



Northbridge, MA



**Urban Land
Institute**

Boston/New England

About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

Mission

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

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

ULI at the local level

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



Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

Northbridge, MA

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



This TAP

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

The Panel

Co-Chairs

Emily Innes, Harriman

Edward O'Rourke, Commodore Builders

Panelists

Sarah Barnat, Barnat Development LLC

Susan Davis, Nelson Mullins

Michael Flynn, GEI

Jason Hellendrung, Tetra Tech

Pawel Honc, Amenta Emma

Claire O'Neill, MassDevelopment

Spencer Grassie, The Roseview Group

ULI Staff

Sara Marsh

TAP Writer

Michael Hoban



Panel Sponsors



MASSDEVELOPMENT
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

Panel Assignment – Address These Questions

1. **“SLUM & BLIGHT”**: What role can the Town play to assist & address vacant/underutilized/deteriorated properties?
2. **ZONING**: What role can the Town play in promoting private reinvestment?
3. **FLOODING**: What can be done to minimize the potential for flooding along the Blackstone River?

The Process

Briefing

- Panelists met with sponsor and received briefing materials

Site Visit:

- Panelists toured The Village of Rockdale with town officials

Panel interviewed stakeholders today including:

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



What did we hear?

Assets

- Blackstone River
- Rockdale Mill
- Geographic midpoint for commuters
- Walkability
- Youth Center
- Mixed-income housing stock
- Demand for additional housing
- Business-friendly town government
- Engaged landlords
- Cumberland Farms



Opportunities

- Firehouse repositioning
- Space for concentrated retail development
- Vacant land
 - Old youth center
 - Former diner
- Blackstone River Valley Historical Park

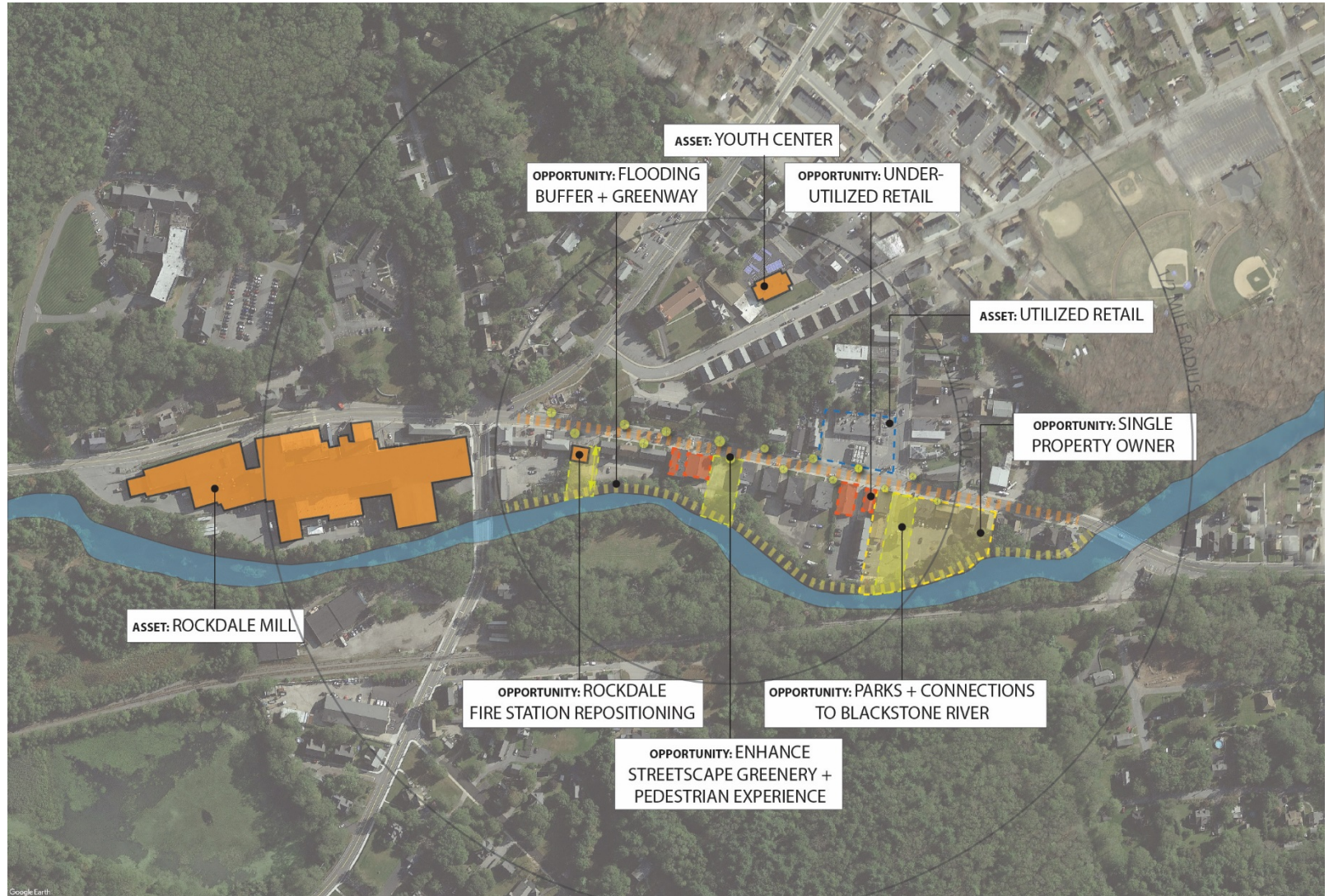


Challenges

- Vacant retail storefronts
- Lacking resources for improvement of existing housing
 - Blackstone River flooding
 - Cost of flood insurance
- Limitation of parking for future development
- Lost sense of community
- Need reason to stop and stay
 - Suspected illicit activity
 - Perception as “forgotten village”



Study Area – Village of Rockdale



Recommendations – Flooding

- Creation of 20 foot buffer zone along the Blackstone River for the pedestrian greenway
- Limit impervious paving
- Rehab over new development
- Apply for MVP action grant to address conditions at river's edge
- Investigate additional FEMA/CDBG resources for addressing flooding impervious surfaces and defunct buildings
- Establish a local shelter

Recommendations – Zoning

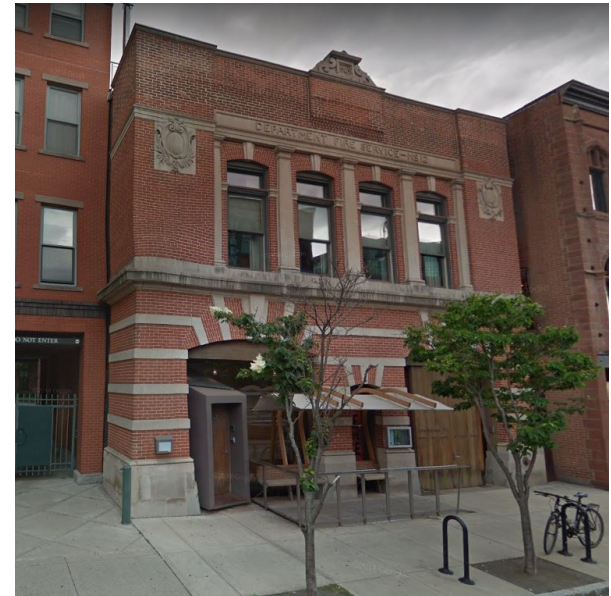
- Allow office for administrative, executive, professional, sales, and other similar uses on the first floor in B-2
- Allow daycare in B-2
- Review parking regulations to reduce the amount of impervious surface
 - Landscaping/storm water control
 - Parking spaces by use
- Consider rezoning the Rockdale Mill to allow a variety of uses

Recommendations – Marketability

Term	Public	Private
Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace dead trees in front of Cumberland Farms • Establish regular weed removal program • Clean up fire station property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint façade and address minor repairs • Weed front gardens • Remove excessive signage (e.g. For Sale sign)
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect for code enforcement issues and conduct slum & blight inventory • Consider lease or sale of fire station retaining right of public access to the river • Considering leasing former youth community site to SMOC for community garden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up vacant lots • Offer conservation easements in exchange for tax breaks on commercial properties
Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply to DHCD for funds for façade improvement & housing rehabilitation program • Establish housing rehabilitation program to assist landlords with redevelopment of vacant properties • Acquire and redevelop or demolish long term vacant structures on the west side of Providence Rd. • Develop riverfront greenway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging the retail to be adjacent to Cumberland Farms gas station on the east side of Providence Rd.

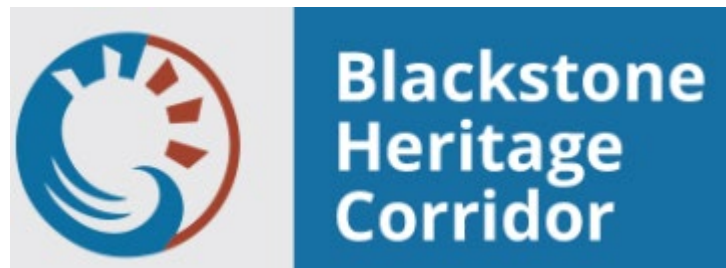
Recommendations – Placemaking

- Signage
 - Banners specific to Rockdale
 - Gateway entrances
- Activities
 - Farmers Market, pop-up retail, seasonal beer garden, food trucks
- Connections to the river and greenway
 - Firehouse
 - Community garden/SMOC
 - Former diner parcel
- Recreational activation
 - Kayak launch/boat landing



Recommendations – Partnerships

- Engage Rockdale Mill's owner
 - Involvement in Rockdale community
 - Evaluate zoning recommendations to reflect their mix of uses
- Engage SMOC on community and social services
 - Potential community garden
- Engage CMRPC and Blackstone River Valley National Historic Park about their joint regional efforts and support to move the Greenway project forward
- Address concerns of already engaged landlords
 - Beautification and maintenance
- Establish a Rockdale community business/neighborhood association
 - Seek the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's advice



Funding & Resources

- **Public Financing**

- CPA
- CDBG
- FEMA HMGP funds
- MVP action grants
- DHCD- Mass Downtown Initiative and LIHTC
- Housing Choice
- MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places
- Tax-Exempt Bonds for Public Infrastructure
- State Revolving Fund (SRF)
- MassWorks Grant
- District Improvement Financing (DIF)/Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- Special assessments
- MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program

- **Private Financing**

- MassDevelopment provides low interest rate loans up to \$100,000 with deferred repayment terms to finance predevelopment real estate projects.



Questions?