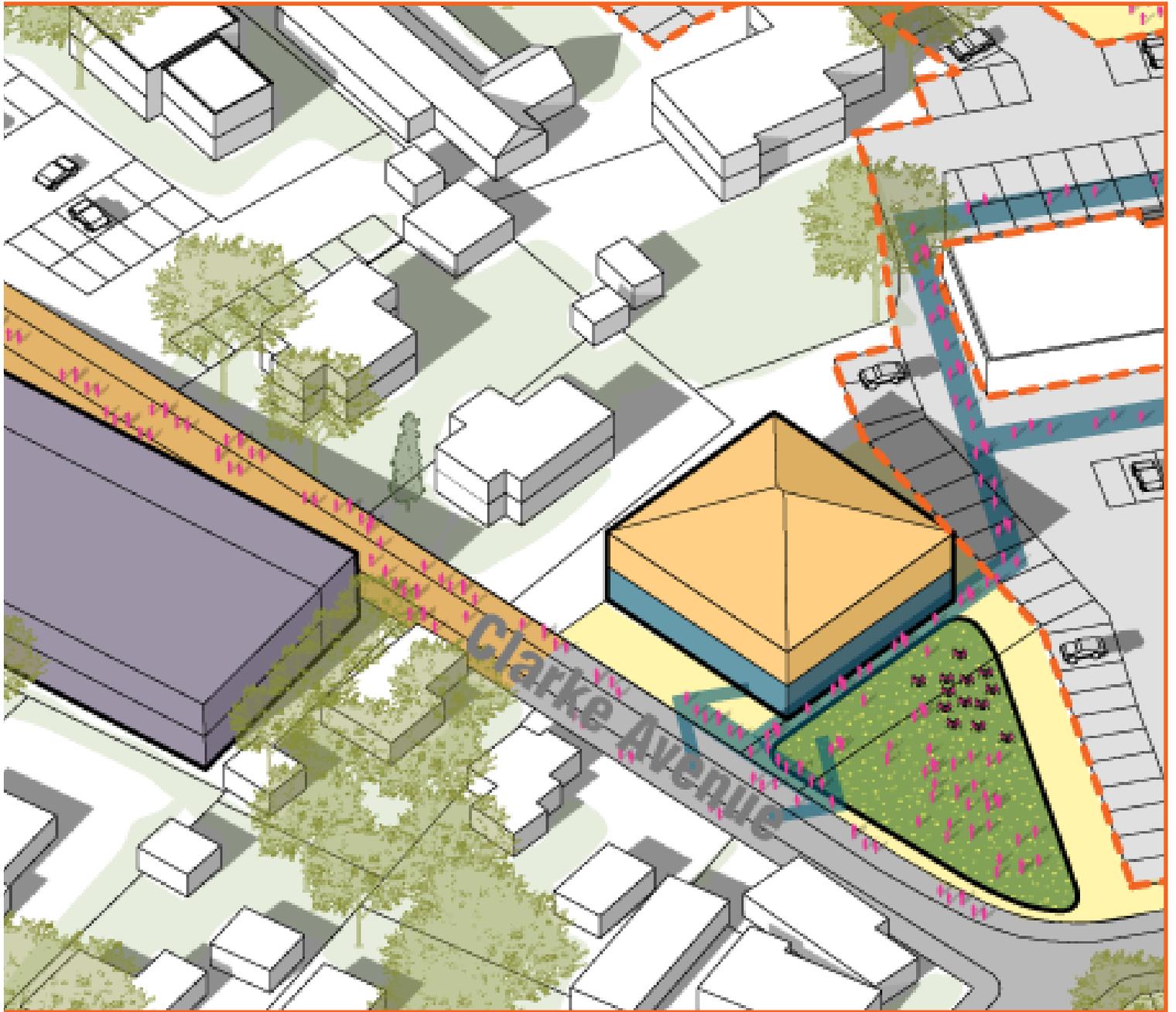
ID #	Category	Topic	Criteria	Evaluation (for explanation only)	Priority Factor	Committee Member Proposal Evaluation Score (Scale 0-2)*
7c		Artist's live-work	The building redevelopment/reuse includes spaces focused towards artists such as artist's live-work spaces, artist's studios	Additional preference if the spaces focused towards artists are incorporated	2.67	
8a	Form of Disposition	Disposition	The form of disposition (lease or sale) should be based on market considerations and provide the best net present value to the City	Disposition has to provide the best value to the City	3.75	

5.3 School Reuse Scenarios

Pepin and Center Schools Building Reuse

1. Promote a mix of civic uses that include an intergenerational center/community space with the Adaptive Reuse of the Center School building.
2. Encourage redevelopment of the Pepin School building as housing/senior housing including affordable housing.
3. Alternatively, the Pepin School building could also be redeveloped as a future library with integrated community space. An expanded library close to Downtown will enhance the pedestrian activity in Downtown and add vitality.
4. Center School and Pepin School both will require significant architectural upgrades related to code compliance, ADA accessibility requirements, and improvements related to building exterior. Center School building is relatively small compared to the Pepin School building and has maintained its original form from 1902. Pepin School building, built in 1912, is in relatively good condition compared to the Center School building, but is almost three times the size of the Center School and will require substantial financial resources for a publicly funded adaptive reuse.
5. The stewardship and responsibility for disposition should be accomplished under the control and direction of the Mayor, by transferring the property from the School Committee.
6. The Center school land should be subdivided and separated into areas for:
 - The building parcel and areas needed for access, landscaping, and parking
 - Public open space at the corner of Clark Avenue and School Street
 - Public parking, vehicular and pedestrian ways
7. The public open space at the corner of Clark Avenue and School Street can be designated as an open space easement during the disposition or can be made available for public use with the subdivision of the Center School parcel.
8. The Mayor's office should initiate the formation of the School Re-Use Committee. The Mayor's office should prepare and solicit reuse proposals through a Request for Proposals procedure. The building and directly associated site area should be made available to the entity and for a project that will best meet the Building Reuse Criteria recommended by the Downtown Strategic Plan, consequent to successful negotiations and with terms and conditions meeting City interests.

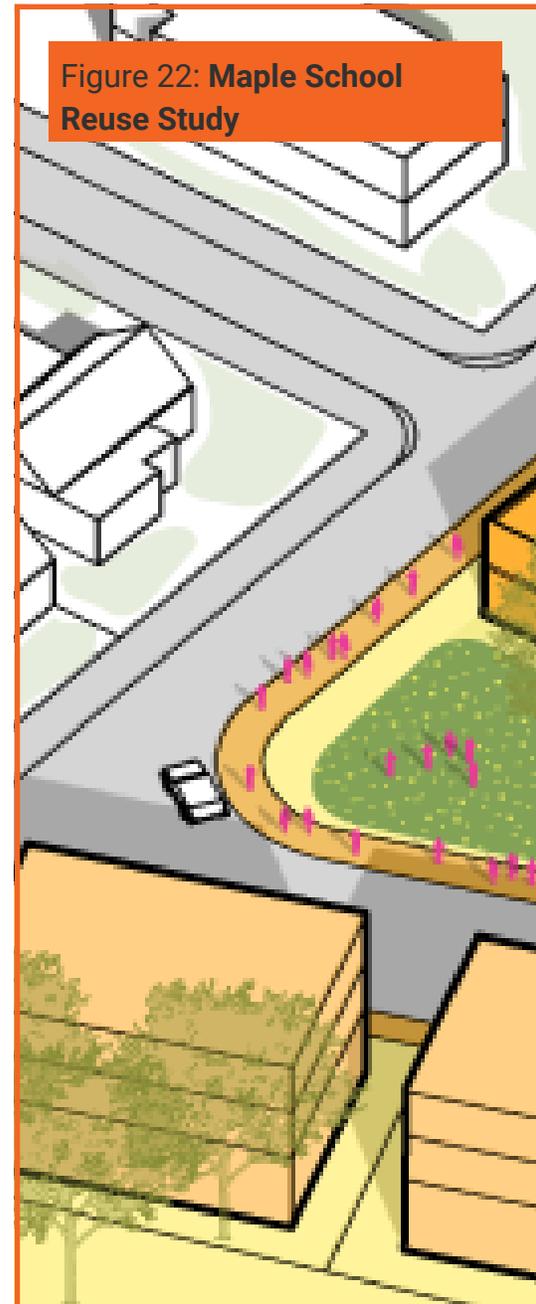


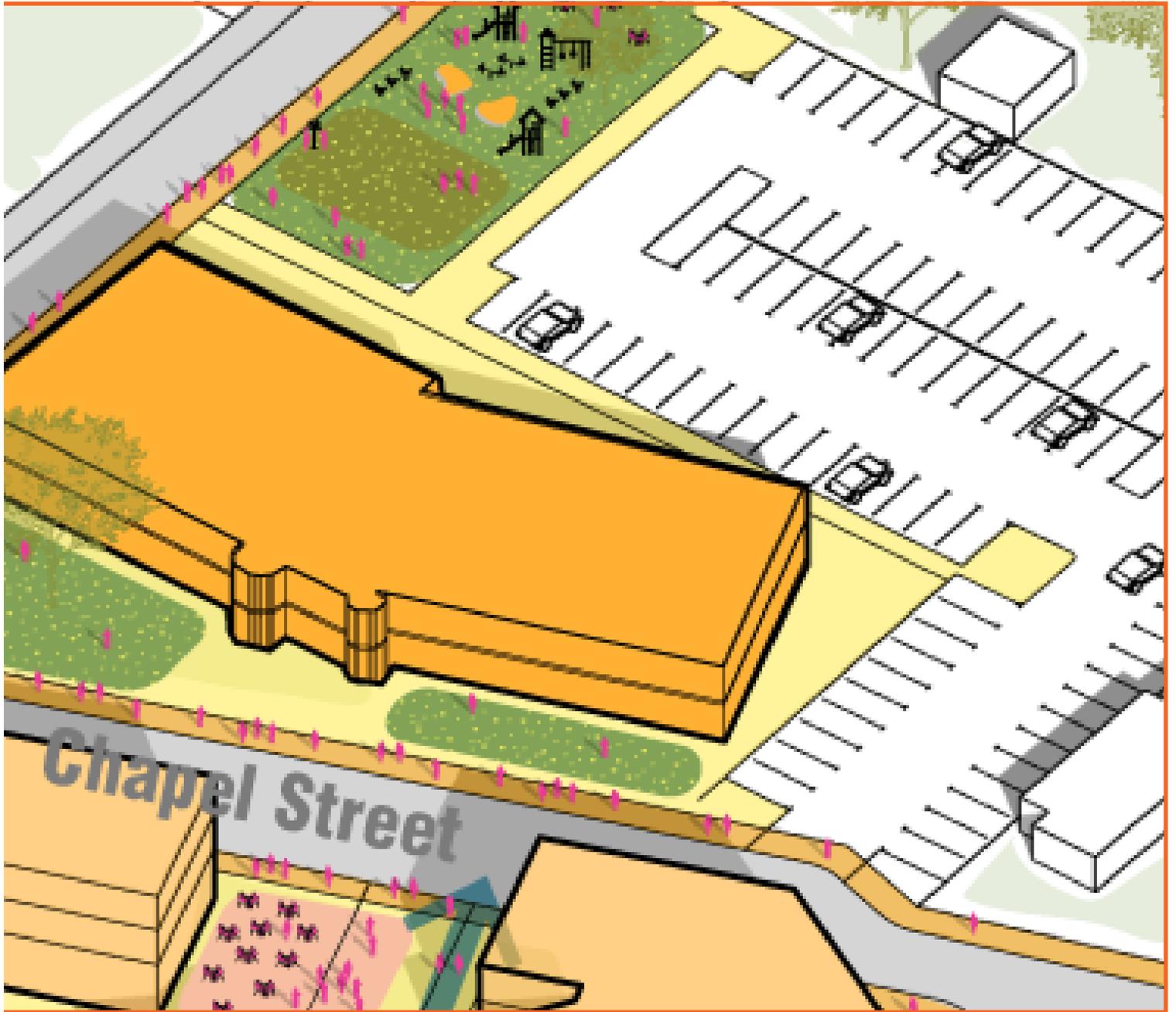


Maple School Building Reuse

1. The Maple School building should be promoted as a live/work or artist housing, including an arts incubator and maker spaces. Housing/senior housing could become a second-best reuse option for the school should the artist live/work and incubator space prove not to be feasible.
2. The stewardship and responsibility for disposition should be accomplished under the control and direction of the Mayor by transferring the property from the School Committee.
3. The Maple School lot should be subdivided and separated into areas for:
 - a. The building parcel and areas needed for access, landscaping, and parking
 - b. Public open space/park along Maple Street
 - c. Public parking, vehicular and pedestrian ways
4. The public open space along Maple Street can be designated as an open space easement during the disposition or can be made available for public use with the subdivision of the Maple School parcel.
5. The Mayor's office should initiate the formation of the School Re-Use Committee. The Mayor's office should prepare and solicit reuse proposals through a Request for Proposals procedure. The building and directly associated site area should be made available to the entity and for a project that will best meet the Building Reuse Criteria recommended by the Downtown Strategic Plan, consequent to successful negotiations and with terms and conditions meeting City interests.
6. The Maple School could also become an alternative location for the public library.
7. Based on the Cottage Street Area Parking Study, the Mayor's office should examine the degree to which the Maple School lot should be used for public parking.

Figure 22: Maple School Reuse Study





5.4 Next Steps

Figure 23: Planning Process Diagram

This diagram illustrates how this Downtown Strategic Plan fits into a larger vision and planning process for the City of Easthampton.



This Study



Formation of School Building Reuse Committee

Development of Request for Proposals

School Building Disposition Process

Disposition, Redevelopment, and Reuse

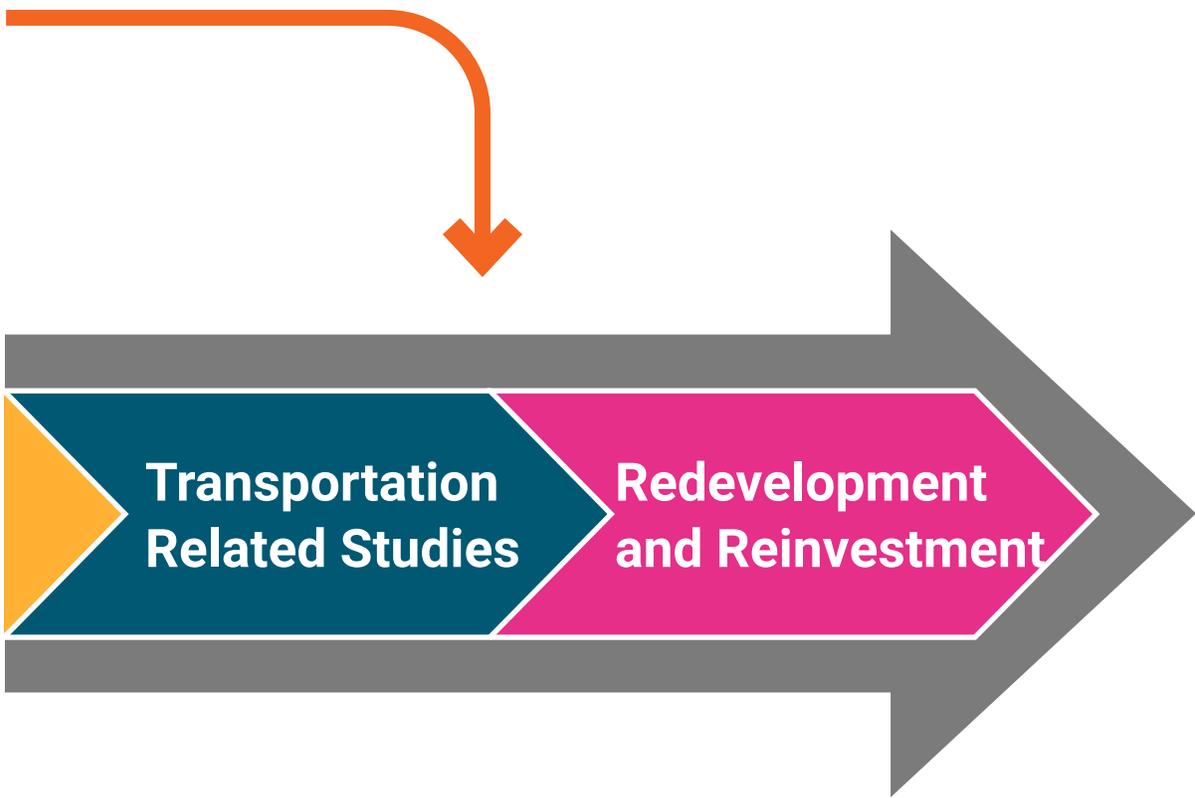
Reuse and Redevelopment of School Buildings

Union Street TIP

Zoning Updates

Short-and Long-term Parking Improvements

Downtown Easthampton Reinvestment Process



6 Smart Growth District Zoning Evaluation



Image 32: Storefronts along Cottage Street enhance the character and identity of downtown Easthampton.

The City approved and adopted Smart Growth Overlay Zoning District (SGZD) in April 2010 with the purpose of promoting residential development in the Downtown area and the revitalization of the historic mill buildings along the Manhan River. While the mills have undergone successful redevelopment and are today important generators of economic activity, a similar transformation has not happened in the Downtown. This Strategic Plan is intended to investigate this issue and find potential reasons.

Massachusetts Chapter 40R zoning or Smart Growth Zoning, as it is also called, is aimed at increasing housing supply and affordable housing in particular by allowing mixed use and denser housing development in designated areas. The districts created through this zoning are overlay districts that allow property owners and developers to choose between applying for building permits under the overlay district (denser housing allowed) or applying under the underlying zoning district that predated the 40R zoning. While 40R districts generally allow for larger developments, an owner or developer may choose the underlying zoning because the amount of development allowed is sufficient to satisfy the project needs or because development may be more economically feasible.

Figure 1 illustrates the existing zoning districts in the Downtown and its surroundings. The entire study area for this Strategy Plan is included in the SGZD, and it also encompasses five (5) other underlying zoning districts. These include the Downtown Business (DB), Neighborhood Business (NB), Mixed Use/Mill Industrial MI, Residential-Urban (R-5), and Residential-Suburban B (R-10) Districts.

Potential Reasons why the SGZD has not Resulted in More Development

The following observations have been compiled as a consideration of potential answers to the question – Is there any premise in the Easthampton Smart Growth Zoning District (SGZD) that might preclude or constrain residential development?

Some of the first elements to review are the use and dimensional requirements set forth by the district. How do they compare to the underlying zoning? Given the fact that developers can choose between applying for a zoning permit through the SGZD or the underlying zone, could the SGZD requirements represent a disincentive to mixed-use development in comparison to multifamily or commercial use requirements in the underlying zoning districts?

An overview of the current Zoning Ordinance points to a few potential reasons to investigate:

Applying for a development permit in the SGZD may be less advantageous to a residential developer than choosing the underlying zoning district

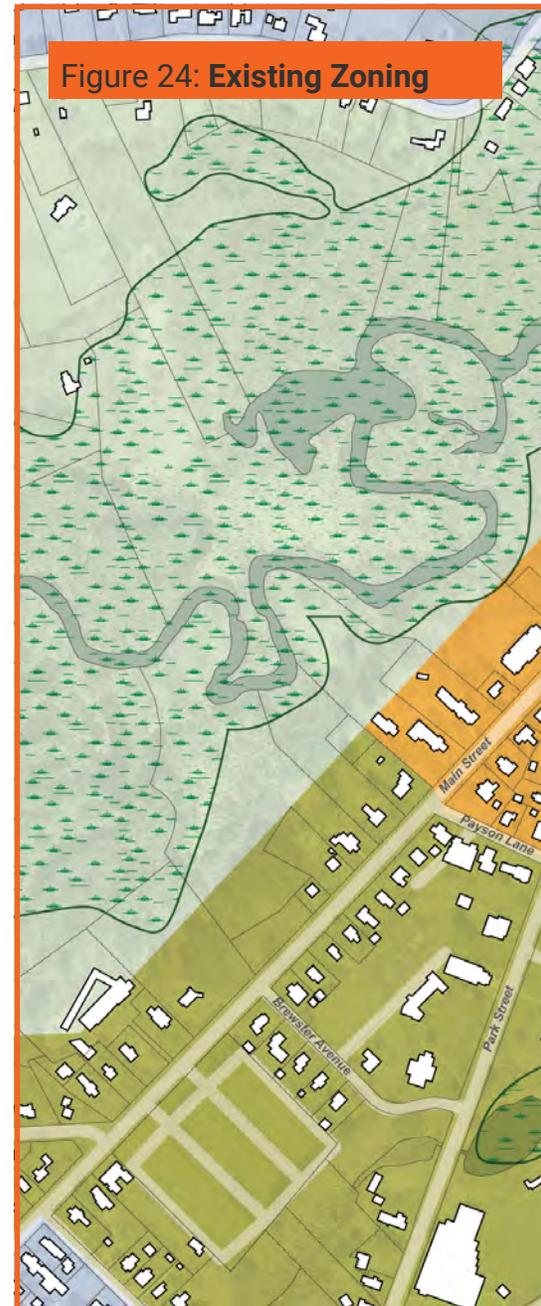
SGZD minimum and maximum requirements for affordable housing units may be limiting the amount and type of developers willing to apply

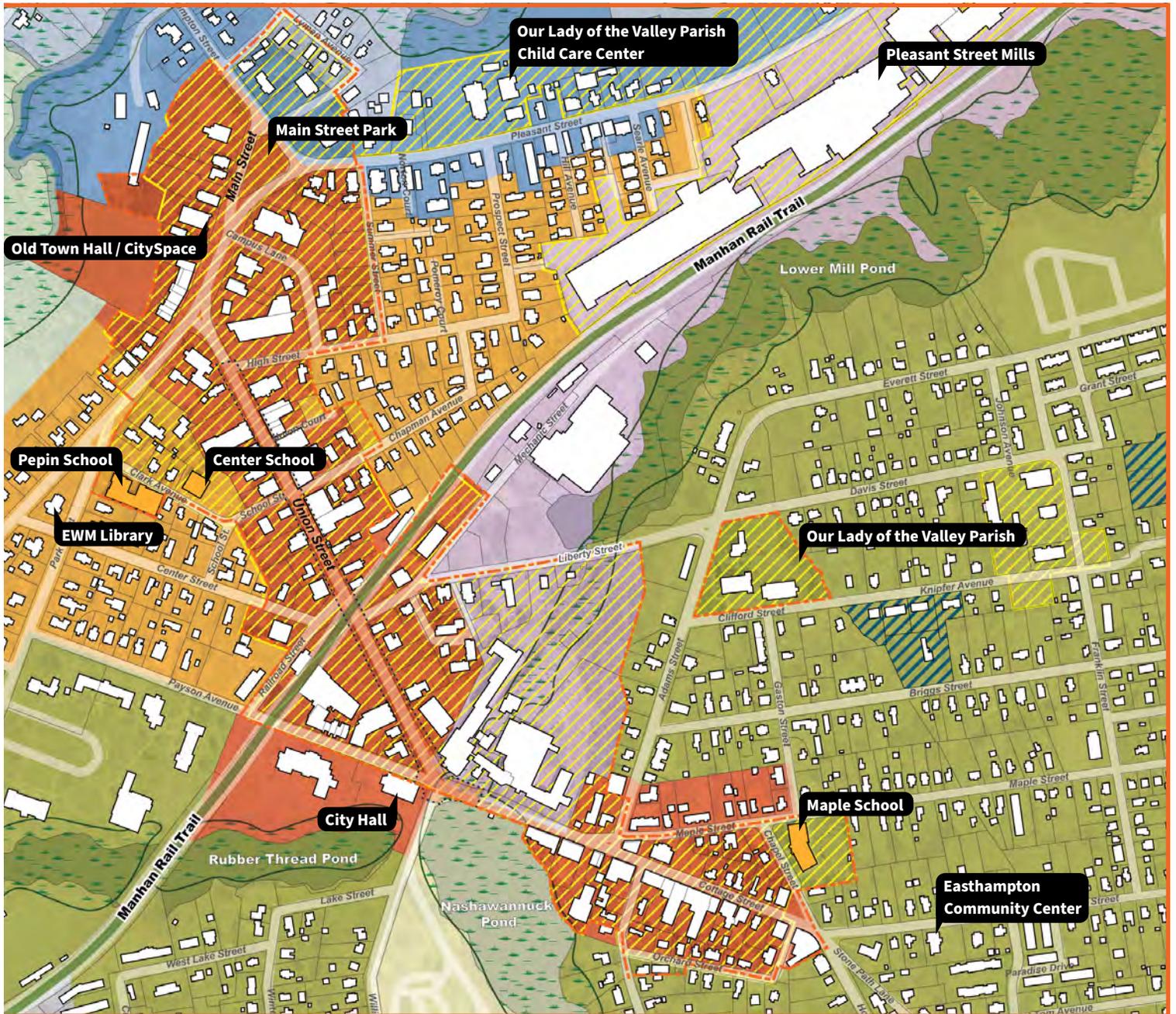
Parcels available for redevelopment may be too small to benefit from SGZD provisions

Dimensional standards may be too restrictive to support mixed-use development

Further analysis of these potential reasons is discussed below, and conclusions are drawn to identify possible ways and recommendations to promote Mixed-use development in the downtown area.

Existing Zoning





Existing Opportunity Zone

 Designated "Opportunity" Zone

"The Opportunity Zone Program is a federally-established program to provide investment incentives for certain census tracts. This is a tool to encourage growth in low income communities."

"The recently passed U.S. Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017 created the Opportunity Zone Program to provide incentives for investment in low income communities throughout the country. An Opportunity Zone is a designated geographic area, in which individuals can gain favorable tax treatment on their capital gains, by investing those funds (through a privately-created Opportunity Fund) into economic activities in the area. The Governor of each state is able to nominate up to 25 percent of its low income census tracts (LICs) to be designated as Opportunity Zones."

-mass.gov/opportunity-zone-program. Accessed 11/12/2019.





Table 7: Comparison of Uses Permitted in the SGZD and the Underlying Zoning

Some of the most relevant uses that could be components of a potential downtown mixed use development include the following, which are listed together with their permitting requirements as established by the Easthampton Table of Use Regulations (Table 5-1) and Section 7.451SGZD Table of Use, of the Zoning Ordinance.

PA = Site Plan Approval
 SP = Special Permit
 SPB = Special Permit from the Planning Board
 N = Not Allowed

Requirement	SGZD	DB	NB	MI	R-5	R-10
Multifamily dwelling (no affordable housing requirement) No dwellings on street level	N	PA	SPB	SPB	PA	SPB
Multifamily dwelling with affordable housing (15% min) No dwellings on street level	N	SPB	SPB	SPB	SPB	SPB
Planned Unit Development for Mixed Uses (4 acres min)	N	PA	SPB	SPB	N	N
Mixed-use Development	PA	N	N	N	N	N
Multifamily dwelling with affordable housing (20% min) Mixed-use projects only, not on the ground floor, except ADA unit on back (SGZD)	PA	N	N	N	N	N
Mill Renovation for Mixed-use	PA	N	N	N	N	N
Convenience market	PA	SPB	SPB	SPB	N	N
Beauty shop, dry-cleaner	PA	PA	SP	SPB	N	N
Pharmacy	PA	PA	PA	SPB	N	N
Supermarket (more than 5000 sf)	PA	PA	SP	N	N	N
Restaurant, bar	PA	PA	SP	SPB	N	N
Baker, deli, fish market	PA	PA	PA	PA	N	N
Professional offices	PA	PA	SP	SPB	N	N
Research and development	PA	SP	SP	PA	N	N
Wholesale trade	PA	N	N	SPB	N	N
General manufacturing, non-hazardous	PA	N	N	SPB	N	N

In looking at the use requirements shown in the table, it becomes clear that the SGZD is the only mechanism to obtain a permit for Mixed-use development because Mixed-use is not allowed in the underlying zoning districts. However, Multifamily Dwelling use is allowed by Site Plan Approval (PA) in the Downtown Business (DB) District, and by Special Permit from the Planning Board (SPB) in the Mill Industrial (MI) District. This could be an interesting option for residential development proposals in the downtown area without having to include ground floor retail or uses accessible to the public.

An overview of Area, Height, and Bulk Regulations (Tables 6-1 and 6-2 of the Zoning Ordinance) and rough calculations of the amount of dwellings that could be accommodated on a hypothetical one-acre site, indicates that it might be possible to achieve higher multifamily residential densities in the DB district than mixed-use residential densities in the SGZD (according to Section 8.32, Multifamily Housing Dimensional Requirements, the maximum number of dwelling units per structure shall be 18 and more than one structure may be allowed on a lot provided that the minimum lot size requirements are met for each structure; the minimum lot size requirements in the DB district are 5,000 square feet). Although the development potential of small lots is limited by size and configuration, a prospective developer of a large lot could apply for a Multifamily Dwelling development permit in the DB district and obtain residential densities of 36 units per acre or more, while a Mixed-use development permit in the SGZD zone would require a residential density of 20

units per acre (Table 7-1. Height and Density Requirements in the Downtown Mixed-Use Sub-District). Prospective developers may evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of choosing the SGZD approval process over the underlying zoning based on their expectations about return on investment and residential density.

Another relevant underlying zone to compare is the Mixed Use/Mill Industrial (MI) district. The MI district allows Planned Unit Development for Mixed Uses by Special Permit from the Planning Board (SPB) for lots larger than four (4) acres. The largest parcels in the downtown study area are located along Cottage Street. Both are lots larger than 4 acres and therefore could qualify for Planned Unit Development. However, these properties have been redeveloped in recent past years, and it seems improbable that further development would take place. The rest of the land parcels located within the Downtown study area are smaller than 4 acres and would not qualify for this type of Special Permit.

Affordable Housing Requirements

Section 7.461 of the SGZD requires that “not less than twenty percent (20%) or more than 50% of housing units constructed shall be Affordable Housing. For Multifamily Housing limited to elderly residents, projects shall have at least thirty percent (30%) affordable housing units. Every project shall create at least one affordable unit.”

While the minimum 20% requirement

of affordable units is consistent with the purpose and standards of Chapter 40R, the state regulations do not establish a minimum requirement below 20% or a maximum percentage limit of affordable units. Could these requirements in the Easthampton ordinance be perceived as limitations or actually become restrictions to the type of developer interested in mixed-use or housing development?

Studies on affordable housing have identified the competitive strengths of partnerships between for-profit and nonprofit developers to succeed at building affordable housing relative to the strength of for-profit and nonprofit developers working individually. For-profit developers often bring expedient access to financial resources that allows them to quickly activate the land purchase and design/construction processes, but remaining involved in the operational and management aspect of affordable housing services may not be part of their mission or timetable. Nonprofit developers typically operate with limited cash reserves, but their mission and legal structure is driven to long-term oriented social and community service; profit distribution to individuals is prohibited, which allows them to operate with lower rates of return. (source: Rachel Bratt, Should We Foster the Nonprofit Housing Sector as Developers and Owners of Subsidized Rental Housing? March 2007).

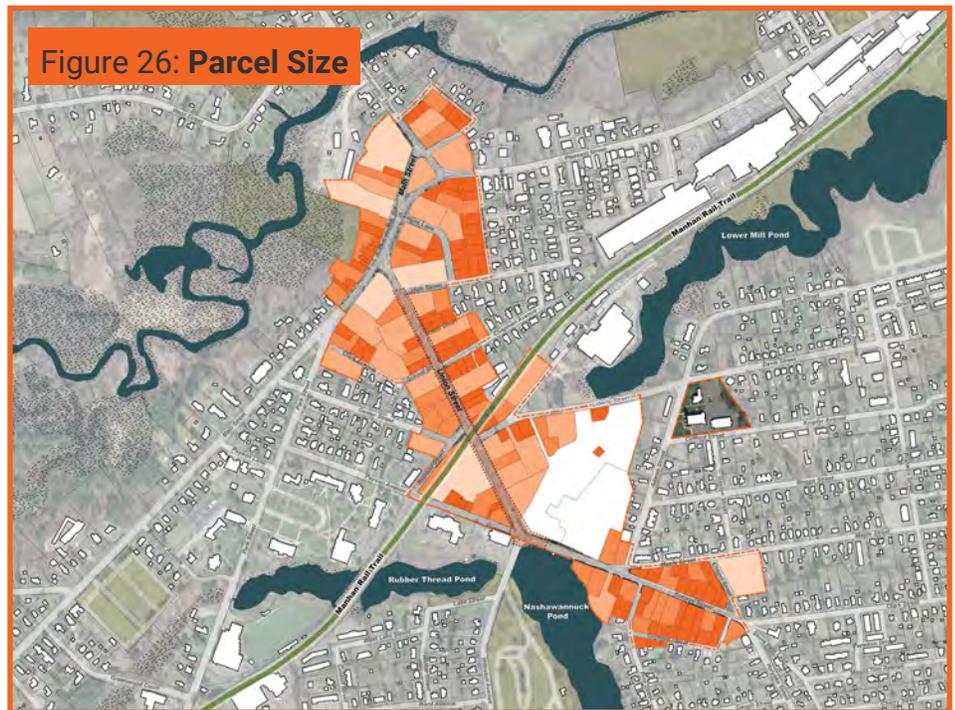
The SGZD requirement of at least one affordable unit per project makes every property owner or developer apply for affordable housing tax credits and/or associate with a nonprofit entity that might obtain additional subsidies and operate the units, regardless of the developer’s

interest and mission (the regional housing partnership, HAP, is identified as the Monitoring Agent in the ordinance, but this is a different role than a development partner). This may discourage for-profit developers to participate in small projects in the downtown on account of added complexities to the financing and development process, especially considering that it is possible to apply for a permit for multifamily housing in the DB underlying district without any requirement for affordable units (see Multifamily Dwelling in Table 5-1 above).

On the other hand, the 50% cap to the number of allowed affordable units in a project excludes the possibility that a nonprofit developer may become engaged to build the entire residential component of a mixed-use project unless it includes 50% of the units at market rate (arguably contrary to the nonprofit mission) or it becomes a partner with a for-profit residential developer. While the 50% cap may be an effective tool to seek income diversity in new developments, it could have unintended consequences in discouraging certain types of developers from working in the downtown.

Parcel (Lot) Size Limitations

An analysis of property lot size using Assessor's data and mapping information available through the state's geographical information system database (MassGIS) indicates that close to half of all the existing properties in the Downtown study area are smaller than ¼ acre (10,890 square feet). A parcel classification by size is represented in Figure 2, where the smaller lots are shown in a darker color.



With the SGZD density requirement of 20 housing units per acre and 20% being affordable units, parcels smaller than ¼ acre or 10,890 square feet would require the development of up to 4 housing units, one of which would be affordable. Would this represent enough economic incentive to attract for-profit developers? Would this provide enough return on investment to encourage a property owner to add housing units to an existing commercial building? While a detailed proforma analysis is beyond the scope of this study, it seems likely that many of these parcels might not be redeveloped as mixed-use projects unless they become assembled as part of a larger development proposal, where the otherwise thin margins of profitability may



be compounded by a larger development volume and scale.

Dimensional Requirements

A review of dimensional requirements as established in Table 6-1. Easthampton Table of Area Regulations, and Table 7-1. Height and Density Requirements in the Downtown Mixed-Use Sub-District (SGZD) indicates

that dimensional standards in the SGZD allow for the creation of more development volume than those in the underlying zoning districts. Therefore, they do not appear to be a discouragement to developers for choosing the SGZD over the underlying zoning districts but rather an incentive (e.g. Maximum Building Height for Mixed-Use and Multi-family Dwelling in the Downtown portions of the SGZD is 60 feet or 5 stories, while it would be 55 feet or 4 stories in the underlying DB district with a Special Permit of the Planning Board).

Parking Requirements

Parking requirements may be restrictive for mixed use development when all the required parking for the residential, commercial, or other use components is added together. This may be particularly difficult to accommodate in smaller parcels, such as the ¼ acre parcels discussed above. Larger sites may offer more flexibility to layout parking, building footprints, and open space due to their size and configuration.

Using again a parcel smaller than ¼ acre or 10,890 square feet as an example, the required 4 housing units could be accommodated in a 5-story building of approximately 1,000 square feet per floor, where the ground floor is commercial space and each upper floor is a two-bedroom residential unit. Each of those units would need 2 parking spaces and the entire building would need 1 more space for residential visitors. In addition, the ground floor commercial space would require 3 spaces, adding up to a total of 12 parking spaces.

Envisioning a ¼ acre rectangular parcel with the required minimum lot width of 50 feet and 217' of lot depth (10,890 square feet in total) and applying the required setbacks of 10 feet in the front, 5 feet in the sides, and 20 feet in the back, it becomes apparent that only 6 parking spaces can fit in the parcel behind the building (50% parking deficit relative to the zoning requirement).

While the current ordinance allows and encourages reductions in the number of spaces through shared parking proposals, a 50% parking deficit may be too difficult to overcome without being able to find alternative parking locations within walking distance or other forms of parking relief for mixed-use development projects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summarizing findings and results from the analysis, the SGZD is a 40R overlay zoning district well designed and intended to permit mixed use development with affordable housing by right (subject only to Site Plan Approval by the Planning Board). However, mixed-use development in the amount and intensity originally anticipated when the district was established has not happened. Some of the identified potential reasons may be avoided or mitigated by considering small adjustments to zoning to address the identified issues:

- Consider redefining the current density requirement of 20 units per acre as a minimum allowable density of 20 units per acre, and leaving more flexibility to determine the maximum allowable density for each project through the Site Plan

review and approval process. This would make the SGZD more competitive with the current Multi-family Dwelling use in the Downtown Business (DB) district.

- Consider deleting the requirements of at least one affordable unit per project and a maximum of 50% of the units being affordable, and keeping only the requirement that a minimum of 20% of the housing units be affordable for projects with more than 12 units. This would not only be consistent with Chapter 40R regulations (Section 6(a)(4)), but it would facilitate compliance for small for-profit developers, nonprofit developers interested in developing all the housing component of a mixed-use project, and property owners seeking to add a few housing units to their existing commercial buildings and increase their return on investment.

- Consider easing up parking requirements for mixed-use projects, by adopting special standards in the SGZD Downtown Mixed-use Subdistrict more supportive of smart growth and walkable neighborhood environments (e.g. one (1) on-site parking space per dwelling unit instead of one per bedroom, two (2) on-site parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space instead of three), at least for smaller parcels within the downtown (e.g. a “threshold” could be considered in which properties smaller than ¼ acre could be subject to lower parking ratios while larger parcels are subject to the standard requirements unless they find parking reductions by sharing agreements with other properties located nearby).

7

Downtown Revitalization Strategies

- Downtown-wide Recommendations
- Main Street Subarea
- Main Street x Union Street Subarea
- Lower Union Street Subarea
- Cottage Street Subarea

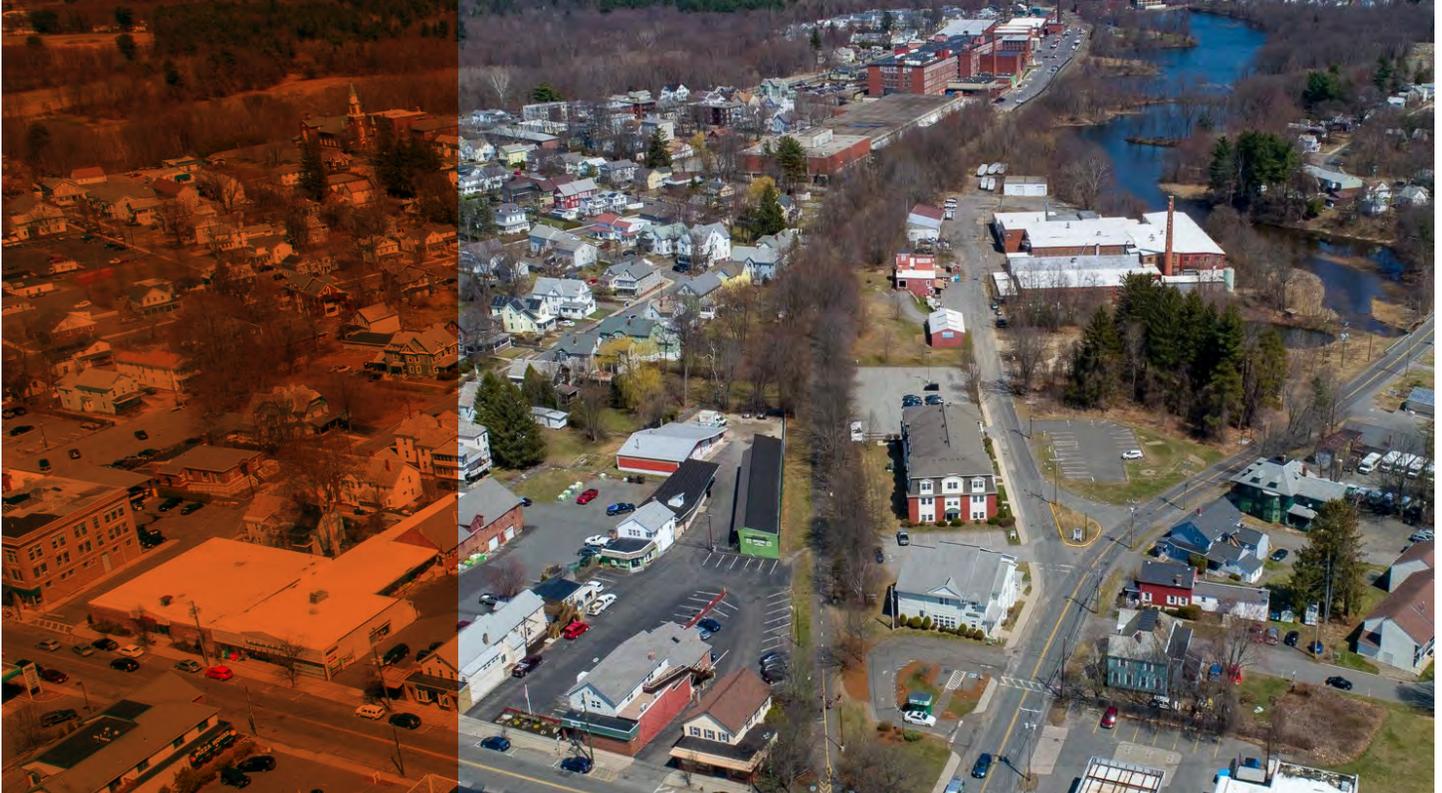


Image 33: An aerial view of downtown at the intersection of Union Street and Liberty Street.
Photo Credit: Patrick Brough.

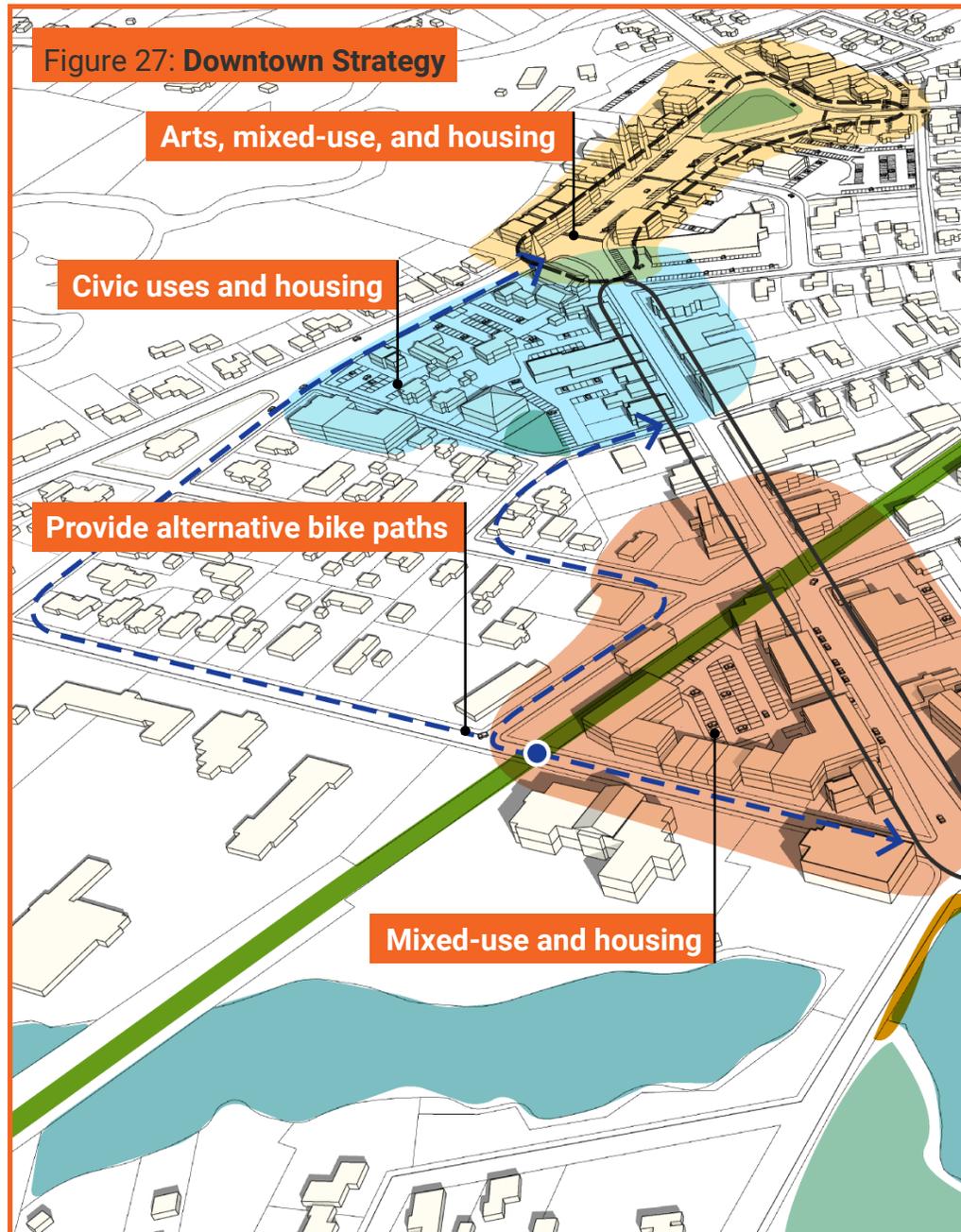
The proposed revitalization strategies are based on community engagement feedback from multiple public workshops. The strategies also incorporate findings and conclusions from the analysis of existing conditions in the Downtown study area.



Image 34: A young workshop attendee reviews the recommendations for the reuse of her school.

7.1 Downtown-wide Recommendations

1. Connect neighborhoods across Lower Mill Pond to the activities in the Pleasant Street Mills. The City should allocate funding or look for grant sources to study the feasibility of pedestrian connections across the Lower Mill Pond.
2. In addition to recent planned improvements for bike access on Union and Cottage Streets, the City should also designate alternate exit points and routes to different destinations of the Downtown like Cottage Street, Union Street, and Main Street.
3. The City should identify and designate additional on-street parking opportunities along the side streets to increase the supply of parking in Downtown. Additional on-street public parking opportunities exist along Chapman Avenue, Railroad Street, Liberty Street, Mechanic Street, Payson Avenue, Adams Street and Chapel Street.
4. The City should promote shared parking arrangements for the Easthampton Savings Bank lot, Rite Aid, Church parcels and the Center School parcels. Additional shared parking arrangements can be promoted at 60 and 64 Union Street parcels (Dunkin Donuts and Pizza House), Bank of America building, Galaxy Restaurant and Moriarty parcels, and parcels adjoining Union Street Bistro and Bakery.
5. Promote wayfinding and signage for the current and future public parking lots and as ways to distinguish between subareas.





7.2 Main Street Subarea

Land Use

1. Promote mixed-use and residential land uses with mixed-uses closer to Union Street and residential uses along the periphery to transition between the character of Downtown and the residential neighborhoods.
2. Potential mixed-use/housing redevelopment sites:
 - a. The Massage School and D & D Auto Parts as potential housing infill sites
 - b. Vacant Moriarty as future mixed-use
 - c. Bank of America building with an active new tenant
3. Florence Bank on Main Street could potentially be mixed-use in the long-term as an anchor for the Downtown if Florence bank decides to relocate to another vacant site close to Downtown.
4. Mixed-use could include arts/entertainment components. The revitalization of Old Town Hall would provide the arts/entertainment anchor of a future Main Street theater and entertainment district.

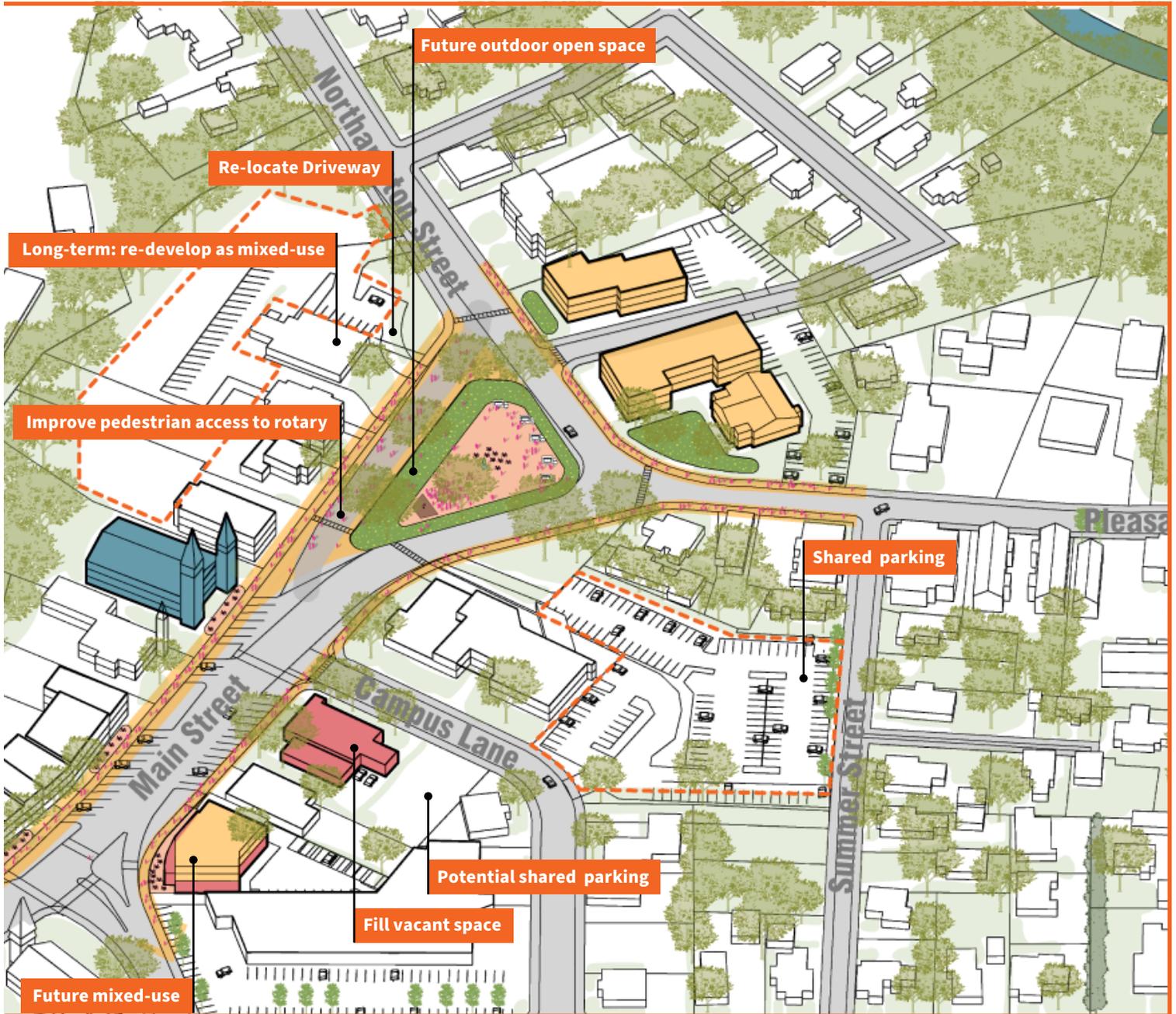
Open Space/Streetscape

1. Uses along the North side of Main Street are disconnected from the activity in the Downtown and along Union Street. A road diet along Main Street that reclaims excess asphalt for wider sidewalks, pedestrian-activated traffic signals at crosswalks, and traffic calming design will better connect this active area along Main Street with the rest of the Downtown.
2. Better access to Rotary Park (Mayher Fountain and Park) along with a road diet and pedestrian improvements along the Southbound lane of Main Street could make this open space available for public art exhibits and events.

Transportation/Access (Parking)

1. Formalize a shared parking agreement between the Easthampton Savings Bank and the Old Town Hall project to provide additional parking for the future performing arts and community space on the second floor of the Old Town Hall.
2. Consider a Main Street traffic study to narrow down traffic lanes, widen sidewalks, and make room for bikes.
3. Evaluate the feasibility of the reconfiguration of the Main Street/Rt. 10 intersection into a T intersection as a long-term option to improve the traffic flow and reclaim the Rotary park active public use.





7.3 Union Street x Main Street Subarea

Land Use

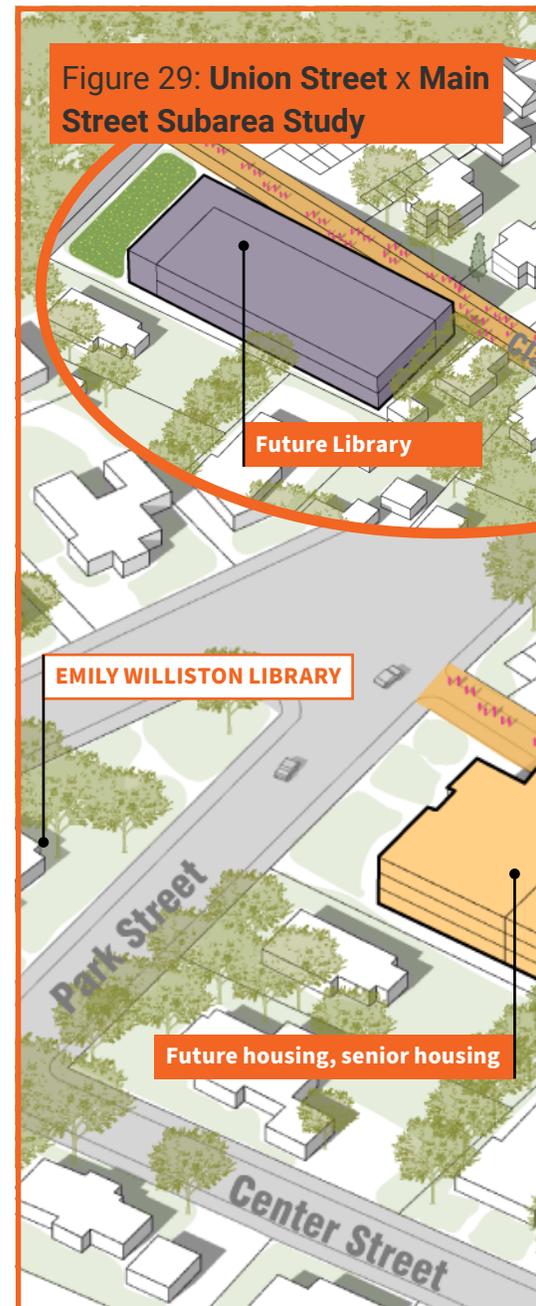
1. Civic and housing-focused land uses should be incorporated in the Union and Main Street Subarea.
2. Promote a mix of uses. Residential/senior housing and civic uses like an intergenerational center with multipurpose community space in close proximity to Union Street will help enhance existing commercial activity. Residential/senior housing uses including affordable housing in Downtown promotes diversity of housing types in Easthampton and reduces dependence on automobiles when residents live close to services.
3. Encourage mixed-use infill development along Union Street, especially on the Rite Aid commercial lot to promote additional activity along Union Street.

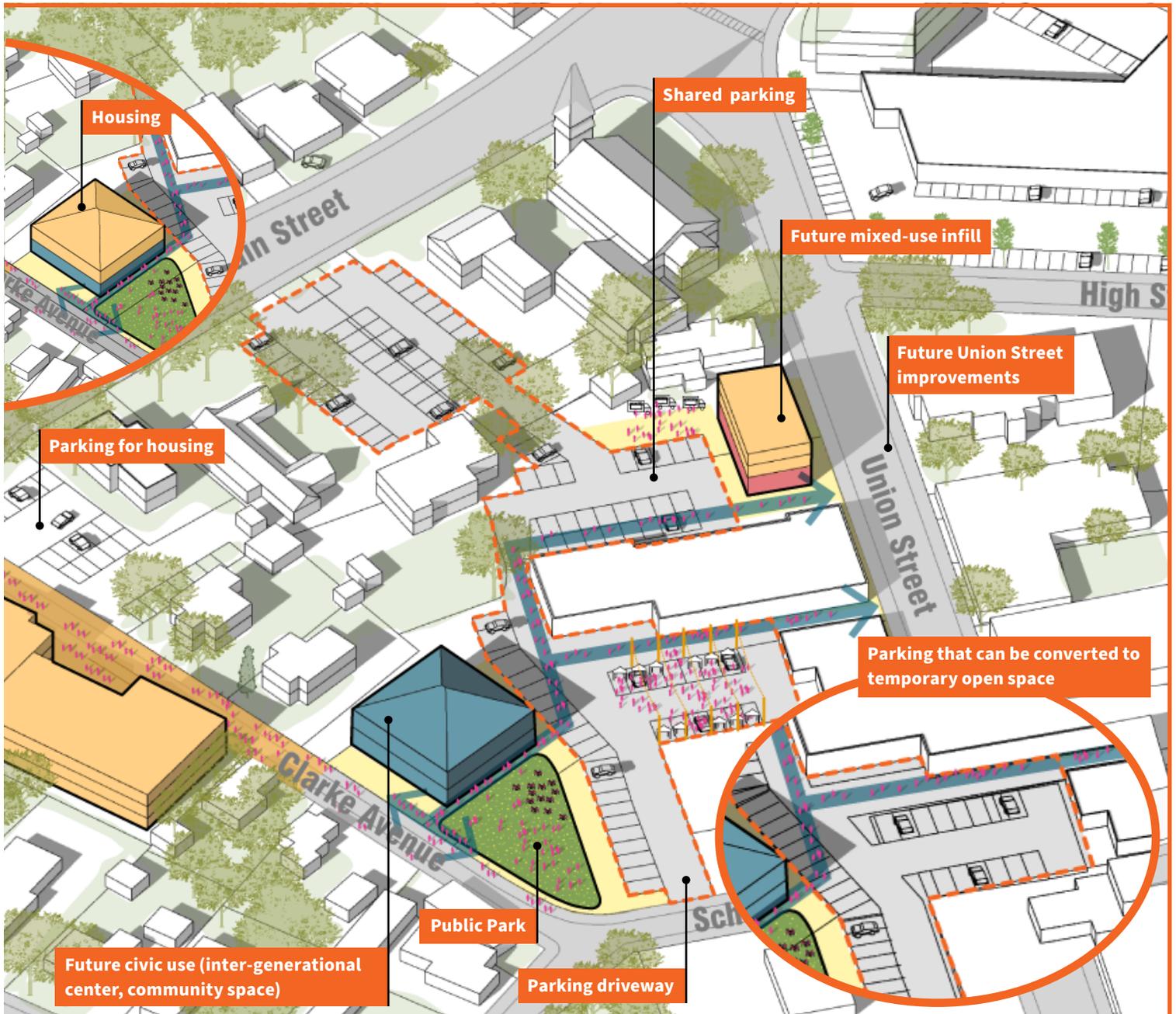
Open Space/Streetscape

1. Create a small park/public open space at the corner of Clark and School Streets, look for opportunities to add more green space. Integrate an open space requirement as a part of the Center School disposition process.
2. Seek to maintain/replace existing street trees that will be impacted by the Union Street reconstruction.
3. Promote temporary tactical urbanism placemaking activities with food carts/trucks and outdoor seating to generate activity.

Transportation/Access (Parking)

1. Promote shared parking among the different property owners. The existing parking lots on the Rite Aid and surrounding parcels, including Church parcels, could be reconfigured to optimize parking inside the blocks for shared parking.
2. Encourage removal of fences to promote pedestrian connectivity.
3. Contribute to the facilitation of a shared parking arrangement with Center School lot.
4. Create pedestrian connections from Clark Avenue to Union Street across existing parking lots.
5. Consider closing Clark Avenue to vehicular traffic (except emergency vehicles, residents and service/ADA access) to create a pedestrian-oriented street





7.4 Lower Union Street Subarea

Land Use

1. Promote a mix of uses with commercial or retail at the ground level and residential or office uses above.
2. Encourage the redevelopment of the current shopping plaza including the Hurry Scurry site to create an attractive mixed-use development that strengthens pedestrian activity along Union Street; the housing component should include affordable housing.
3. Support infill redevelopment of the underutilized sites like current 7-Eleven and Studio 72 commercial studio as mixed use or housing.

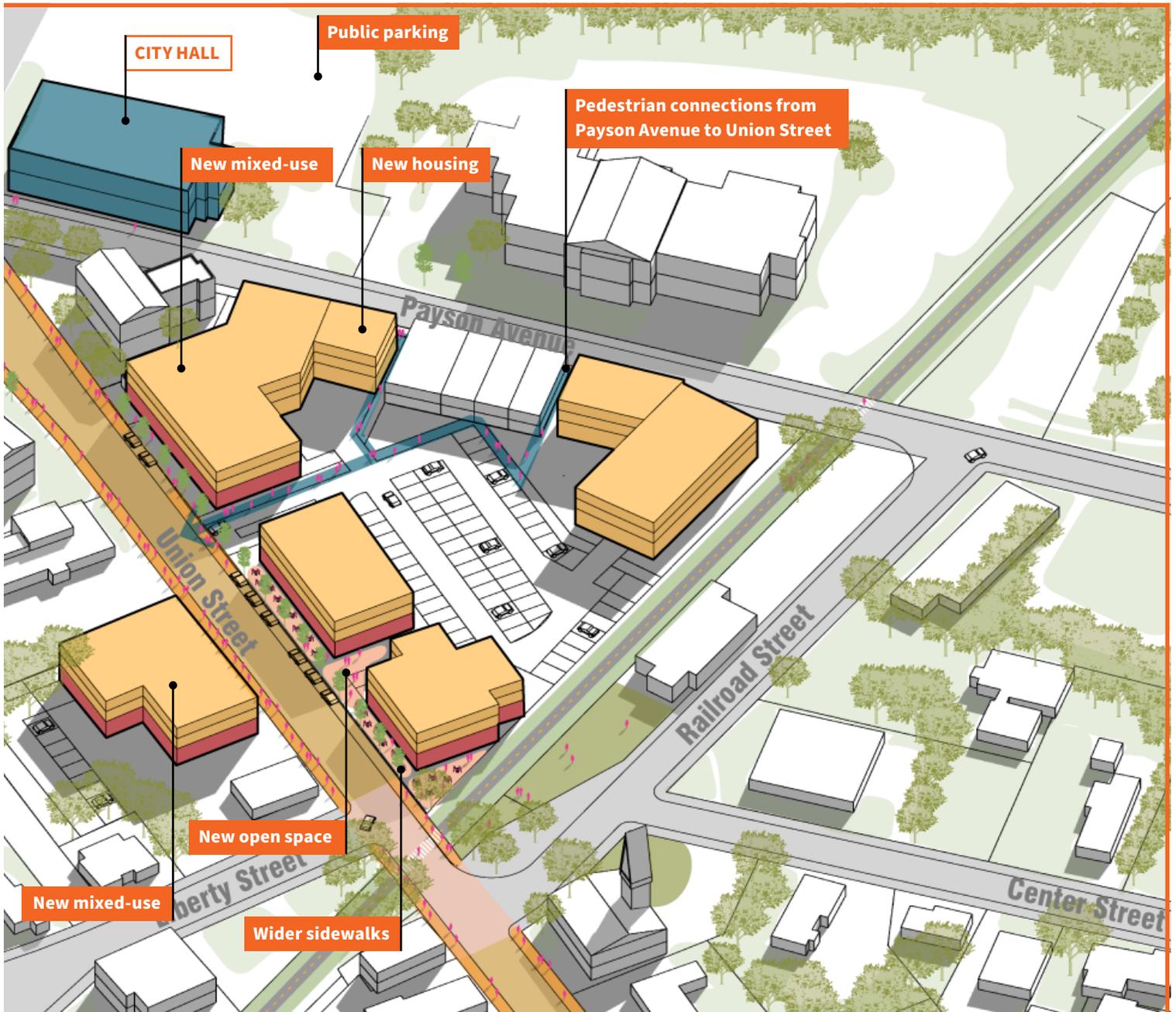
Open Space/Streetscape

1. Enhance the intersection of Manhan trail and Union Street with improved and safe pedestrian and bicyclist connections, and additional open space opportunities.
2. Improve the Union Street streetscape for pedestrians with active uses, wider sidewalks, and green buffers along parking frontages as part of new and existing reinvestment in properties.

Transportation/Access (Parking)

1. Any redevelopment of the shopping plaza property should achieve a good balance among the mixed-use components and required parking so as not to burden the area with heavy traffic.
2. The planned Union Street TIP project will remove some street parking in favor of bicycle infrastructure. Reintroduction of on-street parking should be considered in any future redevelopment of the shopping plaza or 7-11 property.





7.5 Cottage Street Subarea

Land Use

1. Promote mixed-use infill appropriate to current scale of Cottage Street to build upon the existing character of the area.
2. Potential mixed-use infill/redevelopment of parcels on the north side of Cottage Street would create opportunities for more cultural/retail uses at the street level and increase pedestrian activity. For this future infill/redevelopment, building height should be retained to a maximum of three (3) stories to maintain the street character relative to the existing two-story buildings.

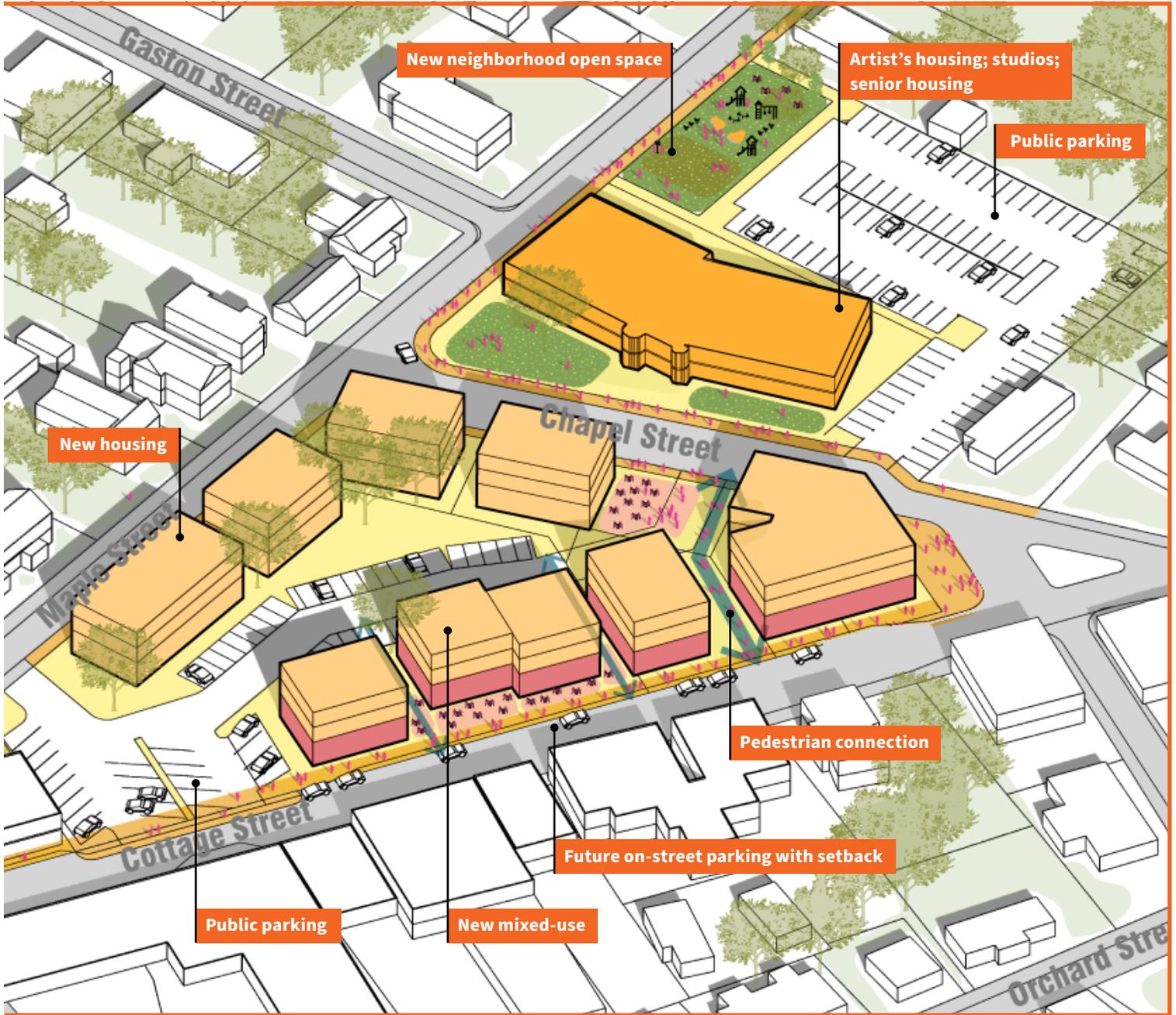
Open Space/Streetscape

1. Create a small park/ public open space along Maple Street behind the school building to serve the neighborhood. Integrate this open space requirement as a part of the Maple School disposition process.
2. Improve the streetscape at the intersection of Chapel and Cottage Streets to enhance pedestrian safety, walkability, and appearance as a gateway to Downtown.
3. Promote mid-block connections from Cottage Street to the Maple School building to improve the identity of the Maple School building as a part the Downtown. Any potential redevelopment of the residential lots along Cottage Street should encourage safe mid-block pedestrian access to the Maple School building.
4. Investigate opportunities to add more public amenities along the pond (e.g. kayak rentals, restaurant with outdoor dining facing the pond).

Transportation/Access (Parking)

1. The current narrow configuration of Cottage Street helps develop the character of this area by promoting active uses on both sides of the street that pedestrians can easily patronize. The narrow street width effectively slows traffic and creates a more vibrant, pedestrian-oriented environment.
2. The City should examine the current land uses and the existing parking supply to understand the demand for public parking in the Cottage Street area. This Cottage Street Area Planning study should examine the total demand for parking so that comprehensive areawide parking strategies can be developed to alleviate parking challenges of the existing businesses.
3. Traffic congestion due to Cottage Street's narrow right-of-way could be alleviated by eliminating parking along the north side of the street and using that space to widen vehicular lanes or add a shoulder for safety. The City can test this alternative with temporary tactical urbanism type improvements prior to implementing it.
4. The one-way loop option will invite heavy traffic and make truck maneuverability difficult along Maple Street and hence is not preferred at this time. Further traffic study would be required to understand the benefits and challenges of this rerouting which is currently outside the scope of this study.





8

Action Plan

The following chart lists recommended actions to implement the proposed Downtown Strategic Plan, as well as responsible parties, and estimated priority. Priority is assigned within the following timeframe: H = High/Short-term; M = Medium/Medium-Term; L = Low/Long-term.

Implementation of these diverse strategies that are generated with the extensive community engagement process will require collaboration between different City departments, boards, committees, neighborhood and business organizations. Hence, the assigned responsible parties for different actions are for guidance only.

Table 8: Action Plan

	Actions	Priority	Responsible Party or Collaborating Parties
A	Redevelopment		
1	Prioritize redevelopment efforts to areas within Downtown with greatest opportunity for redevelopment	M	Planning
2	Promote redevelopment of the parcels identified in the parcels susceptible to change including properties along Cottage Street	M	Planning
	■ Engage property owners to understand their future plans	H	Economic Development/ Chamber
	■ Understand development feasibility either as redevelopment or infill	L	Planning
	■ Remove zoning hurdles	H	Planning
	■ Engage in marketing efforts to promote redevelopment	H	Planning/Chamber
	■ Seek creative entrepreneurs to fill vacant spaces and redevelop/infill properties with creative unique land uses – Rivertown Lodge – Hudson NY,	H	Chamber
	Update Smart Growth Overlay District Zoning based on the recommendations	H	Planning
	Promote active uses on the first floor – arts, restaurants, amenities	H	Planning/Chamber
B	School Building Reuse/Redevelopment		
1	Change Zoning for the School Properties to allow uses desired by the community	H	Planning
2	Initiate formation of the School Reuse Committee	H	Planning
3	Develop School Disposition RFPs	M	Disposition Committee/ Planning
4	Research and encourage formation of community land trusts as potential non-profit lessees of the school properties	L	Planning
C	Connectivity		
1	Initiate Main Street pedestrian improvement study	M	Planning/DPW
	■ Examine the opportunity for road diet, pedestrian and bike improvements	M	

	Actions	Priority	Responsible Party or Collaborating Parties
	■ Traffic study to understand feasibility of T Intersection to reclaim Rotary Park as an accessible open space	M	
2	Initiate engineering and financial feasibility of the pedestrian connections across the Lower Mill Pond	M	Planning/DPW
3	Implement alternate bike routes with wayfinding, signage and potential on-street markings	H	Planning/DPW
4	Implement traffic calming measures on Chapel and Holyoke Streets	M	Planning/DPW
5	Improve sidewalks and pedestrian realm adjacent to school properties in conjunction with redevelopment	H	Planning/DPW/Disposition Committee
6	Create a connected network of sidewalks and pedestrian crossings and bike routes	H	Planning/DPW
D	Parking		
1	Initiate a Cottage Street parking study to inventory existing uses in the Cottage Street area, understand peak parking demands, and develop on-street and off-street parking strategies to address parking concerns	H	Planning/Chamber
2	Find and implement additional on street parking opportunities on side streets	H	Planning/Dpw
3	Implement short-term evening and weekend public parking on the Maple School lot	H	Planning/Dpw
4	Create a wayfinding and signage program to advertise public parking and shared parking locations as well as highlight the district subareas of downtown	L	Planning/Chamber
5	Initiate shared parking arrangements within Downtown		Planning
	■ Public education and community outreach to the stakeholders, patrons and businesses to educate on the benefits of the shared parking	H	Planning/Chamber
	■ Understand parking utilization of the parcels with the highest shared parking potential	H	Planning
	■ Share findings with the owners to create consensus on benefits of creating shared parking	M	Planning/Chamber
	■ Update zoning to allow and/or encourage shared parking in Downtown Easthampton	H	Planning

	Actions	Priority	Responsible Party or Collaborating Parties
	■ Develop Shared Parking Agreement/Lease Template	H	Planning/City Council
	■ Conduct/encourage a pilot shared parking project with agreeable parcel owners (Easthampton Savings Bank and CityArts) to document “Lessons Learned”	M	Planning/Chamber
	■ Based on the pilot project engage additional parcel owners participate in shared parking arrangements	L	Planning/Chamber
	■ Participate in the shared parking arrangements by leasing additional spaces from the property owners as public parking or contributing parking spaces to shared arrangements	L	Planning/City Council
6	■ Provide wayfinding for parking, economic development, and placemaking	L	Planning/DPW
E	Open Space		
1	Implement tactical urbanism type approaches to encourage creative use of the Rotary Park – outdoor concerts, exhibitions, farmer’s market etc.	M	CitySpace
2	Study feasibility of Nashawannuck Pond improvements – extended boardwalk, fountain	H	Planning/Pond Committee
	■ Community outreach to surrounding property owners	H	Pond Committee
	■ Study feasibility, understand regulatory next steps, and funding	M	Planning
	■ Work with property owners to develop activation strategies	M	Planning
3	Attract additional uses like kayak rentals on the Pond	H	Chamber/Pond Committee
4	Engage Union Street property owners that share lot boundaries with Center School to remove fences	H	Planning
	■ Remove fences to improve pedestrian connectivity between different uses	M	Planning
	■ Use tactical urbanism approaches to activate in-between spaces with small parklets, pedestrian connections	L	CitySpace
5	Develop temporary tactical urbanism approaches to create the Clark Avenue Park next to the Center School to generate interest in community	L	Planning/CitySpace
	■ Seek seed funding and implement	M	CitySpace

	Actions	Priority	Responsible Party or Collaborating Parties
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document finding in terms of the size, types of uses, pedestrian connectivity from Union Street, community engagement 	M	Planning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the creation of a Union Street and Mill District Business Association. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for long-term improvements with the future lessee/owner of the Center school and surrounding property owners. 	L	Planning/Parks and Rec
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subdivide the Center School parcel to retain the ownership of the open space permanently or seek perpetual open space easement from the future Center School owner 	M	Planning/City Council
6	Develop neighborhood focused park behind the Maple School along Maple Street	M	Planning/Parks and Rec
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subdivide the Maple School parcel to retain the ownership of the open space permanently prior to disposition or seek perpetual open space easement from the future Maple School owner 	M	Planning/City Council
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek seed funding and implement 	L	Planning/Parks and Rec



Image 35: *The Dudley Street Neighborhood Institute CLT in Boston, MA. Photo by Cheryl Senter. Image Source: Larson, S. (2016, May 5). Land Trust Network Launches in Boston. Retrieved from Next City: <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/boston-land-trust-network-launches>*

Community Land Trusts

Action B-4 recommends looking into the formation of a Community Land Trust (CLT) in Downtown Easthampton. A CLT is "an organization created to hold land for the benefit of a community..."¹ The CLT's board oversees the work of the trust; typically, two-thirds of board members are residents. The CLT board sets the rules and guidelines for use of the land, which often includes an agriculture component.

In the CLT model, all land is public and only the homes themselves can be bought and sold for a small profit. When someone purchases a home in a CLT, they only pay for the structure itself and not the value of the land it sits on. There are many different types of CLTs which have been successfully implemented in every type of community from urban to rural. The CLT model is a strong solution to provide affordable housing and combat the displacement often caused by gentrification. By removing fluctuating land values from the equation, permanent affordable housing can be established.

1 The Institute for Community Economics. 1982. "The Community Land Trust Model." In *The Community Land Trust Handbook*, 5. Greenfield, MA: The Institute for Community Economics.

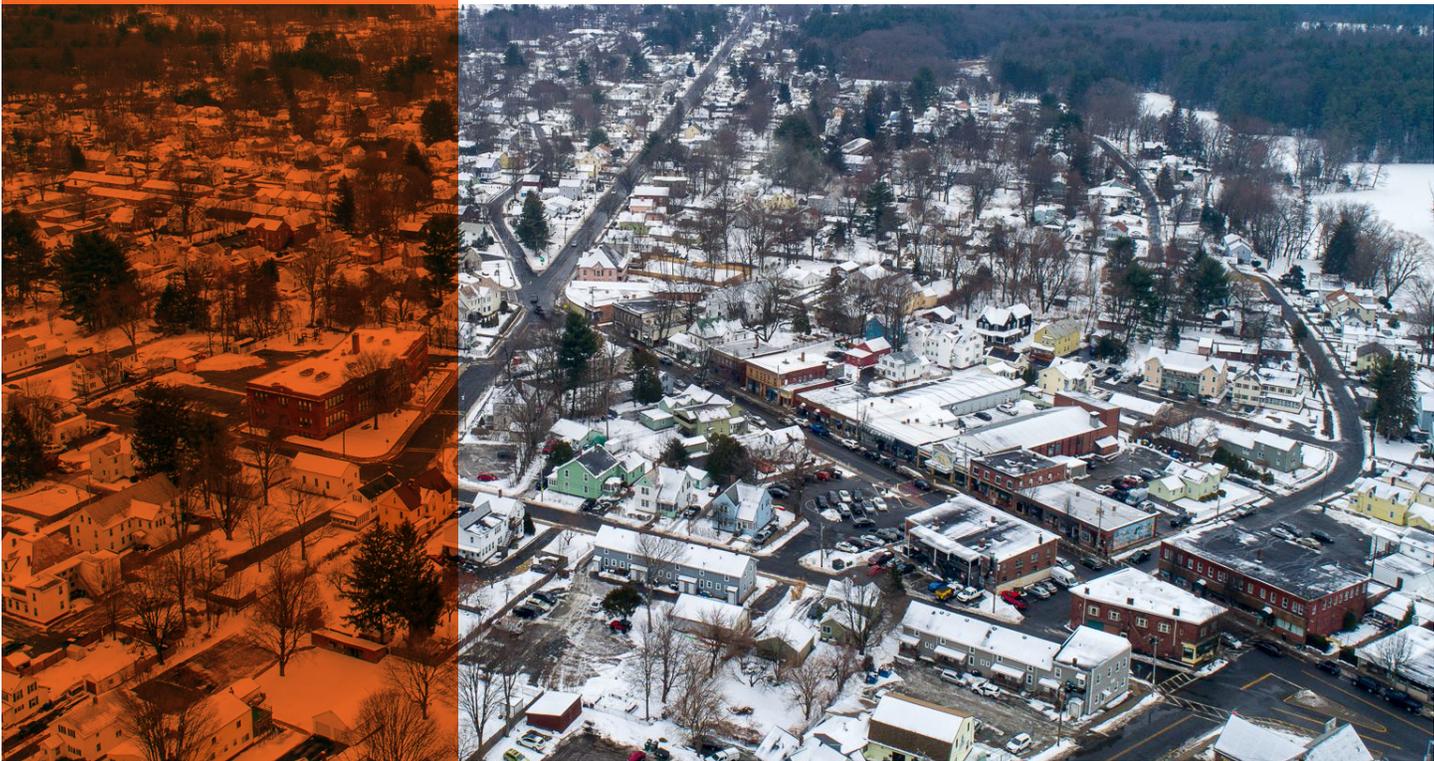


Image 36: Downtown Easthampton in the snow. Photo Credit: Patrick Brough.

#Plan **Downtown**

E A S T H A M P T O N



Easthampton Downtown Strategic Plan

March 2020

Prepared for the City of Easthampton

Prepared By Harriman | RKG | NV5