



**Salem Technical Assistance Panel:  
The Church Street Lot**

**The Urban Land Institute—Boston**

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**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Boston**

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# Salem Technical Assistance Panel: The Church Street Lot

On September 23, 2008, ULI Boston conducted a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) in the City of Salem, Massachusetts. The purpose of the TAP was to study the development potential of the city-owned Church Street Lot in downtown Salem. The panelists brought expertise, energy and enthusiasm to the task and produced a set of recommendations for the City of Salem to consider in addressing not just the development of the Church Street Lot but also the vibrancy of downtown Salem.

Salem aims to grow its downtown into an even more vibrant, prosperous and sustainable place. The city can further this goal through the targeted development of city owned property within the downtown. The Church Street lot had been identified as a site for additional parking. However, the panel determined that an additional parking structure would not be an appropriate use to further the city's goals. Residential development of the site would better promote the vibrant, sustainable growth of downtown Salem

Though the city appears to have adequate parking supply, parking in downtown Salem is a real issue. As such, Salem should conduct a comprehensive parking analysis followed by the development and adoption of a parking management plan.

These recommendations are described in greater detail, along with an overview of the process and findings of the TAP panel, in this report. The panel enjoyed learning about Salem's active and historic downtown and appreciated the opportunity to present recommendations that could help maintain the vibrancy of that downtown.

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### *The Urban Land Institute*

The Urban Land Institute (“ULI”) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, ULI now has more than 40,000 members worldwide, working in private enterprise and public service and representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines.

ULI’s mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. 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.

### *ULI Boston*

ULI’s Boston District Council (“ULI Boston”) serves more than 1,200 ULI members throughout New England. ULI Boston is committed to supporting the communities of New England in making sound land use decisions and creating better places. ULI Boston takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of land use issues, convenes forums to find solutions and impartially reports findings.

### *The Technical Assistance Panel Program*

The Outreach Committee of ULI Boston administers the Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program. TAP is designed to provide objective, expert advice to municipal and community-based organizations that have requested assistance in addressing the feasibility, design or implementation of a proposed development initiative. A TAP panel consists of a group of ULI real estate professionals who bring their expertise to a local community for a one-day collaborative consultation. This pro bono program allows local government or qualifying non-profit organizations to draw upon the expertise of local ULI members’ in urban planning, real estate development, design, and finance.

### *Salem TAP Process*

On September 23, 2008, the Salem TAP Panel gathered at the offices of the City of Salem. Tom Daniel, Economic Development Manager, and Lynn Goonin Duncan, Director of Planning & Community Development, led the panelists on a driving tour of Salem, viewing the major corridors leading into the downtown, new developments, and key activity areas.

During the remainder of the morning and into the early afternoon the panel conducted interviews with key stakeholders. Panelists were also provided with background information on Salem and the Church Street Lot site as well as previous plans, studies and policies.

After several hours of deliberation, the panel developed the recommendations described in this report. The day concluded with a presentation to a public audience that included city councilors and local residents.

## *Salem TAP Panel*

The Panel consisted of the following ten professionals covering a range of expertise:

- **Allen Kieslich [Co-Chair]**, President of Kieslich Development Consultants
- **Richard Lampman [Co-Chair]**, Vice President at Tocci Building Companies
- **Barry Abramson**, President of Abramson & Associates Inc.
- **Ira Baline**, Senior Associate at Bergmeyer Associates, Inc.
- **Steven Heikin**, Vice President at ICON Architecture, Inc.
- **Lynn Hoffman Carlton**, Senior Associate at Sasaki Associates
- **Fern Kanter**, Executive Vice President at Capital Hotel Management
- **Howard Muise**, Senior Project Manager at Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.
- **Beth O'Donnell**, Vice President at Essex River Ventures, Inc.
- **Linda Painter**, Assistant City Planner at the City of Providence Rhode Island

The TAP host was Tom Daniel, Salem's Economic Development Manager. Michelle Landers, Manager ULI Boston, and Ned Baldwin, provided administrative support.

## *Stakeholders*

The following stakeholders were interviewed during the TAP:

- **Kimberley Driscoll**, Mayor, City of Salem
- **Michael Brennan**, Chairman and **Russ Vickers**, Vice Chairman, Salem Redevelopment Authority
- **Colleen Bruce**, Chief of Marine and Special Programs Division, National Park Service
- **Barbara Cleary**, Preservation Committee Co-Chair, and **Emily Udy**, Preservation Projects Manager, Historic Salem Inc.
- **Josh Basseches**, COO, Peabody Essex Museum
- **Matt Picarsic**, Principal, RCG, LCC
- **Gail Rosenberg**, Project Manager, DCAM
- **Patricia Zaido**, Executive Director, Salem Partnership
- **Kate Fox**, Executive Director, Destination Salem
- **Beth Bower**, Special Assistant to the President for External Affairs, Salem State College
- **Rinus Oosthoek**, Executive Director, Salem Chamber of Commerce
- **Joseph Cosgrove**, Director of Planning and Development, MBTA



## *The City of Salem*

Located sixteen miles north of Boston, the City of Salem is a historic coastal community. Salem is bordered by Swampscott and Lynn on the south, Peabody on the west, Beverly on the north, and Marblehead on the east. Salem has a land area of 8.1 square miles and approximately 18.5 miles of coastline. The over 41,000 residents display great diversity; Salem school children speak no less than twenty different languages.

Salem has a rich legacy as an historic seaside community featuring numerous architectural treasures as well as several museums. The first major port in the United States, Salem played a prominent role in the East Indian trade. It was the home of author Nathaniel Hawthorne and, more recently, the birthplace of prominent businessman Jack Welch. There is also a different historical legacy associated with the infamous Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692.

Salem has become a commercial, cultural, educational, judicial, and tourism center of the North Shore. The city is the home to Salem State College; the North Shore Medical Center; the Essex County District Superior and Probate Courts, and Registry of Deeds; and the world-famous Peabody and Essex Museum. The city also contains 350 acres of public parks, two golf courses and four marinas. The regional shopping destinations of the North Shore Mall and the Liberty Tree Mall are in the adjacent towns of Peabody and Danvers.



Courtesy of National Park Service Collection

Salem is connected to Boston via a station of the MBTA commuter rail and seasonal ferry service. State Route 128 and Interstate 95 pass through the adjoining town of Peabody. State Routes 1A, 107, and 114 also pass through Salem.

## *Downtown Salem*

Salem's 131-acre downtown features a dense grid of two to six story buildings providing a mix of retail, service, restaurant, residential, and office spaces as well as historic and cultural sites. Washington Street between New Derby Street and Bridge Street is the central spine of the downtown. The Essex Street pedestrian mall links Washington Street to the Peabody Essex Museum and National Park Visitors Center. The Museum Place Mall sits on the north side of Essex Street just east of Washington Street. Nearly one million visitors come to Salem each year and over 6,000 workers come to the downtown every day.

Several new projects are currently underway around downtown Salem. The new \$106-million J. Michael Ruane Judicial Center is being constructed at the northwest end of downtown; the former Essex County jail building is being redeveloped as residences and a restaurant; and a 31-unit mixed-use project is under construction at the intersection of Washington Street and New Derby Street.



## The Church Street Lot

The parcel that was the focus of the TAP is known as the “Church Street Lot.” The 1.5-acre site is located east of Washington Street between Church Street, Federal Street and St. Peter Street. The site is not visible from the primary corridors of Bridge Street, Essex Street or Washington Street. The site is currently used for surface parking – 142 long term stalls and 47 short term stalls. The lot is highly utilized in the daytime for downtown employees and users of the court system.

Two churches front the St. Peter Street side to the east, and a mix of offices and retail shops are adjacent to the pedestrian walkway to the west. To the south is the Museum Place Mall, an 117,000 square foot retail and office center with a 914-stall municipal parking garage, and the Essex Street condominiums. To the north are 10 Federal Street, a 136,000-square-foot office building, and a condominium complex at the corner of Federal Street and Ash Street.

Historically the site was developed with residences. But in the 1950s the site was cleared as part of an urban renewal program that was never completed. The site is still owned by the Salem Redevelopment Authority and is currently a surface parking lot utilized by downtown employees and visitors.

The city has previously considered developing the site. In 2005, a parking structure feasibility study concluded that an approximately 450-stall parking structure and 23,000 square foot office building could be accommodated on the site.



Photo Credit: City of Salem



## Findings

Through interviews with stakeholders, review of city documents, and visual inspection of the site and the downtown, the Panel developed an in-depth understanding of the objectives, expectations, issues and challenges associated with the Church St. Lot. The extensive expertise of the Panel enabled a thorough evaluation of opportunities and alternatives. The following summarizes the Panel's findings.

## Objectives

The City of Salem has recognized that the current use of the site does not serve the best interests of the city. The city seeks to determine the best use of the site that would generate activity that is supportive of the downtown, catalyze additional investment downtown, alleviate the parking problem, and create tax revenue.

## Expectations

In general the Panel found that stakeholders expect the site to be used for additional parking with some retail, office or community use. The city had previously studied developing the site with additional parking and office space.

## Issues

Any recommendations must address:

- Connectivity between the site and the main activity areas of the downtown;
- Parking concerns; and
- Impact on the urban character and heritage of downtown Salem.

## Challenges

- The site is not on a main street or at a gateway to downtown, nor is it easily accessed from a main street and it is physically and visually separated from the Essex Street by the large mass of the Museum Place Mall.
- Stakeholders spoke of a perceived parking problem, intrinsically linked to the site due to its current use as parking.
- The market is weak and demand for various land uses are low.
- The panel felt that the condition of the Museum Place Mall was problematic and had a detrimental effect on connectivity of the Church Street Lot to the rest of the downtown. Improvement to the mall could increase its vitality and provide a better connection between the Church Street lot and Essex Street. Though private control of the mall complicates the ability to implement change, the panel feels that changes should be considered to lighting, painting, façade treatments, entryways, thru connections to streets, and connections to the Museum Place garage.

## Opportunities

- Salem seeks to foster the growth of a creative economy. The development of the site could be designed to attract or a support businesses of that type.
- Addressing parking at the site enables consideration of broader parking issues for downtown Salem.
- Development of the site could fill an underutilized space with active streetscapes and good urban form.

## Alternatives

The Panel considered the feasibility of various land use alternatives for the Church Street Lot.

*Parking:* The Panel determined that Salem's parking problem is not due to a shortage of supply but rather due to inadequacies in managing the existing resources. As such, building a parking structure adjacent to the existing Mall Garage, which is not at full capacity except on Halloween, would not be an efficient use of the site.

*Office:* There appears to be insufficient demand for the development of office space in downtown Salem to justify the use of this location for additional office space at this time or in the foreseeable future. The cost to build new office space is such that the rent necessary to cover costs would be uncompetitive, certainly until existing available supply is absorbed, the economy recovers, and city center market-rate office space is in high demand. Such conditions are not expected in the immediate future.

*General Retail:* The site is not a strong location for retail due to the lack of visibility from the main streets and also due the competitive impact new retail could have on the existing businesses of downtown. Existing storefront vacancies or use of storefronts for non-retail businesses indicated that downtown demand is fragile. The appropriate strategy should be to boost demand, not increase supply.

*Hotel:* Demand for a boutique hotel may be sufficient to justify a new one in Salem. However, the location lacks appeal because it is not on or visible from a main access route. Additionally, the range of hotel developers who would consider a site of this size is severely limited.

*Institutional:* Salem State College is looking to create additional space and has expressed interest in the downtown area. However, the programmatic needs of the College are not clear at this time. The city may wish to continue communications with the College to determine if there is interest in the site as the College moves forward with its facility planning.

*Community:* Salem's Senior Center is in need of a new location. However, the programmatic needs and funding sources are not defined at this time. As these issues evolve, the city may wish to revisit this option possibly in conjunction with other development on the site. Use of this site for a senior center however would not generate the economic activity or tax revenues desired.

*Public:* The city could develop all or part of the site as a municipal building to allow the city to relocate offices currently occupying leased space on Washington Street. The city could also consider the alternative of leasing space developed at the site. It was noted by the Panel that the city preferred not to move out of the existing city hall building. Furthermore, use of the site for municipal use would not generate the economic activity or tax revenue desired.

*Residential:* Salem is seeking to promote the growth of the downtown residential community. Live-work studios or townhouses would also support the growth of businesses that are part of the creative economy that is important to Salem's future. Though the market is currently not conducive to the development of for-sale residential units, the panel feels that residential development would be the most feasible option for the site as the economy recovers. This alternative is discussed in the next section in more detail.



**Recommendation 1:  
Residential development of the Church Street Lot**

The Panel concluded that residential development would be the most appropriate use of the site. Salem is actively seeking to increase the vitality of its downtown and residential development would increase the local consumer-base for downtown businesses, and provide the city with consistent tax revenues.

The TAP panel quickly developed two possible design concepts to illustrate various design concepts that could be accommodated on the site. Each concept is described and illustrated below.

We recognize the market is currently not conducive to development of additional for sale market rate residential product and that the viability and feasibility of this concept is contingent upon market recovery. Assuming such a recovery, we consider this use to hold the best prospects for market and financial feasibility in the mid-term future.

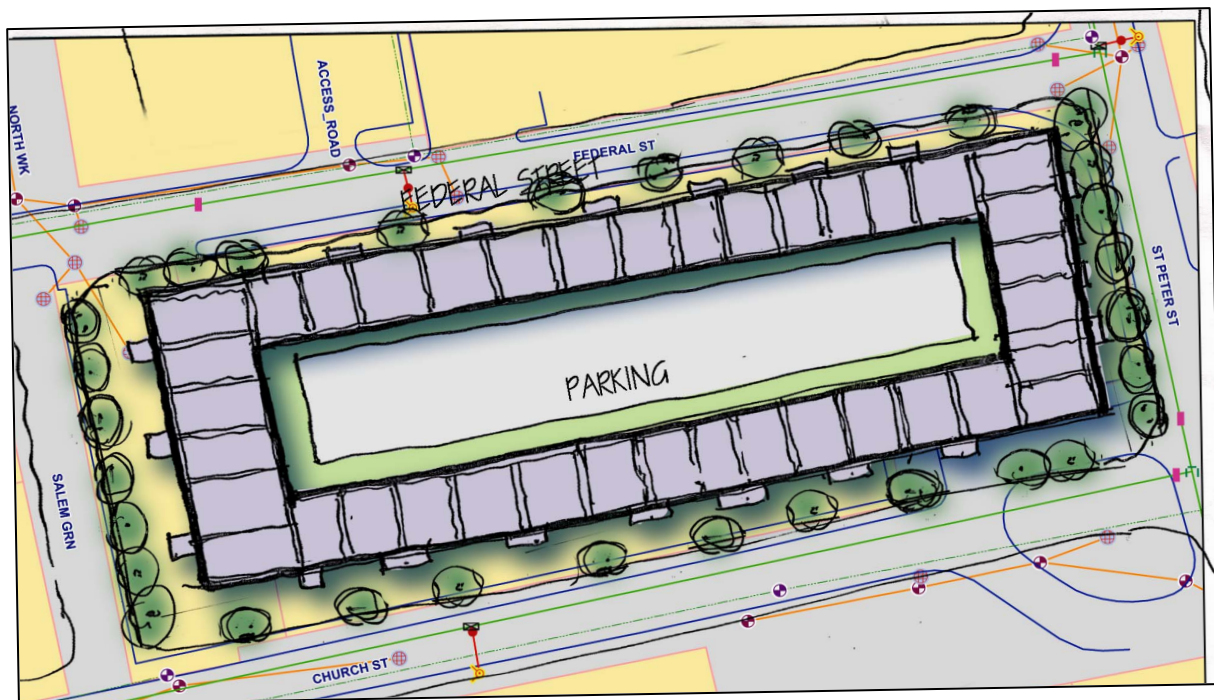
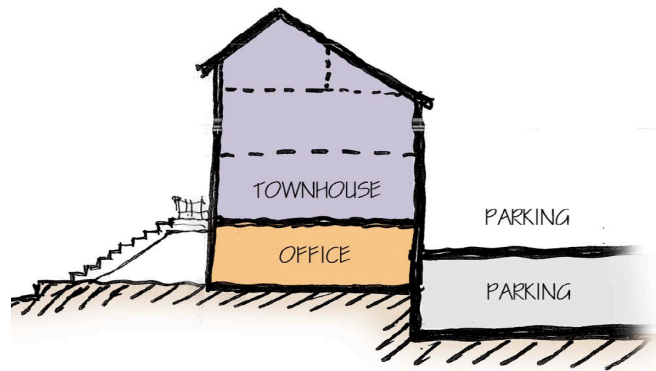
Whatever design approach is adopted, certain programmatic principles should be considered. The scale and articulation of the structures should relate to the context of the historic downtown. Perimeters should be designed as active, pedestrian friendly streetscapes. Parking should be incorporated in an accessible yet unobtrusive form.



## Residential Concept 1

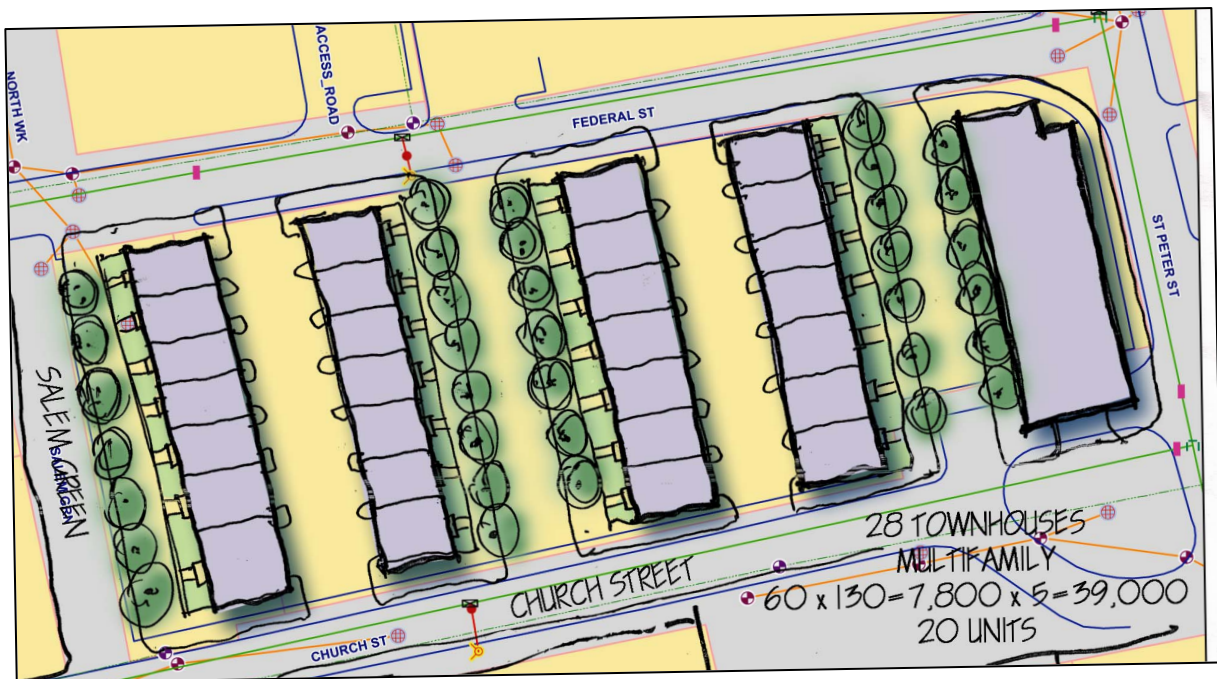
The perimeter design concept, illustrated below, could accommodate between 38 and 76 residential/commercial units in a tiered structure that would include street-front lower-level loft-type units that also could be used for live-work purposes. This design would lend itself to a live-work concept that would appeal to professionals, such as attorneys who want to live near the courthouse, or creative professionals who seek studio space attached to their residence.

The center of the site could feature a two level parking structure with adequate spaces to serve the needs of the new residents. The interior upper parking level would be landscaped to enhance its appearance.



## Residential Concept 2

Alternatively, the existing mass of the site could be divided into four blocks by means of new streets and alleys. Each block could accommodate seven row houses, for a total of 28 units. Resident parking would be provided in alleyways behind or under each residence. This plan could be phased, with blocks built out in sequence as the market allows. The additional area on the north side of the site could accommodate a building containing approximately 20 additional apartment loft units or could be used for surface parking. This plan could be phased, with blocks built out in sequence as the market allows.





## Recommendation 2: Downtown Parking Management Plan

Though the panel was only asked to study the potential of the Church Street lot, the panel felt that there is an opportunity for the city to address related issues regarding parking and circulation in the downtown. Regardless of the development strategy adopted for the site, the Panel recommends that a comprehensive parking resource study and the preparation of a parking management plan be made a priority.

As noted previously, the availability of convenient parking is a concern in downtown Salem among downtown residents where parking is provided by allocating a portion of the municipal garage spaces to these developments. This arrangement presents unique challenges during winter snowstorms. Yet, the City of Salem possesses significant parking resources. Anecdotal evidence indicates that Salem's public parking problem is not a shortage in supply; rather the problem stems from public perceptions of convenience, cost, predictability, and safety. As such, It is recommended the city conduct a comprehensive parking management plan that would align the design, pricing and operations of the parking supply in order to achieve the city's objectives for downtown Salem. Improvements are needed in garage design, signage, pricing, safety, and vehicle circulation. More importantly, these aspects need to be guided by a unified vision outlined in an overall center city development plan.

The first step would be a parking resource study that would assess the supply and demand of parking and the community's issues and concerns. Important factors include resident and non-resident usage by time of day and day of week, alignment between parking locations and activity areas, circulation patterns and special event needs.

With the resource study as a benchmark, a comprehensive parking management plan could be developed to promote the vision of the city and identify policies and programs to most effectively use parking resources.

The plan could feature a strategy based on key parking facilities spaced around the downtown, such as Riley Plaza, Museum Garage and the Sewell Street Lot.

A new garage located at Riley Plaza could serve as a gateway to the downtown and provide additional parking where it is needed most, near the downtown and the increasingly popular waterfront. Located at the south end of the downtown, yet visible from the intersection of Essex and Washington Streets, Riley Plaza has the potential to become the focus of vehicular activity from all directions. This new parking structure, combined with adjusted vehicular circulation on surrounding streets, could significantly alleviate congestion in the downtown.

The Museum Place Mall garage is currently underutilized due to problems of perception, pricing and design. Cosmetic improvements such as a fresh thematic paint scheme, improved lighting, clearer signage, and new pedestrian access, such as an external glass-enclosed stairwell, would transform the garage's negative image. Variable pricing and employee parking programs would also address the usage problems.

The panel noted concerns that the removal of the existing surface parking on the Church Street lot would disproportionately affect the residents north of Essex Street and around Washington Square. A garage located at the MBTA station or under part of the Salem Common could help address the neighborhood concerns and also be convenient for visitors coming into the city from the north and east and ease traffic flows through the city.



The Boston Common underground garage is a successful example of a garage under public space that provides public parking and reserved parking for the residents of Beacon Hill. Including these potential parking facilities in a parking study would allow the city to understand the potential value of new garages in these locations.

In conjunction with addressing downtown parking facilities, the plan should include proposals for improvements to circulation and way-finding for vehicles and pedestrians. Circulation should be efficient for visitors and employees; signage should be installed with a consistent design concept; and streetscapes should create an invitation for pedestrians to stroll between the various historic sites, parks, restaurants and places of commerce. Congestion at the intersection of Washington and Lafayette Streets could be alleviated by the creation of a circular one-way traffic pattern around the park using Harbor Street. Sidewalks, especially along the major pedestrian busy routes of Washington, Derby, and Hawthorne Boulevard, could be widened to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, workers and residents. The city could also consider making Washington Street a pedestrian mall on weekend and/or holidays.

The city should also ensure that the several transit and trolley services that currently serve downtown Salem are coordinated with the parking and circulation.



## Additional Considerations

Although not directly associated with the Church Street lot or the downtown parking issue, the Panel discussed related challenges and other potential economic development opportunities in the City of Salem that the city could consider for further study.

- Vehicular Access to Salem

Vehicular Access to and thru Salem is a significant challenge on most days. The conversion of North Street to four lanes to Route 35 (Gardner Street in Peabody) would offer the opportunity to alleviate much of the daily traffic to/from the West (Danvers, Peabody, Routes 128, 95, 35,114). In addition, re-designation of US Route 1A to follow the existing State Route 114 and 107 should also be considered. This will reduce thru traffic in the historic center city, reducing traffic conflict, and create a human sense of space for pedestrians.

- MBTA Lot

The MBTA lot has significant potential for development as a Transit-Oriented development and/or a parking structure. Utilizing the height difference between the north end of Washington Street and the water presents an opportunity to deck over the existing parking lot and build a visual focal point at the head of Washington Street.

- The Derby Warf

The Derby Warf contains a significant open area. Utilizing this area for “big tent” uses such as Summer stock and weekend concert, or cultural events has the potential of significantly increasing the visors to Salem’s historic Center. Utilizing nearby theater shows/groups from Salem State College and the North Shore Theater provide an excellent opportunity to utilize this prime location.

- The Electric Company Substation

The Electric Company Substation on the South River between Congress and Lafayette Street on Peabody Street is an urban eyesore and a physical impediment to development in the downtown. Efforts to request the power company relocate the substation or update the buildings exterior to blend with the environment should be considered. Additionally the portion of the site currently used for outside storage of miscellaneous material and old vehicles could be cleared or given to the city for waterfront development and public use.

- Generating Station

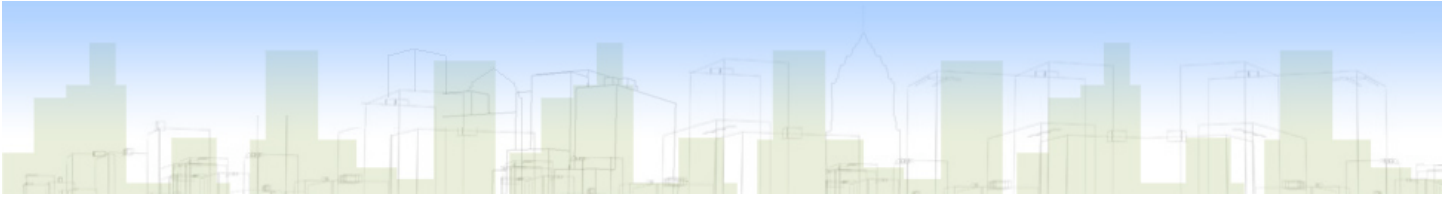
A master plan and schedule for the reuse of the Generating Station property is essential. This piece of property is a cornerstone to the future of Salem’s sustainable prosperity. This site on the Salem Harbor offers an unprecedented opportunity for Salem to increase its residential and recreational base so as to become one of if not the most sought after locations in New England to live.

- North River Cove

The panel also discussed the visual blight on the north side of the North River. This area, as well as the MBTA parking area, has the potential for a development of diverse housing, private and public space, and waterfront use that could be connected across the North River via a pedestrian bridge.

- Harbor Breakwater

To reduce damage to the shoreline, marinas, and development around Salem Harbor, consideration could be given to a breakwater at the harbor entrance from Winter Island toward Marblehead. Those familiar with the storm of 1993 and other Nor’easters, can attest to the power of the sea and the need for such a protective measures.



**ULI Boston**

111 Huntington Avenue  
19th Floor  
Boston MA, 02199  
617.239.0564 | [boston.uli.org](http://boston.uli.org)

**ULI**

1025 Thomas Jefferson Street NW  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007  
202.624.7000 | [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)



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