



# 3. Strategies for Growth and Change

As Lowell evolves, it will encounter new opportunities and challenges that shape its growth and transformation. This plan provides a significant opportunity for us as a city and community to prioritize the specific enhancements we value for our neighborhoods and to determine the extent of change we are comfortable with. Within this chapter, you will find strategies aimed at guiding and shaping sustainable and equitable growth and development in Lowell. These strategies were created in collaboration with the community and informed by many conversations and feedback received throughout the engagement process.

Intended audience for this chapter: **action takers**

## Well-managed and strategic growth is essential to make our city more affordable, equitable, and resilient.

The concept of growth and change often sparks complex and multifaceted discussions among residents, businesses, and various stakeholders. Determining where growth is appropriate, the types of growth needed, and who reaps its benefits can lead to divergent opinions and concerns. Lowellians may have differing perspectives on preserving the character of existing neighborhoods versus embracing development in certain areas to revitalize the city. The nature of growth—whether it's focused on infrastructure, housing, commercial and recreational amenities, or larger economic development initiatives, can also bring about contrasting perspectives. Addressing these perspectives necessitates thoughtful and comprehensive planning approaches that weigh trade-offs, incorporate compromises, and aim to maximize community benefits.



Differing perspectives and opinions aside, the reality remains that evolving dynamics, influenced by economic, environmental, and social factors, will continue to shape the trajectory of our city's growth. For instance, in areas close to Downtown and other parts of Lowell, we see ongoing interest from developers to build more. The growing attention from private developers aligns with the community's desires for enhanced infrastructure, affordable housing, education, and cultural amenities. Yet, if not overseen or regulated effectively, private development might yield undesirable and unintended consequences including gentrification, displacement, and the loss of community identity. Recognizing that change and development interest is an ongoing factor in the growth of Lowell, proactively planning and managing this growth is essential to ensure it aligns with and advances our community's long-term vision and values.

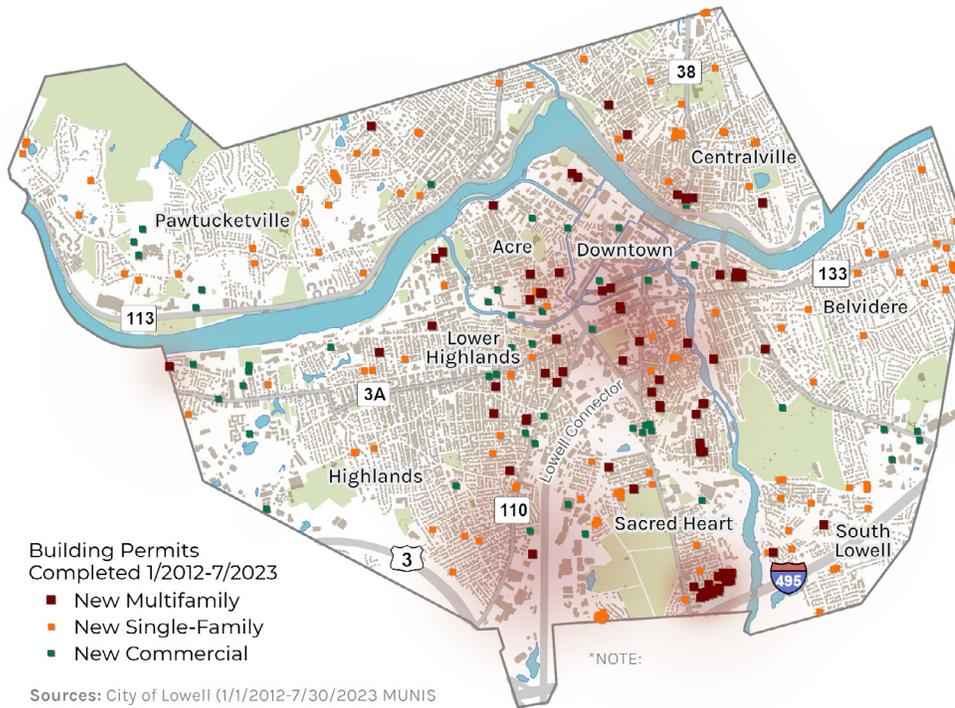
**Lowell Forward aims to establish a clear framework and path to navigate, oversee, and direct land use and development to serve the best interests of our community!**



**Acre Crossing**  
Photo Credit: City of Lowell



**555 Merrimack**  
Photo Credit: City of Lowell



Building Permits Completed 1/2012-7/2023

- New Multifamily
- New Single-Family
- New Commercial

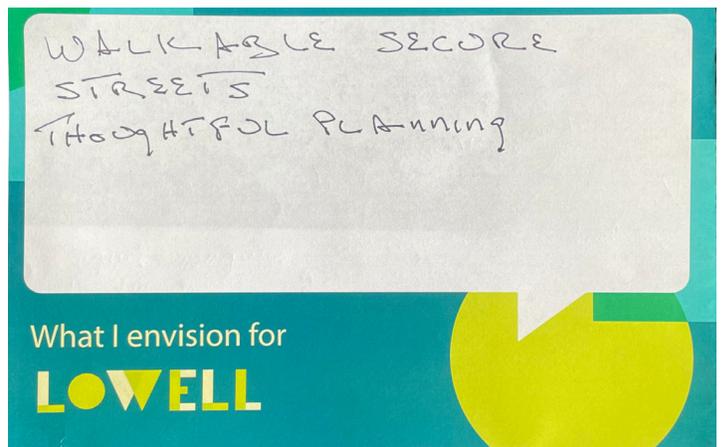
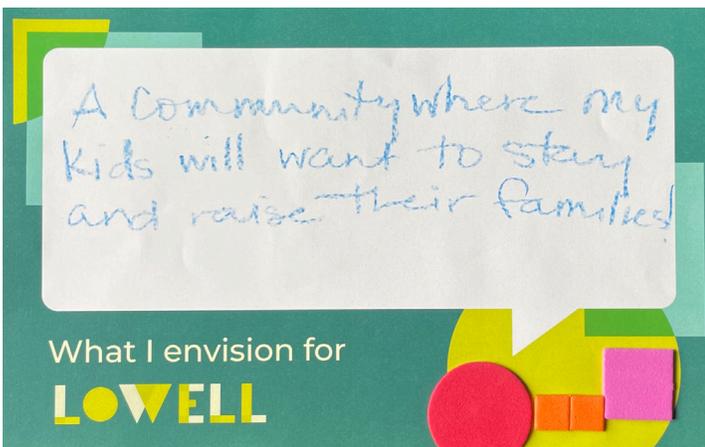
Sources: City of Lowell (1/1/2012-7/30/2023 MUNIS building permits); MassGIS (town boundaries, buildings, open space); MassDEP (hydrography).  
Produced by NMCOC 1/3/2024

**Top:** New residential developments that are environmentally sustainable and include income-restricted housing.

**Top Left:** Acre Crossing Residents will have 30+ income-restricted homeownership units. Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership is the lottery agent for this new development at 650 Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA.

**Top Right:** 555 Merrimack will have 27 units have a preference for households with income at or below 60% AMI that also qualify for voluntary services, including supportive services focused on recovery from substance.

**Left:** Building Permits completed for new multifamily, single family and commercial projects between January 2012 and July 2023 use disorder.



Comment Cards from participants at the Public Workshop 2 focused on Growth Strategies.

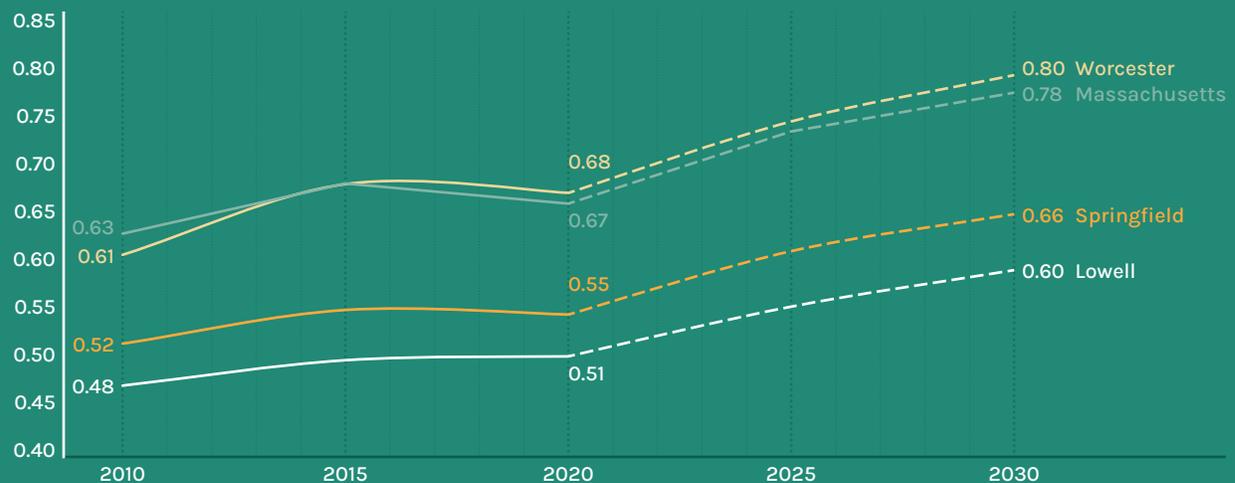
## What does sustainable growth mean for Lowell?

Growth encompasses a much broader spectrum than simply increasing our population. It's about enhancing the overall well-being of our existing communities while considering sustainable, equitable and inclusive development. Quality of life improvements, such as access to better employment, education, healthcare, and cultural opportunities, are all fundamental aspects of growth. Sustainable growth involves optimizing our existing resources rather than just expanding them. Efficient use of our existing infrastructure, promoting environmental-friendly practices, and preserving our natural spaces are all important elements of growth.

## What does the data tell us?

Lowell's population is stagnating, and it is projected that this trend will continue over the next two decades as people slowly move out of the city. Unlike population, Lowell jobs are expected to grow over the next decade by 17%, although this projected job growth is still below projections for other peer cities and the statewide average. Lowell's ratio of jobs to population—an indicator of a city's ability to attract and retain resident workers—is increasing, although it is lower than peer cities and the statewide average. If this trend continues, Lowell will continue to lose its population and economic opportunities to other cities in the state.

Historic and Projected Ratio of Jobs to Population for peer Massachusetts Cities, 2010 – 2030



Source: UMass Donahue and Lightcast

These macro trends are particularly apparent in our Downtown, where there is relatively low presence of residential uses compared to the rest of the city, a lack of street-level activity, and a perception of vacancy.

## Why plan for growth?

Without growth, the City's financial responsibility will add pressure to existing residents to keep funding basic services and City operations. Access to more affordable and diverse housing options, efficient transportation and transit networks, and quality public infrastructure, were the top needs identified by the community throughout Lowell Forward's engagement efforts. Proactively and responsibly planning for growth and development can not only help us meet some of these needs, but also help us shape the change intentionally as much as possible so that it aligns with and advances our goals and values as a city.

## Housing Dynamics:



**More than half** of renter households and more than a third of owner households are housing-cost burdened in Lowell.

Lowell's Downtown and the surrounding areas are home to **underutilized** land with the **potential** to accommodate residential development.



## Downtown Activation:

**79%** of Downtown businesses reported fewer on-site customers in 2021 than 2020.

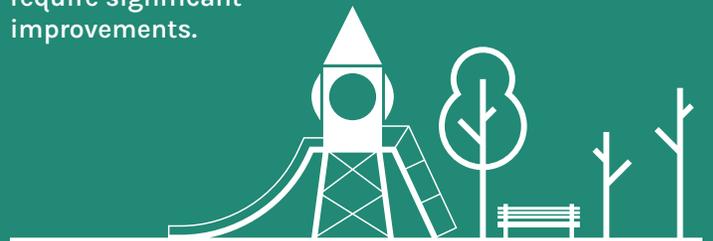


**60%** of Downtown businesses were operating at reduced hours or capacity in April 2021.



**Additional residential development** could address citywide affordability challenges, while greater residential density could drive foot traffic Downtown.

Public realm spaces—**parks, plazas, and streetscapes**—are underutilized, disconnected from activity centers, or require significant improvements.

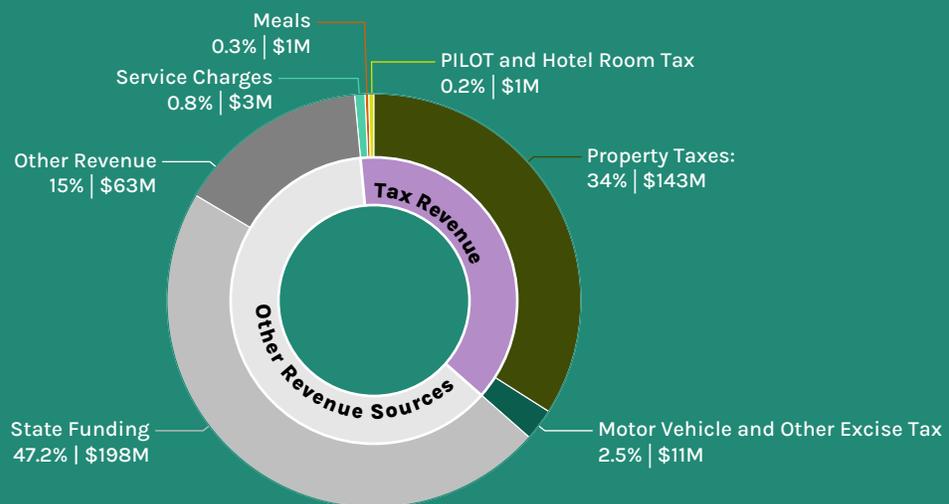


## What can growth do for us?

Well-managed and strategic growth and development can positively impact the City's fiscal sustainability through increased tax revenue and generate more resources for providing, improving, and maintaining quality public services and infrastructure. It can foster more job and educational opportunities for Lowellians, as well as offer new recreational and community amenities. While the housing crisis requires many different policies and programs to address all our community's housing needs, creating new affordable housing programs and adding more affordable units is a major goal for growth in Lowell in this plan. In essence, well-managed and strategic growth can help us provide more options for all family sizes and needs, keep housing affordable for Lowellians, and support fiscal sustainability for high-quality public infrastructure and services, in addition to cultivating job, business, and educational opportunities through economic vibrancy and diversification.

### Intentional Changes in Land Use Can Support Fiscal Sustainability

Most of Lowell's tax revenue comes from its property tax base. Investments in diverse development (including commercial and industrial), can support property values and, in turn, generate greater resources for public services.



Source: City of Lowell

## Growth and development for all

Throughout the Lowell Forward planning process, the planning team engaged the community in workshops and meetings to identify needs and opportunities in the city and neighborhoods, creating an open dialogue about what future growth and development in Lowell could look like. These conversations helped to navigate various complexities and build a more shared understanding of diverse perspectives and needs within the community, ultimately leading to more inclusive and well-thought-out growth strategies. The strategies outlined in the following pages present concepts and ideas for guiding growth, change, and development in a direction that maximizes public benefits while minimizing potential negative externalities that can result from unsustainable development. Two overarching principles for growth, highlighted on the subsequent page, guide these strategies and concepts:

- **Growth should be sustainable, balanced, and integrated**
- **Growth should serve the interests of our community**

## Growth should be sustainable, balanced, and integrated

This means that various development components including land uses, transportation and infrastructural networks, environmental systems, and commercial and community assets, must be **coordinated, connected, and maintained to maximize efficiency and yield positive outcomes** for the community.

Working with City staff and the community, Lowell Forward identifies the physical locations in the city where **integrated growth can help us achieve multiple outcomes for our community**. These are areas that already have sufficient residential and commercial density and existing infrastructure that can be expanded, in order to avoid sprawl and costly, unsustainable outcomes. By focusing on these areas, Lowell can optimize resources and infrastructure while minimizing strain on additional areas. This approach allows for more efficient utilization of existing services and facilities, making it easier to enhance mobility, create new housing options, and foster economic activity.

Concentrating growth in already dense areas promotes a more sustainable urban environment. It supports walkability, reduces commuting distances, and facilitates more mixed-use development—cultivating vibrant communities where Lowellians can live, work, and access amenities more conveniently.



Lowell Forward

## Growth should serve the interests of our community

Growth should help to improve quality of life for Lowellians, and not exacerbate past and existing inequities. Addressing the need for better infrastructure, affordable housing, and enhanced amenities for our communities will require collaborative efforts between the public sector, private developers, community organizations, and residents. Are there **ways in which we can catalyze private development and public investment to maximize multiple opportunities and benefits for Lowell residents?** Where does this occur, how do we make it happen, and what does it look like?

It is important to understand that growth will not look the same everywhere across Lowell, nor does it need to. For some communities and areas in Lowell, more substantial investment and redevelopment will bring about more transformative change in economic activity, quality infrastructure and community well-being. In other areas with stable patterns of development, less change is needed.

Growth and development in Lowell should be approached with context sensitivity. It should consider the nuanced understanding of local dynamics and challenges, and enable development solutions that are better suited and tailored to address specific needs of Lowell's different areas and communities.



Strategies for Growth and Change

# Place Types

Lowell is composed of a diverse set of places with different built forms and land uses. Each place plays a different role in the daily lives of residents, workers, and visitors. Together, these places define the physical and social infrastructure of the city. Throughout this process, the planning team worked with the community to identify the most important places that define Lowell's structure and create a shared mental map that helped to visualize how the city functions today. Identifying and categorizing the various types of places in Lowell sets the groundwork for prioritizing what kind of improvement or change we want to see in places across Lowell.

## Residential Areas



Back Central  
Photo Credit: Utile



Cambodia Town  
Photo Credit: realtor.com



Belvedere  
Photo Credit: realtor.com

## Nodes



Downtown  
Photo Credit: City of Lowell



Cambodia Town  
Photo Credit: Utile



Back Central  
Photo Credit: Utile

## Open Space



South Common  
Photo Credit: Utile



Merrimack River Walk  
Photo Credit: Utile



North Common  
Photo Credit: City of Lowell

## Corridors



Merrimack Street  
Photo Credit: Google Street View

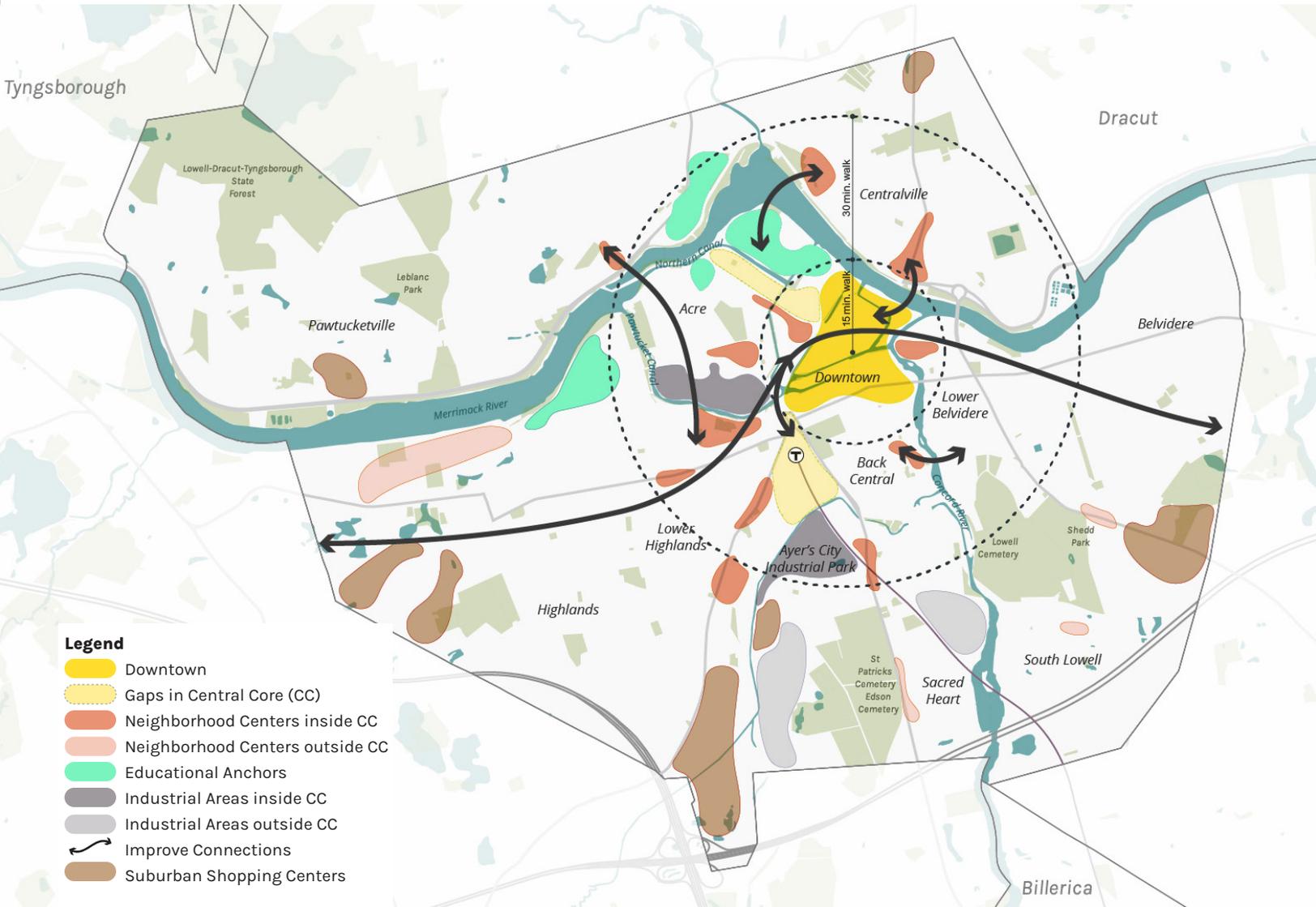


Bridge Street  
Photo Credit: Google Street View



Middlesex Street  
Photo Credit: Google Street View

# Growth Strategies Map



- Legend**
- Downtown
  - Gaps in Central Core (CC)
  - Neighborhood Centers inside CC
  - Neighborhood Centers outside CC
  - Educational Anchors
  - Industrial Areas inside CC
  - Industrial Areas outside CC
  - Improve Connections
  - Suburban Shopping Centers

**Strategy 1**  
Grow and Activate our Downtown



**Strategy 2**  
Build on Lowell's Unique Strengths



**Strategy 3**  
Create Opportunity in Strategic Areas



# 1: Grow our Downtown

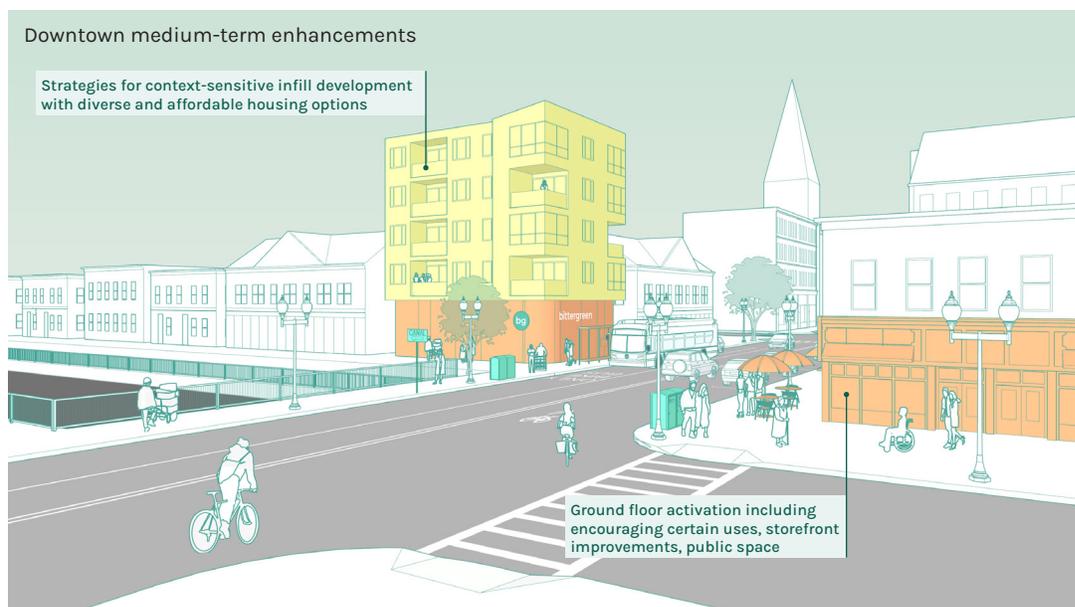
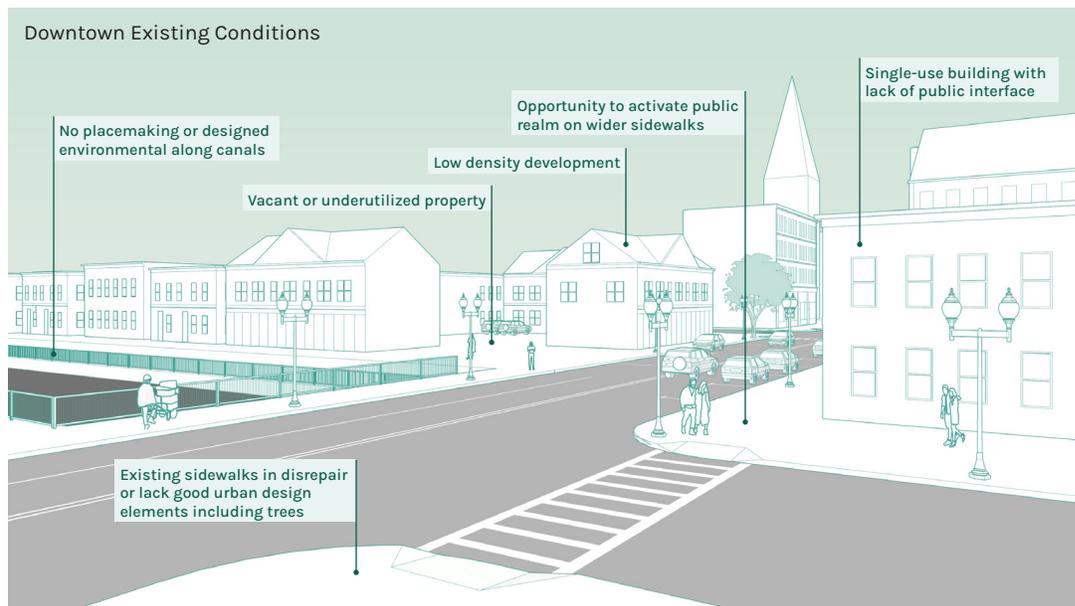
## 1.1: Densify, Activate, and Connect Downtown

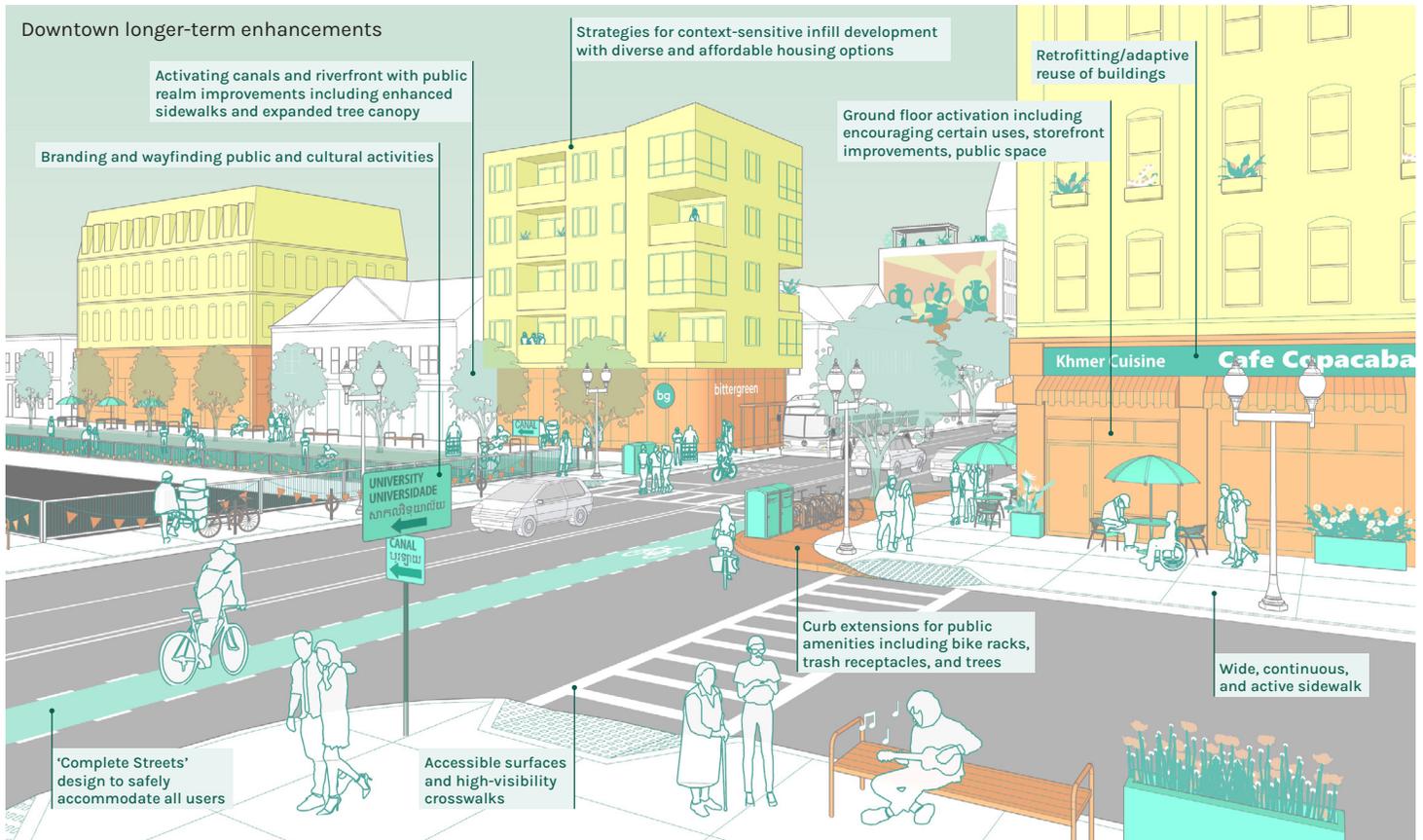
Increase residential density and increase occupancy of commercial uses in Downtown Lowell in order to:

- Drive foot traffic Downtown to support a vibrant, 24/7, mixed-use district that appeals to a broad range of users and bring several benefits to our larger community
- Support Downtown retail that serves residents, workers, students, and others
- Elevate Lowell's "brand" and make it more attractive to employers, residents, and visitors.
- Make living in Lowell more accessible to more people by increasing housing supply and impacting housing affordability

The concepts below illustrate potential incremental development improvements for our Downtown that embody desired economic and community development outcomes. *Note: Illustrations shown are conceptual ideas and reflect general conditions in Downtown and not a specific place or area.*

### Grow Downtown





## What is Infill Development?

Infill development involves locating new development projects on previously unused or underused land within existing urban areas. This practice increases density by placing new development near existing resources and infrastructure and promotes environmentally sustainable urban growth by leveraging existing utility and transportation networks. Well-designed projects can minimize travel distances, reduce car dependency, and make public transit more accessible. Infill development supports diverse and affordable housing options, bringing residences closer to job opportunities compared to suburban developments that may exclude low-income households and place people farther from essential resources.

Future infill projects in Downtown should be context-sensitive and complement the existing development character, especially our historic buildings. One way to achieve this is to set clear design guidelines for desired scale, character, and uses. In addition, we need to establish policy tools to ensure that community interests are protected, including maintaining levels of affordability. Future development in Downtown will be an incremental process, where the success of one well-planned project can establish precedents and standards for subsequent developments.

## 1.2: Activate the Riverfront and Canals

Maximize the potential of our canals and waterways to become a connector, an experience, and an identifier of Lowell by:

- Identifying gaps in the current network of pedestrian and bike access along canals
- Improving pedestrian experience at key intersections/crossings identified
- Enhancing connections between activity centers across the Merrimack River
- Collaborating with community organizations and local anchors to initiate short- and medium-term projects to activate the canals in strategic areas as pilot studies
- Develop a comprehensive canal wayfinding strategy and activation campaign
- Leverage the national park in the heart of downtown

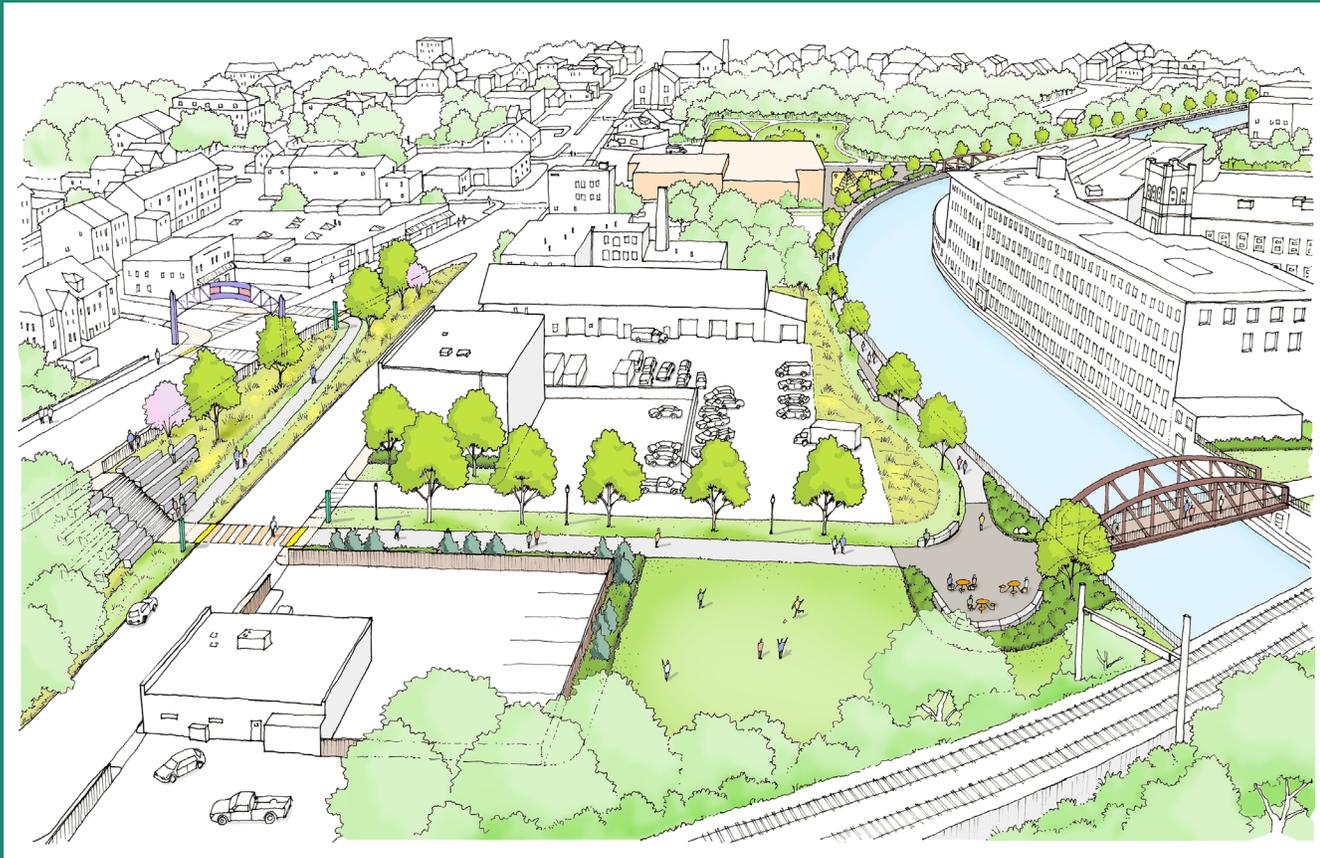
Some short-term and cost-effective activation strategies could include recurring events such as neighborhood parties, fairs/markets, and concert series in key areas identified. Engage local artists and community groups to tell the story of the canals, the industry that occurred and still occurs along them, as well as installations to interact with. In the future, events and cultural projects could be scaled up to draw new visitors within and outside of Lowell.

*Note: There is already a long history of cultural planning and extensive investment around the river and canals. The strategy outlined in Lowell Forward does not entail creating only new initiatives, but building on, supporting, and tying together the great work already being done by our community groups, artists, city departments, and leaders. This includes improving infrastructure along our waterways, creating better wayfinding strategies, and launching promotional campaigns to highlight our city's beautiful features*



Photo Credit: City of Lowell

## Catalytic project (conceptual): Pawtucket Canal



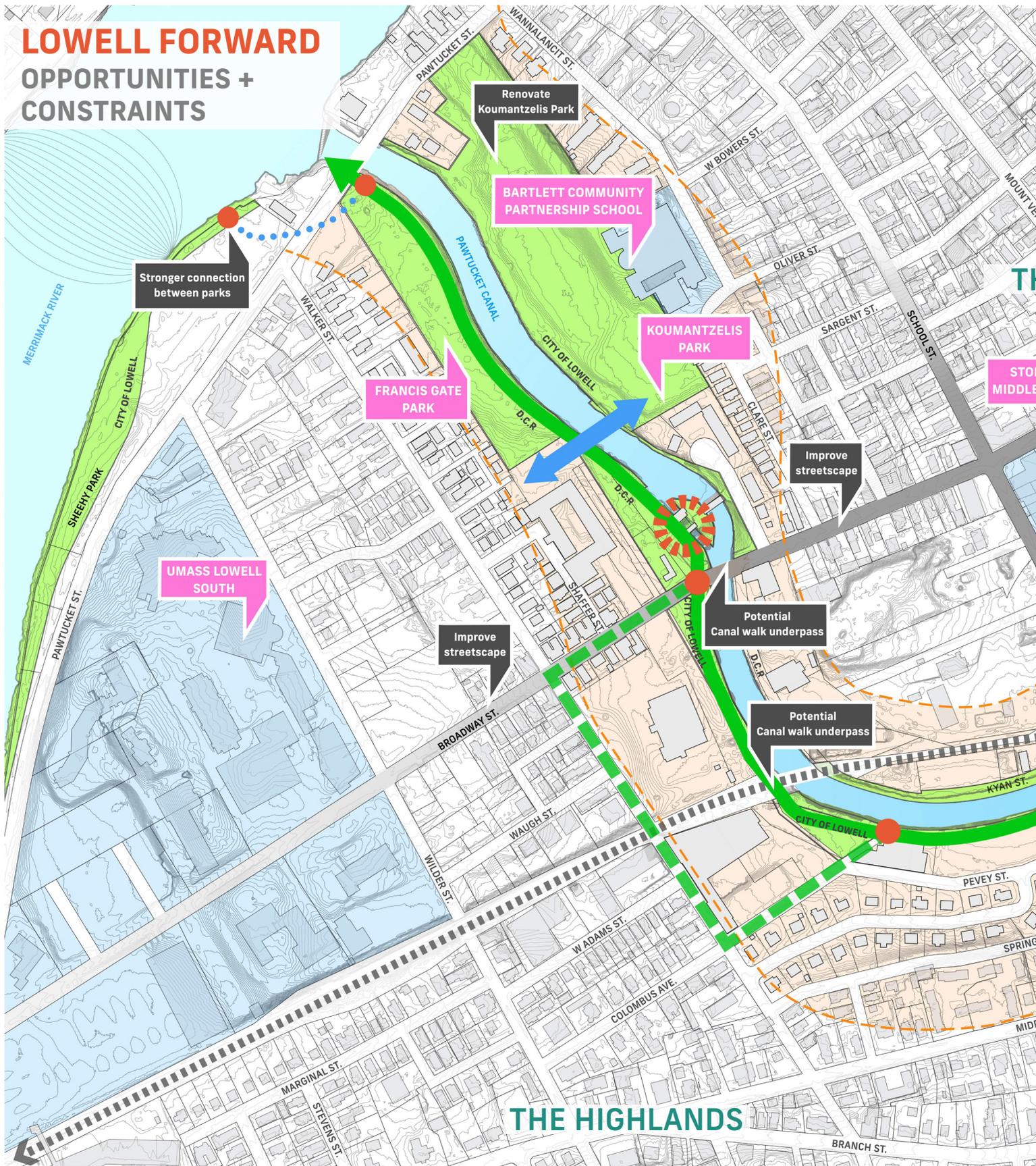
The city's unique network of canals and its source, the Merrimack River, are a defining feature of Lowell, with four main walkways connecting Downtown. However, key gaps exist along the Pawtucket Canal and near the Concord River Greenway's end by the Boott Cotton Mill. The Pawtucket Canal link has long been identified as a potential future link, and its completion would provide an important connection to, and amenity for, the Lower Highlands neighborhood in addition to having a significant impact on residents' and visitors' experience of Downtown.

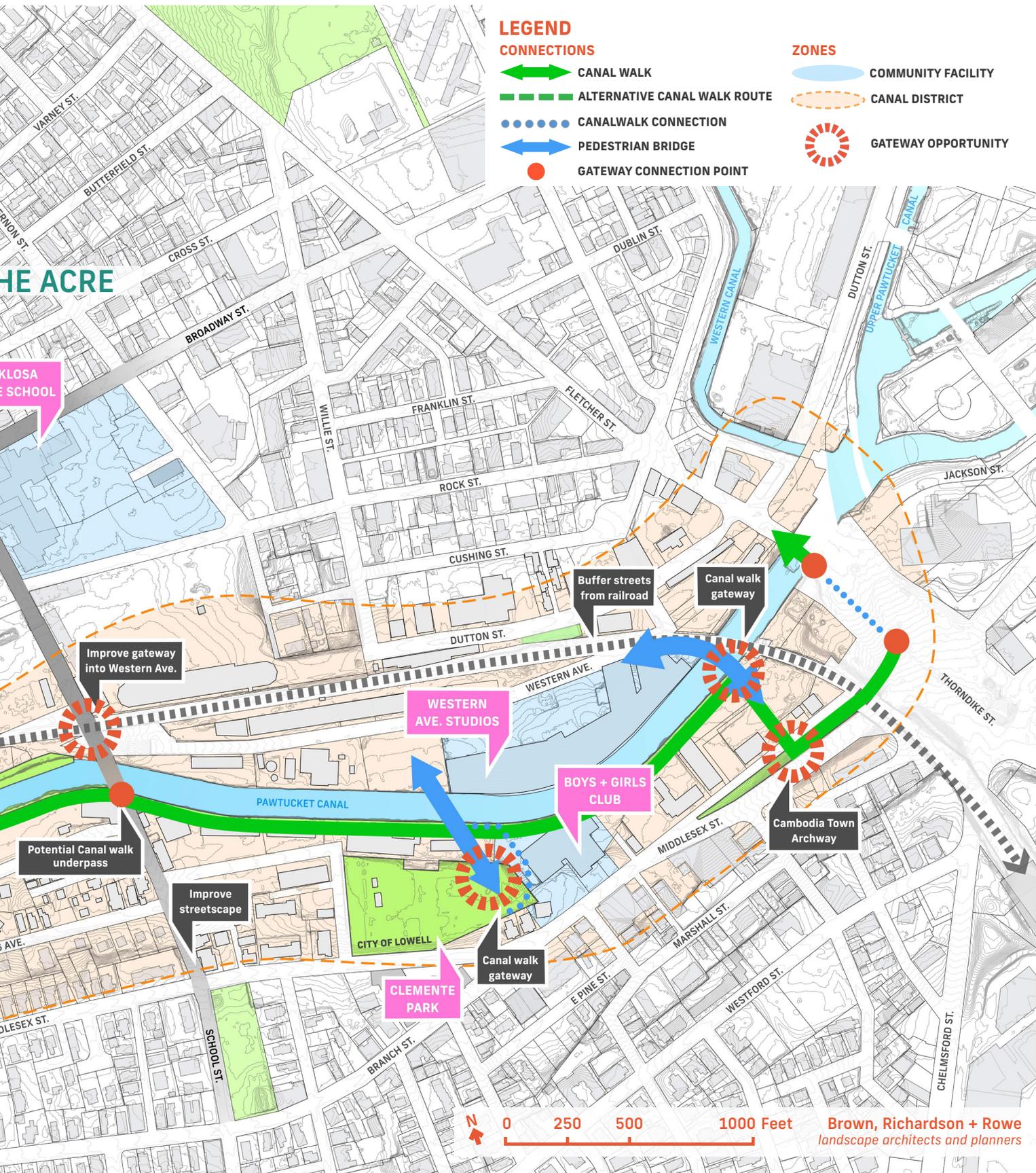
In Lowell, creating new open spaces and public amenities is challenging due to limited undeveloped land in the dense urban area. However, the evolving urban landscape offers a unique opportunity to reimagine the industrial areas and canal banks along the Pawtucket Canal. The Lowell Forward Plan proposes new canal walkways along the canal banks, potentially including pedestrian bridges at strategic points. The plan also foresees utilizing existing parcels along the canal to establish improved connections, possibly extending to the canal's banks, aiming to craft a significant new green space at the city's core.

Since 2006, Lowell, the National Park Service (NPS), and consultants have worked on the feasibility of Pawtucket Canal walkways, uncovering challenges like railway bridge crossings and managing historically industrial soil contamination. Despite these obstacles, the City, with NPS, is committed to pursuing the vision for the Pawtucket Canal walkways. Within the Lowell Forward Plan, prior proposals have been reviewed, outlining an initial vision for this canal network segment. Recent developments along the Pawtucket Canal, including renovations to Clemente Park, approved improvements to the Boys and Girls Club, and plans for various enhancements, suggest growing interest and demand for the new canal walkways.

**The Plan:** The Pawtucket Canal walkways are proposed as 8' to 10' wide paved pathways along the south side of the existing canal, utilizing the Department of Conservation and Recreation's existing easements along the canal edges. These walkways would feature new greenery, seating, and site amenities. Installing pedestrian bridges over the canal would enhance access and link parcels on the northern side to planned amenities in the Highland neighborhood to the south. Connections from adjacent areas like Clemente Park, the Boys and Girls Club, and Middlesex Street would further integrate with the Highland Neighborhood.

# Catalytic project: Pawtucket Canal





**LEGEND**

**CONNECTIONS**

- CANAL WALK
- ALTERNATIVE CANAL WALK ROUTE
- CANALWALK CONNECTION
- PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
- GATEWAY CONNECTION POINT

**ZONES**

- COMMUNITY FACILITY
- CANAL DISTRICT
- GATEWAY OPPORTUNITY

THE ACRE

KLOSA  
SCHOOL

FRANKLIN ST.

ROCK ST.

CUSHING ST.

DUTTON ST.

WESTERN AVE.

WESTERN AVE. STUDIOS

BOYS + GIRLS CLUB

CITY OF LOWELL

CLEMENTE PARK

Canal walk gateway

MIDDLESEX ST.

Cambodia Town Archway

MARSHALL ST.

WESTFORD ST.

EPINE ST.

WESTFORD ST.

BRANCH ST.

SCHOOL ST.

MIDDLESEX ST.

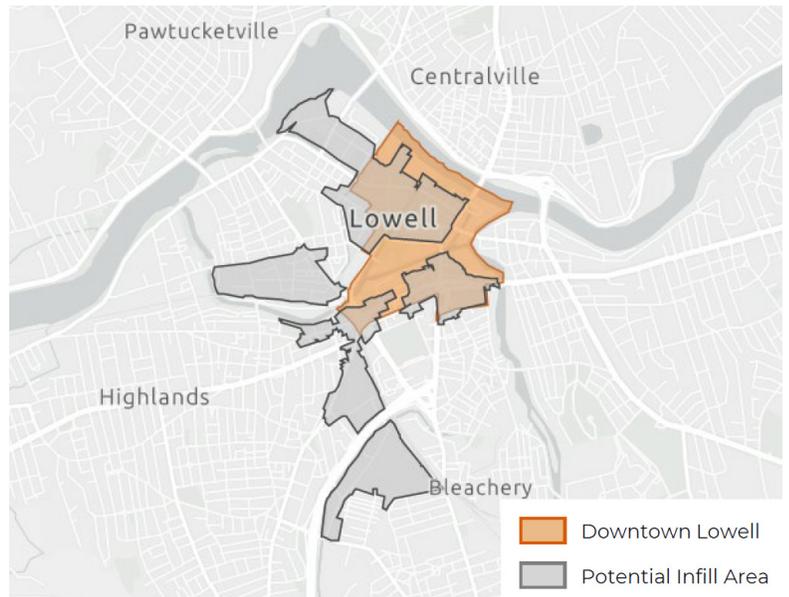


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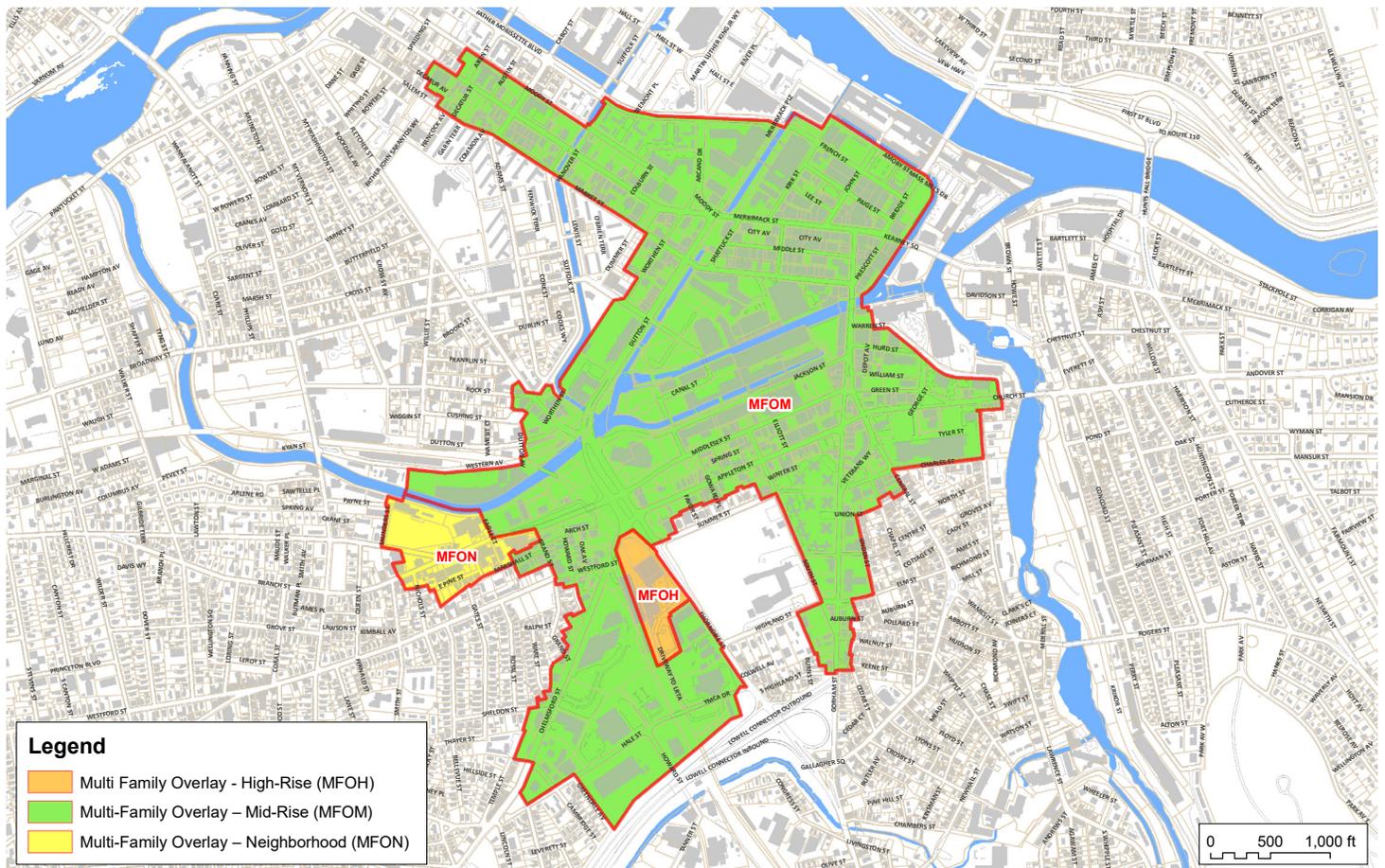
Brown, Richardson + Rowe  
landscape architects and planners

### 1.3: Fill Gaps in the Central Core

Based on site utilization, residential density, and proximity to commercial and transit hubs, the planning team has identified key areas in and around Downtown that could accommodate greater density of commercial and residential density. These areas include the Merrimack corridor area and the area around the Gallagher Station. The City and various community organizations are stewarding several development improvement efforts and partnerships in these areas, including the Transformative Development Initiative in the Acre neighborhood, in partnership with MassDevelopment. Attracting diverse and vibrant commercial and residential activity in and around Downtown can attract private investment, talent, and businesses, and in turn shift commercial property tax burden from landlords to tenants, with generation of additional tax revenue from potential new developments.



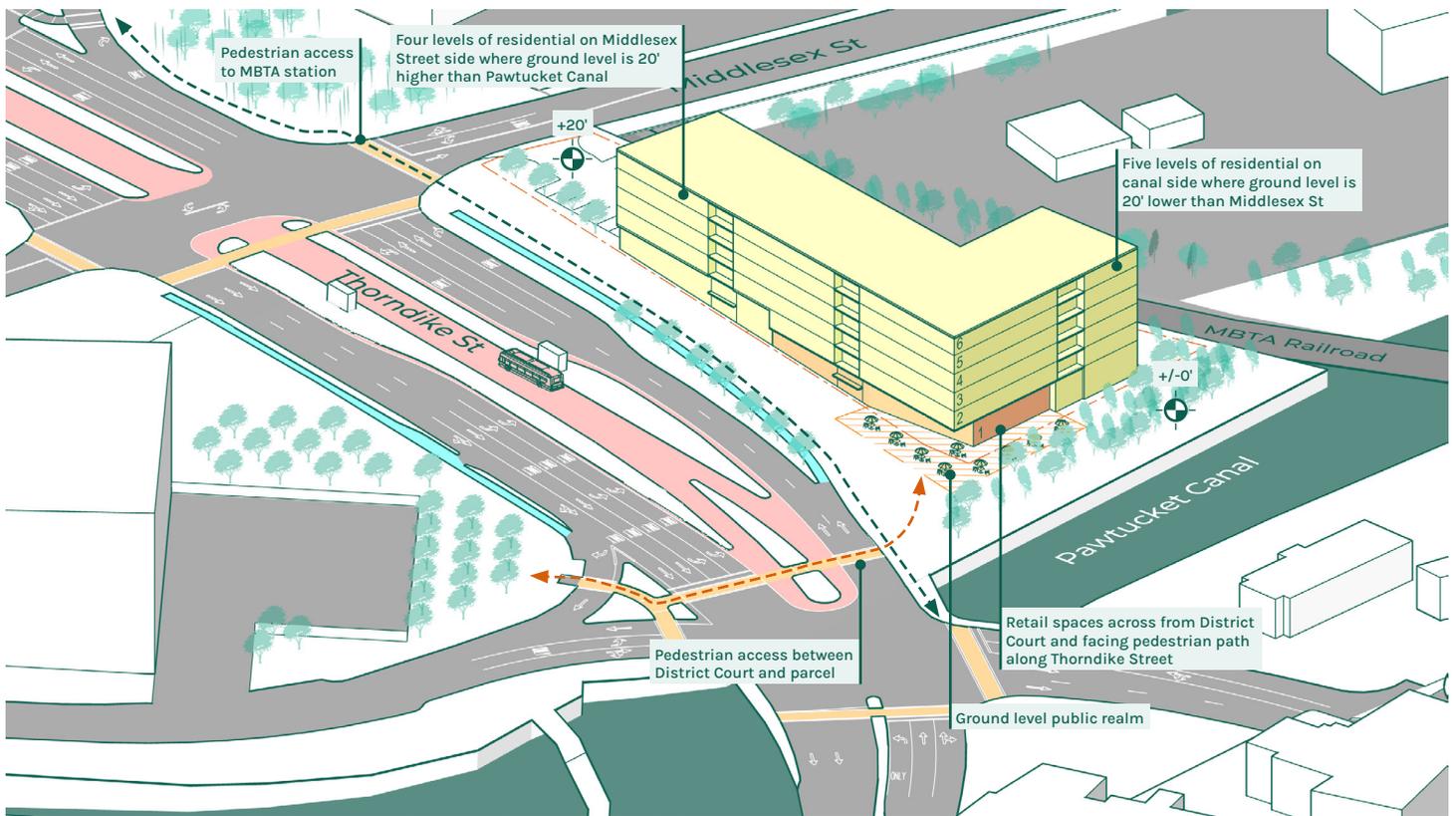
### Transit Oriented Development Zoning Framework



The three zones in the map above intend to step down from high-density high-rise construction at the MBTA station to mid rise on the primary corridors approaching the station, and finally to neighborhood infill around the station at historically-appropriate scale and density. MBTA Communities Overlay Data source: Stantec.

**Catalytic Project: City-owned site by the Gallagher Station**

The area around the Gallagher MBTA station has potential for densification and improved connectivity. Utilizing a city-owned vacant site strategically positioned between Thorndike St, Middlesex St, and the Pawtucket Canal, serves as a catalyst for incentivizing potential private investment and future development. It offers a prime opportunity to foster residential and economic growth and maximize accessibility through mixed-use development. Leveraging public land to catalyze private investment can offer the opportunity to establish longer-term and higher-value goals for our community, and support us in proactively addressing the housing shortage, and better connecting our downtown and central neighborhoods. Moreover, it opens up the opportunity to engage in strategic public-private partnerships and setting a model for what community-centered TOD development could look like in the area.



Conceptual development test-fit of potential multifamily housing with mixed-use component facing Thorndike Street.

**Test-Fit Yield**

Gross Area:	<b>100,000 GSF</b>
Building Height:	<b>60' - 69'</b>

**Levels 2 - 6: Residential**

Total Residential Area:	<b>95,000 SF</b> (90 total units at 900 SF/unit average)
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**Ground Level**

Retail:	<b>5,000 SF</b>
Parking:	<b>50 Total spaces</b>



Photo Credit: Google Earth

## Where to learn more:

### Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Acre

MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) is a program for Gateway Cities designed to accelerate economic growth at the neighborhood level. The program works with local partnerships to foster actionable projects and create more vibrant streets. Lowell's TDI District includes the upper Merrimack and upper Market Street corridors of the Acre neighborhood and is supported and led by MassDevelopment, the Lowell Plan, the Coalition for a Better Acre, UMass Lowell, the City of Lowell, Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union, Community Teamwork, Lowell Housing Authority, and Panella. Recently, the Lowell TDI partnership established a new equipment grant for small businesses in the Acre neighborhood. The grant will help small businesses purchase new equipment and expand their operations and continue to contribute to the unique character and identity of the area.



### Appleton Street Housing Study

The City of Lowell applied for an "Alignment with Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing Grant" (PRO Housing Grant) to create development-ready parcels for future affordable housing projects in the Jackson, Appleton, Middlesex (JAM) area. In anticipation of grant funding, the City is studying housing development opportunities on vacant and underutilized public and private properties along Appleton Street. The study will identify barriers to housing development and prioritize sites for further study if the City receives funding through a PRO Housing grant.

## 2: Build on Lowell's Unique Strengths

### 2.1: Enhance Neighborhood Centers

Our neighborhood centers provide the greatest opportunity for growth and strategic community improvement. Lowell's small businesses are pillars of the city's economy, however, they face ongoing challenges. According to Lowell small businesses owners and business organizations, major challenges faced are:

- Lack of experience and knowledge to run a business
- Low foot traffic with limited and irregular business hours
- Lack of required space improvements in the places leased for business
- Language barriers as many small business owners don't have English as first language
- Safety and security concerns that affects both owners and customer base

Strategies to enhance neighborhood centers and drive economic growth include:

- Promote, support, and grow Lowell's local businesses (see page 81, on Topic specific Goals for detailed action items)
- Strengthen connectivity to and within neighborhoods through multimodal options and safe street design.
- Improving the public realm infrastructure and neighborhood services.
- Promoting contextually sensitive development that enhances neighborhood vitality and celebrates each neighborhood's distinct identity



Neighborhood Center: Existing



Neighborhood Center: Longer-term improvements

## Where to learn more: Cambodia Town Neighborhood Plan

The Cambodia Town Neighborhood Plan is an ongoing partnership between the Lowell Department of Planning (DPD), Lowell Community Health Center (Lowell CHC), Lowell Community Health Center’s REACH LoWELL Program (Lowell CHC REACH LoWELL), and the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA). The Planning Team first approached this initiative through a lens of increasing physical activity by addressing mobility challenges in Cambodia Town, but through the community engagement process it became clear that mobility was not the only built environment factor contributing to negative health outcomes. The project evolved into a Neighborhood Plan addressing four intertwined focus areas:

- Mobility + Connectivity
- Cultural Identity
- Environment + Sustainability
- Economic Development



## 2.2: Leverage Institutional Anchors

Lowell's anchor Institutions including UMass Lowell and Middlesex Community College, provide a strong basis to empower jobs and overall economic growth, and they play a pivotal role in supporting small business growth in the city. Creating strategic partnerships with anchor institutions to support small businesses can boost the city's economy while creating new jobs and adding a rich character to Lowell businesses through:

- Targeted purchasing initiatives that support small business growth, and drive associated hiring
- Skill development and workforce training to align skills of labor force with in-demand occupations
- Partnerships and programming to support the provision of technical assistance, access to funding, and networking for small businesses
- Targeted focus on supporting business owners in minority and immigrant communities
- Workforce development initiatives increase the attractiveness of talent in Lowell, thereby attracting new businesses

In addition to strategic local partnerships, it is important for the City and institutions to better coordinate development projects including campus plan extensions, transportation projects, and infrastructure projects, to ensure adequate connectivity and accessibility in adjacent neighborhoods. Good communication, transparency and engagement with the surrounding communities regarding institution development plans is vital to this process.



**Middlesex Community College**  
Photo Credit: City of Lowell

## UMass Lowell East Campus Initiative

The UMass Building Authority (UMBA) is working with a team led by GMH Communities (a private real estate development company) toward the development of approximately 10 acres of land with improvements, consisting of five parcels on UMass Lowell's East Campus. The property is located along the Merrimack River between two major local attractions, the 7,800-seat Tsongas Center and 5,000-seat LeLacheur Park baseball stadium. While this master planning process is still in its initial phases, it is a prime opportunity for the City and the University to proactively plan and coordinate efforts for improved neighborhood connectivity and robust community engagement.



**UMass Lowell**  
Photo Credit: Jessica Wilson

## Examples of partnerships between Universities and local communities

Lowell can employ strategies to address Downtown vacancy and improve neighborhood connectivity by learning from successful efforts in other cities.



**City:** Philadelphia  
**Entity:** University of Pennsylvania  
**Program:** Buy West Philadelphia

- University requires its large national vendors to partner with local firms and partners with local community orgs. to identify qualified vendors and contractors
- Conducted surveys to understand retail needs of residents and students

**Outcomes:** Annual local spending increased from just over \$1 million in 1986 to \$57 million in 2000.

**City:** Baltimore  
**Entity:** East Baltimore Redevelopment, Inc. (EBRI)  
**Program:** East Baltimore Development Initiative

- John Hopkins deeded 100+ properties it owned to EBRI
- EBRI launched a \$1.8 billion plan in 2003 to redevelop 88 acres, construction of 2,200 mixed-income housing units, 1.1 million SF of life sciences and biotech labs and offices, and retail space

**Outcomes:** The development serves as a magnet to attract new biotech companies to the area, such as Annagen BioTech LLC, Chesapeake Limulabs LLC, and WindMIL Therapeutics.

Source: *Leveraging Colleges and Universities for Urban Economic Revitalization: Anchor Institutions and Urban Economic Development: From Community Benefit to Shared Value* (2011). Photo Credit: City of Philadelphia (left), baltimorefuture.blogspot.com (right)

## Leverage Unique Strengths to Drive Economic Growth

Lowell’s anchor institutions have a powerful impact on the city’s economic growth. They can play a pivotal role in supporting small business growth.

**City:** Durham (+ statewide presence)  
**Entity:** North Carolina Community College (NCCC) System



**Program:** Training for Local Businesses

- NCCC conducts business-focused training programs that service 600-700 local businesses every year
- Services, such as training courses and use of university infrastructure, are free of charge and tailored to the needs of companies

**Outcomes:** Till date, NCCC has started 669 businesses with creation/retention of 6,827 jobs.

**City:** Philadelphia  
**Entity:** University of Pennsylvania



**Program:** Economic Inclusion Program

- The program engages local, minority, and women-owned businesses and residents in the University’s economic activity through targeted purchasing and hiring initiatives

**Outcomes:** In 2015, Penn spent \$122 million with West Philadelphia-based businesses (~13% of the university’s total purchasing), and 48% of new hires across Penn and its health system were local residents (1,572 new hires).

Source: *Leveraging Anchor Institutions to Grow Inner City Businesses—A Resource for Inner City Entrepreneurs* (2010), *Engaging Urban Universities as Anchor Institutions for Health Equity* (2016), North Carolina Small Business Center Network.

# 3: Create Opportunity in Strategic Industrial Areas

## 3.1 Redevelop Underutilized Industrial Areas

There are a number of opportunities to redevelop older industrial sites across Lowell for new economic development and job creation efforts.

### Ayer's City Industrial Park/Tanner Street Corridor

One important and prime area is the Ayer's City Industrial Park or Tanner Street Corridor area, which has direct access to the Lowell Connector Highway and located within close walking distance to Gallagher Terminal. Planning for the Ayer's City Industrial Park commenced concurrent with the City's 2013 comprehensive plan update (Sustainable Lowell) and continues to be an important development goal to advance in Lowell Forward. In terms of growth strategies, this area falls within Lowell's central core, identified in this plan as an opportunity area for new infill development to better connect surrounding neighborhoods, accommodate new uses, and foster economic development.

Below is a **test concept** for the Ayer's City Industrial Park/Tanner Street Corridor area that was generated during the Lowell Forward process to foster discussion with community groups around future industrial growth and development opportunities. The concept explored strategic redevelopment of vacant or underutilized parcels to accommodate modern industrial, research and development, and heavy commercial uses. It also explored street and site layout options to visualize alternatives for enhanced safety and efficiency around truck, vehicular, and pedestrian circulations. Additionally, the concept looks at ways we can activate the underutilized River Meadow Brook, running along the western edge of the district to provide public recreational use as a district-wide multi-use path, which can connect to Lowell's larger system of multi-use paths.



Existing Conditions

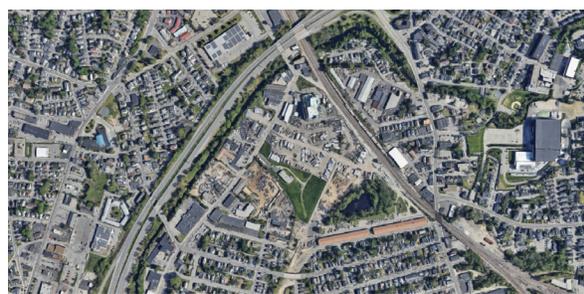
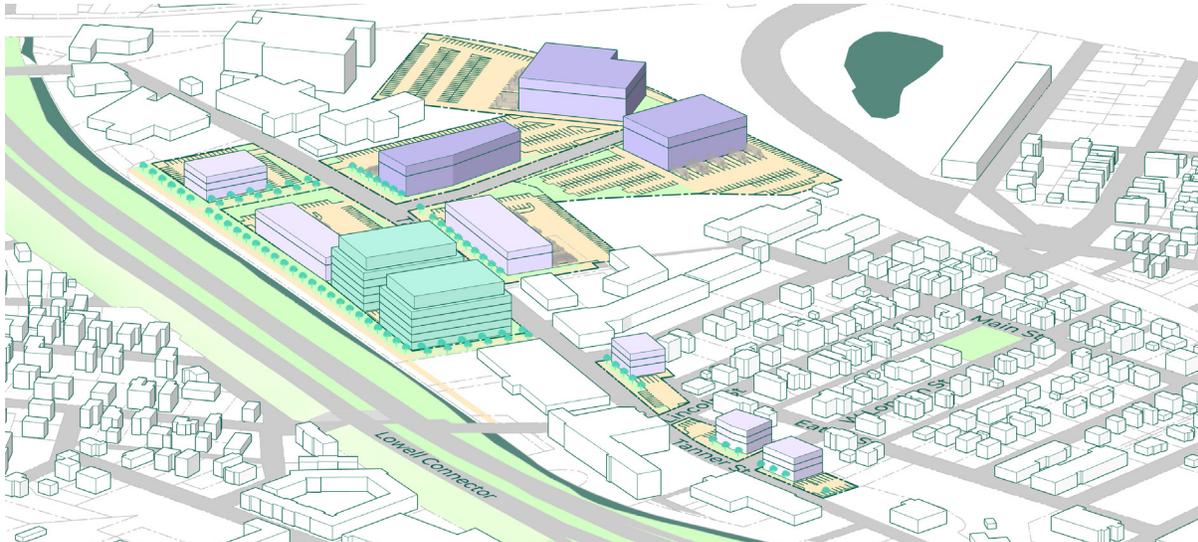


Photo Credit: Google Earth



Test concept for community discussion.

## Where to learn more:

### Ayer's City Industrial Park Urban Revitalization and Development Project (Tanner Street Initiative)

The Ayer's City Industrial Park is a 20-year redevelopment plan for the section of Lowell around Tanner Street roughly bounded by the railroad tracks, Lowell Connector right-of-way, and Plain Street. Ayer's City Industrial Park is the culmination of several recent planning efforts for the Tanner Street corridor. A key component of the Tanner Street District planning effort is the completion of a market research study (currently underway), which will provide a realistic picture of the types of industries and development that can be supported and targeted for the Tanner Street district given existing and future market conditions.



Photo Credit: Google Earth

### Area along Western Ave and the Acre Neighborhood

Another previous industrial area with potential for new mixed-use development including small manufacturing, artist and maker spaces, and residential uses is the area along Western Ave and Pawtucket Canal in Acre neighborhood. As part of its revitalization efforts, the City revisited its zoning codes to accommodate downtown production spaces; an artist district zoning overlay led to the creation of Western Ave Lofts and Studios, a live/work space for over 300 small-scale manufacturers and artists in a historic fabric mill building. Located alongside the Pawtucket Canal, Western Avenue Studios would be a short walk from the Hamilton Canal District and the rest of Downtown Lowell, but many physical conditions including the rail tracks disrupt connectivity. Proactively planning for, and investing in, this area could unlock potential for vibrant mixed-use and creative job development aligned with the City's larger goals for supporting a creative economy.



Photo Credit: Google Earth

## 1999 Acre Plan

The Acre Plan was the product of a 10-month planning process, guided by a 29-member Citizens Advisory Committee made up of representatives from a cross-section of residents, businesses, agencies, and Department of Planning and Development (DPD) Staff, a group that continues to meet today. The City Council approved the Plan in June of 1999 and State approval from the Department of Housing and Community Development was received in January of 2000. Numerous creative partnerships were the key to the success of implementation. Private investment and cooperation, City commitment, Federal and State grants, and non-profit efforts all continue to be vital to making the Acre a liveable community.

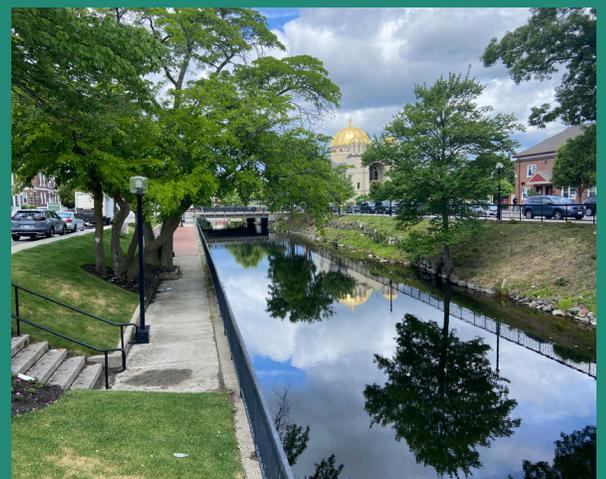


Photo Credit: Jessica Wilson



Photo Credit: Marte Media