

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

Capitalizing on Land Use Opportunities in the Howard Street Corridor

Framingham, Massachusetts



February 12, 2013



**Urban Land
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Executive Summary

Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council, the Howard Street Corridor Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Framingham, Massachusetts in February 2012, bringing together stakeholders, Town planners, community leaders, and a panel of planning, design, engineering, and development professionals for a day-long session focused on identifying the issues, constraints, and opportunities presented by the Howard Street Corridor, located within downtown Framingham. The report that follows, which summarizes the TAP recommendations, is comprised of five 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 Howard Street Corridor TAP including Town officials, stakeholders, and the Panel of land-use professionals.

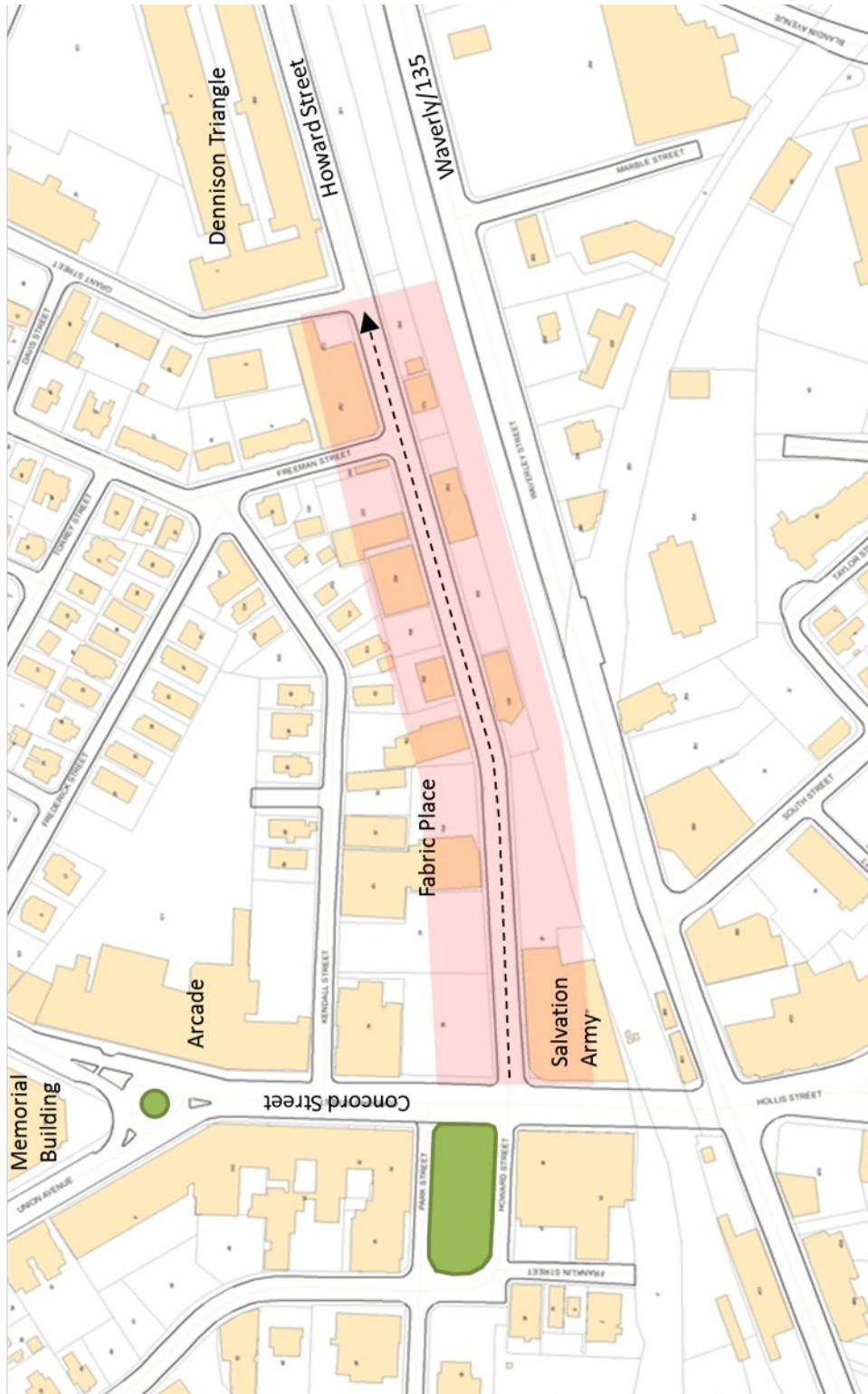
Chapter 2: Background and Assignment gives background information about the Howard Street Corridor, and provides an overview of the Town's planning efforts to date related to downtown revitalization and capital improvements. This chapter also reviews the Town of Framingham's objectives for the TAP, as stated in its initial application, which were to address the following key issues: corridor vision; appropriate land uses; desirable walking environment; rail crossing impact; as well as a variety of implementation issues. It also states caveats to which the Panel's recommendations are subject.

Chapter 3: Observations and Findings presents the Panel's insights about the corridor's positive attributes (including the geographic location, transit access, and substantially intact urban

fabric) and the principal challenges (including traffic/accessibility issues, insufficient retail, safety concerns, and property taxes) related to the Howard Street Corridor environment which result in a level of market attractiveness considered insufficient to support significant new development. The planned relocation of a campus of MassBay Community College to the downtown presents an opportunity to inject activity into and change the perception of downtown.

Chapter 4: Recommendations presents a concept plan for the Howard Street Corridor siting the MassBay Community College campus on the Fabric Place property. ***The Panel believes that locating the MassBay campus on this site would maximize the ability to capitalize on this opportunity for transformative change in downtown.*** This chapter also proposes ways of transforming the Salvation Army property into a positive contributor to the area's renewal, and discusses other appropriate uses and more general improvements to safety and traffic circulation in the Howard Street Corridor that can catalyze a self-reinforcing cycle of revitalization.

Finally, *Chapter 5: Implementation* presents a menu of actionable next steps in support of the revitalization of downtown Framingham that can be undertaken in the short term while the longer-term projects are progressing. These include site acquisition, a vision for the downtown, a streamlined permitting process, a traffic and parking management plan, and tax incentives for targeted development.



Map showing Howard Street corridor and surrounding area

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 pre-eminent, 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.

MassDevelopment Support

MassDevelopment is the state's finance and development authority. Both a lender and developer, the agency works with businesses, nonprofits, and local, state, and federal officials and agencies to strengthen the Massachusetts economy. Through these collaborations, MassDevelopment helps create jobs, increase the number of housing units, eliminate blight, and address factors limiting economic growth including transportation, energy, and infrastructure deficiencies.

Recognizing the alignment between ULI Boston's Technical Assistance Panels and MassDevelopment's mission to support sustainable redevelopment across the Commonwealth, in 2011 the two organizations partnered to support TAPs in four Gateway Cities throughout the Commonwealth. The success of that initial year's collaboration led to continued support in 2012-13. The Howard Street Corridor TAP was the seventh sponsored by MassDevelopment to date.

MassDevelopment partnered with ULI Boston to sponsor the Howard Street Corridor TAP, under the direction of Jim Lydon, Senior Vice President at MassDevelopment.

Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of the disciplines associated with the challenges of evaluating land uses in the Howard Street Corridor.

Disciplines represented included architecture and urban planning, development, consulting, legal, and infrastructure engineering. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the Town's objectives for this TAP. The following is the list of panelists:

- Barry M. Abramson, Abramson & Associates (TAP Co-Chair)
- Nyal McDonough, The Berkshire Group (TAP Co-Chair)
- David Bennet AIA, LEED AP, David L. Bennet & Associates
- Robert F. Daylor, Tetra Tech Rizzo
- Nancy Ludwig, ICON Architecture
- Matt Marotta, ICON Architecture
- Ryan D. Pace, Anderson & Kreiger
- Rhonda Spector, MassDevelopment
- David Traggorth, Traggorth Companies

Alison Steinfeld, Director of Community and Economic Development for the Town of Framingham and Erika Oliver Jerram, Senior Planner, served as primary contacts for ULI Boston for the Town. Also in attendance was Jim Lydon, Senior Vice President at MassDevelopment.

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.

Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders – policy makers, Town staff, business owners, property owners, and representatives of area institutions – who met with the Panel and shared information, ideas, and opinions on a range of issues affecting the Howard Street Corridor. Stakeholders at the session included:

- Charles Sisitsky, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen
- Jay Grande, Planning Board Director
- Michael Tusino, Building Commissioner
- Jeremy Masette, Town Engineer
- Holli Andrews, Framingham Downtown Renaissance
- Bonnie Biocchi, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce
- Rev. Dr. J. Anthony Lloyd, Greater Framingham Community Church
- Ed Carr, MetroWest Regional Transit System
- Marlene Aron, commercial real estate broker
- Vaivos Theodorakis, VTT Management
- Richard Haskell, MassBay Community College
- Francesca Purcell, MassBay Community College
- Lou Goldberg, Salvation Army

TAP Process

The Howard Street Corridor TAP was held on February 12, 2013 at the Framingham Town Hall. In the morning, Alison Steinfeld, Director of Community and Economic Development for the Town of Framingham, welcomed the Panelists at Town Hall, then members of C&ED staff and other Town officials led a walking tour of the Howard Street Corridor.

The tour proceeded from Town Hall south on Concord Street past the Arcade commercial block and Kendall Hotel property to the intersection of Howard and Concord Streets; proceeded east on Howard past the Fabric Place parcel and the Dennison complex; turned north onto Bishop Street then walked behind the Dennison complex; then walked through the residential neighborhood on Grant, Davis, Freeman, and Frederick Streets; then returned to Town Hall.

After the tour, the ULI Panel interviewed a diverse series of stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues, dynamics, and opportunities surrounding the Howard Street Corridor. The Panelists then engaged in an intensive charrette to develop recommendations addressing some of the critical issues associated with revitalization of the area. The TAP concluded with a presentation to the Board of Selectmen and members of the community at a public meeting that evening at the Town Hall, which was also cablecast live on Framingham's Government Channel.

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



2. Background and Assignment

Howard Street Corridor

Howard Street is a 0.37 mile long, east-west feeder street into Concord Street/Route 126, the main commercial and historic spine through downtown Framingham. Running parallel with and just north of the MBTA/CSX railroad tracks, Howard Street connects Concord Street with the Bishop/Beaver Street intersection to the east and to the rear of the MBTA commuter station to the west. The intersection of Concord and Howard Streets effectively serves as the southern edge and gateway of the downtown core. Despite some isolated positive redevelopment activity along the corridor in recent years, Howard Street is predominantly characterized by a series of discordant and inefficient land uses and underutilized or vacant sites.



Fabric Place property viewed from intersection of Howard and Concord Streets

The former Fabric Place property, located at the northeast corner of Concord and Howard Streets, represents a significant opportunity for the downtown. The property contains 77,533 square feet of land with an irregularly shaped, 32,225 square foot building, which is largely vacant and unsuitable for redevelopment, set back from

Concord Street behind a large parking lot. The property is on the market for sale.

The Kendall Hotel, at the southeast corner of Concord and Kendall Streets, has been redeveloped for residential but marketing is hindered by its lack of parking.

The Salvation Army complex across Howard Street to the south has also been partially vacant since an associated thrift store recently relocated to Route 9, leaving only the Corps in what was once a popular department store.

The Avery-Dennison complex of large mill buildings – now known as the Dennison Triangle – defines the eastern edge of the Howard Street corridor. The building running along Howard Street is now partially occupied by the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), a regional social services agency that is relocating to a nearby property. The Dennison also includes a residential component that was developed as loft condominiums but has been converted to rental units in response to unsuccessful sales efforts. Of the remaining two buildings in the Dennison complex, one is occupied Class B-/C office space and the other, a partially renovated shell, is vacant and for sale. The complex is served by a parking garage.



Dennison Triangle area

In between the Fabric Place property and the Dennison Triangle is an area characterized by small buildings on small parcels occupied by a variety of automotive, commercial, residential, and non-profit uses, at a density that represents an underutilization.

Recent Activity

For over a decade, the Town has committed significant resources to revitalizing downtown Framingham. The central business district was



The Arcade Block on Concord Street

rezoned in 1999 to encourage mixed uses and transit-oriented development to take advantage of the fact that the downtown is a public transportation hub. The Town's revitalization activities are focused on creating a more positive environment to entice and keep residents and consumers downtown to support existing businesses and create a

sustainable market for new commercial activity.

The Town currently works closely with and partially funds the Framingham Downtown Renaissance, a non-profit organization focused on applying the successful National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Streets model to the downtown.

Significant capital improvements are scheduled for the 2013 construction season. Given cost constraints, the Town's focus has been on what is referred to as "the double Y" – an area defined by the intersection of Concord and Union Streets to the north (forming one "Y"), the intersection of Irving and Hollis Streets to the south (forming the second "Y"), and Concord Street, which connects the two Ys. A major plan initiated by the Town to

effect significant traffic and streetscape improvements to the double Y is currently in the 25% design phase under the jurisdiction of MassDOT. The side streets (including Howard Street) have not been incorporated into the project, with the exception of the actual intersection of Howard and Concord Streets, which has been redesigned as part of the 25% plans. The Town has negotiated an easement on the southern portion of the Fabric Place property to accommodate traffic improvements.

There are also long-term plans under review by MassDOT that would create an east-west underpass along Route 135/Waverly Street where it intersects with Concord Street. The railroad tracks would remain at grade. This project, part of the comprehensive Downtown Study completed in 2009, while not a full road/rail grade separation, will eliminate the need for cars on Concord Street to stop for anything other than trains, making automobile travel more efficient, reducing the confusion, and improving the pedestrian environment through a more simplified experience.

Town of Framingham's Objectives for the TAP

While the Town has established an overall vision for downtown Framingham that is based on promoting mixed-use development that takes advantage of its extraordinary transportation network, there is a need to provide a more focused vision with details relative to specific parcels. The overriding issue before the Town relative to Howard Street is: what are the appropriate land uses and how may the Town encourage the timely transition to those uses in order to help achieve the overall vision for downtown Framingham?

Planning and Design Issues

- Corridor vision: What is a vision for the Howard Street Corridor that can be achieved

over time and that is compatible with and supportive of the overall vision for Downtown Framingham: a dynamic mixed-use environment that attracts residents from throughout Framingham and the region, provides a variety of goods and services, offers multi-family housing, serves as the civic center of the community, and contributes to the tax base?

- Appropriate land uses: What are the appropriate and desirable land uses for the corridor?
- Desirable walking environment: How do we create a walking environment that is in fact and perception safe and pleasant?
- Rail crossing impact: How might the recommendations for Howard Street change if the long term rail crossing solution included a grade separation at the Bishop/Blanding Streets intersection?

Implementation Issues

- How do we encourage change? How should the Town achieve the vision?
- How do we phase out and /or relocate uses that are inconsistent with or undermine our vision?
- Does the language of the CB zoning district support the recommended land uses? If not, how can it be improved?
- Are there specific recommendations for regulatory changes that the Town can implement?
- How do we identify and secure funding to help effect and/or leverage change?
- What is the highest and best use of direct Town investment in this initiative?

Caveats for the TAP

The Panel's recommendations with regard to the location of the MassBay campus are subject to the following caveats:

- The Panel was tasked with focusing on a limited study area within a one-day planning exercise. Accordingly, it cannot speak to the availability and assets of alternate sites that might exist in the downtown, especially to the north of the Y.
- The Panel was provided general information concerning MassBay's program requirements. MassBay's representatives did not suggest any location criteria, discuss specific locations, or have any information about the recommendations of the Panel; and representatives of DCAMM were not available to the Panel. Accordingly, the Panel acknowledges that some program or other facility location factors and criteria may point to alternate site location attributes, and possibly alternate sites, and that a decision on locating the campus must be based on a full consideration of such factors by MassBay (and DCAMM).

3. Observations and Findings

Over the course of the day – through the walking tour, the stakeholder interviews, and the subsequent charrette – it became apparent to the Panelists that downtown Framingham is currently underutilized. It is a downtown that has become isolated from many of the Town’s residents; and efforts should be made to restore it to being everybody’s downtown and increasing its vitality.

Among the positive attributes of downtown Framingham:

Geographic location: The downtown area is located in the strong Metrowest corridor, midway between Boston and Worcester, at the crossroads of two major state roads (Routes 126 and 135), with easy access to I-90 (MassPike).

Transit access: Downtown is the hub of the regional transportation network: the commuter rail line offers frequent service between Boston and Worcester, and the Metrowest Regional Transit Authority provides bus service along eleven different routes throughout the entire Metrowest community.

Intact urban fabric: Downtown is fortunate to still have a largely intact urban fabric with blocks of distinctive older buildings, such as The Arcade, which provide a human scale along its main spine.

A remaining core of civic functions and a center for an ethnic, immigrant population: Downtown retains civic functions (Town Hall, library, performance center, churches) that enable it to serve some of the functions that mark a true town center having meaningful connection to all of the Town’s residents. It also has become a business center for a vibrant ethnic, immigrant population (largely Brazilian).

The principal challenges that face downtown Framingham:

Traffic/accessibility issues: Although having regular commuter rail service is an undeniable benefit, the several at-grade crossings impede the efficient flow of auto traffic along all north-south corridors.

Limited retail and businesses to attract broad patronage: Many of the larger stores and service businesses that formerly attracted a broad cross-section of Town residents have relocated closer to the highways, resulting in empty storefronts and less pedestrian activity, with many of the businesses that occupy space serving a more limited market, which is not appealing to the majority of Town residents.

Safety concerns: There is a widespread perception that downtown is not a safe place to walk around.

Property taxes: Commercial property tax rates are high compared with surrounding towns.

Permitting: Permitting for development is considered overly complex.

The net effect of the above is that downtown does not fully function as a town center for all of the Town’s residents, and the downtown’s market attractiveness is not sufficient to support significant new development.

4. Recommendations

MassBay Community College

The Panel believes that the proposed relocation of MassBay Community College presents a great opportunity for transformative change in downtown Framingham.

Locating the facility downtown would provide an instant infusion of new development and young people at many hours of the day and night. If the facility is strategically sited within the downtown, this can significantly enhance the pedestrian character, activity level, perception and reality of safety, and increase the market for downtown businesses.

MassBay eventually expects to require between 130,000 and 160,000 square feet of program space, and to need parking for 500-700 cars. The schedule of arriving and departing students is spread out over the day, limiting the impact on peak rush hour traffic.

Locate for maximum leverage

The Town should work closely with the State Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) and MassBay Community College to ensure that, through design and programming, the college is integrated into downtown life. It is essential that the campus be located in the right place in order to get the maximum leverage out of its relocation; mis-locating it by even a few blocks can diminish its enormous potential to generate revitalization and redevelopment in the downtown. The Panel recommends that, in addition to other programmatic, facility, and design considerations, the criteria for site location to be employed by DCAMM and MassBay place a strong emphasis on the relative ability of alternate sites to promote

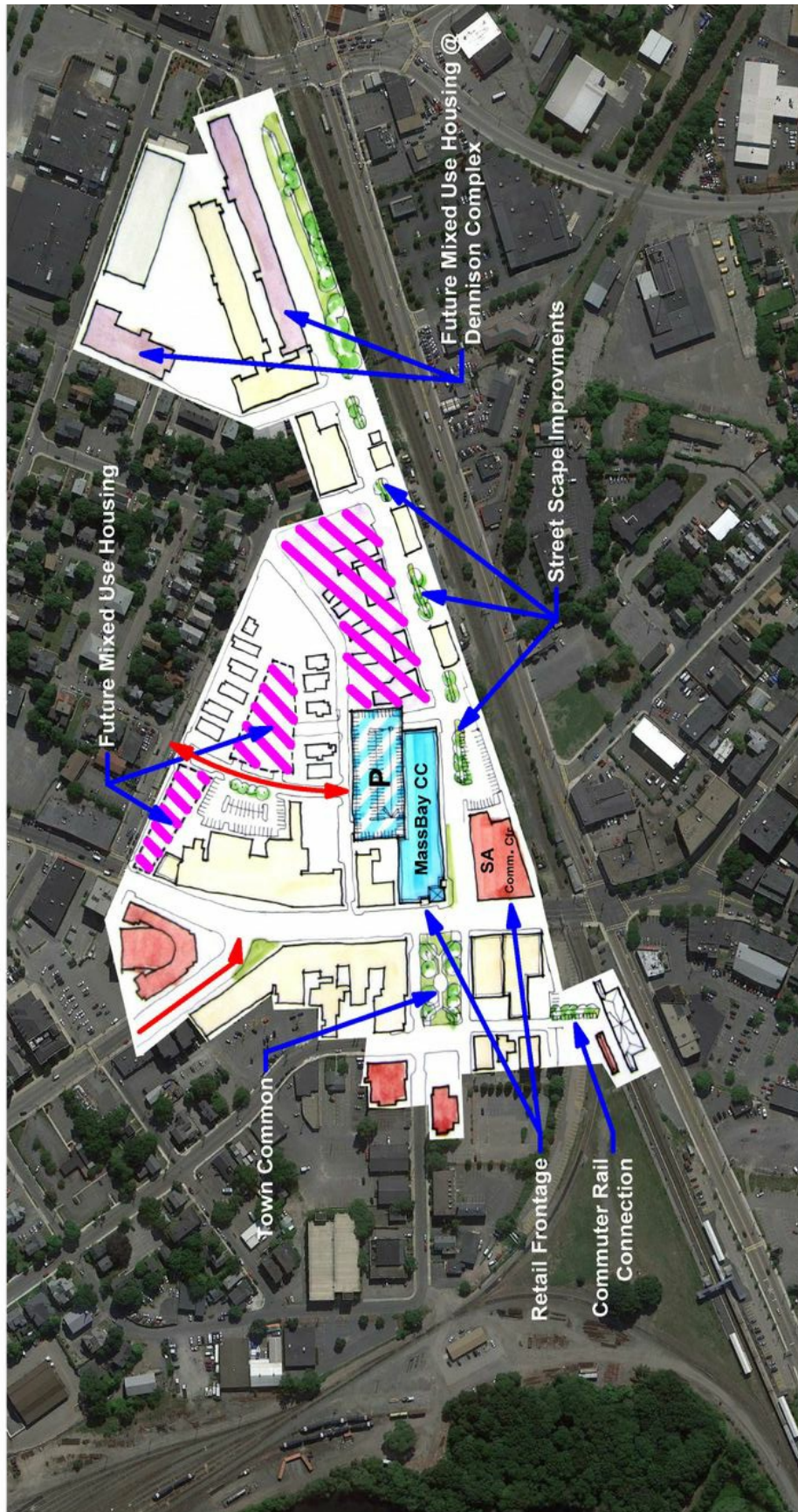
economic development within the downtown. Specific contributing factors could include:

- A location fronting or very proximate to the portions of Concord Street (or Union Avenue) characterized by dense commercial activity and buildings accommodating such activity.
- An ability to place a bookstore and/or cafeteria/café/restaurant fronting directly on the above-referenced commercial corridor (which could be accomplished by locating these elements separately from the main campus).
- A location proximate to the commuter rail station (and also north of the tracks) to promote mass transit use by MassBay students, faculty, staff, and visitors, and generate pedestrian activity for the downtown.
- Close proximity to the Town Common, so this could serve as a shared public-oriented campus green for MassBay and benefit from the activation that MassBay users (and possibly, programming and security) could contribute to it.
- The ability to provide a parking deck proximate to underutilized property which might be made available for shared use, promoting redevelopment of such property.

The Concord Street/Howard Street intersection presents an optimal combination of attributes to meet the above revitalization and redevelopment criteria – providing maximum benefit for the downtown from the MassBay relocation, as well as providing significant benefits to MassBay and its students. Concentrating the campus there can take full advantage of the nearby commuter rail station, the Town Common, and the existing commercial concentration along that portion of Concord Street. The proximity to these assets



Aerial photo focusing on properties in western portion of study area



Concept plan

would encourage maximum interaction of the students, faculty, and staff with the downtown and its businesses, whereas a location further removed from these assets might result in a drive-in/drive-out dynamic. If that corner can be anchored and activated, it would enhance the potential for more intense use and redevelopment of existing buildings and new development along the two corridors running off that intersection.

No school is an island

It is important that the MassBay campus be designed not as an isolated island but, rather, to extend its positive effect out into the community.



Emerson College bookstore brings life to Tremont Street

Public-oriented program elements such as the bookstore and café should be located directly on Concord Street to reinforce pedestrian activity in the downtown. The relocation of Emerson College to the area previously known as the Combat Zone in downtown Boston is a good example of the positive impact such a campus presence can have if fully integrated into its neighborhood.

Activate Town Common

Efforts should be made to enhance the campus setting by activating the Town Common on Concord Street as a College Green or “Quad” for MassBay, with this activation serving to make it more attractive to the community at large. One idea would be to put some type of food service



Town Common could become activated with an outdoor café

there, with outdoor seating during the temperate months. The campus bookstore/café or an independent operator might run a pop-up coffee or sandwich concession; perhaps tai chi classes or other outdoor wellness activities could enliven the space.

Fabric Place and assemblage of other properties

The Fabric Place property, with assemblage of ancillary property, represents a great opportunity at the optimum location to accommodate the entire MassBay program on one site. The core Fabric Place property is underutilized and on the market for sale. If not used for this purpose, given the problematic prospects for appropriate urban development, it is possible it might be redeveloped at a density and design more appropriate to a suburban location. With the addition of two small parcels fronting Kendall Street, the site would be large enough to accommodate MassBay’s build-out program as well as an attached garage with approximately 100 spaces per level (integrated with automotive workshops). Conceptual design assumed a MassBay building of four stories and a parking deck with three to six levels (perhaps starting a half-level below grade) depending on parking requirement. The only property not owned by the Fabric Place owner necessary to assemble this larger site is a storefront church, which might be receptive to relocation to an appropriate facility.

There may be other solutions (e.g., split campus) if the full assemblage is not possible or alternate locations are considered preferable for some components of the MassBay program, which would have to be explored through further programming and design efforts.

Opportunity for shared parking

Another significant benefit of siting MassBay and its parking deck at the Howard/Concord corner is the possibility that it could provide evening shared use (to the extent that there is excess capacity in evening hours) for residential units at the Kendall Hotel (which has no parking) and potentially for other future residential developments east of the MassBay campus (including perhaps a portion of the parking needed for the proposed residential project on the Arcade property). The availability of low-cost evening parking could be a considerable incentive for such development while also providing some revenues to MassBay.

Alternate siting approaches

The Panel believes MassBay's and the Town's redevelopment goals can be maximized by siting all or most of the campus in the southern portion of the downtown core – close to both Concord Street and the commuter rail – and that the Fabric Place property provides an available site well-suited to these objectives. In the event that all or some of this recommended site cannot be assembled or is considered inappropriate for other reasons, the Panel encourages MassBay and DCAMM to consider alternate site(s) that would provide similar redevelopment benefits for the downtown and benefits to MassBay. Splitting the campus might be one option: Some of the program might be placed on the Fabric Place site or some other site (or multiple sites) in the vicinity of the Howard Street/Concord Street intersection, with other program elements located elsewhere in the downtown – though, preferably, still close to Concord Street. Although more complicated to implement and operate, if not spread too far apart, this could further the goal of promoting pedestrian activity.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army building at the southeast corner of Concord and Howard Streets is owned by two separate entities within the Salvation Army organization. Both entities seem at present to be committed to retaining ownership of the building at this pivotal location. They acknowledge their prime location and are working with an architect to figure out how best to take full advantage of the prominent site in both physical appearance and programmatic functions.

The Panel feels it important to respect the valuable work being done by the Salvation Army, as well as their desire to remain close to their client population, but encourages exploring how the various missions of the organization can be advanced while at the same time enhancing the environment and prospects for revitalization of downtown Framingham.

There are many examples of Salvation Army facilities across the country that contribute to the vibrancy of their communities, combining their core mission activities with broader community uses, such as providing meeting space, sports and



Existing Salvation Army building; new Kroc Center of Boston

fitness facilities, after-school programs, and events of general interest, in attractively designed facilities. In the Greater Boston area, the Salvation Army's new facility in the Dudley Square area of Boston provides a great example of the asset such a facility can represent to its community.

The panel recommends that the frontage along Concord Street be designed to incorporate new retail space, with the main entry for Salvation Army services and programs moved to the Howard Street side. There may be opportunities for sharing facilities with MassBay, such as a gymnasium, as well as providing community service opportunities for MassBay students – perhaps staffing a healthcare clinic with students from their highly regarded nursing programs.

Howard Street Corridor (East of Recommended MassBay Site)

The land on the southern side of Howard Street is considered to have limited development potential due to its relatively shallow depth (especially east of the Salvation Army building) and its adjacency to the railroad tracks.

The Dennison Triangle has potential for redevelopment as the market recovers. The space which SMOC is relocating from is likely in a condition that will allow it to be released to another non-profit or private office tenant(s) without major redevelopment. Artist studio space might also be a possibility for all or some of the space, given the proven market for this in the downtown Framingham area (albeit at relatively low rents). The vacant building on Bishop Street appears to have had significant shell renovation which would also position it for re-use without the huge investment that often makes a gut rehab infeasible. The key factor will be attracting tenants to these buildings, which is related to the image and appeal of downtown Framingham. A relatively proximate MassBay campus and the transformative impact it may have changing the amenity, activity, and image of downtown can provide a big boost to marketing this space. MassBay may even provide some direct market to the extent it generates business activity or incubator space.

The development potential of the properties on the north side of the street between the Fabric Place and Dennison is limited by the disparate ownership pattern and the limited market support for new development. With a neighboring MassBay campus, proximity to an enhanced downtown core, and, possibly, available evening parking capacity at the MassBay garage, prospects for redevelopment of this area would be significantly enhanced. Mid-rise or dense townhouse style residential, capitalizing on nearby transit, would be an appropriate use, though market-rate development would likely still require considerable assistance to be feasible under typical development investment return parameters, at least until the full effect of the revitalization effort is realized, and perhaps even after that. Development of high-quality, well-managed, mid-rise affordable housing could also be appropriate for this area. Potential for retail in this mid-block area would seem limited and any significant amount of retail use (unless a destination anchor) could siphon some of the market that should be focused on the Concord Street spine. This area may present an opportunity for further MassBay expansion/consolidation or business activity or incubator space generated by or related to MassBay.

In the event MassBay does not locate at the Fabric Place site, mid-rise residential with mixed-use ground floor retail would be an appropriate use, though market rate would likely require considerable assistance to be feasible under typical development investment return parameters. The Concord Street frontage should be retail and the ability to include a significant amount of this mixed-use element could enable the development to benefit from Tax Increment Financing and, possibly, New Markets Tax Credits (which is available to projects in areas which meet certain criteria of economic distress).

The relocation of the MassBay campus to downtown Framingham is the clear first step in the transformation of the area. But the beginnings

of a solid foundation have already been put in place through the efforts of the Framingham Downtown Renaissance organization, with programming such as art shows and a farmers' market that makes the downtown a destination where people want to be, and can ultimately lead to the development of successful retail, commercial, and housing ventures.

There are additional measures that can improve the experience of people on the street and jumpstart the area's revitalization that can be implemented independent of the MassBay campus plans:

Safety perceptions

Although the downtown in reality is not a high-crime area in terms of personal or property incidents, there is a widespread perception that it is not a safe place to walk around. It is important to address the perception of safety in the downtown area. Based on the experiences of other cities, establishing a police sub-station and regular waking detail along the Howard Street corridor could improve the feeling of safety along the sidewalks. Alternately (or supplementing Town actions), MassBay's security operations and the increased activation of nearby areas could also play a major role in enhancing safety. Improving crosswalk and bicycle safety could also make the streets more appealing to pedestrians and cyclists, and attract new life to the street.

Traffic and rail signal efficiencies

The Town should continue to work with the State to improve traffic and rail signal efficiencies to exercise all available steps to reduce the time spent stopped in traffic. Although long-term infrastructure projects like the creation of an east-west underpass along Route 135 may ultimately be the best solution, there seem to be simpler, more readily achievable operational improvements that could be investigated in the near term.

Promoting restaurants

An active restaurant scene can be a major contributor to enhancement of image, visitation, and market perception supportive of other uses



Waltham's Main Street has become reinvigorated by an influx of small restaurants offering diverse cuisines

such as residential. With its relatively underutilized, low-cost commercial space, urban environment, and ethnic flavor, surrounded by a more traditional suburban market, downtown Framingham has similar attributes to those which contributed to a downtown revival in Waltham which started with the attraction of restaurants. Especially with Brazilian steakhouses popping up all over the country, this may be a particularly opportune time to promote and assist such use in the downtown.

Self-reinforcing cycle

All of these improvements would catalyze a self-reinforcing cycle: sidewalk vibrancy would enhance efforts to attract shoppers, diners, artists, and ultimately residents, which would drive the demand for multi-family housing, which would in turn create the need for retail goods and services, and other tax-paying entities, and result in even more robust street life; and thus the cycle continues.

5. Implementation

Site Acquisition

The Panel recommends that the Town of Framingham encourage the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) and MassBay Community College to pursue the Fabric Place site for the location of a new campus. In the event DCAMM and MassBay do not feel they can play a proactive role in pursuing a particular site and must, instead, evaluate sites proposed in a competitive RFP process, the Panel recommends that DCAMM and MassBay place a high priority in its selection criteria on redevelopment impact of alternate sites; and the Town take a proactive role in either assuring that the Fabric Place and assemblage property owners make a proposal at a reasonable price in response to the RFP; or, in the event the Town cannot reliably otherwise ensure the owner(s) make such a proposal, consider the Town acquiring an option(s) and responding to the RFP, and that the Town give strong consideration to putting the possibility of eminent domain squarely on the table if agreement cannot be reached otherwise. While the appropriateness of using eminent domain is something a municipality must determine for itself based on its own calculations, we note that a taking of a mostly unused private property which is currently on the market for a public facility such as MassBay would represent a very defensible use of this power.

Vision for the Downtown

There was uncertainty among the various stakeholders interviewed by the Panel about what the Town's broader vision for the downtown is – or if one even exists. It is important that the Town unify and clarify its vision for the downtown area, then clearly and actively communicate that vision

to others in the community and beyond, and advocate for its realization at every opportunity.

Expedited Permitting

The economics of multi-family and commercial development in Framingham are extremely difficult, and any action the Town can take to reduce the cost of development in Framingham would improve feasibility. For example, a long and expensive permitting process is discouraging to developers. Streamlining the town's permitting process would help make Framingham a more "developer-friendly" municipality, which would help spur new projects in the downtown.

One specific area to address is the requirement that projects of over 8,000 gross square feet require a special permit. Framingham should clearly state in their zoning bylaws the desired uses and outcomes and allow such development to proceed "as of right" with the least cost or delay as possible.

Traffic and Parking Management Plan

The Pearl Street garage is an underutilized asset; several other opportunities for improving the flow of vehicular traffic through the downtown are being evaluated and should be moved forward without delay.

Tax and Other Incentives for Targeted Development

Tax Increment Financing, which can be applied to job-producing development uses, can be a

powerful tool in terms of encouraging the types and locations of development consistent with the Town's overall vision for revitalization. This incentive reduces the operating costs of new development, thus allowing projects to access greater amounts of financing. While the town forgoes the full increase in property tax revenues, property taxes are greater than in the no-build scenario, and over time increase to the normal established rates.

Projects that include a significant non-residential component may pursue New Markets Tax Credits, assuming downtown Framingham meets the criteria of economic distress.

Various affordable housing financing programs may present a realistic approach for making development feasible in the near term. Currently evolving State Transit-Oriented Development funding could be appropriate as the program clarifies and is funded.