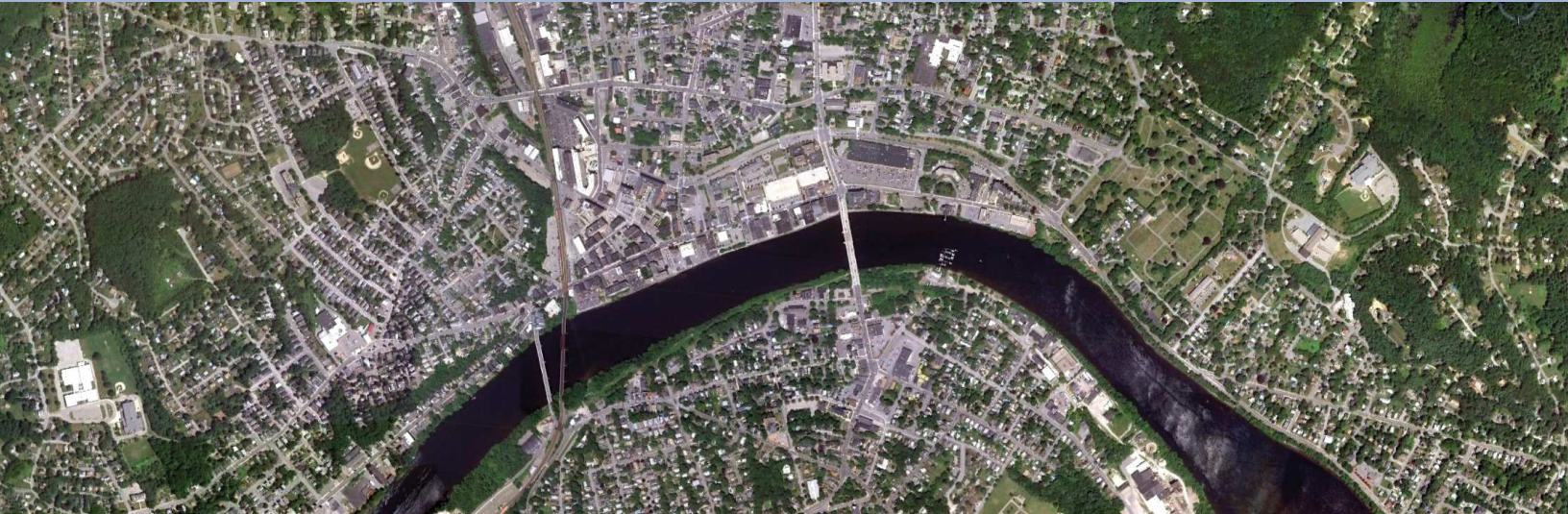


A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# Revitalization of Merrimack Street & Downtown Riverfront

**Haverhill, Massachusetts**



January 11, 2011



**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Boston**

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# Executive Summary

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Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council, The Haverhill Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Haverhill, MA in November, 2011, bringing together stakeholders, City and community leaders, and a panel of land use and development professionals for a day-long session focused on opportunities for revitalizing Merrimack Street and the riverfront in downtown Haverhill. The report that follows is separated into six chapters.

*Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process* gives an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) and provides a detailed list of participants in the Haverhill TAP including City officials, stakeholders, and the panel of land use and development professionals.

*Chapter 2: Background and Assignment* provides an overview of Haverhill's downtown riverfront and Merrimack Street, focusing on the building stock, the river wall, and the river walk. This chapter also reviews the City's efforts to date as well as its objectives for this Technical Assistance Panel which were to address the following key issues: market; planning and design; feasibility and financing; and management and implementation.

*Chapter 3: Observations and Findings* addresses the relevant issues raised in the tour and panel deliberations concerning the physical, market, and economic conditions that now characterize and challenge revitalization of the project area. Prominent among these are: The physical and visual barrier created by the river wall; the promising but disconnected initial segments of the river walk; the challenging market framework for redevelopment of Merrimack Street; and other challenges to feasible adaptive reuse and development, specifically: the poor economies of scale due to their relatively small size (compared with successful major redevelopment projects in the

Washington Street core area) and disparate ownership; the lack of critical mass and continuity of successful development and use along Merrimack Street and its disconnection from the more successful Washington Street core area; and the lack of sufficient on-site or guaranteed off-site parking.

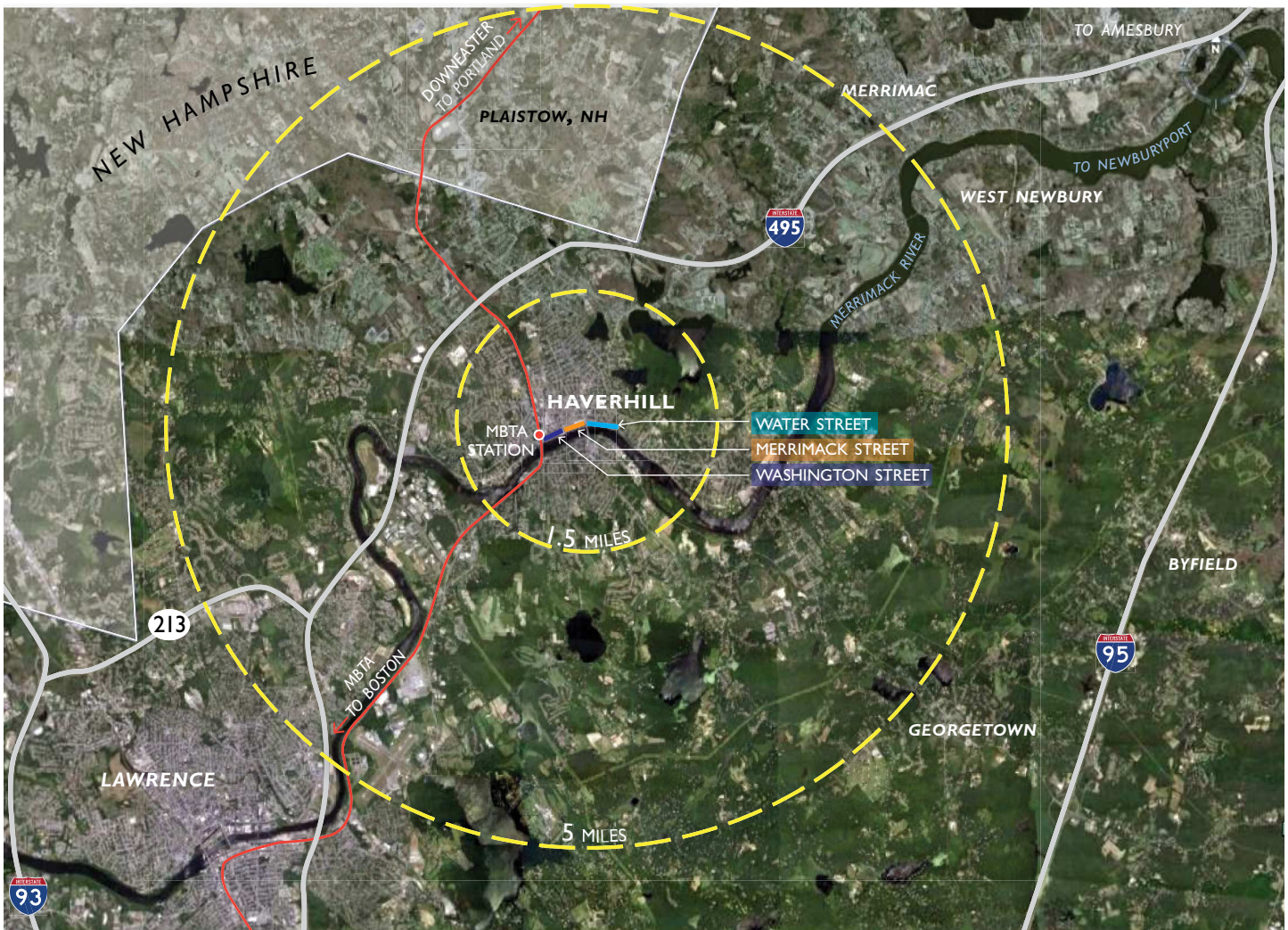
*Chapter 4: Constraints and Assets* summarizes the significant challenges for revitalization and discusses the area's assets and opportunities. Prominent among these are: funding already secured by the City to get started on public improvements; the proven market appeal of downtown, specifically the nearby Washington Street core area, to draw developers, residents, visitors, and some businesses; the Burgess-Lang business incubator; ample public parking; Haverhill's designation as a Gateway City, making it eligible for prioritization of state funding and certain incentives only available in such cities; buildings eligible for historic tax credit financing; properties available for redevelopment; and strong community energy and commitment.

*Chapter 5: Concept Strategies* provides strategies that the City can pursue to further revitalization, comprising the following major elements:

- Enhance the destination appeal and draw of downtown Haverhill as a whole and Merrimack Street in particular by means of creating anchor type draws of two types:
  - Unique public amenities such as a continuous riverwalk and a major river-fronting public place at Washington Square (along with supporting public amenities such as streetscape),
  - Activity anchors such as theater, other cultural use and/or innovation center.



**Figure I:** Regional Context (Google Earth, Fall, 2011)



- Support private building redevelopment (and possibly anchor amenities) by means of:
  - Zoning, public parking allocation
  - Proactive redevelopment implementation (perhaps utilizing a new public development entity such as a redevelopment authority) in marketing (e.g. packaging of properties to create a larger scale development opportunity through a two-stage RFP process) and financial assistance and technical support.

Finally, *Chapter 6: Next Steps* summarizes recommendations for actionable next steps for the City to explore and implement the strategies for revitalization of Merrimack Street and the downtown riverfront discussed in the preceding section. This chapter also outlines the panel’s observations and recommendations for redevelopment of the Ornstein Property including its likely strong development potential, maximizing competitive proposals by means of an effective RFP process, and ideas for deal structure.

# 1 | ULI & The TAP Process

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## a. Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. The Boston District Council serves the six New England states and has over 1,100 members.

## b. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of under-resourced communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations. At the TAP, a group of diverse professionals representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate disciplines typically spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing built environments, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

## c. Panelists and The TAP Process

### Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of the disciplines associated with land use and development required to assess possibilities for developing Merrimack Street and the riverfront in downtown Haverhill. Disciplines represented included planning, urban design, architecture, landscape architecture, civil and environmental engineering, transportation planning, market analysis, development finance, management, entitlement and law. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the City's objectives for this TAP. The following is the list of panelists:

- Barry Abramson, President, Abramson & Associates (TAP Co-Chair)
- Dick Lampman, Vice President of Business Development, Tocci Building Corp. (TAP Co-Chair)
- Jeff Beam, Principal, The Community Builders.
- Gina Ford, Managing Partner, Sasaki Associates
- Jane Howard, Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates
- Yanjia Liu, Urban Designer, cbt architects
- Nancy Ludwig, President, ICON architecture, inc.
- David Nagahiro, Principal, cbt architects
- Jim Nickerson, Project Manager, GEI Consultants
- Beth O'Donnell, Development Consultant
- Ryan Pace, Partner, Anderson Kreiger
- Rhonda Spector, Vice President, MassDevelopment
- Dave Traggorth, Director of Development, Mitchell Properties
- Lynn Wolff, President, Copley Wolff Design Group

Caitlin Bowler of ICON architecture, inc. served as a consulting technical writer. Michelle Landers and Sarah Krauthaim of ULI Boston provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP event.

Officials from the City of Haverhill who served as primary contacts for ULI Boston included the following:

- James J. Fiorentini, Esq., Mayor
- William Pillsbury, Jr., Director of Economic Development and Planning
- Andrew Herlihy, Division Director, Community Development

### Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the cooperation of the diverse group of stakeholders—property owners, local residents, business people, and non-profit board members—who met with the panel and shared ideas, assessments and opinions on a range of issues related to the revitalization of Merrimack Street.

Stakeholders at the session included:

- Burt Barrett, Commercial real estate broker
- Scott Cote, Pentucket Bank President
- Philip Christenson, Civil engineer
- Tom Falkner, Haverhill Bank
- Bill Grogan, Planning Office for Urban Affairs
- Jim Jajuga, Haverhill Chamber of Commerce
- Gerry McSweeney, Owner, Landmark Building
- Herman Ocasio, Owner, Ocasio Building
- John Michitson, Haverhill Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Abol Tehrani, Resident
- Ron Trombley, Member, Greater Haverhill Foundation

### TAP Process

The Haverhill TAP was held on November 29, 2011 at the Roma Restaurant on Middlesex Street. In the morning, Mayor James Fiorentini, William Pillsbury, Jr., Director of Economic Development and Planning, and Andrew Herlihy, Division Director, Community Development, welcomed the panelists, then led the group on a walking tour of the downtown riverfront corridor—including the Main Street Bridge, Merrimack and Wall Streets, the Riverwalk at Haverhill Bank, Washington Street, the Riverwalk at Sanders Place (i.e. behind the Tap Room Block), and the MBTA/Downeaster train station—followed by a bus tour of the recent residential adaptive reuse development just north of Washington Street and the Bedford MBTA station and the adjacent, City-owned Ornstein parcel.

After the tour, the ULI panel interviewed a diverse series of stakeholders, listed in the previous subsection, to gain a better understanding of relevant issues. The panelists then engaged in an intensive “closed door” charrette to develop potential revitalization concepts for Merrimack Street, as well as “next step” recommendations. The panel presented these to the City Council that evening.

The presentation is available electronically at the ULI Boston website <http://boston.uli.org>.



## 2 | Background & Assignment

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At the request of the City, the TAP focused on the Merrimack Street corridor and riverfront in Downtown Haverhill.

Also, at the City's request, the panel gave secondary consideration to the Ornsteen Property, a 4.84 acre City-owned, riverfront site located on the opposite bank from downtown, a short distance upriver from the Comeau Bridge.

### **a. The Merrimack Riverfront**

The Merrimack Street corridor comprises the eastern half of Haverhill's downtown spine which extends approximately 3,000 feet from the recently reconstructed Comeau Bridge in the west (upriver), past the railroad bridge approximately 300 feet downriver, down Washington and Merrimack Streets to Main Street and the Basiliere Bridge.

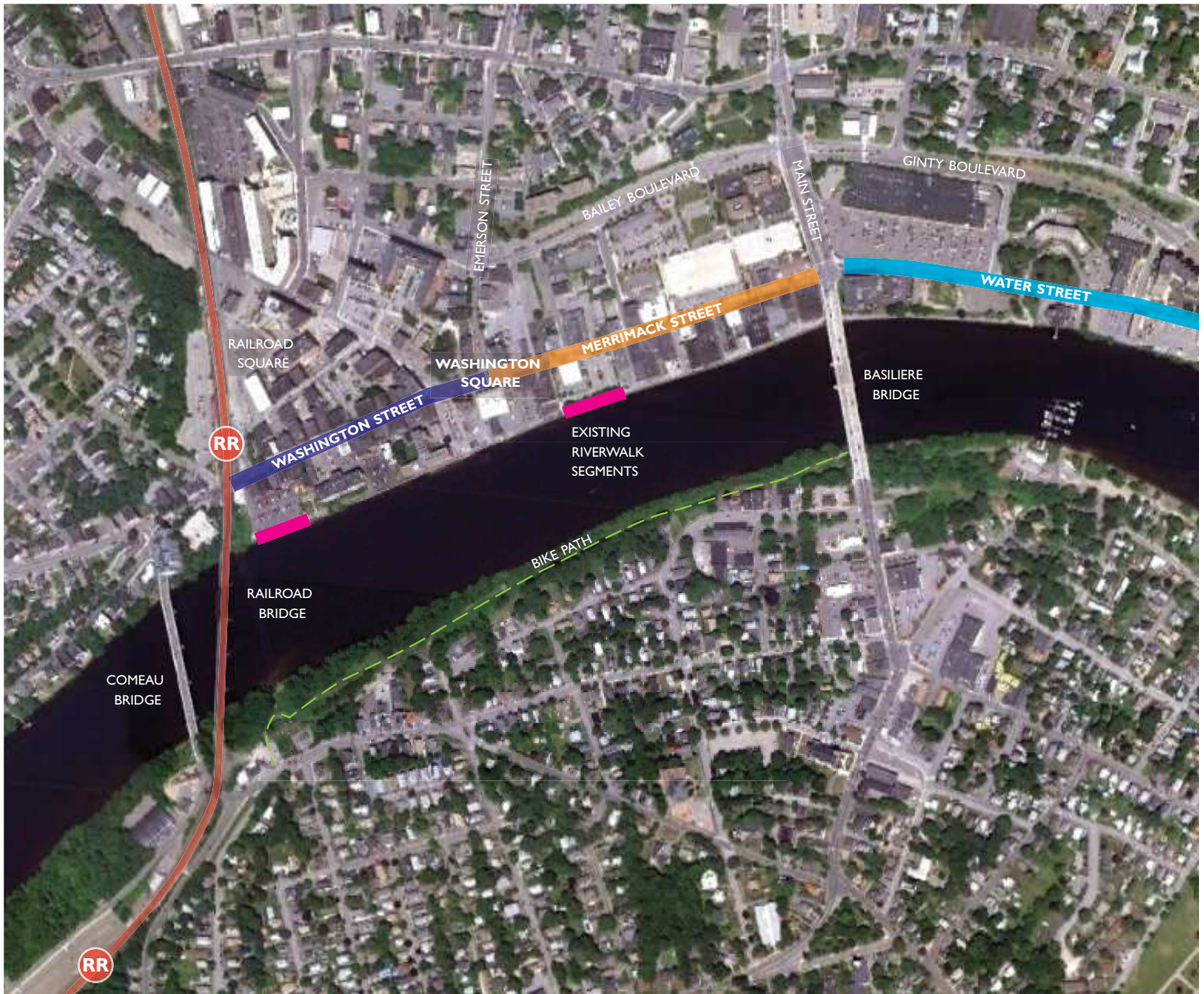
The Merrimack Street corridor/riverfront Project Area is generally bounded by Main Street, Bailey Boulevard, Emerson Street and Washington Square, and Wall Street (the riverfront). This area includes a mix of older buildings housing retail, restaurant, office, social service, and limited residential uses, with significant vacancies, especially on upper levels. Public and private parking facilities are also located within the Project Area.

Together, Washington and Merrimack Streets form the core of Haverhill's historic downtown district and share tantalizing proximity to the city's greatest untapped natural asset, the Merrimack River. From Haverhill the tidal river wends approximately 16 miles toward Newburyport where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean just north of Plum Island. While once polluted and a place to be avoided, the river is now clean and supports fishing and boating for residents throughout the Merrimack Valley.



A view west down the Merrimack River from the Basiliere Bridge. The river wall features prominently.

**Figure 2:** Immediate Site Context





## Washington Street

Although not the focus of this TAP, as the face of Haverhill's slow but steady revitalization, Washington Street served as a constant point of comparison during evaluation of Merrimack Street, its struggling neighbor. Just steps from the train station, a new parking garage constructed by MRVTA, and a short walk from over 500 recently completed residential units in renovated mill buildings, Washington Street has become a destination featuring a number of restaurants, bars, cafes, and retailers that contribute to and benefit from Haverhill's revived night life culture.

To its continued benefit, Washington Street's fabric of historic buildings was left relatively undisturbed during the Urban Renewal period that so damaged Merrimack Street's physical structure and economic

vitality. Property owners and businesses have made significant progress rehabilitating, renovating, and repurposing historic structures and facades on Washington Street, creating a sense of activity along the street, notwithstanding the presence of the occasional ground floor vacancy and still significant upper floor vacancies in some buildings.

The City's efforts to support the transformation of Washington Street, by enriching the streetscape, and completing a 115 yard stretch of river walk behind the Tap Room block (from the railroad bridge to the Porter Place Residences open space), have resulted in a viable and attractive urban realm that has been successful in attracting restaurant and retail patrons, residents and some businesses to Haverhill's downtown.



Railroad Square at the west end of the Washington Street core area.

## Merrimack Street

Just east of Washington Square, Merrimack Street was, until the 1960's, Haverhill's primary retail street. The Square, located between Merrimack and Washington Streets, served as the western edge of the Urban Renewal District and now stands as a visible demarcation line in the quality of the urban fabric and economic vitality along Haverhill's commercial corridor.

Urban Renewal's impacts devastated Merrimack Street. More than 100 business concerns were paid to move off the street and never returned. The city punched gaping holes in the street's building edge, removing historic structures to make way for contemporary buildings and expanded structured parking, leaving the urban fabric tattered. The structured parking was set back from the street, resulting in a less than optimal depth for development fronting the street. That shallow parcel adjacent to the street is now used as a surface parking lot.



Mayor Fiorentini describing issues on Merrimack Street.

Faced with urban fabric in such disrepair, when developers chose to work in Haverhill, they focused on the more intact Washington Street corridor and environs, which is also closer to the commuter rail, rather than Merrimack Street.



The surface parking lot on the north side of Merrimack Street, in front of the Urban Renewal structured parking facility, created a 300 foot gap in the street edge.



## Building Stock

There are a number of beautifully restored historic buildings in downtown Haverhill that reflect the city's rich past and the optimism many feel toward its future. The "good bones" of the Washington Street core have attracted capital from major regional developers as well as smaller scale property and business owners with personal stakes in the city's vitality.

As described in the previous section, Urban Renewal damaged Merrimack Street's bones, making it more difficult for its remaining historic structures to become viable redevelopment opportunities. In addition, much of its vacant building stock is mismatched with demand that exists in the area. Additionally, the street contains undistinguished modern lowrise infill buildings.

Each of the following buildings illustrates a particular market challenge facing properties on Merrimack Street.

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### THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING

At the eastern end of the street, at the prime corner of Main Street but far removed from the activity of Washington Street, the Woolworth Building stands as a symbol of Merrimack Street's decline and the challenges to redevelopment. The Haverhill Foundation purchased the building in 2005 and has struggled to find a viable way forward. Board member George Trombley describes the Woolworth building as "the most visible as you approach on the river coming from Newburyport, and therefore very valuable," but also as "the most visible sign post of disinvestment." Finding a tenant to inhabit the structure far from the more successful end of Merrimack Street will be a challenge. While some hold a sentimental attachment to the building, it is generally not a distinctive historic structure, so renovation or redevelopment of the site are both options.



The Woolworth Building's rear facade.

### THE OCASIO BUILDING

The Ocasio Building is a handsome, five story structure that sits opposite the surface parking lot and houses several small businesses on its ground level, with vacant upper stories. From a structural/space planning perspective, renovation of the upper floors of the building could be appropriate for office or residential, either of which would benefit from the view of the Merrimack River. Redevelopment potential, especially for residential, is challenged by a lack of adequate on-site parking and assured off-site parking.



The Ocasio Building



### **THE LANDMARK BUILDING**

Originally designed as a department store and repurposed into an urban mall, the Landmark Building now houses some social service tenants. It is largely unattractive to retailers and smaller office uses because of its antiquated layout and its large floor plates, which might also pose a challenge for residential reuse, as would its limited on-site parking.



The Landmark Building

### **THE HAVERHILL BANK & RIVER WALK**

The Haverhill Bank and its suburban-like layout, where parking surrounds a self-contained out-of-context suburban style building, swallows 260 feet of prime frontage on Merrimack Street. Although one of two riverwalk segments is located at the rear of this parcel, it is set back far from the street and obscured by the building and parking lot. The property is a dramatic example of the disruption caused by an urban renewal project to an otherwise functional street edge.



A view east down Merrimack Street from the Haverhill Bank.

## The River Wall

The river wall levee, rising 9 feet from Wall Street, stretches from the Basiliere Bridge to the Porter Place alignment and is a physical and visual barrier between Merrimack Street and the river. The combination of the grade change between Merrimack Street and Wall Street, the height of the river wall (with a 3 foot vertical addition planned, it will eventually reach 12 feet) and the use of Wall Street to access loading and limited parking at the rear of buildings renders the river inaccessible from the Merrimack Street core and complicates most opportunities for changing the relationship between the street and the river or connecting the two.



The River Wall extends the length of Merrimack and Washington Streets.

## The Rail Trail

On the southern side of the Merrimack River is a railroad right of way, constructed in 1851 as part of the Georgetown Branch Line, which the city acquired in 2008. The segment the city now controls stretches from a point just short of the railroad bridge in the west to the Basiliere Bridge (Main Street) in the east and is a critical first step toward realizing its “Bridge to Bridge” vision—a continuous one mile bike/walking path that would connect the two riverfront edges primarily via pedestrian paths over the Basiliere and Comeau bridges.

The City has already completed rough grading of the railroad segment of the loop, and has secured funding to upgrade the segment in 2013.



It's height creates an imposing barrier from grade level on Wall Street.

## b. The City's Efforts to Date

Acquiring the railroad right of way was a major step for the city toward realizing its vision of the Bridge-to-Bridge loop.

Working with its representatives, the City has secured a \$1.2 million grant, of which two thirds must go toward code improvements to the Merrimack Street Garage, fifteen percent will go toward upgrades to the rail trail, and fifteen percent will go toward downtown streetscape improvements.

The City has also been working with the Army Corps of Engineers to determine what maintenance and reconstruction is required to ensure the structural integrity of the river wall, and has continued talks with its representatives from the state legislature, the Congressional delegation, and the Patrick Administration to secure grant and other funding to help it finance this work.

## c. City of Haverhill's Objectives for the TAP

The TAP was a one day event intended to provide the City of Haverhill with expert outside perspective on prospects and strategies for revitalizing Merrimack Street, in part by creating connections between the street and the river.



Panelists listen to a stakeholder during the morning's discussion.

In preparation for the TAP, the City developed the following set of questions for the panel to address:

### (1) MARKET ISSUES

What strategic marketing approach should be utilized to attract appropriate developers to the project area?

### (2) PLANNING AND DESIGN

What type of zoning /regulatory framework will be needed to accomplish conversion to mixed use/mixed income projects which incorporate riverfront redevelopment?

### (3) FEASIBILITY AND FINANCING

What mix of financing tools must be made available to accomplish the goals of the riverfront corridor redevelopment?

### (4) MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

What structural tools should be analyzed/created to facilitate and oversee redevelopment of the riverfront corridor? (i.e. redevelopment authority, community development corporation, etc.)

The panel reviewed the materials provided to panelists by the City before the TAP. Through tours and interviews with stakeholders during the day, panelists gained an overview of relevant market dynamics and development history and issues, as well as stakeholder aspirations for the area. Following a three hour charrette, the panel developed a series of concept strategies for the City to consider as it moves forward.



# 3 | Observations & Findings

## Issues raised in Tour & Discussions

During the tour and in the subsequent charrette, panelists' discussion focused on five sets of issues:

- (1) the river wall and associated design challenges;
- (2) elements of a successful river walk;
- (3) building stock;
- (4) parking; and
- (5) building redevelopment challenges and strategies.



Loading, service, and parking on Wall Street.

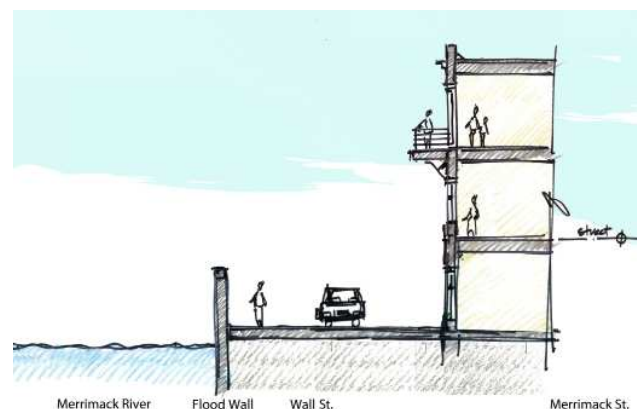
## The River Wall

As stated, the 9 foot tall river wall is an imposing structure that presents serious design challenges to creating usable and attractive connections to the river.

First, the 3 foot addition that the Army Corps of Engineers is requiring is a major project, which will add to the visual barrier to the river.

Second, there is a significant elevation change between the grade at Merrimack Street and the grade at Wall Street. A design for the river walk will have to get pedestrians from Merrimack Street grade to the river walk grade, potentially atop the river wall, in a way that is intuitive and ADA compliant.

Wall Street runs parallel to Merrimack Street, adjacent to the river wall, providing rear access to the buildings on the south side of the street for loading and services. Contiguous hardscape on the parcels also provides limited on-site parking. Thus, a third challenge is maintaining vehicular access to the rear of these buildings—which building owners need and use—while facilitating pedestrian access through a river walk.



Existing section from the Merrimack River to Merrimack Street.

## UNIQUE CONDITIONS

Together the river wall, Wall Street, and the service alleys between buildings create conditions that are generally negative in terms of a pedestrian experience. Changing these conditions will require some significant urban design initiatives.



Existing alleys that connect Merrimack and Wall Streets frame cramped views of the river wall.



The imposing scale of the wall at the Wall Street grade.



## The River Walk Segments

The City has constructed two attractive and functional stretches of river walk.

### HAVERHILL BANK SEGMENT

The first segment (approximately 260 feet in length) spans the rear edge of the Haverhill Bank parcel near Washington Square. A row of trees buffers the river walk from the parking lot that surrounds the bank. The view to the river from the walk is attractive, but the river walk itself is not easily visible from the street and there are no uses in the direct vicinity to draw people out to or near it.



The Haverhill Bank segment of river walk is obscured from view by the bank's parking lot.

### WEST END SEGMENT

The second segment (approximately 340 feet in length) is at the west end of Washington Street, behind the “Tap Room” block.

Although adjacent to a surface parking lot, the lot serves several restaurants and cafes that feature dining decks that look out over the parking lot toward the river. A change in grade

from the river walk up to the dining decks (elevated above at-grade basement levels) creates visual connection between the two activity zones. The walk itself is generous (11 feet wide), providing ample space to walk or sit and take in the view and benefits from the activity of the dining decks.



The west end river walk segment benefits from synergistic, adjacent uses.



## Market Framework

**RESIDENTIAL.** Residential is a primary reuse for redevelopment of older mill and mercantile buildings in small city downtowns. Successful recent mixed-income residential development has been clustered in the Washington Street core, primarily in large mill buildings, taking advantage of proximity to the vibrancy of Washington Street and the nearby commuter rail. This development has been primarily rental (mandated for an initial period for historic tax credit financing). Rents for market rate units are reported to be approximately \$1.70 - \$1.80 per square foot with strong occupancy rates. Some smaller projects have been developed as condominiums. The success of these projects has proven the market appeal of downtown Haverhill in attracting a regional market of residents to projects with the right product, location, and price.

Currently, the financing market for condo development projects is very limited and **will** take some time to recover, especially in non-prime locations, as downtown Haverhill would be considered. The rental housing development market has recovered more quickly, but still requires strong economics and the rents attainable in downtown Haverhill, especially outside the established core, make attaining financial feasibility challenging.

**OFFICE/R&D.** The regional office/R&D market is over-supplied and most tenants prefer modern, high-way accessible space with ample parking. Generally, small city downtowns have very limited success in competing for the mass market of tenants. Rather, the market for office space in these downtowns typically comprises smaller professional and service firms, financial institutions, government and non-profit organizations serving a relatively local area. This market is occasionally supplemented by non-locally oriented businesses that choose a downtown location because of extra-market reasons such as the owners' living or having other special ties to the town and/or an appreciation of the unique downtown

character. Accordingly, demand is limited and rents are low (reportedly \$10 - 12 per square foot modified gross for un- or minimally renovated space).

Downtown Haverhill's office/R&D sector benefits from the Burgess-Lang Business Center, a privately owned and operated business incubator operating in two large eight-story industrial buildings on Essex Street on the western edge of the downtown core. The center offers a wide variety of options from incubator offices of 200-square feet up to full 16,000 square foot floors suitable for professional offices, R&D, light manufacturing, distribution and storage, and provides business support services to nurture start-up companies. The facility reportedly has 100,000 square feet or more of capacity available to be built out to tenant specifications at low rents.

**RETAIL/RESTAURANT.** There is a fundamental question of whether Haverhill's commercial core in its current state can support significant additional retail and restaurant space. Only five miles by car from Plaistow, NH, Haverhill's retail market is directly impacted by its close proximity to sales tax free New Hampshire; and downtown is also impacted by big box retailers in proximate suburban Massachusetts locations. Accordingly, downtown Haverhill's retail mix is particularly focused on specialty and convenience retail and restaurants. While Washington Street can boast bright spots in terms of such retail and dining, it is marked by vacancy. This will improve as the economy recovers, but to the extent the downtown can support additional retail, it will be more likely to locate in the center of retail and restaurant activity on Washington Street, rather than on Merrimack, unless significant moves are made that will draw retail customers and restaurant patrons to the downtown and Merrimack Street. Residential development and office occupancy of upper floors will also provide support, albeit limited, for existing and new retail and restaurants.

## Adaptive Reuse / Development

There are building, site, and locational characteristics challenging redevelopment of the underutilized older and infill buildings on Merrimack Street. These are:

### RELATIVELY SMALL SIZE

The recent wave of residential redevelopment in the Washington Street core area has predominately been of large historic mill buildings. In addition to attractive physical presence and dimensions, these buildings are of a size yielding economies of scale in development and operation, making them attractive to major regional developers, and warranting the sophisticated expertise and considerable upfront costs entailed in their complex development and financing,

including employing historic tax credit and other financing mechanisms. The underutilized buildings along Merrimack Street are smaller and, especially if developed individually, will be less likely to rationalize the effort and cost of assembling complex financing and undertaking the other arduous work of development. Accordingly, they will tend not to attract major developers and the expertise, access and credibility relative to raising capital, that such developers provide. Small scale also imposes other cost premiums in terms of greater inefficiencies in usable to total building area and expenditures for elevators, HVAC, and sprinkler systems, spread over smaller usable areas.



Two unrenovated facades on Washington Street.



Renovated building on Railroad Square.

## **LACK OF CRITICAL MASS/CONTINUITY/ PROXIMITY TO CORE**

A major reason the Washington Street corridor has experienced the redevelopment that it has is the tight continuous fabric of attractive older buildings fronting the street and the relative proximity to the commuter rail. The addition of significant residential development as well as the businesses in the Burgess-Lang Center in the area immediately adjacent to Washington Street provide mutually-reinforcing support. By contrast, Merrimack Street is separated from this core of activity by the break in activity at and streets intersecting Washington Square, and the fragmented fabric of the buildings and street-front activity in the buildings along Merrimack Street. These factors plus the relative distance from the commuter rail present obstacles to tenanting and redevelopment which grow as one moves east on Merrimack Street.



Washington Street's uninterrupted facade edge has been an asset to its redevelopment.

## **LACK OF PARKING**

The properties on Merrimack Street tend to have limited, if any, capacity for on-site parking. The ability to provide on-site parking has been an advantage for the major redevelopments in the Washington Street core. At least some means of providing guaranteed proximate parking to supplement any on-site parking will be necessary to spur residential redevelopment on Merrimack Street. Current zoning requires on-site parking at an unnecessarily high ratio for downtown multi-family (especially rental) residential development. Haverhill's parking requirements, by use, are as follows:

Residential	1.5 / D.U.
Office	3 / 1,000 sf
Retail	4-5 / 1,000 sf
Restaurant	1 / 3 seats

Getting approval for parking at lower ratios and satisfying it off-site are possibilities, but developers must undergo the risk of a special permit process as opposed to knowing up-front what the City will approve and securing long term rights to municipal parking is problematic.

## **FINANCING BY LOCAL BANKS**

Although two well-respected and committed community banks are located on Merrimack Street, they do not lend for seemingly “superficial” investments like facade improvements because such improvements do not add collateral value. They and other financing sources may also be expected to be conservative on financing pioneering building redevelopment projects.

## **VIABILITY OF REDEVELOPMENT**

The upper level reuse for which a broad market seems most apparent is residential. However, rents that could be attained on Merrimack Street would likely be somewhat less than the rents reported for the Washington Street core area projects for



the foreseeable future without significant improvements to the area. Even with relatively solid rental performance, the relatively high cost of redeveloping older commercial buildings for residential poses a major hurdle. Construction costs for historic tax credit caliber renovation of mercantile buildings of the scale found on Merrimack Street might be expected to be in the range of \$125 - \$150 per square foot, with total development costs at \$150 - \$200 per square foot (not including parking). Such costs could challenge feasibility even with historic tax credits and other assistance. While non-historic tax credit caliber renovation would be less costly, and allow for condominium development, feasibility would be even more challenging without the considerable boost of historic tax credits. As market conditions improve, projects with the right product and location will be marketable, though they may require some additional financial incentives to be feasible (though such need will be reduced with market and area improvements).

Affordable housing may be a component of residential redevelopment, providing access to another set of financing assistance programs; however, the availability of the state and federal funding essential for such projects is constrained, and, especially for small projects with limited affordable components, the effort and cost entailed in their procurement diminishes their benefit.

Live-work and artist housing could expand the market, but the above financial feasibility challenges would effect these uses as well.

Renovation of buildings for upper level office use would be less costly but the market for such space, even at relatively low rents, is limited and, generally, the type of smaller tenants who would take such space are not good candidates for prelease redevelopment financing due to their limited size, credit characteristics, and time horizon.

Retail and restaurant use of ground floor space is important to enhance the appeal of the street. Upper level residential and office space will provide some support for retail and restaurant. However, until the draw of the area to a broader market has been solidified, such use will not contribute significantly, if at all, to the feasibility of redevelopment.

In summary, redevelopment and new development on Merrimack Street is considered to be challenged by marginal development economics and would likely require significant assistance for the near term, as well as being less attractive to larger, more experienced developers.

Some combination of federal and state historic tax credits, new Gateway City residential tax credits and, possibly, New Markets Tax Credits may help such projects toward feasibility, though scale and complexity pose significant challenges for utilizing such resources. In the absence of, or even, for the near term, in addition to, such resources, other assistance may be required to spur investment. These may include: low acquisition cost, relief on real estate taxes, and assistance with parking. As the economy and real estate market improve and, to the extent public and anchor amenities can be introduced to the area, enhancing its market appeal, feasibility may improve, lessening the need for financing assistance.

To the extent development opportunities are not attractive to major or more experienced developers, the City and local businesses will have to work creatively with smaller, local developers and property owners to overcome these challenges and continue revitalization of the downtown. We note that such developers, while often lacking in sophistication, sometimes have the enthusiasm, more economical hand's on approach and lower investment return thresholds that can impel them to undertake developments which larger developers will not seriously consider.

## 4 | Constraints & Assets

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Through the tour and discussion, the panel became aware of both the constraints facing the City of Haverhill in its efforts to continue revitalizing Merrimack Street and the downtown area, as well as some unique opportunities.

### Constraints

In summary, significant challenges and constraints that the panel identified are as follows:

- Physical barriers and land use
- Challenging building characteristics and fragmented ownership
- Parking management and supply
- Permitting risks
- Limited potential for additional retail without significant additional support or attractions
- Oversupplied regional office market
- Challenging financial feasibility for redevelopment
- Demands on public dollars for flood and parking deck improvements

### Assets

The opportunities, however, are very encouraging.

**FUNDING IN HAND** - The \$1.2 million grant secured by the City for code improvements to the Merrimack Street Garage, upgrades to the rail trail, and downtown streetscape improvements will continue to provide momentum in the downtown.

**MARKET APPEAL** - Downtown Haverhill has proven market appeal, based on significant assets, which accounts for the redevelopment that has already occurred in the Washington Street Core.

- Proven appeal of downtown to draw regional market
- Proximity to public transit
- Proximity to river
- An attractive core area of retail and restaurant activity

**BURGESS-LANG BUSINESS CENTER** - The incubator provides an unusual asset in bringing businesses downtown, some of which might potentially be attracted to other space in the downtown.

**AMPLE PUBLIC PARKING** - The area appears to have ample public parking to meet current and potentially significant additional needs, especially off-daytime peak hours (evenings and weekends) when residential demand is greatest.

**GATEWAY CITY.** As a Gateway City, Haverhill benefits from prioritization for public funding through MassWorks and special public financing incentives for private development such as enhanced investment tax credits for businesses and the new Gateway City Residential Tax Credit under the new Housing Development Improvement Program (HDIP). The HDIP program is planned to start in

2012 and will be administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development. The program was designed to increase residential growth, expand diversity of housing stock, support economic development, and promote neighborhood stabilization by providing tax incentives to developers that rehabilitate properties that will be sold or leased as market rate units.

**HISTORIC STRUCTURES** - The Merrimack Street corridor has buildings available for redevelopment that could be eligible for historic tax credit financing.

**PROPERTIES AVAILABLE FOR REDEVELOPMENT** - There are properties on Merrimack Street owned by the City and the Haverhill Foundation (whose mission is consistent with the City's redevelopment objectives). Additionally, numerous private properties are reported to be available, a number of them being actively marketed, and at least one property owner (the Ocassio Building) has expressed interest in pursuing redevelopment as well as sale. This presents the possibility for coordinated execution of a larger vision along Merrimack Street.

**COMMUNITY ENERGY** - Finally, there is clearly desire and will among stakeholders, residents, property owners, city officials and other civic groups, to make changes that would allow Haverhill to meet its full potential. There is also a sense of pride and momentum from successful public and private projects in the downtown. These elements represent key building blocks for the city's revitalization.



One of many buildings on Merrimack Street which could be eligible for Historic Tax Credit financing.



## 5 | Concept Strategies

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Based upon the challenges and opportunities characterizing the project area, the panel devised a number of concept strategies.

In formulating these strategies, the panel tried to balance near term realities with a longer term vision for revitalizing Merrimack Street and making the riverfront and downtown a unique draw within the region.

The intent is to give the City ideas that can inform a long term conceptual framework for revitalization, with component interventions that can happen independently, allowing an opportunistic, incremental approach.

It is important to note that these concepts do not represent a blueprint to be rigidly followed. Rather, they provide a menu of ideas to be tested, evaluated and explored. Some may prove untenable, while others may gain traction. The City should be flexible and consider opportunities that may arise and which, if generally consistent with the overall thrust of the redevelopment strategies represented in this report, should take priority over specific recommendations whose realization may prove more elusive.

Generally, the strategies comprise the following big ideas:

- **Enhance the destinational appeal and draw of downtown Haverhill as a whole and Merrimack Street in particular by means of creating anchor type draws of two types:**
  - **Unique public amenities (along with supporting public amenities such as streetscape)**
  - **Activity anchors such as theater, other cultural use, and/or innovation center**
- **Support private building redevelopment (and possibly anchor amenities) by means of:**
  - **Zoning, public parking allocation**
  - **Proactive redevelopment implementation in marketing, financial assistance**

## a. Creating Destinalional Public Amenities

### RIVER WALK - Completing the Loop

The City has identified the “Bridge to Bridge” loop concept as the driving component of its long term vision for the downtown. Given its success with the bike path, the prominence of its two bridges, and the Corps of Engineers’ requirement that the City complete significant improvement to the flood wall, the panel agrees that the City should begin this effort in a way that incorporates a river walkway atop the flood wall. This could turn a barrier into a unique urban amenity that could draw visitors and residents to the downtown and Merrimack Street and enhance the brand of both.

The High Line in New York City, while very different in scale, setting, and financial resources available to it, presents a model that may be relevant—both physically and in terms of its dramatic draw on visitation and development—far beyond what most anyone anticipated.

The elevated river walk could be cantilevered atop the existing elevated floodwall and may itself be part of the Corps of Engineers mandated addition. It would not need to be very wide. A width of approximately 8 feet would be considered adequate for most of its length.

The cost of adding the river walk atop the flood wall is preliminarily estimated at approximately \$1,000 per linear foot for a total of approximately **\$2,000,000** for the approximately 2,000 feet remaining to complete the elevated path. This cost would be in addition to the cost of the mandated 3 foot addition to the floodwall, roughly estimated at approximately \$500,000, based on \$250 per linear foot. These and other estimates for public improvement costs are ballpark numbers to provide an order of magnitude and would need to be confirmed or refined by additional analyses.

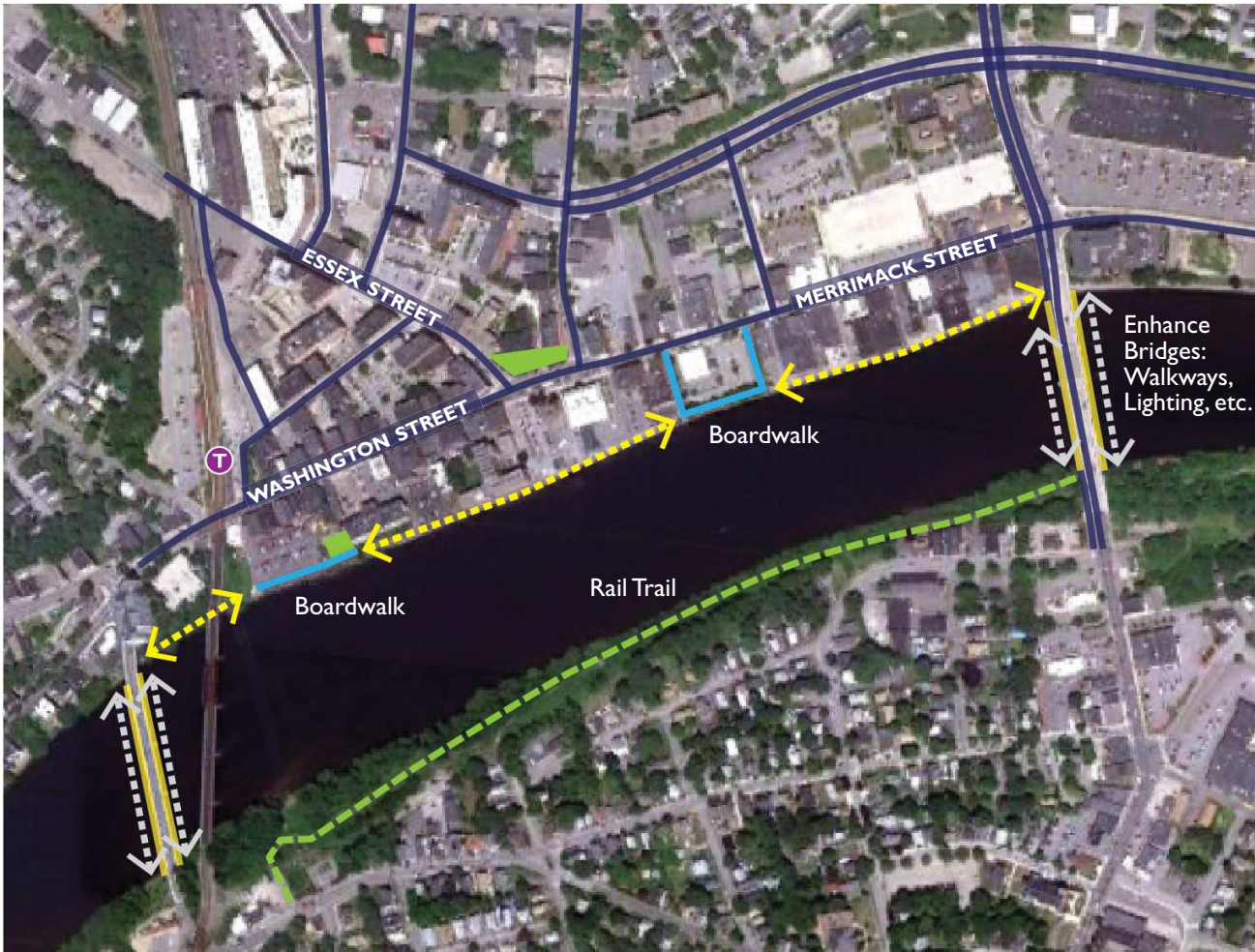
To the extent funds are not available to do this all at once, it could be built incrementally. The panel notes that, if built in segments, they would have to connect to existing points of handicap accessibility such as the existing sections of the river walk.

As the river walk gains in popularity, private property owners could modify their buildings to connect to the river walk, which could become a major amenity for such development, while adding to the elevated space available to the public.



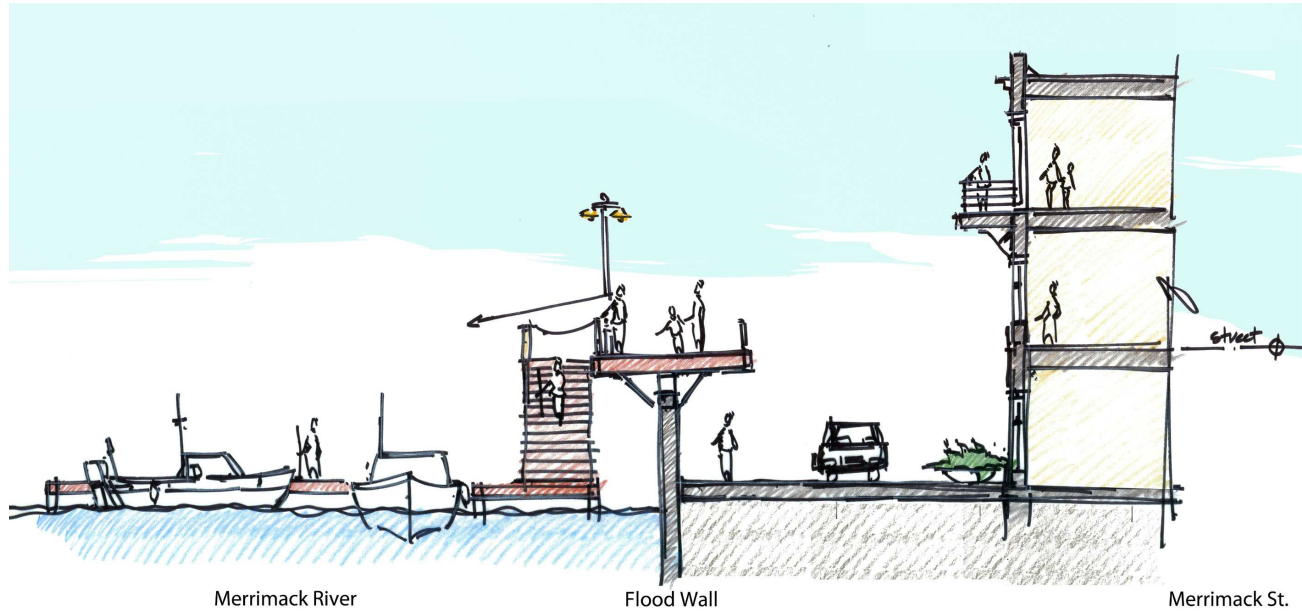
The High Line in New York City.

**Figure 3:** Completing the Loop

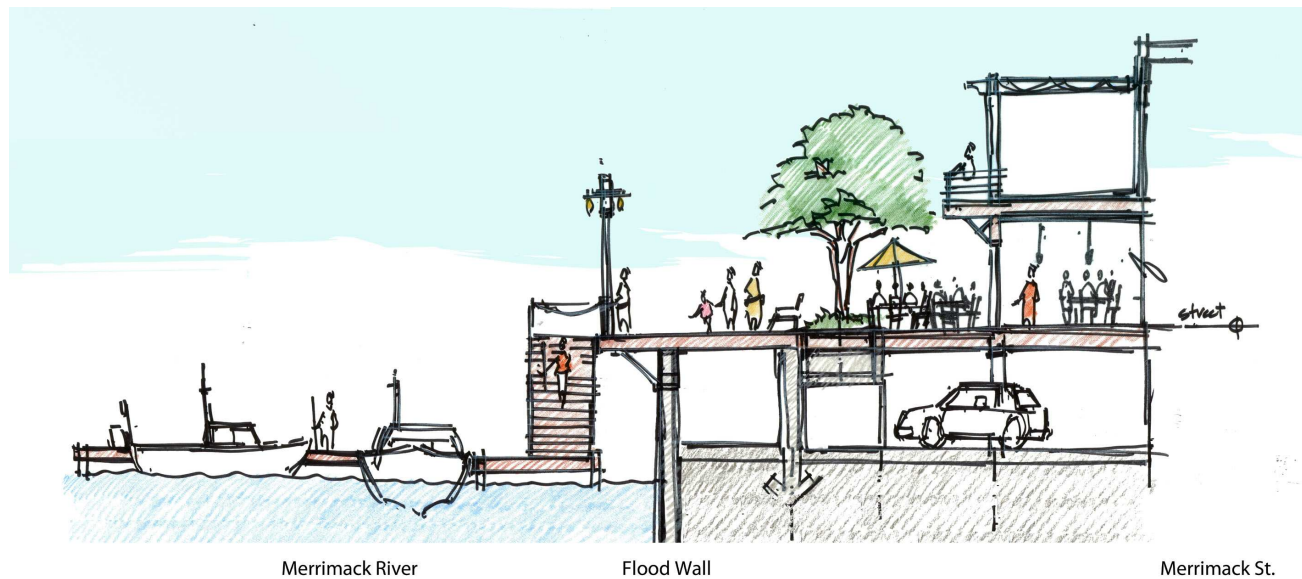




Section 1: Retain driveway, add deck on flood wall for boardwalk



Section 2: Add deck on flood wall for boardwalk, connect boardwalk with riverfront building



## CREATE A CENTRAL WATERFRONT PUBLIC PLACE AT WASHINGTON SQUARE

Another major recommendation is creation of a great public place on the riverfront at Washington Square with the City in the lead. This could be either on the site of the bus station and its parking lot or replacing the Post Office, if that becomes available, or some combination of the two.

A great public space at this location could pull the center of gravity to the threshold of Merrimack Street. It would also provide the setting for large public events and draw Haverhill residents and visitors from a broader area to the downtown.

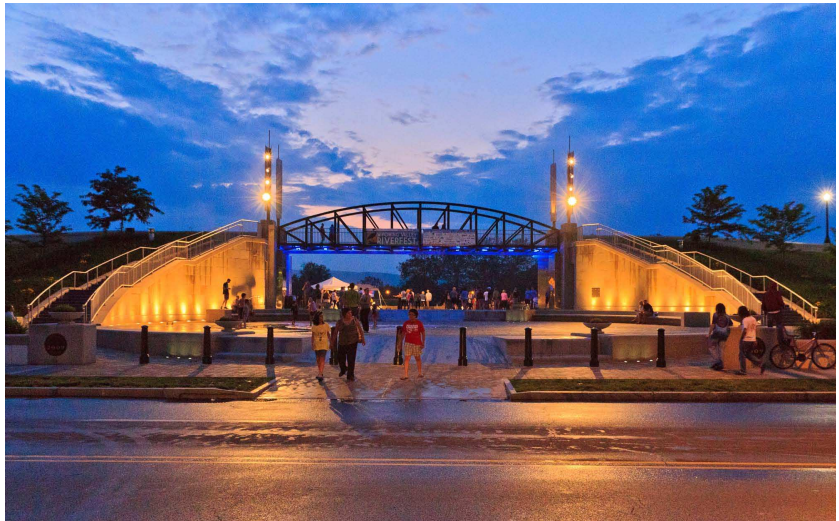
It would be important to activate the space with a cafe structure with outdoor seating. Perhaps an amphitheater could be incorporated. The supervised public restrooms currently housed in the bus station should also be provided.

Establishment of a strong connection to the river at this location would greatly enhance its appeal and usage.

A concept that could provide a truly destination level of appeal would be to insert an opening in the flood wall that could be closed by means of a gate when flooding threatens. This would allow a window and access to the river from the Washington/Merrimack Street corridor. Steps down to the water's edge could allow visitors to get their feet wet and access floating docks. See *Section 3* on page 28.

While reportedly cutting against the grain of the Corps of Engineers New England District's preferred practice, such gates have been approved by the Corps and constructed in other locales such as Wilkes Barre, PA and numerous cities in the Midwest. Panel members with direct experience in such improvements preliminarily estimate the cost to be somewhere in the vicinity of \$1 - \$2 million. Political support from congressional representatives could be important to swaying the Corps to approve this, as well as for earmarking appropriations for the project.

**Figure 4:** A Public Place at Washington Square



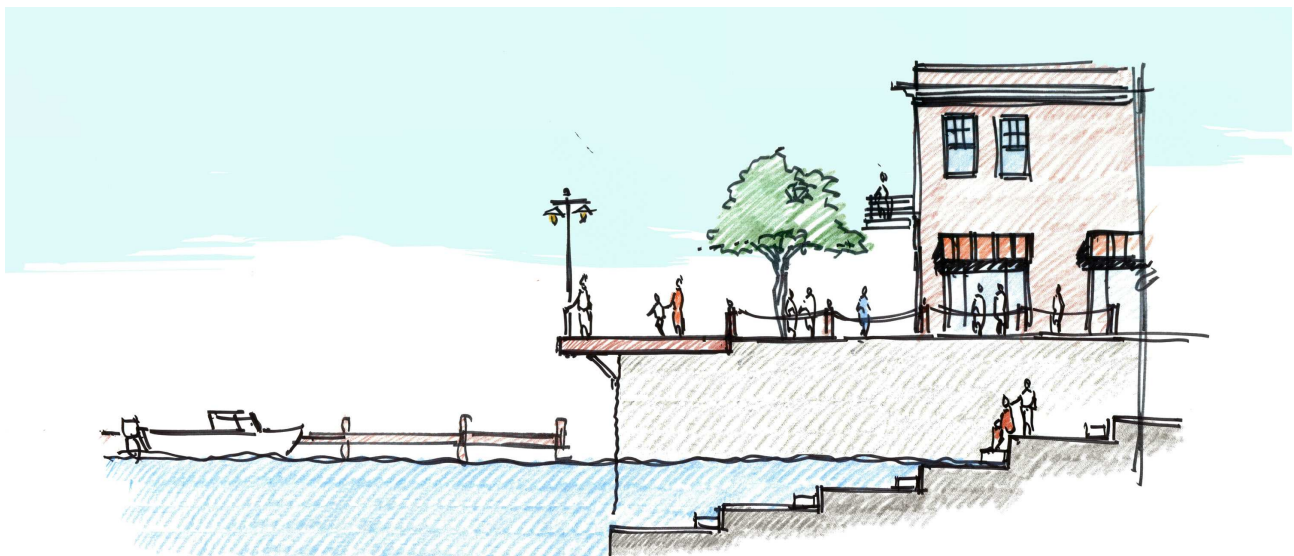
Water access through a flood gate in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania.





An interactive fountain is integrated into the plaza at the Wilkes Barre floodgate.

**Section 3:** Add deck on flood wall for boardwalk, open part of flood wall for better river recreation opportunities.



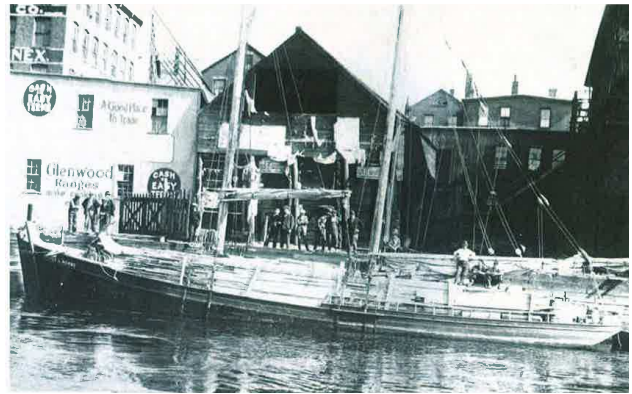
Merrimack River

Merrimack St.



## BRING PEOPLE ONTO THE RIVER

Additional seasonal recreation infrastructure should be added to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to **get out on the river!** Floating docks could provide places for passive recreation, such as fishing or lounging, or starting points for active recreation such as community canoeing, kayaking, or sailing. A boat launch with attendant parking might be placed across the river, perhaps at the Ornsteen property.



Historically, Haverhill's downtown had closer connections to the Merrimac River.



Riverside gatherings



An engaged river



Docks and boating opportunities



Water features

## ENHANCE THE AMENITY OF MERRIMACK STREET WITH IMPROVED STREETScape

The City has made modest streetscape improvements to Washington Street that are successful in creating a sense of continuity on the street and signaling the City's interest in the street's vitality. Completing the Streetscape along Merrimack Street using the same vocabulary that has been applied to Washington Street—patterned brick edge along the curb, high quality fixtures—but with somewhat different design moves would enhance the pedestrian experience of the street.

In addition, the parking lot in front of the Merrimack Street Parking Deck could be amenitized with upgraded landscaping, fencing, and the like, if the garage is not to be redeveloped in the near term future.



Example of streetscape improvements on Washington Street.



The small public park in front of the Merrimack Street Garage would benefit from upgrades.



## ENHANCE VIEWS AND CONNECTIONS TO AND THROUGH MERRIMACK STREET TO THE RIVER

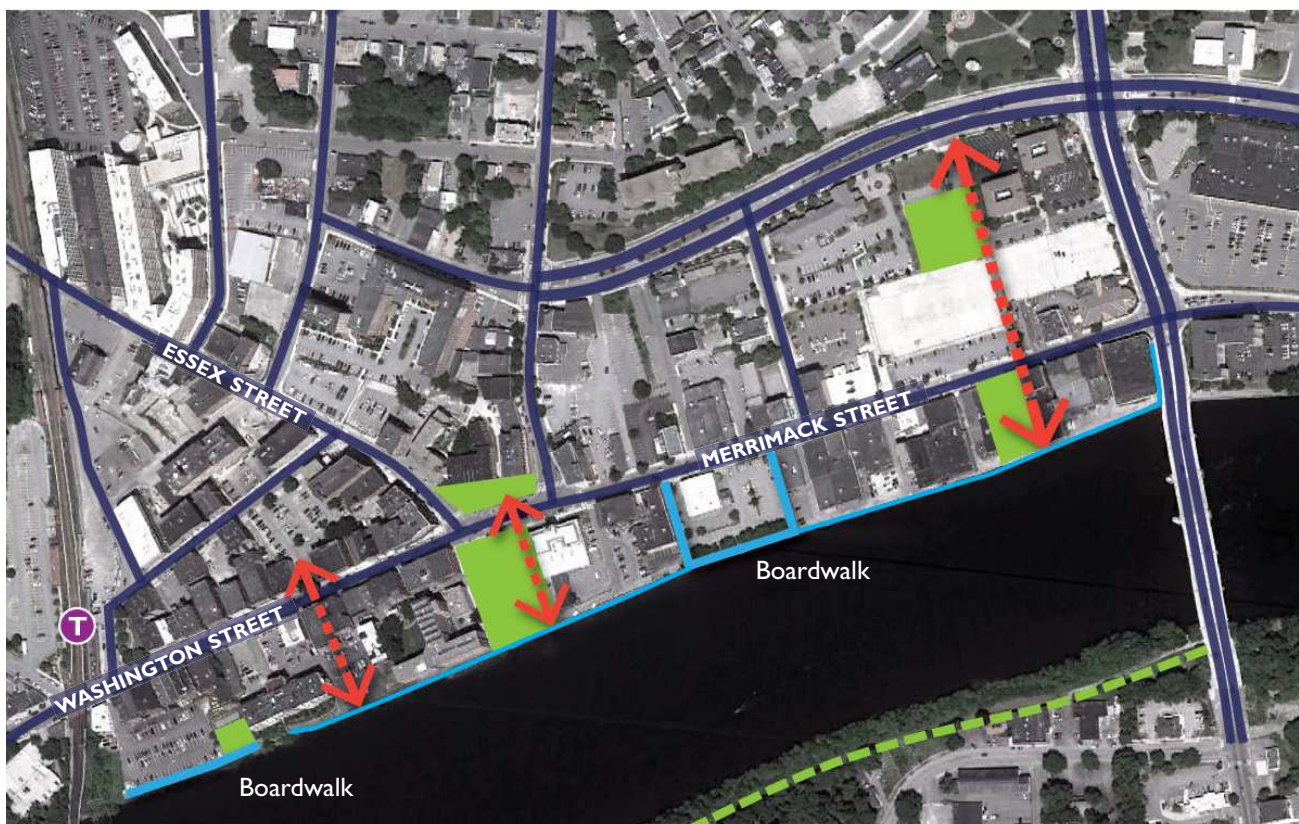
Selective demolition of a limited number of buildings could create the space to forge a meaningful connection(s)—first visual, then physical—to the river and turn remaining structures into better redevelopment opportunities. Cleared space between Merrimack Street and the river walk could become landscaped path(s) to the river.

As practical, the City should next plan for north-south connections at one or more strategic locations in the downtown that would provide view corridors to the river, that could be further developed into physical paths and urban spaces conducting people to and across Merrimack Street to the river. One option, likely pursued in the long term, in tandem with

major redevelopment, would be to reconnect Bailey Boulevard to Merrimack Street by demolition of the western portion of the Merrimack Street parking deck. This option would need to be carefully considered weighing the potential for significant redevelopment replacing the deck, the ongoing viability and remaining useful life of the parking deck and the need to maintain an ample supply of parking.

The panel understands that the idea of converting Merrimack Street to one way traffic or pedestrian-only has been raised in the past. The panel does not see the need for this and would consider either approach to be a negative.

**Figure 5:** North-South Connections





## b. Creating Destinal Activity Centers

### Theater/Cultural Center

Haverhill does not have a theater, just the kind of use that would draw more people downtown from the immediate region and serve as an ideal complement to the existing restaurants, bars, and cafes. The parking required by a theater and other cultural use to serve this evening and weekend schedule would not compete with existing peak week day time uses.

A movie theater, more likely a specialty theater like Landmark Cinema in Waltham, if it could be drawn to the site, would be a great mass market entertainment attraction.

A live theater/cultural center could also be a big draw. The Haverhill Foundation is currently exploring such an option for the Woolworth Building. The panel suggests exploration with regional theater groups or possibly Northern Essex Community College to see if there is interest in collaboration on such a venture.

Either of the above would likely entail considerable public assistance, which would be warranted by spin-off impact on local businesses and development.

A softer and less costly option would be a tent-like performance structure such as used at the Bank of America Pavilion in Boston. An appropriate site for this might be the vacant waterfront site on Water Street opposite the supermarket just downriver from Merrimack Street.

### Innovation Center

The City could explore the idea of an Innovation Center, perhaps in tandem with the community college, the Burgess-Lang Center or some other anchor organization. The idea would not be to replicate or compete with the Burgess-Lang Center, but rather to add another dimension to business generation in the downtown. If viable and of great enough scale, this concept might rationalize the demolition of the western portion of the Merrimack Street parking deck for its reuse, if that is the most appropriate site and ample parking remains or can be replaced. Clearly, the community college's interest in and funding for this concept is speculative, but panelists feel it is worth exploring to gauge viability.

**Figure 6:** Cultural Anchors at Merrimack & Main Streets



## c. Support Private Building Redevelopment by means of Zoning, Public Parking Allocation

Support private building redevelopment and new infill development (and possibly anchor amenities) by means of zoning, public parking allocation and proactive redevelopment implementation in marketing, financial assistance, and zoning.

### Zoning & Permitting

Zoning and permitting certainty with respect to development rights and approval timing will be critically important for developers who might invest in the Merrimack Street corridor/riverfront Project Area. An uncertain zoning and permitting landscape has the potential to discourage developers from pursuing projects in the area.

While the panel did not review the City's zoning code and permitting practices in any detail, the City should consider adopting the following recommendations to the extent they are not current practice.

- Review the applicable zoning to and consider changes that ensure a zoning and permitting process that is both consolidated and expedited. Review of the code could benefit from input of developers and property owners.
- Consider zoning that is flexible and performance- or incentive-based (e.g. density bonuses) rather than traditional.
- Encourage uses and development that are consistent with Haverhill's short-term and long-term aspirations for the Merrimack Street corridor/riverfront Project Area. Examples might include live-work housing, artist housing and studios, cultural/entertainment uses, as well as more traditional residential, office, and retail/restaurant use.
- Clarify parking requirements, allowing for fulfillment with off-site parking. Consider lowering requirements based on actual market needs and concept of area-wide shared use.

- The permitting process should also be clear, one-stop-shop, and within a defined timeframe. For example, the City could assure project review and decision being completed 90 days from submission. Identifying a proposal review committee in advance of a project submission which would be committed to an intensive accelerated review process within a stated timeframe and securing cooperation from all departments and agencies involved.

### Parking

Providing adequate proximate off-site parking at advantageous terms conducive to marketability and financing would be a major incentive for redevelopment.

Marketing and financing requirements for development of market rate residential would likely indicate parking in the range of 1.0 per unit for rental and 1.5 for condominiums. Parking for market rate rental units could be "right to park" meaning they would basically be available for public/business employee use during the day, while at least 1.0 space per unit of parking for market rate condominiums should be reserved 24-hour spaces. Affordable units might require only 0.6 – 0.75 spaces per unit. The actual per unit ratios for specific projects would depend upon their unit mix in terms of number of bedrooms and market versus affordable.

To figure demand for the new development, the City would have to estimate a high and low number of dwelling units and/or commercial space could be created in the district—given vacant square feet in buildings to be reused and some kind of FAR cap for new buildings. It would assume that new buildings would supply parking on site, with an incentive to do structured versus surface lot parking.

As actual parking demand may be less than the levels indicated by marketing and financing, and may

assume mixed-income, the overall demand calculation might be based on ratios as low as 0.75 per unit for rental and 1.0 per unit (all 24-hour reserved) for condominium.

Consideration would need to be given to potential restaurant and theater parking demand, whose peak would overlap with that of residential, though this could be accommodated, at least in part, by on-street parking within a somewhat broader area.

Once an estimate of 24-hour and non-reserved space needs has been developed, the City would have a maximum number that it would need for on-site and off-site spaces. The City could then plan its using vacant spaces or adding capacity in the rebuilt/reconfigured Merrimack Street garage (or one of the adjacent sites) to meet the off-site number.

Ultimately, the issue is parking management. A parking allocation system in which the City makes a limited supply of allocable spaces available on a first come first served basis could provide an incentive spurring redevelopment.

The above should be integrated in a Parking Management/Capital Investment Plan, which would entail:

- Evaluate parking supply
- The paid parking plan needs to be carefully rolled out and cover on and off-street parking
- Allow off-site parking to meet redevelopment and permitting requirements through long-term leases or other agreements (coordinate with collective City property marketing initiative)
- Reduce parking requirements through a new overlay district—potentially establish market-based minimums
- Evaluate long-term opportunity to redevelop city decks
- Determine condition/viability/reinvestment worthiness of existing deck
  - Make improvements to deck to maintain integrity; add lights or otherwise amenitize
  - Amenity surface parking lot including improved lighting to enhance perception of safety

## Circulation

The panel does not see the need or benefit in making changes to the traffic pattern on Merrimack Street, such as making it one way or pedestrian only.



The public parking deck behind Pentucket Bank, north toward Bailey Boulevard.



Surface parking on the "short" parcel in front of the Goecke Memorial Parking Deck on Merrimack Street.



#### **d. Support Private Building Redevelopment with Proactive Redevelopment Implementation in Marketing, Financial Assistance**

The City or aligned entities can play a proactive role in promoting and implementing redevelopment and new development by means of some or all of the following strategies:

##### **EXPLORE AND CREATE APPROPRIATE ENTITY(IES) TO FACILITATE REDEVELOPMENT**

The City should explore the creation of new or strengthening and utilization of existing entities to support its redevelopment objectives. Options include creation of an Urban Renewal Agency in the form of either a Redevelopment Authority or Economic Development Industrial Corporation or use of the existing Housing Authority.

Such entities allow flexibility with regard to state procurement and disposition requirements, making possible the flexible two-stage RFP process and deal structures that may be most conducive to attracting and partnering with well qualified developers to achieve ambitious long term projects. Other attributes applicable to some or all of the above entities are: long term continuity and buffering from volatile political changes which can be particularly important for long term projects; eminent domain power, which, even if used sparingly or not at all, can provide useful leverage in property assemblage; and ability to make loans to projects.

Given the nature of the recommended public and private improvements, a redevelopment authority would appear to be the best substantive fit. However, the City should also weigh the capacities, requirements, and costs of setting up and maintaining this versus alternate entities.

Nongovernmental entities may also play a useful role. A new community development corporation, expanded Haverhill Foundation or Chamber of Com-

merce might provide business technical, property marketing support, or act as a developer for certain projects. Perhaps the Burgess-Lang Center, the community college, or other organization might collaborate in some way with any of the above entities or directly with the City to provide such support or implementation.

It would be important to carefully consider the attributes of each type of entity and how they would fit the needs of various objectives and weave the efforts of the selected entities into a coherent whole.

##### **TECHNICAL AND MARKETING SUPPORT**

Provide technical support to assist small developers in implementing development, particularly re. financing such as tax credits or other complex mechanisms.

Capitalize on the Burgess-Lang Center by helping property owners market to those firms that may be growing out of their space in the center and looking for a different type of space than available there (or elsewhere) to rent space in or purchase properties on Merrimack Street.

##### **PACKAGING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Explore packaging public, non-profit and private properties to create development opportunities that could be more appealing, especially to larger, more experienced developers, due to their greater volume/economies of scale and the ability to pursue a unified program of development rather than riskier stand-alone projects.

This approach could be facilitated or managed by the City. The City, possibly acting through a related governmental entity, could gather properties in a package by means of options and market them in an RFP

process. The properties owned by the City could be packaged together with the Haverhill Foundation's Woolworth Building and as many target private properties as can be enlisted in the effort on reasonable terms. A flexible, two-stage RFP could facilitate the success of such an ambitious initiative.

Zoning bonuses and/or parking allocation priority for larger scale projects could facilitate assemblage as well as the appeal of the development opportunity (though flexibility should be maintained to support promising smaller projects).

## **DIF / TIF**

District Improvement Financing (DIF) may provide a means of supporting public improvements to the extent funding cannot be secured from state or federal grant sources. In terms of general order of magnitude, an increase in assessed value of \$100 per square foot for redeveloped and infill buildings running the length of Merrimack Street at standard building depths and 4 floors would be preliminarily estimated to yield an annual property tax increment in the range of approximately \$500,000 - \$1,000,000, which, upon completion, would support considerable DIF bond financing (or rationalize City's tapping into general finances). More detailed analyses of building capacity, value enhancement, assessment practices, staging, and financing parameters would be required to confirm or refine such an estimate and its financing implications.

Tax Increment Financing, providing property owners a schedule of advantageous property tax payments, provides an alternate means of supporting redevelopment projects.

On a smaller scale, the City's facade renovation program should be extended to the Merrimack Street corridor.

## 6 | Next Steps

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### **a. Merrimack Street & Downtown Riverfront**

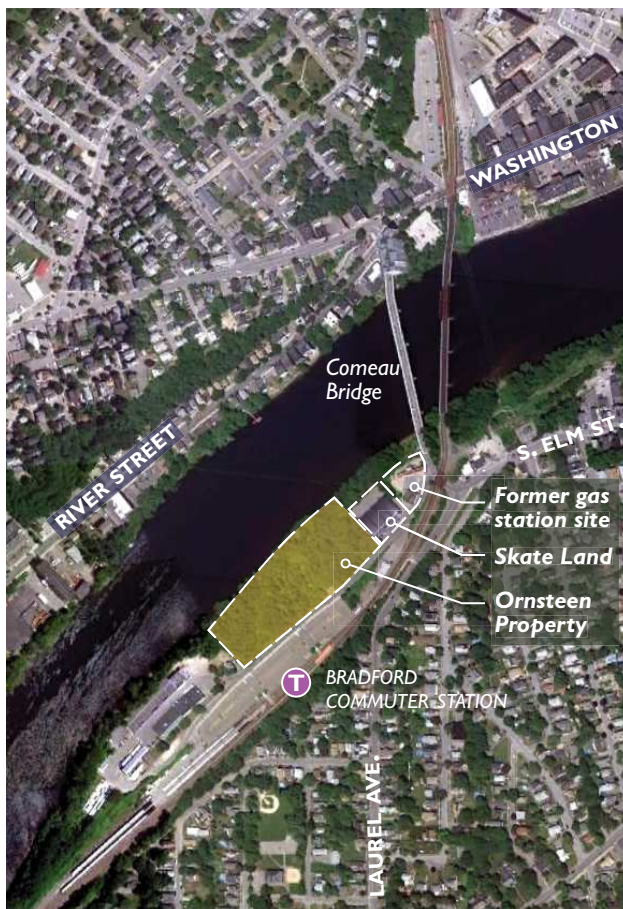
- Explore vehicles best suited to further redevelopment initiatives, e.g. creation of redevelopment authority, strengthening of or collaboration between existing city departments, non-profit groups, Burgess-Lang Center.
- Design and construct Merrimack Street streetscape improvements
- Create a Parking Management/Capital Investment Plan
- Explore design, costing and approval for major public improvements such as the loop, central waterfront open space and gateway and supporting public improvements
- Explore funding options for major public improvements such as state funding, DIF
- Explore collective property marketing for redevelopment, facilitated by City
- Expand facade improvement area to Merrimack Street
- Formulate a comprehensive permitting and zoning structure (coordinate with collective City property marketing initiative) and Parking Management/Capital Plan
- Explore Anchor Concepts for Woolworth Building or other locations with potential participants such as community college, regional theater groups, specialty cinema operators.
- Continue to Engage Local Organizations in Revitalization Efforts
- Construct and facilitate private connections to Boardwalk/River Access/Parks



## b. Ornstein Property

The Ornstein property is a 4.84 acre, wooded, riverfront parcel adjacent to the Bedford MBTA train station, near the foot of the Comeau Bridge on the south side of the Merrimack River. Railroad Avenue provides access to the parcel, as well as to Skateland. The parcel at the corner of Railroad and Laurel Avenues was the site of a gas station. The parcel is less than five minutes from Washington Street and only a minute from the bike path.

**Figure 7:** The Ornstein Property in Context



## DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Riverfront + Commuter Rail = Readily developable site upon market recovery

- Consider market rate for-sale townhouses
  - Potential strong feasibility, disposition revenues, property taxes
- Diversify product versus. downtown

## City RFP Process

- Maximize competitive proposals for targeted development from qualified developers
- Determine objectives
- Market effectively e.g. outreach, advertising
- Deliberate disposition process, preferably by means of a two-stage RFP

## Deal Structure

- If for-sale not viable at time of disposition, consider land lease with participation, especially upon conversion to for-sale
- Potential staged development/phased disposition
- Retain ownership of Riverfront Trail
- Potential boat launch and parking
- Consider developer funding and/or constructing public realm improvements



A view toward the Comeau Bridge from the Ornstein property.