



ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# AMESBURY'S LOWER MILLYARD

AMESBURY, MA

APRIL 30 – MAY 4, 2021



## URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to over 45,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals as well as other related disciplines.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has nearly 1,400 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANELS (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues posed. The Panel 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.

A recent independent study by Rivera Consulting surveyed municipalities that received assistance from the TAP programs and reported a positive impact by the TAP process on communities. Eighty-two percent of participating municipalities said their behavior and approach to municipal planning and economic development strategies were affected; 67% said there were increased municipal investments related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report; and 62% said at least one key developable asset addressed in their TAP report had been redeveloped, consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations.

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
ULI and the TAP Process	6
Background and History	9
Assets and Opportunities	11
Challenges	14
Recommendations	16
Funding and Resources	24
Conclusions	25

# Executive Summary

The City of Amesbury, Massachusetts (the City), turned to the Boston/New England Chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) for expert guidance related to the redevelopment of the Lower Millyard District, an area of the City that is key to solidifying a number of connections to surrounding economic, real estate, and recreational assets.

In response, ULI convened a hybrid (virtual and on-site) Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to study the development and redevelopment opportunities of the Lower Millyard District. The TAP Panel (the Panel) was comprised of ULI members, real estate professionals with particular expertise relevant to the development challenge at hand.

To better understand the study area, the Panel toured the Lower Millyard District (the District) in person and conducted a series of video conferenced stakeholder interviews with local business owners, city employees, residents, and commercial property owners. Following the interviews, the Panel spent a full day online in a design charrette, working through the information they heard, applying their professional expertise to the issues, and ultimately arriving at a set of recommendations to help guide the redevelopment of the area. The Panel's recommendations were delivered via video conferencing to the City of Amesbury and assembled constituents on May 4.

## Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process

The Urban Land Institute, the District Council system, and its Technical Assistance Panels process is described for context. A list of the TAP Panelists and participating stakeholders may also be found in this section. This section outlines the TAP study area, details key elements within the geography, and describes

the process undertaken by the Panel to arrive at its recommendations to the City.

## Chapter 2: Background and History

The Background and History section outlines the questions posed to the Panel by the City relating to the redevelopment of the study area and provides information relating to the history of the Lower Millyard, which provided the Panel with an understanding of previous planning efforts as well as recent property transfers and present ownership. Also included in this section is information about the City of Amesbury, particularly key commercial, residential, and demographic information.

## Chapter 3: Assets and Opportunities

As the TAP Panel began its evaluation, it was important to identify the strengths and opportunities of the study area as well as the challenges that may make development in the Lower Millyard difficult. From walkability and availability of transportation, to access to the Riverwalk, the study area presents a number of appealing opportunities to connect residents of and visitors to Amesbury with the City's rich history and engaging current economy. An engaged citizenry and new, energetic public leadership were also of note.

## Chapter 4: Challenges

The Lower Millyard is not without its challenges. Previous redevelopment attempts have struggled and new development has had to work hard to thrive. The topography of the site can be problematic as some sections of the area sit in a floodplain, and scattered parcel ownership may make property assembly for any development of size a challenge.



## Chapter 5: Recommendations

By detailing short-term (within one year), mid-term (one to three years), and long-term (three to ten years) planning strategies, the Panel presents a set of recommendations that the City may begin to tackle to finally achieve a successful redevelopment of the Lower Millyard District. From more simple improvements such as new or improved wayfinding and street lighting, to property acquisition and/or business relocation, to significant public realm improvements, the plan outlined by the Panel gives the City a vision for how the study area could be improved and a roadmap for how to get there.

## Chapter 6: Funding Sources/Resources

Finally, the Panel provided the City with

a set of recommendations relating to potential funding for the improvements and actions detailed within this report. With MassDevelopment at the table and a number of other state and local resources potentially available, there might be interesting opportunities to begin to finance the improvements suggested herein.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

With recommendations in hand and an engaged citizenry and business community at the table, the City of Amesbury has an interesting opportunity to finally realize the broader value of the Lower Millyard District as a community connector, a recreational asset, and a platform for additional economic and real estate development.



Located in the Upper Millyard, the Blue Moon Cafe makes good use of its patio space overlooking the Powwow River. Source: TAP Panel.

# ULI and the TAP Process

ULI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to over 45,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals as well as other related disciplines.

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## The Panel

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts representing the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities to help the City of Amesbury chart a path for the redevelopment of the Lower Millyard District. The Panel, represented in the following list, are individually experts in architecture, development, engineering, urban planning, and finance.

### Co-Chairs

Nyal McDonough

Michael Wang, Form + Place

### Panel

GerryLynn Darcy, Lupoli Companies

Ileen Gladstone, GEI Consultants

Iris Lin, Halvorson | Tighe and Bond Studio

Alyson Stein, POAH

Bob Uhlig, Halvorson | Tighe and Bond Studio

Eleni Varitimos, MassDevelopment

*Panelists have donated their time.*

## ULI Staff

Michelle Landers, executive director

TAP Writer: Kelly Annis, ULI St. Louis & Branch Communications

## Stakeholders

The TAP also benefited from the participation of the diverse group of stakeholders – property owners, public officials, business owners, representatives from non-profits, and Amesbury residents.

Bart Bailey, BB Alarm

Paul Bareford, BareWolf Brewing

Stevie Bareford, BareWolf Brewing





TAP Panelists touring the study area with City leadership. Source: ULI Boston.

Rick Bartley, Water Street Commerce Park

Jay Bullen, Brewery Silvaticus

David Frick, Planning Board, City of Amesbury

Paul Gagliardi, Healy Deshais Gagliardi

Pam Gilday, District 1 Councilor, City of Amesbury

Hon. Kassandra Gove, Mayor, City of Amesbury

Nipun Jain, Planning Director, City of Amesbury

Scott Mandeville, Councilor, City of Amesbury

Joe Muraco, National Grid

Michelle Riaz, Brewery Silvaticus

Tony Rinaldi, District 2, Councilor, City of Amesbury

Pete Suorsa, Water Street Realty Trust

Jain, City Planner, Bob O'Brien, Joe Fahey, Barbara Lorenc, Matt Sherill, Mayor Gove.

Panelists observed the large amount of parking in the surface lot and the deterioration of the raised parking deck.

After introductions and a briefing, the first stop was Heritage Park, home to the Carriage House, a fountain (currently covered), and greenspace leading to the Powwow River. Panelists continued southeast along Water Street crossing Plumbush Creet to 35 Water Street (Bartley Building), which was recently sold to Coastal Connections, an organization that supports people with disabilities.

Panelists observed the final segment of the Riverwalk and noticed several pedestrians crossing the large parking lot rather than following the trail around the back of the building.

Panelists walked north on Chestnut Street, passing the Quonset huts, to Oakland Street. The eastern side of Chestnut Street lacks adequate sidewalks, leaving the panelists and other pedestrians to walk in the street. Directly across from the Quonset huts is the entrance to German Motor sports and more fencing on the west side of the street, further

## The TAP Process

The Amesbury Lower Millyard TAP was held over the course of three days, April 30, May 3, and May 4, 2021. On the morning of April 30, panelists were greeted at the Lower Millyard parking lot by the Office Community and Economic Development Director Angela Cleveland for a guided walking tour of the study area. Cleveland was joined by Nipun



Panelists touring Heritage Park with the District's parking lot and parking deck in the background. Source: ULI Boston.



Walking north on Chestnut Street, there are boarded up buildings on the east and a salvage yard (and no sidewalk) on the west. Source: ULI Boston.

north on Chestnut, screens the view of the Nichols Salvage Yard. As panelists approach Oakland Street, they noted the deterioration of the large mill building (1-9 Oakland Street) at the corner of Chestnut and Oakland. The mill's two buildings are connected by breezeways, sit vacant, and have both boarded-up and broken windows. Again here, pedestrian access is challenging as the sidewalks on both sides of Chestnut Street are quite narrow and largely inaccessible to residents with mobility issues. The group convened in the parking lot of CI Works, a successful flex office and maker space, before walking east on Oakland Street toward BareWolf Brewing. Panelists noted that the building at 11 Oakland Street also appears to be vacant or underutilized, though it is in better condition than 1-9 Oakland.

The Panel returned to Chestnut Street, noting the fully occupied buildings at 6 and 10 Chestnut Street, and walked south, back down to Water Street. They also crossed the footbridge over Plumbush Creek to the rear of the Transportation/Senior Center parking lot.

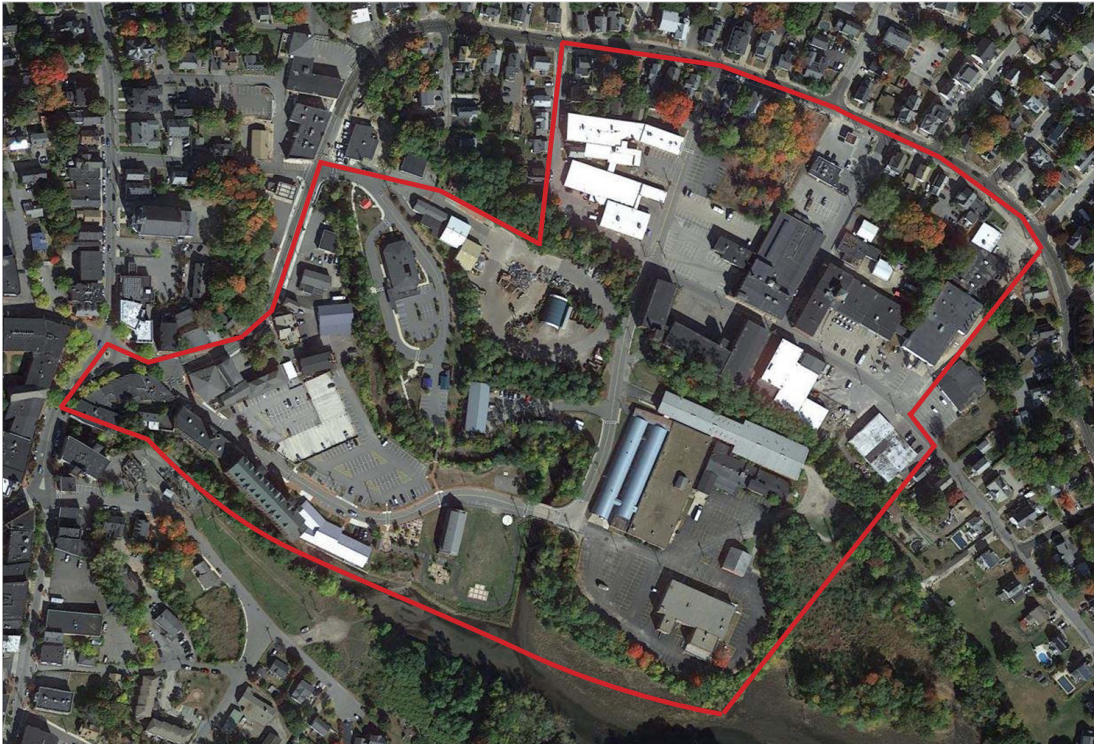
The walking tour provided the Panel with important insights into what it is like for residents and visitors to walk to District destinations and helped bring into focus the challenges that might arise in the course of redevelopment.

Following the tour, the Panel spent the afternoon interviewing a variety of stakeholders, each with some form of interest in the site and unique views of the potential for the area's new or expanded uses. Elected officials, business owners, residents, and other interested parties met with the Panel in small groups to share their experiences in the Lower Millyard, answer questions of the Panel that arose during the tour, and to provide ideas for the study area's redevelopment potential. These additional perspectives and personal insights helped inform the Panel's deliberations, which followed on May 3.

To work through the briefing materials provided by the City and the information gleaned from the stakeholder interviews, the Panel spent a full day in a virtual charrette. Using their professional experience to guide deliberations, the Panel evaluated the current state of the Lower Millyard, discussed a variety of potential development/redevelopment scenarios, and ultimately arrived at a set of recommendations that the City can use to guide work in the area in the next year, the next three years, and in the coming ten years and beyond. Each set of recommendations are tied to the overarching vision outlined by the City to transform the Lower Millyard into a more welcoming, walkable, activated, and successful destination within Amesbury.



# Background and History



Aerial view of the Upper and Lower Millyard District. Source: Google Maps, TAP Panel.

With a goal of developing a comprehensive, implementable vision for the Lower Millyard District, the City of Amesbury turned to ULI for assistance. The Lower Millyard has been the subject of multiple studies over the past 30 years, yet none of these studies, be they niche environmental studies or more comprehensive analyses, have taken hold.

The District needs a vision to guide both public and private improvements and investments. At present, it is home to a variety of building types and uses, from pedestrian and visitor-friendly breweries to vehicle-centric uses such as an auto parts store and salvage yard. Ownership of parcels in the District is mixed and the City does not maintain control

over a significant portion of land that would be ripe for redevelopment. The City does, however, control much of the current “green” recreational space.

To address this development challenge, the City posed the following questions to the TAP Panel:

1. What is/are the best use(s) for this District, including City-owned land and historic buildings?
2. How do we make a stronger connection to our transit/community center?
3. How can we make a stronger connection between this District and our Central Business District?





Several historic mill buildings have undergone conversions in the District. Source: TAP Panel.



Pedestrian access improves closer to Heritage Park and the Riverwalk. Source: TAP Panel.

## City of Amesbury

Home to just over 17,000 residents, the City of Amesbury is small yet boasts an active and engaged citizenry.

Transportation access in and around Amesbury is facilitated by interstates 495 and 95, and a small bus transit center may be found in the northern end of the study area. The Riverwalk also provides interesting and enjoyable pedestrian and bicycle transportation access through parts of the City and on one path to Salisbury Beach and another to Newburyport.

The rich history of Amesbury is evident in its mill buildings, some of which have undergone conversion to residential, office, or other commercial uses. These buildings have largely withstood the test of time, yet redevelopment of these structures is an expensive and extensive undertaking, and it's possible that some buildings may not be renovated successfully.

As noted earlier, the Lower Millyard District is located along the Powwow River, which once powered the City's industrial mills and is today designated as a Priority Protection Area. The District itself is a Priority Development Area of State Significance. Both of these designations may come into play when seeking additional funding or other resources from the state.

## Population/Demographics

According to the United States Census Bureau<sup>1</sup>, Amesbury's 2019 population of 17,532 residents is an increase of over 7% since the 2010 census. The City's population largely identifies as White (96%) and just over 70% live in owner-occupied housing. The median home price is \$336,200 and has risen like many suburban areas, and the median gross rent for residential units is \$1,195/month. Over 94% of the population has completed high school and another 41% have earned a college degree. The median household income (2015-2019) is \$82,468, and it is estimated that only 6.3% of the population live in poverty.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/amesburytowncity-massachusetts/PST040219>



# Assets and Opportunities



The Riverwalk begins in the Lower Millyard District and travels along the Powwow River, eventually connecting to the Merrimack River, Newburyport, and Salisbury Beach. Source: TAP Panel.

The Lower Millyard District is an interesting and accessible section of Amesbury with redevelopment potential that has yet to be fully realized. The potential for the District to become a vibrant hub and connector of residents and visitors may best be achieved via a comprehensive plan to leverage its many assets over time.

## Location

**Proximity to Main Street** – The Lower Millyard is within walking distance to Amesbury’s Main Street, providing visitors and surrounding residents with connections to a variety of businesses, restaurants, and other amenities.

**Walkability** – The compact nature of the District makes the area easy to navigate on foot, and the distance between businesses

and amenities is generally manageable for those wishing to walk.

**Access to Riverwalk** – The Riverwalk begins in the District and connects the area with other key points in Amesbury as well as distant destinations such as Newburyport and Salisbury Beach. The multi-use trail is highly accessible and provides a protected path for pedestrians, bicyclists, strollers, and more. To assist with wayfinding, the Coastal Trails Coalition provided the City with signage for the Riverwalk and connection to Salisbury Ghost trail in early 2020. The signs will cover the entire trail network and are being installed in the spring and summer of 2021.

**Opportunities for connectivity** – With downtown to the west and residential neighborhoods to the east and north the District could be a key point of connection for residents and visitors navigating the City.

The connections beyond the District, via the busline or via the Riverwalk for pedestrians and bicyclists are also assets of note.

**Transportation access** – Two interstates, I-495 and I-95, may be found within two miles of the District. Additionally, MVRTA bus service to Amesbury is managed via a transportation hub located in the northern section of the District.

**Natural landscape/riverfront** – The Powwow River runs along the southern edge of the District and provides welcome access to the sights and sounds of moving water. The natural beauty of the area, highlighted by the District's current open space and viewing from patios and balconies of neighboring businesses, is also an asset worth leveraging.

**Waterfront activation** – While some businesses, such as Brewery Silvaticus, have recognized the potential of activating spaces close to the river, additional opportunities remain for more consistent programming and activities along the river's edge.

**Accessible parking** – Parking in the District is ample and accessible via the parking deck and lot along Water Street, though the deck is in need of immediate structural repairs.

**Nearby residential neighborhoods** – Neighborhoods surround the District to the north and east, providing a market for retail, residential, and other commercial uses.

**Suburban appeal** – Amesbury is a small city that maintains a rather suburban nature. With low-rise, small-scale buildings, the streetscape is pleasant and walking the area is comfortable.

**Favorable market conditions** – Today's favorable residential and commercial markets present interesting opportunities for economic development and growth in Amesbury and in the District specifically.

## Community

**Engaged community** – During the stakeholder interviews, it became clear that Amesbury is home to a very engaged public and private sector. Residents, too, are interested in the health and vitality of their community and are willing to participate in the civic process.

**Community spirit for outdoor recreation** – There are numerous opportunities to get outside and the residents and visitors to Amesbury appear to enjoy doing just that. From walking to biking to enjoying personal watercraft, the streets, trails, and bodies of water in and around town attract people who enjoy outdoor recreation.

**Opportunity to activate greenspace** – There are a number of open, green spaces in the Lower Millyard that could provide wonderful venues for additional activities, be they formally programmed or spontaneous events.

**New leadership** – Public leadership has recently changed and the City's councilpersons and new mayor are actively engaged and interested in the development opportunities the District may present.

**Economic diversity** – The City is home to an economically diverse population of residents as well as a diverse range of commercial enterprises. This diversity is a strength and an opportunity on which to build.

**Willingness to "think big"** – Both elected leadership and the residents interviewed voiced an interest in 'thinking big' as it relates to future plans for the District and the City.

**Pedestrian focus** – Again, the compact, human scale of Amesbury makes walking in town enjoyable and the City has worked to support the safety of pedestrians moving around town.

**Compelling history** – The interesting history of the District as a milling center and the unique, beautiful old mill buildings help define and differentiate Amesbury and the District.

**Community attention to investing downtown/urban core** – There is a focus in the community on the viability and commercial health of downtown and the urban core. This recognition and focus should help support actions taken in the Lower Millyard.

## Site Conditions

**Attracts community members year-round** – The businesses and Riverwalk in the Lower Millyard attract residents and visitors throughout the year.





A local Market Days event, organized by local merchants, activates Heritage Park and brings residents and visitors down into the District. Source: TAP Panel.

**Historic architecture** – The architecture of the historic mill buildings is unique, beautiful, and often expensive to replicate, which makes building renovation particularly appealing.

**City owns major parcels in district** – While the City does not control all of the land in the District, it does maintain control over a certain number of key parcels, which enables it to control and maximize activation efforts.

**Large developable parcels that can spawn economic activity** – While not currently controlled by the City, the District has a few large parcels that would be attractive to a developer and each could provide a catalyst for additional economic activity.

**Breweries are destinations** – Residents and visitors to Amesbury regularly enjoy the District's breweries, and the business owners are highly engaged and interested in seeing the area succeed.

**Upper Millyard is a current destination** – There is a compelling opportunity to build on the success of the adjacent Upper Millyard, connecting it more actively and intentionally

with the Riverwalk and downtown.

**Environmental cleanup has been performed** – Often expensive and tedious to manage, portions of the District have already undergone environmental remediation and the parcels are now considered 'clean.'

**Parking deck requires attention** – While it may seem odd to note the pending maintenance requirements of the current parking deck, the investment those improvements will require may help make the case for the redevelopment and reimagining a new or rehabilitated structure that could serve the larger purpose of the District going forward.

**National Grid site may come into play** – Directly across the Powwow River, National Grid owns and maintains a site that houses a power station and transformers. There is a possibility that National Grid may relocate the equipment and put the parcel on the market, which could make a welcome park and bookend surrounding the Powwow River as it flows through the District.

# Challenges

In much the same way the District's location and conditions provide opportunities for development or improvement, those same conditions also present certain challenges.

## Location

**Floodplain** – Some sections of the Lower Millyard are located in a floodplain, which may make the placement of new buildings or significant infrastructure challenging or problematic.

**Wetlands** – In addition to its location in a floodplain, the District is also home to wetlands. While providing an interesting and appealing natural amenity, the wetlands may be an obstacle to significant development.

**Topography** – The topography within the District is varied with a significant grade change between the Upper and Lower Millyard. This grade change can turn a pleasant stroll into exercise and also limits additional development at those points of significant elevation change.

**Heritage Park not well connected to downtown/Upper Millyard** – Heritage Park makes good use of its proximity to the River, yet remains visually disconnected from downtown by the Carriage House building and from the Upper Millyard given limited sightlines from Chestnut Street.

**No direct access to commuter rail** – The District is served by a bus line but does not have direct access to a commuter rail line, making the area a step removed for those seeking an easy commute to Boston or other rail-served employment centers.

## Site Conditions

**Environmental conditions** – As a former manufacturing yard, the District has a number of development parcels that have already

addressed known environmental issues. Other parcels may have environmental issues that have yet to be discovered.

### **Carriage House is not a viable structure**

– Efforts have been taken to try to save the historic Carriage House. At this stage however, the building is no longer safe, remains too difficult and too costly to redevelop, and should be dismantled.

### **Sub-optimal uses for downtown location**

– The proximity of the District to downtown makes it a compelling site for a number of commercial and residential uses, yet many uses in the District today (e.g., auto shop and salvage yard) do not leverage that proximity.

**Salvage yard** – The salvage yard is unappealing for all passing by, whether on foot, bike, or in a vehicle.

**Auto shop** – The auto shop is another business that may find more success in a location closer to the interstate or other major thoroughfare. In an area that is working to become more walkable and appealing to visitors, it is – or will soon be – out of place.

**Streetscape** – The streetscape within the District has great potential. At present, however, it is not inviting to pedestrians, the sidewalks lack continuity, and remains disconnected from downtown as there isn't signage or other visible markers to draw visitors south along Water Street from downtown or south along Chestnut Street from Elm Street.

**Riverwalk** – The Riverwalk is an incredible amenity for Amesbury and the Lower Millyard, yet it is tucked away and not clearly marked, making it difficult for new users to find access points. When users do find the Riverwalk, they are confronted by a rather abrupt and unceremonious end to the trail with little direction to points beyond.



**Connectivity within District** – Sidewalks are scarce in the District and streets often end in dead ends, either due to grade changes or building placement.

## Community

**Historically there has not been a cohesive approach** – To-date, development in the District has occurred on an ad hoc basis. Without a vision for the area, certain key parcels, such as the Bartley property, have changed ownership and represent a missed opportunity for larger property assemblage to support broader development goals.

**Masterplan is dated** – The District is operating under a Masterplan that is dated [2004] and needs to be revised to provide a new vision for the City's Lower Millyard area.

## Economics

**Largest developable parcels are privately owned** – In order to best position the District for transformative development, the City needs to control a greater degree of the land. At present, the larger parcels in the Lower Millyard are privately owned.

**Limited resources for public investments** – While public investments in the Lower Millyard are warranted, the City does not have ready access to the financing needed to fund key improvements.

**Lack of critical mass of downtown housing** – The surrounding neighborhoods are home to a number of single-family homes, yet there are few opportunities to live directly downtown.

**Competing retail/visitor destination in Newburyport** – Amesbury's wish to become a retail and/or visitor destination may be tempered by the proximity of Newburyport, which features a more established shopping district.

**Some parcel owners are unengaged** – There are several parcel owners along Chestnut and Oakland Streets who are not engaged with the City and discussions around redevelopment of the Lower Millyard. The future plans for those buildings and their related use is unclear.

**Lack of investment in strategic parcels** – To support development, investment, and interest in the Lower Millyard District, the City likely needs to invest in certain strategic parcels. The lack of investment to-date in those parcels remains a challenge to future development.



In many instances, pedestrians face an intimidating environment of narrow sidewalks and inadequate lighting. Source: TAP Panel.



The grade change between Elm Street and the Lower Millyard presents an interesting development challenge. Source: TAP Panel.



The salvage yard remains visible behind a fence intended to lessen the visual impact of the disarray behind. Source: TAP Panel.

# Recommendations

Panelists divided their recommendations into short-, medium- and long-term categories, providing guidance to the City on a wide range of actions and improvements that can help address immediate concerns and interventions to help build the case and lay the foundation for the longer-term, transformational development to come.

This is not the first planning initiative the City has undertaken for the Lower Millyard and surrounding area. Progress has been made on a number of fronts, yet today with the City's goals of a unifying vision, improved connectivity, and increased economic, recreational and social opportunities for the District, the Panel envisioned a series of interventions and improvements that can be tackled over time to realize the Lower Millyard as the connected destination District the City envisions.

Before detailing the improvements sketched out over time, the Panel noted two broad themes that will shape development in the District going forward.

**Reimagining the public realm** – In order to better connect the Upper and Lower Millyards, the City can initiate improvements to public spaces, such as widening the sidewalks and improving street lighting, and encourage new building along Water Street to extend the urban fabric deeper into the District to activate the street edge. Terraced seating near the River's edge will also provide opportunities for programming, informal seating, and further activate the Park. Should the National Grid site become available, this would be yet another opportunity to extend commerce east from downtown into the District and open additional land for park space along the southern edge of the Powwow River.

**Connectivity** – Today, there are three primary nodes of activity in the Upper and Lower Millyard: the space in and around Heritage Park; the intersection of Oakland and Morrill Streets; and the intersection of Water and Elm Street. The City has already begun certain Elm Street streetscape improvements, which will improve the pedestrian experience and increase connectivity. An enhanced Heritage Park experience and connection to more pedestrian-friendly streetscapes along Water Street will strengthen the connection to downtown. Talk of a Powwow River pedestrian and bike bridge across to Mill Street would serve to directly connect the Lower Millyard with a new riverfront park on the west side of the River, which could feature an overlook of the waterfalls at the former substation site. An extension of Oakland Street, too, could more directly connect the Millyard to transit options and the senior center.

## Short-Term (One Year and Under)

Using the City's current master plan as a base, the Panel began to envision how a phased redevelopment scenario may begin to take shape in the Lower Millyard. With an initial focus on the Water Street corridor, planning could begin on a reconfigured parking structure on the north side of Water Street that could house new retail spaces fronting the street and a new plaza to the south. Decked parking in this new slightly taller configuration would be plentiful, increasing from 240 to roughly 375 spaces, and would be tucked behind the new commercial storefronts. The southern end of the parking deck might feature yet another retail or commercial building, this time up to three stories tall, making good use of the grade





Potential streetscape improvements along Oakland and Chestnut Streets might include curblines, sidewalks, modest plantings, and period lighting. Sketch depicts the view looking south at the intersection of Oakland and Chestnut Streets. Source: TAP Panel.

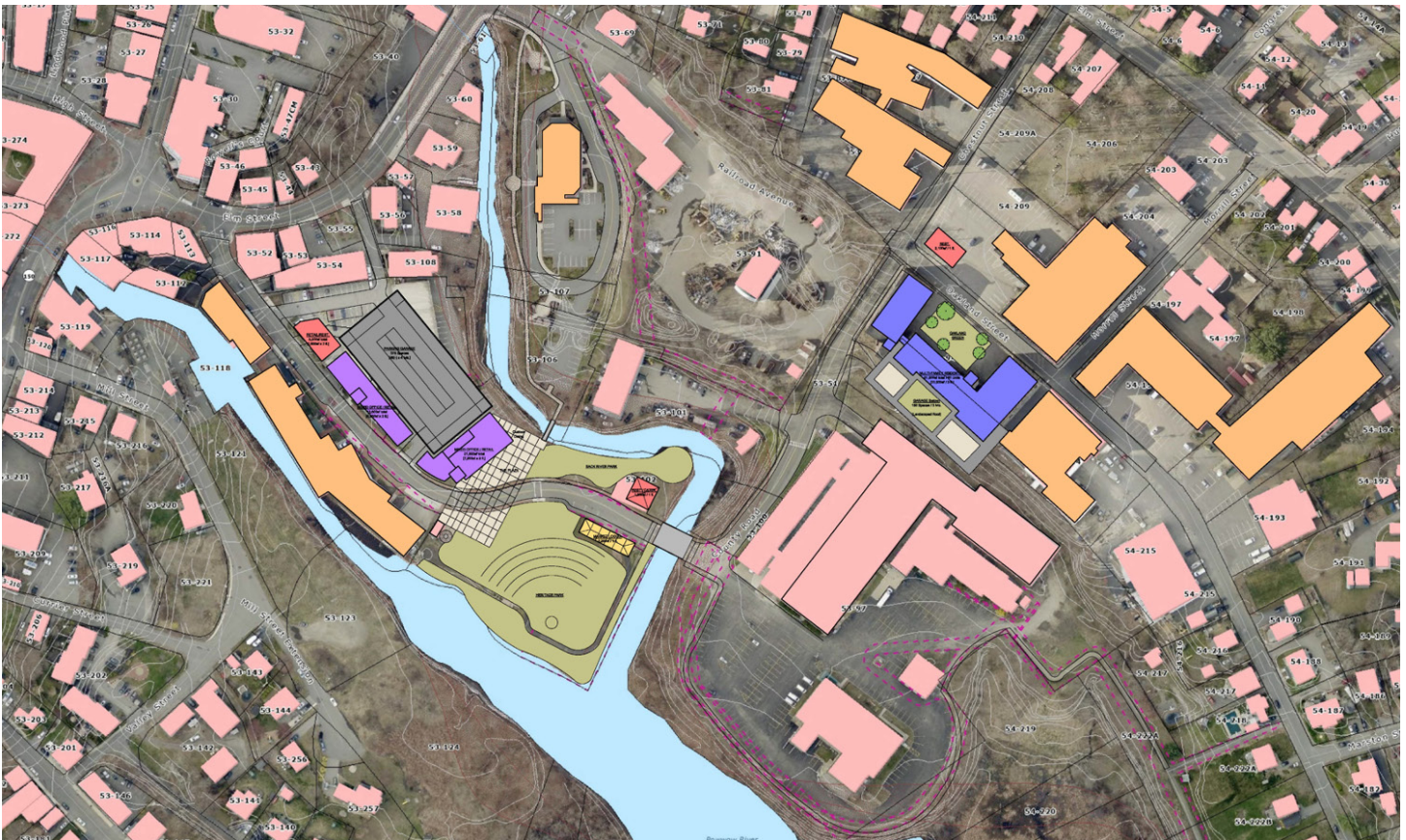


Looking north on Chestnut toward Elm Street, the addition of sidewalks on both sides of the street, period lighting or lighting that is connected to downtown, and modest plantings would greatly enhance the pedestrian experience. Source: TAP Panel.



With the assembled information from the City, the stakeholders, and after evaluating the strengths and challenges of the study area, the Panel sketched two drawings that begin to embody the emerging vision for the Lower Milliard District. The District is depicted as an area rich in public spaces and amenities on both sides of the River. Connections to downtown, the Riverwalk, and surrounding neighborhoods are made increasingly clear with these contemplated improvements. Additional opportunities for commerce emerge as the parking deck is redeveloped and new buildings possibly replace the National Grid infrastructure close to downtown. Source: TAP Panel.





Phase One, short-term improvements to the District focuses on Water Street, Heritage Park, and the mill buildings on Oakland Street. Source: TAP Panel.

change along Water Street. A new plaza at the southern end of the parking deck and in front of the retail building provides outdoor seating opportunities for the businesses and begins to connect to Heritage Park with paving materials that are incorporated into the street and plaza. This new plaza and street paving also strengthens the connection from the transit and center senior center, visually bridging the street at grade, calming traffic, and connecting the public spaces on either side of the street. The removal of the Carriage House would provide for greater space and remove the physical and visual barrier it creates today.

Along Oakland Street, the current mill buildings could be redeveloped into roughly 60 multi-family residential units, and parking for the units could be placed below, leveraging the topography of the hillside at the rear of the building. Streetscape improvements, a potential courtyard, placemaking installations, and other ground floor design modifications would enhance the

experience of Oakland Street for residents and visitors to the District.

**Signage** – The Lower Millyard attracts visitors today and has great potential to serve as an even stronger destination. To assist visitors in finding and navigating the District, however, the City is encouraged to install signage that will help both pedestrians and motorists move to and through the area. Signage provided by the Coastal Trails Coalition will undoubtedly assist along the Riverwalk, yet additional signage is needed to connect the Upper Millyard with the Riverwalk. In addition to navigation signage, the City may also wish to use this installation opportunity to include information on or directions to businesses in the Upper and Lower Millyard, specifically, at this early stage, to the breweries currently in operation.

**Establish Heritage Park as a destination within the District** – Heritage Park is a welcome swath of open green space in an otherwise commercial and industrial area.





Clockwise from top left: Signage in the District would assist navigation to amenities, Source: ULI; parking spaces on Water Street are already being used for temporary outdoor seating for area businesses and could be permanently converted to non-vehicular use, Source: TAP Panel; Heritage Park could become a venue for outdoor concerts and movies, Source: Adobe Stock; and the Powwow River is an interesting amenity in the District that could be leveraged further, Source: TAP Panel.

By activating the Park further with consistent year-round, flexible programming (e.g., skating, Bocce, etc.), the Park can become a draw on its own accord, welcoming visitors to the District and encouraging further commerce in the area. In place of permanent infrastructure, there are opportunities to host temporary or weekend markets or pop-up events that create destination buzz and stimulate economic activity in the area.

The Park is also home to an attractive water fountain that sits dormant. By removing the protective tarpaulin cover from the fountain and restoring water service, the fountain and its associated bubbling water sounds can add additional life to the Park, instead of adding

to today's feel of a deserted space that is awaiting activation.

**Safety** – Stakeholders noted that they didn't feel as safe as they would like when moving through the District. The lack of safety did not relate to crime; instead the safety concerns centered around pedestrian movement in relation to vehicular traffic in the District. The City would do well to enhance the street lighting throughout the District, illuminating the sidewalks and allowing pedestrians to more easily see further down the street to their car or other destination. Sidewalks in the District also need attention to help improve pedestrian safety. As they tend to be the streets with the most pedestrian traffic, Chestnut and Oakland





Placemaking strategies can build on the importance of place, creating a destination and engaging the community in activities. Source: ULI.

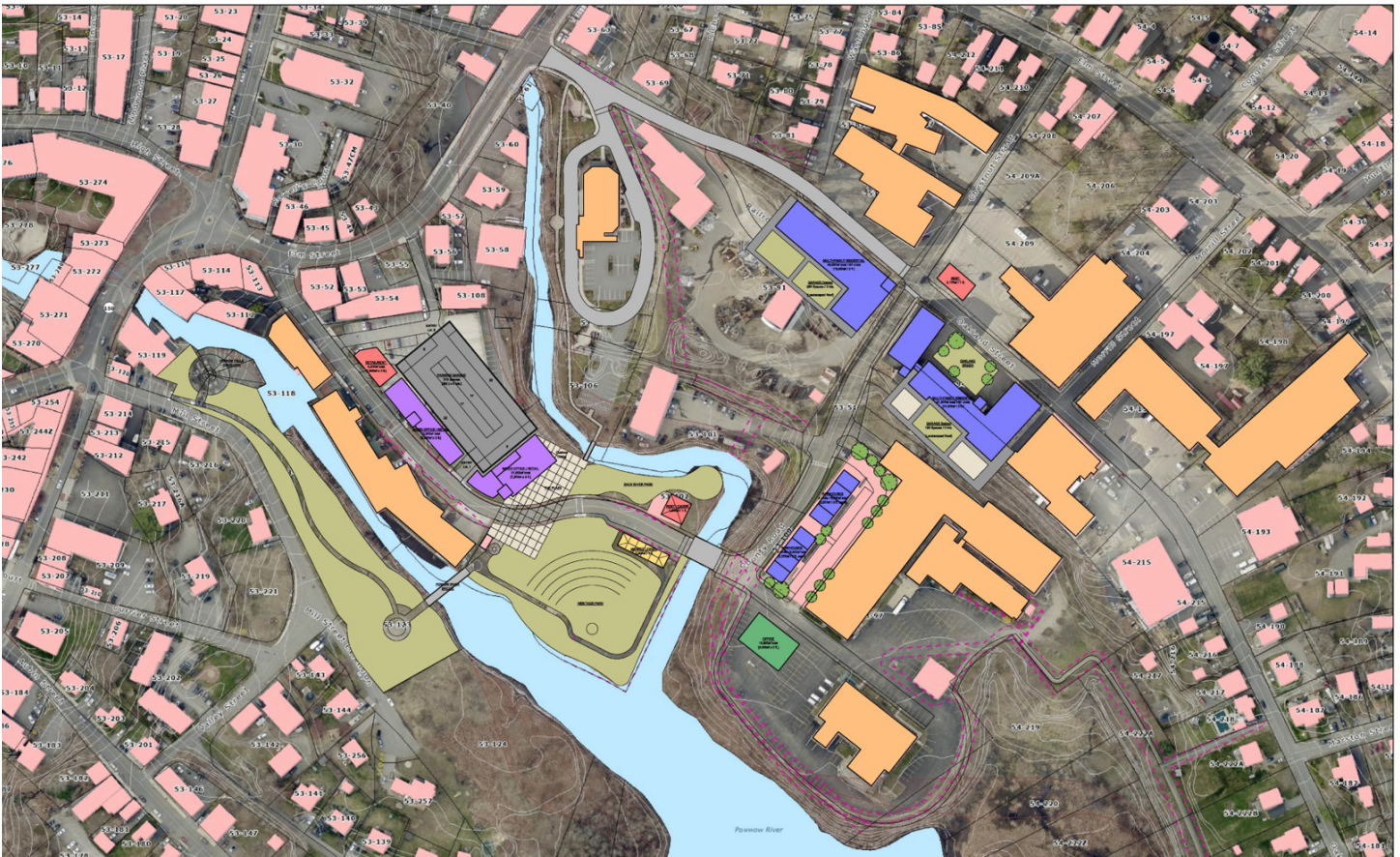
Streets in particular need improved sidewalks and better connections at intersections.

**Placemaking** – The District today does not feel distinct or special, yet the budding artisan and light industrial businesses, the connectivity potential, and the Riverwalk amenity combine to provide a potentially exciting “vibe.” The City is encouraged to celebrate and highlight these special characteristic through placemaking endeavors. Public art, such as murals and/or sculptures, can add vibrancy to an area and further differentiate the space from its surrounding neighborhoods. Open studio events or artists tours are additional methods for highlighting the visual artists working in the District and, again, highlight how and why the District is special. Look for opportunities to install placemaking interventions with co-benefits. Example, lighting that has an artistic element but also enhances safety. These placemaking activities can and should also

extend to the Riverwalk. As this popular trail moves through and starts/ends in the District, there is a unique opportunity to celebrate that terminus and tie it to other experiences in the District. This may also include improvements to the surrounding riverfront area in the Lower Millyard, finding ways to celebrate the River running through the area instead of planning around or in spite of it.

**Parking** – Given the abundance of parking available in the Lower Millyard District, via the current structured parking and on-street spaces, and the perceived lack of parking in the Upper Millyard, the City is encouraged to create an Upper and Lower Millyard parking plan. The plan may include the elimination of on-street parking on the south side of Water Street, as abundant parking is available in the structured spaces. By pulling the parked cars off one side of Water Street, pedestrians are able to move more freely in the District, the businesses along Water Street will enjoy





Phase Two, medium-term improvements would include an expanded Heritage Park across the River, streetscape improvements along Chestnut, and connection of Oakland to Market Street. Source: TAP Panel.

greater visibility, and the trail connection to the Upper Millyard is maintained. The existing garage and lot also require examination. With significant deferred maintenance coming due on the structure, it may make sense to use the opportunity to redesign and rebuild the parking structure to accommodate additional street-level businesses while tucking parking behind and above.

## Medium-Term (One to Three Years)

In the medium-term, a Phase Two set of interventions begins to address the other side of the Powwow River, considers building and streetscape improvements along Chestnut Street, and identifies improvements west along Oakland Street.

Along the western/southern edge of the Powwow River, additional recreational and commercial activities could be activated with the potential future acquisition of the National Grid site, should it become available, and

construction of a new bridge across the River, extending the Riverwalk across to a new public park. This new park would provide a welcoming open space connection to Mill Street and could feature an overlook of the falls at the old sub-station site.

The connection from Heritage Park north to Oakland is challenging due to the topography of the street and the sub-optimal mix of uses currently in place. Phase two interventions here could include a new pedestrian-friendly streetscape along Chestnut Street featuring new live-work units with street-level engagement along the edge of the parcels owned or recently held by Rick Bartley. The Water Street Bridge is in need of repairs and should be addressed at this time, and Oakland Street could be extended west to Railroad Avenue, thereby effectively linking the transit and senior center more effectively with the District and providing another potential site for multi-family housing.

**Carriage House** – As mentioned earlier, the Carriage House is past the point of saving and should instead be demolished and removed. Disappointing as it may be for many who appreciate the building's history and architecture, clearing the structurally unsafe building will free additional space for public use at Heritage Park and open an important visual connection to the Park for residents and visitors entering the District from downtown on Water Street.

**Parking Deck** – Following the creation of and guided by a District parking plan, it will be important to address the current state and future of the parking deck. Structured parking is critical to the economic health and vitality of the District, yet the needed improvements to the deck may make way for opportunities to build/rebuild the structure into something that also provides additional commercial opportunities. By wrapping the parking structure in rentable retail or office space, the pedestrian experience is greatly enhanced along Water Street and additional economic activity is brought to the District. A study may be warranted to determine the viability of a physical configuration of this sort. Additionally a financing study could help determine the viability of a request for proposal process to create a public-private partnership to guide, manage, and maintain this reconfigured parking parcel.

**Acquire National Grid Parcel if possible** – Directly across the Powwow River is a large parcel of land that is currently owned by National Grid. The land is open space today but is part of National Grid's power network and thus private property. Acquisition of this parcel by the City could provide a welcome public amenity complement to Heritage Park on the east side of the Powwow River.

**Secure funding for Masterplanning District (perhaps rethink zoning)** – In addition to the visioning guidance outlined herein, the City would benefit from the opportunity to masterplan the Upper and Lower Millyard Districts. This process may take some time, yet work can begin in the medium-term to identify and secure the necessary funding for a planning process of this nature.

**Explore valuation and viability of relocating sub-optimal uses** – Without a vision for the District, the City did not have a clear understanding of how the current mix of uses within the District either complemented or detracted from the vibrancy of the District. With this vision and gameplan in hand, the City may wish to reconsider uses in the District with a critical eye. Once businesses have been identified for relocation, the City can begin discussions with business and property owners about future relocation possibilities.

**Area-wide environmental assessment** – Certain environmental remediation has occurred in various locations throughout the District, yet it is unclear whether or not the entire District might be considered environmentally clean today. By undertaking an area-wide evaluation, the City will have a clear understanding of the status of or need for any further remediation efforts.

## Long-Term (Three to Ten Years)

Long range plans for redevelopment in the Lower Millyard would likely require certain property acquisitions, hence the longer lead time.

On the back/northern edge of Plumbush Creek, a new children's play area could be installed. Centrally located, this new playground would be easily accessed from the pedestrian bridge currently in place and connecting south to Heritage Park.

Additional streetscape improvements to Chestnut Street would occur at this time and as development takes place, providing a more welcoming and safer passage for the new residents in the District as well as for residents from the surrounding neighborhoods visiting District establishments.

**Relocation of salvage yard and German Motor Sport** – The Panel views the salvage yard and the auto parts store as sub-optimal uses for the District. Working with the business and property owners, the City is encouraged to relocate these businesses to other locations in Amesbury that are more





Phase Three, long-term interventions would include new multi-family development opportunities as well as further streetscape improvements and a new connection from Chestnut to the transit and senior center.  
Source: TAP Panel.

auto-centric. Moving these businesses will enhance the District's walkability and make the environment more welcoming to residents and visitors alike. Once the businesses are relocated, the parcels would work well if repositioned for multi-family residential development. If planned well, a new development on these combined parcels could also provide another connection through to the transit and senior center.

**Provide Housing Opportunities for seniors and new families, with an affordability component** – Amesbury is home to some wonderful neighborhoods yet there is a growing market demand for housing that seniors can transition into when larger single-family homes are no longer needed or desired. Whether in an independent living or assisted living scenario, it will be critical that there is an affordability component to these new housing options. Similarly, young

families would also benefit from smaller and/or more affordable housing opportunities in Amesbury.

**Potential to provide additional affordable housing** – In addition to the alternative housing options noted above, there is additional room in the market for affordable housing options for City employees and middle-income earners.

**Increase public amenities** – The public spaces contemplated herein by the Panel would be a welcome addition to the City's roster of public amenities. In a City with an active and engaged citizenry who continues to demonstrate a passion for outdoor activities, these open spaces and public amenities will be welcomed by the residents, engaging for visitors, and a point of differentiation for the City.

# Funding and Financing Resources

Early stage recommendations presented by the Panel might benefit from some of the funding sources noted below.

**Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development & MassDevelopment** – Using the One Stop for Growth Grant application is the Commonwealth's new comprehensive funding strategy to help communities access resources such as *Massachusetts Downtown Initiative*, *Community Planning Grant*, *Brownfields Redevelopment Fund*, *Site Readiness Program*, and *Underutilized Property Program*. Amesbury should prepare for the 2022 round of funding. Funding of this nature could begin to address the streetscape and wayfinding recommendations posed by the Panel.

**MA DOT** – The Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, recently launched by MA DOT could also fund the improvement to walkways and streetscapes, improving the connections to and through the District.

**EPA** – Brownfields Area Wide Assessment Grant

**MassDevelopment** – Commonwealth Places Grant program

**AARP** – Community Challenge Grant program

**EDA Grant**

**Federal Rapid Recovery Funds** – As the COVID-19 pandemic begins to come under control, there will be more opportunities for recovery grants. While funding mechanisms are not clear at this point, having a plan to implement any available funds will prepare the community for the opportunities that arise.



# Conclusion

As the City of Amesbury begins to envision the future of the Lower Millyard District, City leadership is advised to remain focused on creating greater connectivity to and through the District, embarking on improvements that enhance or repair the urban fabric, and programming public spaces to encourage residents and visitors to enjoy the District as a year-round destination and Amesbury amenity.

There are a host of short-term improvements that can support walkability in the District and welcome additional activity in the area. With new and/or wider sidewalks, improved street lighting, and wayfinding signage, pedestrians will feel safer walking to or between destinations and increased foot traffic will benefit the retail businesses along the way.

With more time, the City could vastly improve Heritage Park through the demolition of the Carriage House and redevelopment of that site into an expansion of Heritage Park. Consistent, year-round, active programming of the Park will also draw more visitors to the District and year-round programming could help establish the District

as a destination. With the increased visitors and activity, the City is also encouraged to re-evaluate parking in the District and, specifically, evaluate the parking structure. By potentially foregoing further maintenance and repairs on the current building, a newer structure could be built, designed with street-level commercial space and built one floor taller than the current deck to accommodate over 100 additional spaces.

In the long-term, the City should also consider property acquisitions when certain parcels become available. The National Grid site, the salvage yard, and the auto repair facility are each disjointed in use from the City's vision for the District and could provide key space for additional public amenities and development, particularly multi-family residential development.

With an eye toward the future and with its vision in hand, the City can commission a new master plan and set a specific course for the redevelopment of the Lower Millyard that is connected, programmed, and restores the urban fabric of this key section of the City.



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