



Ashland, MA



Urban Land  
Institute

Boston/New England

# About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

## Mission

To provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI is a research and education institution with nearly 36,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

## ULI at the local level

Boston/New England District Council covers nearly all of New England with over 1,300 Members—developers, architects, planners, public officials, financiers, students, etc.



# Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

## Ashland, MA

ULI Boston/New England is committed to supporting communities in making sound land use decisions and creating better places. A TAP brings together a group of ULI members with a range of professional expertise to provide focused, collaborative consultation to a local government or qualifying non-profit organization.



## This TAP

- **Sponsored by MassDevelopment and Ashland, Massachusetts.**
- This panel looked at the full range of options from an unbiased perspective.
- Panelists include public and private sector experts in the fields of architecture, planning, design and law
- **Panelists have donated their time**
- Final Deliverable – Written report (8 weeks) will be available at <http://boston.uli.org>

## The Panel

### Co-Chairs

Jamie Simchik, Simchik Planning & Development  
Michael Wang, Form + Place

### Panelists

Patrick Campbell, Commonwealth Development Consulting  
Rob Caridad, The Chiofaro Company  
Ryan Hoffman, GEI Consultants, Inc.  
Fred Kramer, Stantec  
Deb Myers, DMLA  
Claire O'Neill, MassDevelopment  
Craig Seymour, RKG Associates, Inc.

### ULI Staff

Sara Marsh

### TAP Writer

Michael Hoban



## Panel Sponsors



MASSDEVELOPMENT



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## Panel Assignment – Address These Questions

**Question One: Understanding Market Forces.** What are the mix of uses that present the greatest potential for downtown redevelopment, and what strategies should the Town use to attract that right mix of uses in the right places? Are there any market challenges for downtown redevelopment? What is a realistic absorption rate of new retail/commercial/residential uses?

**Question Two: Understanding Environmental Permitting.** Do any state and federal environmental permitting challenges exist for future downtown development, as relates to an historic nearby industrial contamination? If yes, what can the Town do to mitigate those challenges? Is there anything that the Town can do to preempt future permitting challenges that may disincentive private investment in downtown?

**Question Three: How to Stimulate Investment.** What can the Town do to stimulate private investment in downtown? Would local investments in Town-owned properties or infrastructure help to stimulate private activity? What other strategies can the panel recommend to support transformative redevelopment on key parcels and throughout downtown?

# The Process

## Briefing

- Panelists met with sponsor and received briefing materials

## Site Visit:

- Panelists toured downtown Ashland

## Panel interviewed stakeholders today including:

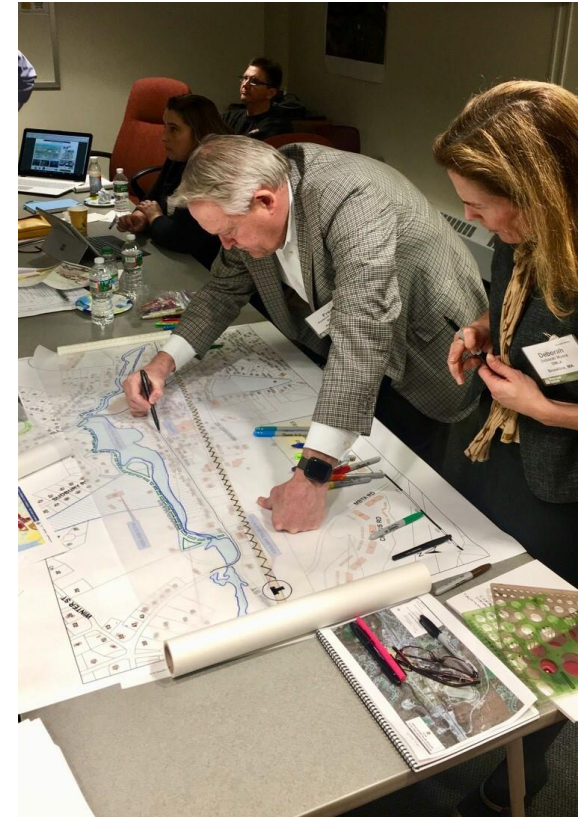
- Town officials
- Local business leaders
- Private property owners
- Local merchants
- Local residents
- Local developers



# What did we hear?

## Assets and Opportunities

- Inventory of architecturally distinct buildings
- Low downtown vacancy
  - Retail, office, residential
- Strong residential demand
- Robust public engagement
  - Enthusiasm for events and embracing new ideas
  - Streetscape planning process
  - Pro development
  - ABA
- Public parking
- Town owned parcels
  - Relocation and redevelopment of public safety facilities
- Natural Resources
  - River, parks, and greenery





Streetscape example: Concord, NH  
Credit: CRJA

## Challenges

- Perceptions
  - Safety
  - Railway
  - Residential impact / schools
  - “Bedroom community”
- Lack of centrally located public green space
- Lack of continuity – street level specific
- Shortage of practical retail and gathering spaces
- Embracing the new demographics
- Underutilized key parcels
  - Street corners
  - Gateway parcels
- Parking locations
- Wayfinding
- Permitting uncertainties
  - Zoning bylaw discrepancies
  - Environmental requirements and approvals on plume



## Recommendations – Market forces

### **What are the mix of uses that present the greatest potential for downtown redevelopment?**

Expand on residential opportunities, dining/restaurants, and experiential destination retail in the downtown area

### **What strategies should the Town use to attract that right mix of uses in the right places?**

Revise and update zoning to support density and uses in downtown area.

Use town owned property and improvements to the public realm to catalyze private investment.

### **Are there any market challenges for downtown redevelopment?**

Diversity of parcel ownership, recapturing the leakage of spending outside of downtown Ashland. Limited economic viability without residential redevelopment. Creating an identity for Ashland.

### **What is a realistic absorption rate of new retail/commercial/residential uses?**

It depends...



## Recommendations – Environmental Permitting

**Do any state and federal environmental permitting challenges exist for future downtown development, as relates to an historic nearby industrial contamination?**

Understanding the environmental requirements and approvals on plume.

**If yes, what can the Town do to mitigate those challenges?**

Integrated process with local state federal regulations and requirements

**Is there anything that the Town can do to preempt future permitting challenges that may disincentive private investment in downtown?**

Advocate for site specific guidance co-published by EPA, MASS DEP, and Ashland to explain liability relief and duty to mitigate vapors.



## Recommendations – Stimulate Investment

### **What can the Town do to stimulate private investment in downtown?**

- Zoning/permitting diagnostic (Less discretionary and more predictable)
- Align zoning with the realities of the market and the physical characteristics of the downtown

### **What local investments in Town-owned properties or infrastructure will help to stimulate private activity?**

- Invest in holistic vision
- Feasibility studies on key town owned parcels – ex: police station site
- Continue to invest in streetscapes and public realm plan including parking, wayfinding, etc.

### **What other strategies can the panel recommend to support transformative redevelopment on key parcels and throughout downtown?**

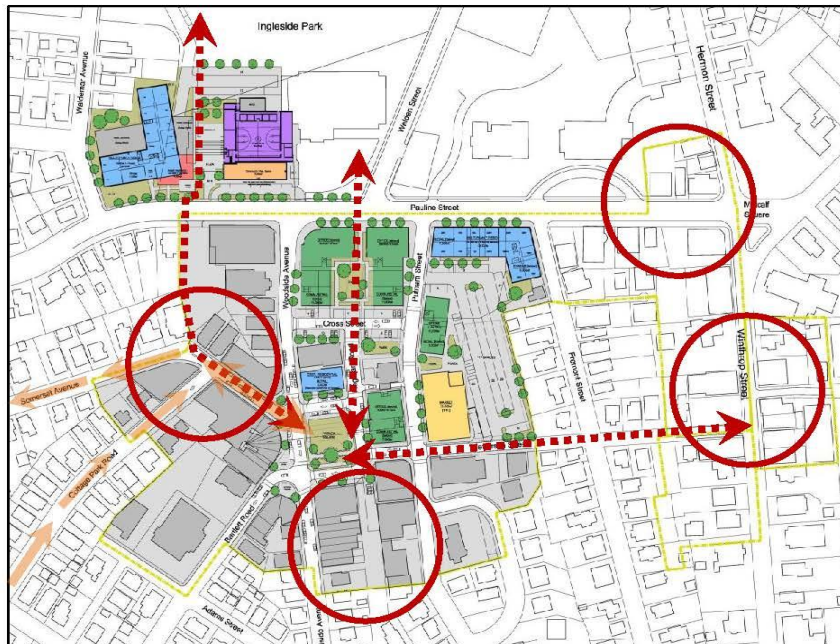
- Work to assemble more easily developable properties
- Education for boards - example: Citizen Planner Training Collaborative.
- Evaluate and identify funding opportunities; TIF, BIDs, DIF

# Recommendations – example case study

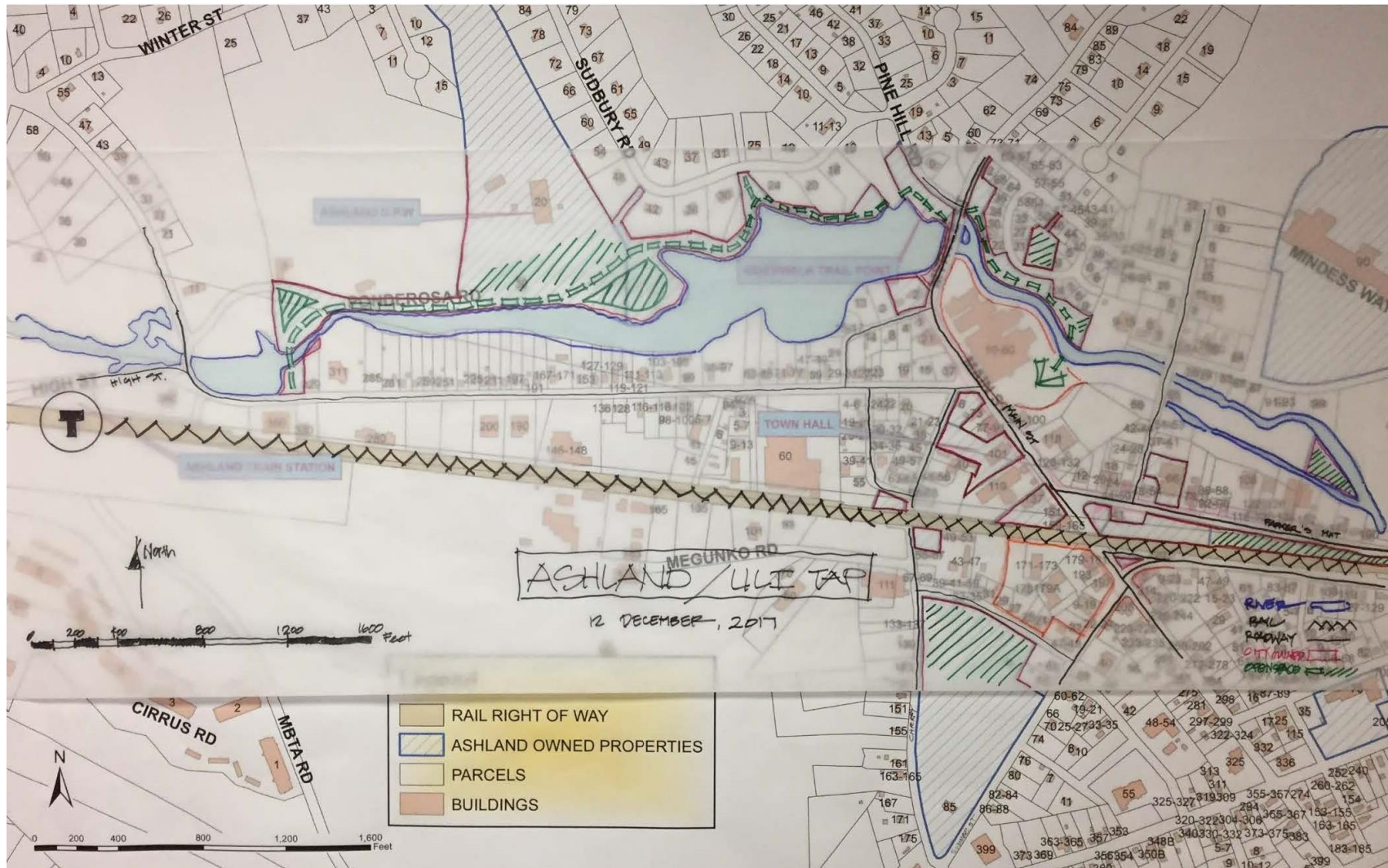
Winthrop Center Business District Master Plan

## MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

### A Holistic Vision



## Recommendations – Downtown Ashland



## Recommendations – Downtown Ashland



# Funding & Resources

- **MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program**
  - Works with municipal officials, planners, local stakeholders, and others to provide technical assistance that uses creative solutions and clear action steps to address site-specific and district-wide economic development challenges
- **Public Infrastructure Financing**
  - Tax-Exempt Bonds for Public Infrastructure
  - MassWorks Grant
  - MassDevelopment issues tax-exempt bonds for improvements to roadways, sidewalks, parks, parking garages, bridges, tunnels, wharves, and a range of public facilities. Infrastructure programs that use this tax-exempt financing includes
    - District Improvement Financing (DIF)
    - Special assessments
- **Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund**
  - Commonwealth supports the arts with capital grants for the acquisition, design, renovation, and construction of cultural facilities. They also offer grants for development studies. Both MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council administer this fund.
- **Predevelopment Loans**
  - MassDevelopment provides low interest rate loans up to \$100,000 with deferred repayment terms to finance predevelopment real estate projects.



# Questions?

