

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

1820 Courthouse Corridor Redevelopment

Plymouth, Massachusetts



September 11, 2012



**Urban Land
Institute**

Boston

Serving the Six New England States

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1. ULI and the TAP Process.....	5
• Urban Land Institute (ULI)	
• Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)	
• Panel Members	
• Stakeholders	
• TAP Process	
2. Background and Assignment.....	8
• The 1820 Courthouse Corridor	
• Recent Activity	
• Town of Plymouth’s Objectives for the TAP	
3. Planning Considerations.....	11
• Master Plan Issues and Recommendations	
4. Observations and Findings.....	13
• 1820 Courthouse Attributes	
• 1820 Courthouse Issues/Considerations	
• Consideration of Possible Uses	
5. Recommendations.....	16
• Site Specific Recommendations	
• Housing Proforma	
6. Next Steps.....	20

Executive Summary

Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council, the 1820 Courthouse Corridor Redevelopment Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Plymouth, Massachusetts in September 2012, bringing together stakeholders, Town and community leaders, and a panel of land use and development professionals for a day-long session focused on identifying opportunities and strategies for revitalizing Plymouth's downtown and strengthening its historic townscape through the preservation of an historic courthouse and the redevelopment of adjacent underutilized publicly-owned properties. The report that follows, which summarizes the TAP recommendations, is comprised of 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 1820 Courthouse Corridor Redevelopment TAP including Town officials, stakeholders, and the panel of land use and development professionals.

Chapter 2: Background and Assignment gives some background information about the 1820 Courthouse Corridor, provides an overview of the Town's recent efforts to acquire the Courthouse and Commissioners Building, stabilize the property, and begin the preservation and redevelopment planning process, and the Town of Plymouth's objectives for the TAP, as stated in its initial application.

Chapter 3: Planning Considerations presents the Panel's observations and recommendations on four larger-scale master plan issues (connectivity, parking, wayfinding, and transportation) that will impact not only the Courthouse redevelopment but the overall revitalization of the Town.

Chapter 4: Observations and Findings presents a collection of the Panelists' insights about the Courthouse site, the factors to be taken into account in coming up with a plan for its redevelopment, and an assessment of possible uses for the site.

Chapter 5: Recommendations presents a concept plan for the site, dividing it into three sections (public use, commercial development, and housing), proposing a market-rate housing development at the back of the site which would generate revenue to support the preservation for public use of the 1820 Courthouse. The middle section of the site would be used for parking in the short-term with the potential for future commercial development.

Finally, *Chapter 6: Next Steps* outlines a roadmap for moving forward with the development of the site, including establishment of a zoning overlay district and expedited permitting, using existing funds to activate programming for the public part of the space, followed by a two-phase RFP process.

Aerial photo of 1820 Courthouse Corridor site



1. ULI and the TAP Process

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, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, economic development professionals, among others.

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 1,000 members.

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of 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 specially assembled with expertise in the issues posed typically spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, 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.

Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of the disciplines associated with the challenges of identifying and evaluating best-case scenarios for this unique preservation/adaptive reuse/new development opportunity, as well as the creation of an RFP package that will attract the attention of suitable development partners.

Disciplines represented included planning, architecture, civil engineering, landscape architecture, real estate finance, real estate law, housing development, retail development, hospitality investment, cultural/historic resources, and traffic/parking. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the Town's objectives for this TAP. Following is the list of panelists:

- Scott Payette, Scott Payette Architects (TAP Co-Chair)
- Derek Osterman, Symmes Maini & McKee (TAP Co-Chair)
- Todd Benjamin Finard, Finard Properties
- Jonathan Greeley, Boston Redevelopment Authority
- Victor Karen, Citybuilding Enterprises
- Nyal McDonough, The Berkshire Group
- Ryan Pace, Anderson & Kreiger
- Josh Alston, Nitsch Engineering
- Ken Turino, Historic New England
- Fern Kanter, Capital Hotel Management

Virginia Quinn served as a consulting technical writer, while Michelle Landers of ULI Boston provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP event.

Melissa Arrighi, Plymouth Town Manager, Lee Hartmann, Director of Planning for the Town of Plymouth, Larry Rosenblum, an advisor to the Plymouth Redevelopment Authority (PRA), and Lieza Dagher, also an advisor to the PRA, served as primary contacts for ULI Boston for the Town. Leighton Price, Chair of Plymouth Growth and Development, Alan Zanotti, member of Plymouth Growth and Development, and Dean Rizzo, Secretary of the Board of Commissioners of the PRA, were also instrumental in organizing the Courthouse Corridor Redevelopment TAP.

Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders—policy makers, Town staff, business owners, residents, and representatives of area tourism, cultural, and environmental organizations—who met with the Panel and shared information, ideas, and opinions on a range of issues affecting the redevelopment of the 1820 Courthouse Corridor. The following individuals served on stakeholder panels:

Policy Makers

- Matt Muratore, Chair, Plymouth Board of Selectmen
- Marc Garrett, Chair, Plymouth Planning Board
- Bob Wollner, Chair, Plymouth Redevelopment Authority
- Mike Tubin, Chair, Historic District Commission
- Lieza Dagher, Chair, Downtown Steering Committee
- Bill Keohan, Chair, Community Preservation Committee
- Leighton Price, President, Plymouth Growth and Development Authority
- Robert Nassau, Chair, Advisory and Finance Committee

Town Staff

- Melissa Arrighi, Town Manager
- Lee Hartmann, Director, Department of Planning and Development

- Dennis Hanks, Executive Director, Economic Development Foundation
- Laura Schaefer, Executive Director, Plymouth Redevelopment Authority
- Bruce Aarons, Director, Department of Community Development
- Jonathan Beder, Director, Department of Public Works

Business/Residential Interests

- Kevin O'Reilly, former Chair, Chamber of Commerce
- Kevin Craffey, building owner, 4 Court Street and former Registry of Deeds building
- Alan Zanotti, co-owner, 1 Court Street
- Steven Wylie, resident, 31 Russell Street
- Nina Peters, homeowner, 17 South Russell Street
- Larry Winokur, attorney, Congregation Beth Jacob
- Phil Cronin, Coastal Restoration and Development Corporation
- Brad Bradley, Radisson Hotel
- Nehemiah Jayne, representative, Twelve Tribes
- Susan Owens, Seabreeze Inn Bed and Breakfast
- Blair Hamaty, business owner, Setting the Space

Tourism/Cultural/Environmental Interests

- Paul Cripps, Director, Visitor Promotion/Services
- Evelyn Strawn, Chair, Conservation Commission
- Rob Kluin, Marketing Director, Plimoth Plantation
- Chris Anzuoni, owner, Plymouth & Brockton Street Railway Co.
- Bill Fornaciari, local architect
- Ann Berry, Executive Director, Pilgrim Society
- Donna Curtin, Executive Director, Antiquarian Society

TAP Process

The 1820 Courthouse Corridor Redevelopment TAP was held on September 11, 2012 at the Plymouth Town Hall. In the morning, Plymouth Director of Planning Lee Hartmann, and Plymouth Redevelopment Authority advisors Larry Rosenblum and Lieza Dagher, welcomed the Panelists at Town Hall and led an hour-and-a-half-long driving tour of the Courthouse Corridor area and other significant sites including the waterfront and nearby residential neighborhoods.

The tour began at Town Hall, then headed northwest to the waterfront, stopping briefly at Plymouth Rock, continued along Water Street, turned southwest on Lothrop Street, then southeast along Court Street (which turns into Main Street), then southwest on Leyden Street to the First Parish in Plymouth and 1749 Courthouse/Museum, then along School Street and past the Courthouse southwest on Russell Street into the surrounding residential neighborhoods around Allerton Street. The group then returned to the Courthouse and toured the interior of the building, followed by a walk around the rest of the Corridor parcel, including the County Commissioners Building and the former police station. The group then walked up and over Burial Hill and returned to Town Hall.

After the tour, the ULI panel interviewed a diverse series of stakeholders to gain a better understanding of relevant issues, dynamics, challenges, and opportunities related to the redevelopment of the Courthouse Corridor. The panelists then engaged in an intensive charrette to develop potential concepts, strategies, and recommendations for the Town to pursue. The panel presented these findings to the Plymouth Board of Selectmen and the public that evening at Town Hall. The PowerPoint presentation is available electronically at the ULI Boston website <http://boston.uli.org>.



2. Background and Assignment

The 1820 Courthouse Corridor

The Town of Plymouth has a unique opportunity to revitalize its downtown and strengthen its historic townscape through the preservation of a centrally located historic courthouse and the redevelopment of an adjacent underutilized set of publicly-owned properties. Ideally, this preservation and redevelopment project will also be an anchor site for Plymouth's quadra-centennial celebration in 2020.

The former Plymouth County Courthouse comprises the 1820 Courthouse, an 1857 addition to the front which includes the historic Daniel Webster Courtroom, and later additions to the rear in 1884, 1916, and 1962. The building is an important architectural landmark that prominently sits at the geographic center of Plymouth's downtown and waterfront district with direct pedestrian access to some of the nation's most important historic landmarks, including Burial Hill, Plymouth Rock, and the Mayflower II. The front portion houses the beautiful Daniel Webster Courtroom, which still contains a witness stand, jury box, judge's bench, and other period furniture.

The 1820 Courthouse is adjacent to the former County Commissioners Building, an approximately 10,000 square foot property originally built for use as a jail. By the beginning of this century, these two buildings had outlived their usefulness to the County of Plymouth, which opened new facilities outside of the downtown area in 2007. Today, these two buildings sit predominantly empty and the loss of day-to-day business activities at the site has had a detrimental impact on local business owners and the downtown center's general economic viability.

Behind the 1820 Courthouse and Commissioners Building is approximately two acres of Town-owned land, much of it underutilized surface parking lots that are the legacy of 19th century school buildings and other structures now long



gone. In total, this area is known as the Courthouse Corridor and is the site that the Town and the PRA wish to develop a coherent development strategy with broad town support that can be implemented in the existing market conditions, and privately funded. Additionally the Town and the PRA have been discussing goals and ideas that would seek to transform the property into a dynamic public-private, mixed-use development in the heart of the downtown, capable of subsidizing the preservation and adaptive reuse of the beloved 1820 Courthouse landmark and acting as a centerpiece for Plymouth's 400th anniversary celebration in 2020.

Recent Activity

In spring 2009, Plymouth Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved a \$1.4 million grant from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for the Town of Plymouth, through the PRA, to acquire the 1820 Courthouse and Commissioners Building and begin the preservation and redevelopment planning process. In October 2009, the PRA negotiated the purchase of the property from the County for \$840,000, at which time the Town gave control of the property to the PRA through a 99-year ground lease.

To date, the PRA and its advisory body, the 1820 Courthouse Consortium, have stabilized the property and commissioned a Historic Structures Report for the 1820 Courthouse and Commissioners Building, completed by CBT Architects in September 2011. The PRA together with the Town of Plymouth are now prepared to issue an RFP for the Courthouse Corridor with the goal of developing a public-private partnership.

Town of Plymouth's Objectives for the TAP

The Town has been pondering the options for this site since acquiring the 1820 Courthouse in 2009 and as a result had developed a comprehensive list of issues that they asked the Panel to address:

1. Redevelopment Strategy

- Given the location and historical importance of the 1820 Courthouse property, and the availability of a significant amount of underutilized Town- and privately-owned property around and behind it, what is the best way to approach a public-private development partnership?
- What role should the Courthouse play in the upcoming year-long 400th anniversary celebration and beyond—economic, cultural, ceremonial? Given that Plymouth is already an important visitor destination, is there a way to brand this building and surrounding development as a “must see” destination for Plymouth residents and visitors beyond 2020?
- What types of uses should we be looking for in the Courthouse Corridor redevelopment, considering that one of our major goals is to strengthen the economic viability of the downtown?

2. Economic Development Strategy

- How could this project be used as a catalyst for further economic and physical development in the downtown, considering the significant amount of other Town-owned properties that exist in the downtown and waterfront area?
- What should we be looking for in a private sector development partner as it relates to maximizing economic development benefits for the Town?

- Should the Town do any market or real estate analysis in advance of issuing an RFP for a development partner? Is this type information helpful or harmful when seeking an experienced, capable private sector partner? What might be the cost of such an analysis?

3. Urban Design, Architecture, and Landscape Architecture Strategy

- How could the Courthouse and Court Square best be used as a gateway to new development behind it, recognizing the site's topography, narrow width, and great depth?
- How could the proximity of Burial Hill and its historic importance add to the value of the Courthouse Corridor redevelopment?
- How can the Town best preserve the historic character of the downtown, recognizing that new construction may not be economical if it is limited to the maximum 35-foot maximum height as allowed in our current zoning, and that the rear of the site extends into a residential neighborhood? What about the treatment of building masses and use of open space and landscaping within the development itself? What about the treatment of Court Square?
- The views of the downtown and Plymouth Harbor are spectacular from the top of Burial Hill and the upper levels of the Courthouse. As you get further up the hill, the views over the Courthouse become even better. How do you capture these views in buildings that do not overwhelm the site?

4. Traffic and Parking Strategy

- How should the Town think about traffic and parking issues generally in the downtown, considering that one of the Town's goals, for this and other potential developments, is to make the downtown substantially more attractive for both residents and visitors?
- How can public and reserved parking best be integrated in the Corridor site, during both build-out and long-term? Is there a simple way to relate the cost of structured parking to the kinds and quantity of development needed to support it?
- The Town is currently studying the possibility of building a transportation center on a waterfront lot about a five-minute walk from the Courthouse.

How can the Courthouse redevelopment take best advantage of this?

5. Planning Strategy

- Should the Town create design and development guidelines for the area and update the zoning in advance of seeking a development partner? What kinds of consultant costs should be anticipated if this approach is taken, assuming limited staff availability to do this work? How long should it take once the team is hired?
- How should the Town think about the future of the rear additions to the Courthouse (1884, 1916, 1962) and the Commissioners Building (1884), considering the value of the land they sit on, their character, and physical condition?
- How will the redevelopment prospects for this project be different with and without the three private house lots that sit at the center of the Corridor site?
- A suggestion has been made to use public funds to open the Courthouse building for a combination of public and private uses as a parallel strategy to seeking a development partner, transferring this project to the developer once they're onboard. This would ensure that the building is available for the 400th anniversary celebration in 2020, even if the partner hadn't been secured in time to upgrade the building. Is this a worthy goal and how should it be approached? Will having tenants with lease agreements in the building aid or hinder our search for a development partner?

6. Political/Funding/RFP Strategies

- What potential strategies can the Town employ to sustain community support for this effort over what could be a long development period?
- What is the best way to reach out to granting agencies to help support this effort? Who should be approached, when, and for what?

7. RFP/Developer Selection Strategies

- What should be the look and feel of the developer RFP and how should it be structured?
- If a community is not working with explicit design and development guidelines, are there

advantages to holding a two-stage selection process – one to qualify developers and development concepts, without a significant design proposal; and a second, with a reduced field, to select the best design and concept execution based on a more elaborate design and development submission?

3. Planning Considerations

Master Plan Issues and Recommendations

Although the Panel’s assignment was focused on the redevelopment of the 1820 Courthouse Corridor, it became evident from the briefing document, the tour, and discussions with stakeholders that there are a number of larger-scale master plan issues that will impact not only the successful redevelopment of the Courthouse site but the overall revitalization of downtown Plymouth.

Given that the Town has limited resources for bringing in professional planning consultants, the Panel felt a particular obligation to stress the importance of addressing these issues. In the words of one Panelist, “Plymouth is a jewel, but not addressing these large-scale issues is akin to surrendering it to a pawn shop.”

Issue: Connectivity

There is currently little connection along the east-west axis between the harbor area and the downtown. The cross streets (Brewster, North, Middle, Leyden) are largely residential and do not draw visitors from Water Street up to Main Street.

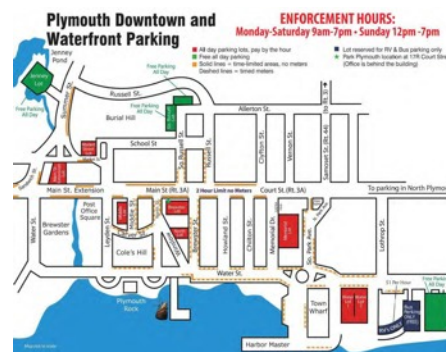


Recommendation

A **Streetscape Improvement Plan**, including wider sidewalks, attractive landscaping, street furniture, and street lighting, could attract visitors to the Courthouse site. Brewster Street in particular leads directly up to the Courthouse and its boulevard-like width provides ample space for enhancements.

Issue: Parking

Although the density of downtown Plymouth makes it well-suited to robust pedestrian activity, the reality of today’s automobile-centric society is that people want to park close to their destination. There is a large amount of parking available in small and medium-sized lots spread throughout the Town.



Every stakeholder agreed that the lack of adequate parking is a problem for both residents and visitors. The demand fluctuates seasonally (highest in May through September) and at various days and times (highest on nights/weekends). The planned parking garage behind Memorial Hall, which will add 300 spaces (100 existing plus 200 new with a new intermodal transportation center), will begin to address this need.

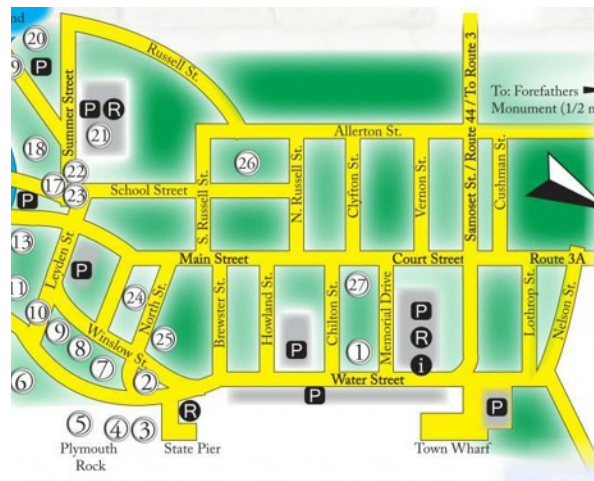
Recommendation

The Town would benefit from **Optimizing Parking Inventory**, making more effective use of the resources that are already available, managing the addition and distribution of new spaces mindfully and creatively, and developing and implementing a

long-term transportation and parking master plan. Ideas include: partnering with private entities to share access to spaces that are not being utilized during nights/weekends; increasing the cost of visitor parking (which is currently low) near popular attractions and the beach; generating revenue for other Town priorities (such as a shuttle bus loop); reducing residents' parking fees with permits; exploring congestion pricing; providing employee parking at remote sites with shuttle buses; consolidating parking into fewer, more strategic locations; locating parking to facilitate easier walking to destinations; making parking near the Courthouse free to attract people to downtown businesses.

Issue: Wayfinding

Plymouth has no trouble attracting visitors to the waterfront area, but the Town has a lot to offer visitors beyond Plymouth Rock and the Mayflower II. Burial Hill, for example, is a significant historic asset, as are the Pilgrim Hall Museum and the 1749



Courthouse and Museum. But visitors currently spend a limited amount of time in Plymouth, and are frequently unaware of attractions beyond Water Street.

Recommendation

A *Wayfinding Strategy* would re-establish historic connections within the Town and make it easy for visitors to find the full complement of sites. With better signage and distinctive paving treatment, the

Pilgrim Path could function as the Freedom Trail does in Boston, directing visitors in an organized way not only to the historic and cultural sites but also past (and into) the downtown's stores and restaurants.

Issue: Transit

Although our automobile-centric society and Plymouth's convenient location off a major state highway mean that most visitors to the Town get there by car, the long-term economic growth of the



Town depends on strengthening multi-modal transportation options and connections. Part of the success of similar seaside towns like Salem, Newburyport, Rockport, and Hingham is due to their capitalizing on public transportation, enabling access by people without cars.

Recommendation

The Memorial Hall parking garage presents an opportunity to make it easier to get to and around Plymouth. The Town would benefit from broadening the scope of that project into a full-fledged *Transportation Center* that connects in a cohesive way all the means of transportation, in addition to cars, by which people get to and around Plymouth (bus, shuttle, commuter rail, bicycle/rail trail). Particularly important is providing a frequent and consistent connections from downtown to the commuter rail stations in Plymouth/Kingston. Again, developing and implementing a long-term transportation and parking master plan would be recommended.

4. Observations and Findings

1820 Courthouse Attributes

The Town of Plymouth possesses a spectacular piece of landmark real estate with the several properties that make up the 1820 Courthouse Corridor.



Among its assets:

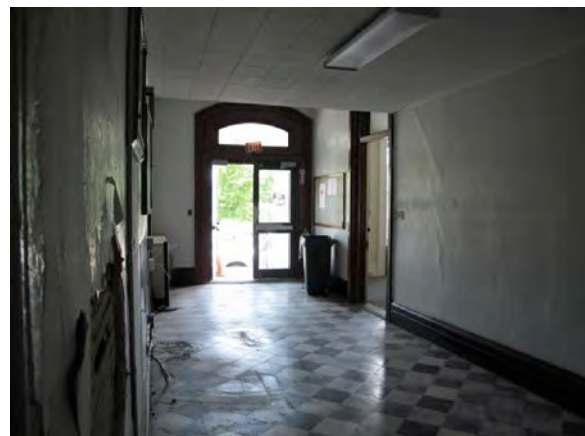
- Sight lines to the water give magnificent views of Plymouth Harbor, and all the way to Provincetown.
- Great central location, close to downtown and the waterfront, and adjacent to historic Burial Hill.
- Courthouse building (especially the 1820 facade) is an important historic resource for the Town.
- Greenspace in front of the Courthouse is a physical and aesthetic amenity that sets off the building and provides a welcoming entry point.
- Dramatic topography, with spectacular views from the hill and the high points of the Courthouse.

1820 Courthouse Issues/Considerations

With thoughtful development, the Courthouse Corridor area can become a catalyst for change and

growth in the downtown area. These are the factors that the Panel considered as they evaluated possible uses for the site:

- There is an appreciation for the historic presence that the Courthouse represents for Plymouth, although with further probing it became apparent that it is primarily the 1820/1857 facade and the Daniel Webster Courtroom that stakeholders think are most worth saving.
- Retaining public access to and public use of the Courthouse building in some form will help to activate the Corridor, and create an anchor to strengthen surrounding retail. Public use was broadly considered to include non-profit/community uses, visitor center, and commercial/retail uses that are oriented to foot traffic and daily visitors.
- The discontinuity of the various elements behind the Courthouse—the abutting Commissioners Building, the police station, and the three privately-owned residences in the center of the corridor—make a single development use particularly challenging.
- All of the publicly-owned buildings on the site are in need of extensive repairs.



- Given the condition of the existing buildings, the cost to develop the property will be high, for either preservation/adaptive reuse or demolition options.
- The site's dramatic elevation relief, rising from 60 to 100 feet from front to back, poses challenges, but the resulting spectacular views present opportunities.
- Burial Hill is underutilized and underappreciated; turning the Courthouse Corridor into a strong presence will help draw people to Burial Hill and help restore its prominence.



Given the widespread reluctance to use public funds for this project in light of other Town priorities, how can Plymouth tap into funding programs that already exist to achieve their vision for this site?

Consideration of Possible Uses

Many different uses for the site were considered, based on the information from the briefing document, site visit, and stakeholder interviews. All were evaluated through the lens of a private developer/investor, weighing the potential profit vs. cost, with consideration foremost for ROI (return on investment). Given the current slow economic conditions, what would be the best market to make this development successful?

- **Hotel/Hospitality** (including lodging, conference center, catering): The market in Plymouth is clearly seasonal, with most of the demand occurring in the months between May and September. In a seasonal market, it is especially important to have a base of regular year-round demand in order to operate a hotel profitably. Dense urban areas or office parks provide such regular demand, but Plymouth (and particularly downtown Plymouth) doesn't have that kind of a diverse demand base to meet the threshold sought by the typical hotel developer in today's market. This is evident by the quality and condition of much of the existing inventory of hotel accommodations in downtown which is reportedly operating at occupancies of 55% to 60% and ADRs (average daily rates) of \$100. As such, given the cost of development and taking into consideration the cost of restoration, it is likely that if there was developer interest it would come at a high cost, one that would require significant concessions and/or guarantees to mitigate the perceived risk.
- **Retail:** The considerable setback of the Courthouse from Main Street means that street-level retail would not be a suitable use. The economic climate is causing retailers to be extremely cautious in their decisions when opening new locations. National retailers are making deals on only the safest of sites, choosing reliable highway locations; regional retailers tend to follow the lead of the national operators, leaving local retailers as the only ones likely to locate here, provided they were willing to be pioneers. But local retailers are not in a position to pay high rents, and space in this building would require costly tenant improvement packages that would in turn prohibit reasonable rents for local pioneers. The likelihood of success for retail would be extremely low.
- **Office:** Although the local market has some interesting pockets of successful office development, the rents needed to justify new office construction are too high to make this a viable option right now. It could, however, be a component of future development on the site.

- **Town Hall/Community Use:** There had been talk at one time of moving the existing Plymouth Town Hall into the Courthouse building. The current town offices comprise almost 30,000 net square feet and are supported by approximately 50 parking spaces on the Town Hall site with additional parking on Lincoln Street and at Stephens Field. There is a master plan study that anticipates an additional need for meeting space.

The 1820/1857 Courthouse is less than 9,000 net square feet; including renovating the later additions would double the square footage. To completely accommodate the town offices and the anticipated need for meeting space would require an addition or reuse of the other buildings on site or an addition to the Courthouse. The condition of the building, and the cost of renovation and historic preservation, make it extremely costly space and financially unsuitable for that use. In addition the town would then have to dispose of the current Town Hall building.

There is a strong desire to maintain public use of and public access to at least some of the building's spaces. Uses as a visitors' center, performance venue, educational space, a Plimoth Plantation satellite location, address many of the desires, but don't generate necessary revenue. There is a need for abundant, clean, and well-functioning restrooms; access to restrooms is critical to extending visitors' stays in the area.

- **Parking:** Every stakeholder mentioned the Town's need for additional parking, but the potential for something more significant here, as well as the narrowness of bordering streets and topography of this site, make parking difficult to construct and unlikely to serve as the highest and best use.
- **Housing:** Housing seemed the likeliest type of project that would generate revenue that could be used to support the restoration of the historic Courthouse building. The full range of housing

types was considered—rentals, dorms, luxury housing, artist live/work spaces, condominiums, townhouses—taking into account post-recession demand, costs of developing, and potential revenue.

Demographic information suggests that Plymouth is growing and housing demand is increasing. In eastern Massachusetts, because of the high cost of housing, there exist some tremendously under-served niche markets. One such niche is young people who are not ready to own a house, but don't want to live with their parents, and do want to live in an appealing environment (an easy commute to their employment and to leisure activities/restaurants/bars). With the development of affordable, attractive rental housing on the Courthouse site, downtown Plymouth could become a vibrant neighborhood that appeals to younger, regional workers.

5. Recommendations

The Panel began by acknowledging that 1820 Courthouse and the three existing privately-owned houses bifurcate the corridor into two very different kinds of projects: public in the front, residential in the back, with something else in the middle. As the parcel currently stands, it doesn't work as a single large site, and it seemed over-reaching to be planning for private property the Town doesn't own. The Panel felt that they should propose a design that considers the three privately-owned homes, integrates them into the development, yet leaves open the possibility for other uses if the owners decide to sell at some future point.

Given the overwhelming community desire to preserve part of the Courthouse for public use, other parts of the site must be developed with the intention of generating the revenue needed to support that goal.

Site Specific Recommendations

The Panel recommends that the site be split into three sections: Public, Use, Commercial Development (phased), and Housing.

- **Public Use:** including adaptive restoration/reuse of the 1820 Courthouse for public use and selective demolition of obsolete sections of the existing structure. There is resounding community support for preserving at least the facade of the Courthouse and keeping the front part of the building open to active public use by both residents and visitors. The Town could partner with entities that could operate the space and fill it with lively public programming. The second floor could be used as function space, generating some revenue. The rear part of the building (beyond the 1884 stairwell) is of little historic significance; given its condition, and the high cost to renovate, demolition is a better option.
- **Commercial Use (Phased):** The middle piece of the parcel would have the short-term use of parking in support of whatever public function occupies the Courthouse building and to compensate for the loss of parking resulting from the housing development. This use would leave the space open for future development, either commercial or additional housing, in response to market demand. The recommended development plan is ambitious in some areas and conservative in others, providing immediate revenue while reserving space for flexible future development. It presents a cohesive vision for the Corridor that should assure potential developers of the Town's willingness to work with them to achieve the success of the project.
- **Housing:** Given the context of the surrounding neighborhood and the three existing privately-owned homes centrally located within the Corridor, there's no other kind of development more appropriate for the rear of the site than residential. It also makes sense economically (see the Proforma that follows).

The rear third of the site would accommodate the development of ± 100 market-rate one- and two-bedroom rental units of approximately 800 square feet in an apartment building flanked by four-story townhouses on either side, with improved landscaped parking at the existing Burial Hill lot. Another apartment building is proposed at the very end of the Corridor. The buildings could capitalize on the steep elevation, offering great views of the waterfront and Burial Hill. The mix of building types would create visual interest along the Corridor, and the vitality brought by the infusion of new residents to the neighborhood could be a catalyst for future growth and development along the Corridor and downtown.

Concept plan showing development strategy for three different uses



The recommended development plan is ambitious in some areas and conservative in others, providing immediate revenue while reserving space for flexible future development. It presents a cohesive vision for the Corridor that should assure potential developers of the Town's willingness to work with them to achieve the success of the project.

Housing Proforma

Demographic information suggests that Plymouth and the surrounding region will continue to experience population growth. As a result of the constraints put upon real estate lenders following the subprime mortgage crisis, combined with the higher-than-average housing costs in eastern Massachusetts, there are niche markets that are tremendously underserved. For example, there is an unmet need for smaller, more affordable units for young workers, urban "creatives," and empty nesters. A lively, walkable town center that offers the kinds of social amenities that appeal to the young (and the youthful) would serve a need very different from that of Pinehills-type housing community.

The numbers in the accompanying chart represent a concept framework for capitalizing value in today's market to get to the kinds of public uses desired by utilizing a product that fits into surrounding context and can realistically be financed by today's market.

This first phase of the development is designed to generate revenue, a portion of which can be used to properly plan and develop the rest of the site. Some of the stakeholders' ideas will require a level of resources available principally to national developers in order to bring them to fruition. The town can capitalize on the value generated by the first phase to demonstrate a cohesive vision for the site that will attract the kinds of high-quality developers who can help the town realize that vision.

A public/private partnership is essential to make something like this happen. Except for rare locations and spectacular sites, public/private partnerships are how projects get accomplished in today's development environment. Banks are no longer

throwing money at projects. Towns must develop strategies that leverage local resources and don't drain local operating budgets. In many communities, if the local entity is willing to contribute some money toward market-rate housing, the state will make matching contributions, recognizing that in Massachusetts the equation between housing cost and revenue is out of balance.

1820 COURTHOUSE HOUSING PROFORMA

100 Dwelling Units @ 800 nsf average

Development Cost

Land Value	\$ 2,000,000
Hard Cost	\$15,000,000
Soft Cost	\$ 3,500,000

Total Development Cost	\$20,500,000
------------------------	--------------

Income

Gross Revenue	\$ 1,800,000
Expenses	\$ 750,000

Net Operating Income	\$ 1,150,000
Debt Service Coverage	1.1

Available for Debt Service	\$ 1,045,000
----------------------------	--------------

Debt @ 5.5% interest, 30-year term	\$15,200,000
------------------------------------	--------------

Source of Funds

Debt	\$15,200,000
Equity	\$ 2,600,000
State HDIP (\$27,000 per unit)	\$ 2,700,000

TOTAL	\$20,500,000
-------	--------------

Use of Funds

Housing Development	\$18,500,000
Land Value to Public Uses	\$ 2,000,000

TOTAL	\$20,500,000
-------	--------------

6. Next Steps

Targeted Process

The Panel encourages the Town of Plymouth to undertake a targeted process to define what can be built on the 1820 Courthouse Corridor. This project has the potential to attract national developers, but are generally somewhat reluctant to work in Massachusetts because they encounter challenging permitting processes in many of the state's cities and towns. One thing Plymouth can do is to give potential developers some certainty; by removing the anxiety and fear associated with unknown, the site then becomes more valuable.

- **Zoning Overlay District:** Plymouth should consider establishing a zoning overlay district that would allow for an increase in allowable height and density as of right. This would indicate the Town's willingness to be flexible for the right use, and would open the door to a wider variety of development options.



- **Expedited Permitting:** Timing is vastly important to private developers, and expedited permitting is one of the tools within the Town's control for ensuring a faster development process.

Additionally, the land value created as a result of the housing development could be tapped to fund the kinds of pre-RFP studies and other marketing necessary to attract high quality national developers to the unique development opportunity presented by the Courthouse.

Preserve/Stabilize Courthouse

The Town should use the Community Preservation Act funds already available to further stabilize the front of the Courthouse and make it useable for public purposes, then find a partner or partners to bring vibrant public programming to the space. By activating the front part of the site, the value of the rest of the site increases. This can occur concurrently with development of the RFP.

Issue Coordinated RFP

Phase I: An RFP for the residential development at the back of the site can happen as soon as the Town has accomplished the above two steps. This would enable the Town to quickly get something built that starts generating revenue. The Panel recommends doing this sooner rather than later: the large number of condominiums already on the market in Plymouth make this an opportune time for rental units to slip in; and acting promptly would allow the Town to get more favorable financing before lending entities start ratcheting up their interest rates in anticipation of a general economic revival.

The Town could also invite, in a general way, suggestions for developing the middle portion of the site in this RFP; then would have the option either to

pursue any promising suggestions or hold off and issue a separate Phase II RFP.



Phase II: An RFP for the middle section can be issued by the Town at any future point in time for a project that responds to changing market conditions and evolving Town goals.

Funding Sources

- Historic Tax Credits
- Community Preservation Act (CPA)
- Community Development Block Grant (CBDG)
- New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)
- Tax Increment Program (H-TIF)
- Cross subsidy from land value of housing development