

# Downtown Waterville Vision Plan

Final Report September 2023



CITY of  
**Waterville**  
MAINE

# Downtown Waterville Vision Plan

Final Report September 2023

**BEYER  
BLINDER  
BELLE**

Mitchell & Associates Landscape Architects  
BFJ Planning



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# Introduction & Background

**The City of Waterville, Maine has come together as a community to lead a dramatic revitalization of the downtown area since 2016. The success of downtown’s renaissance was built upon the foundation of ongoing efforts over many years by residents, businesses, nonprofits, community groups, local institutions, and the City.**

With the opening of the newly restored two-way traffic pattern and pedestrian streetscape improvements in November 2022, along with many new developments, cultural spaces, and existing and new businesses, downtown Waterville has a renewed economic and community momentum toward a vibrant and exciting future.

With many goals of the 2016 Downtown Plan successfully achieved, the City of Waterville initiated “Phase 2” of downtown planning in 2022, to build on the momentum of recent developments, respond to downtown’s continuing needs and challenges, and prioritize inclusivity to support the whole Waterville community. After a 10-month planning process with robust participation from across the community, the Downtown Vision Plan brings together the vision and aspirations of the city for the future of downtown.

The Downtown Vision Plan will be coordinated with the ongoing citywide Comprehensive Plan, and recommends a wide range of short, medium, and long-term actions and policies to continue improving downtown as a vibrant, thriving destination that supports the entire community, attracts residents, workers, and visitors, and advances the economic vitality of the city.

This report documents the planning process, summarizes input from the community, and presents 20 recommendations across four planning themes for the ongoing enhancement of downtown. The plan is focused on implementation, with goals that can be advanced by the city, but also through the actions and investments of institutions, community members, and the private sector.

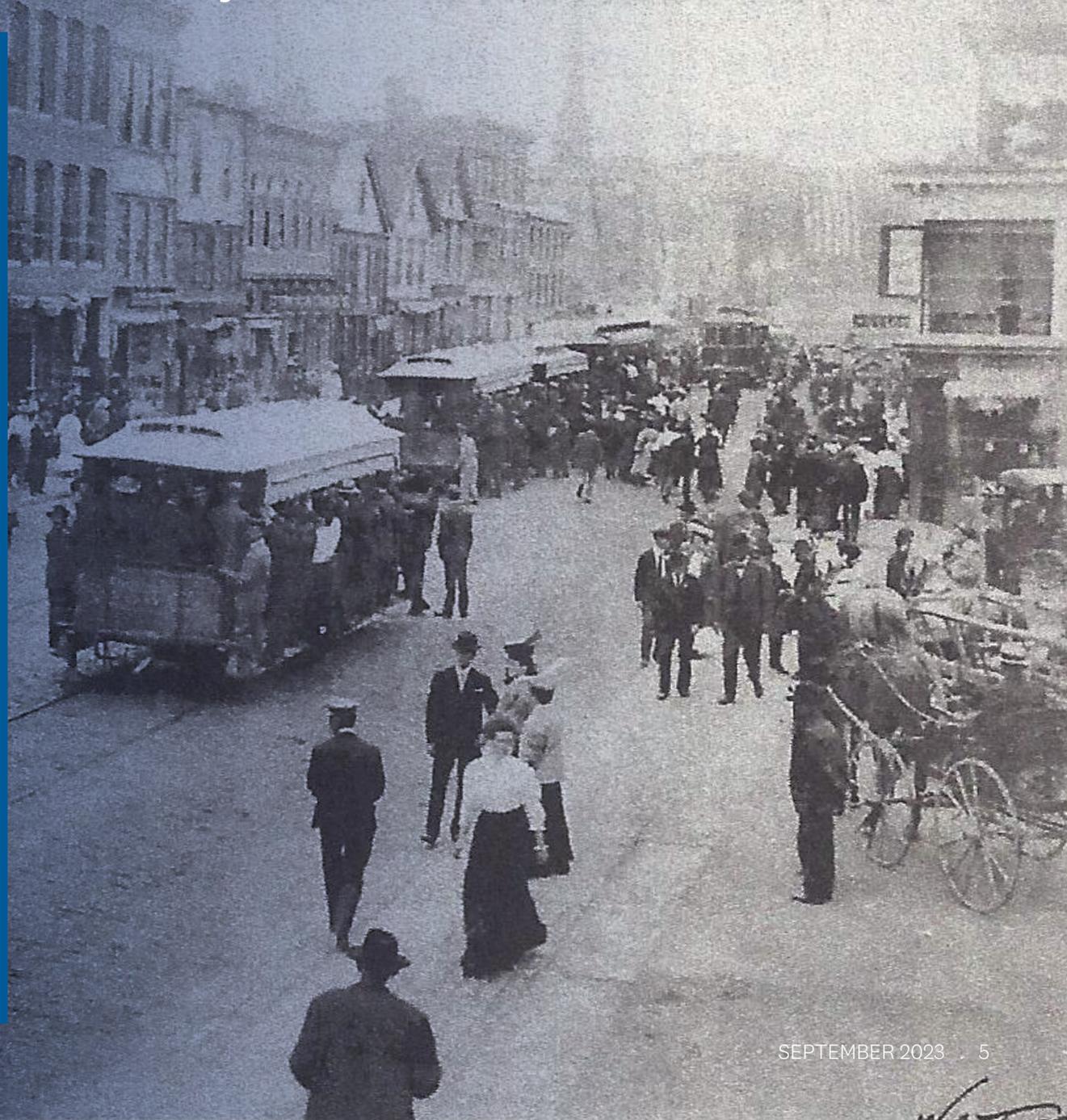
**The City of Waterville is immensely grateful for the participation of residents, businesses, and stakeholders in the downtown visioning process – thank you!**

# Main Street Waterville at the Turn of the Century

**Waterville has a history of overcoming challenges to create a vibrant, thriving downtown that supports the entire community.**

*Highlights from that history that are relevant to this Downtown Vision Plan are drawn from “Water Village: the Story of Waterville, Maine” by Earl H. Smith:*

- Waterville became Maine’s 17th city in 1887.
- By 1904, Main Street was booming and was the retail destination for surrounding towns.
- In 1905 the Waterville Public Library was dedicated. It was established through the leadership of over 50 Waterville women who believed in the importance of education and knowledge to a healthy community. Today, the library again has an essential role in revitalizing downtown for everyone.
- By 1910, Waterville’s industrial might resulted in its welcoming people from all over the world to build their families and businesses. Almost a quarter of the population was foreign born, and then Senator Johnson described it as a place with *“no distinctions of wealth, race, or religion, where everyone is accorded respect due to their lives and work.”*



- Waterville has been debating parking since the car was invented! In 1920 the city put a 1-hour limit on Main Street so shoppers could find parking and installed the first traffic light at Temple Street.
- In 1947 – the city installed meters on Main Street – once again creating debates between the needs of all-day parkers and short-term parking for retail customers.
- Finally, in 1957, the city decided to convert Main Street and Front Street from two-way to one-way. Although it was a well-intentioned plan, it had negative impacts on the walkability and vitality of downtown. Today, with Main and Front once again two-way, we are seeing how our street system can once again support our downtown retail businesses.



**Waterville has become an inspiring example of successful urban revitalization and is being studied across the country.**

- In just one example, NYU sociologist Eric Klinenberg cited Waterville, in his 2018 book about how social infrastructure is vital to strong communities, as a prime example of a “collaborative urban revitalization project that includes business owners, (residents), philanthropic organizations, and civic groups.
- These accolades are well deserved and the result of the hard work of the Waterville community. But challenges remain, and we need to keep working toward a better downtown to cement the gains that have been made.



# What We Heard

## Quotes from community members

All of the recommendations of this Vision Plan are derived from the input we received from the Waterville community and incorporate the many creative and thoughtful ideas and concepts that were generated through the collaborative and participatory planning process.

The quotes from community members shown here represent a small fraction of the input we received, but capture many of the recurring themes we heard about what's currently working in Downtown and where there are remaining challenges.

***“I haven’t seen this level of excitement about downtown Waterville in 35 years.”***

***“You see Waterville in a whole new way – you see so much more of the storefronts and notice the buildings.”***

***“Everything slows down, it’s more enjoyable to walk and to cross the street.”***

***“We need businesses, we need housing, we need to make residential more affordable.”***

***“Main Street turns its back to the Concourse – let’s knit them together again.”***

***“Affordable retail is a lifeline of the communities.”***

# Goals for the Study

Why does Waterville need a new Downtown Plan and what are the goals for this plan?

## 1. Many goals of the 2016 plan have been achieved – plan for what's next

- ▶ Many of the concepts from the 2016 plan have been successfully implemented. Of the 10 original goals, 8 have been achieved or are making great progress. This plan is an opportunity to decide what should come next, what is missing, what should be adjusted, and how to leverage the current energy to keep improving downtown.

## 2. Respond to downtown's continuing needs, challenges, and opportunities

- ▶ Although a lot has been achieved, there is still a lot to do. Waterville still has empty storefronts, small businesses that need support, and residents that need many types of services. There have been many successes, but challenges remain. Waterville needs a Downtown where not some, but all elements are successful.

## 3. Prioritize inclusivity so downtown supports the whole Waterville community

- ▶ The City Council and City administration have made inclusivity a major priority of this plan. This plan will strive to ensure that a successful downtown benefits everyone, and makes all feel welcome regardless of background, economic status, or age. This is Waterville's downtown, and it needs to serve all of Waterville.



**WEST OF MAIN**

**MAIN STREET**

**EAST OF MAIN**

**SOUTH OF MAIN**

# The Study Area

# Visioning Process

## Visioning and Strategic Planning Process



**The inclusive process, beginning with public input at City Council sessions in fall 2022, occurred over ten months and was designed to maximize the depth and diversity of input and viewpoints from the community.**

The planning recommendations were generated through a process of highly engaged and participatory workshops, each held in a different neighborhood to enhance accessibility and participation across the community.

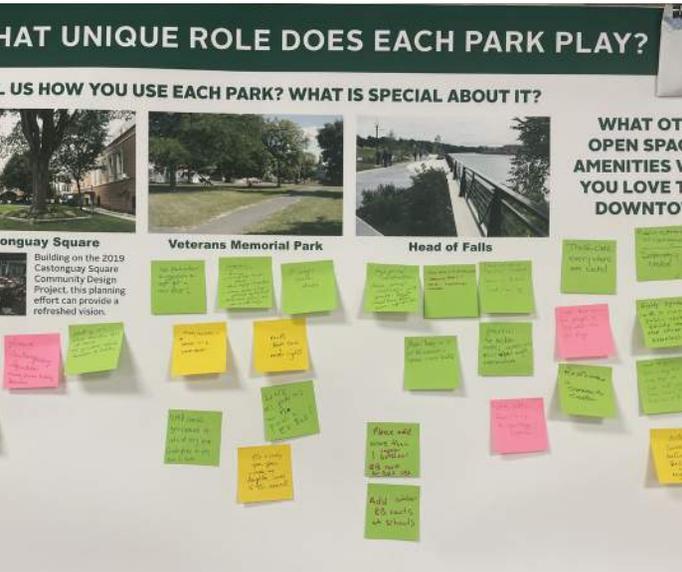
All recommendations in this report stem from this collaborative effort and embody a rich tapestry of ideas and perspectives. This report serves to document the final vision plan and marks an important milestone but not the end of the process.

Next steps include implementation of projects on short, medium, and long-term time frames with continued community engagement.

**The inclusive process engaged residents, community leaders, business owners, and many others!**

# Visioning Process Community Workshops

December 2022  
1. Gathering Ideas



February 2023  
2. Co-Creating Scenarios



March 2023  
3. Refining Concepts



# 8 Planning Principles

The following principles, developed based on community and stakeholder input and feedback throughout the process, are intended to guide the planning and implementation.

1

Leverage  
**strengths and  
new energy**

2

Continue  
**activating  
Main Street**

3

Support  
**existing  
and new  
businesses**

4

Build  
**economic  
fundamentals:**  
jobs, housing,  
visitors

5

Get Waterville  
to the **water**

6

Keep  
downtown  
**inclusive  
and multi-  
generational**

7

Make  
downtown  
**accessible**

8

Keep the  
**momentum  
going**

# 4 Planning Themes

The Vision Plan distills the eight core planning principles into four overarching themes that capture community values and priorities. All recommendations of the Vision Plan are organized within these four planning themes.

The four themes shown here evolved and adapted based on the extensive input received over the course of the planning. Although interconnected, they provide an organizing structure for engaging with the community and stakeholders, enabling participants to dive into specific topic areas while recognizing their relationship to broader planning goals.

**OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY**

**HOUSING & COMMUNITY**

**MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT**

**BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



Community Workshops



# Downtown Waterville Vision Plan - Long Term

## OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY

- 1 Spring St Intersection
- 2 Silver St Plaza
- 3 Appleton St Connection
- 4 Temple St Connection
- 5 Art Walk
- 6 Castonguay Square
- 7 Head of Falls Park

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY

- 13 Main Street Upper Floors
- 14 New Integrated Housing (above Retail & Parking)
- 15 Spaces for Inclusive Community Uses

## MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT

- 8 Bicycle facilities
- 9 Improved public transit
- 10 Parking management
- 11 Parking improvement district
- 12 Long-term structured parking

## BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 16 Activate storefronts with diverse retail
- 17 Attract new employers
- 18 Wayfinding and signage
- 19 Support year-round events
- 20 Business Improvement District



# OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY

“

Unstructured & wild spaces for creative play

The Head of Falls needs to stay open. No other green space on the river exists in downtown Waterville

Outdoor seating

Connect to the water – celebrate it, see it, connect with it

Lighting

Movie & concert nights

Connect to trails

More trees downtown

Active recreation / sports at Head of Falls

”

**OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS**

- 1 Spring St Intersection
- 2 Silver St Plaza
- 3 Appleton St Connection
- 4 Temple St Connection
- 5 Art Walk
- 6 Castonguay Square
- 7 Head of Falls Park



Throughout the planning process, many community members spoke about making downtown more pedestrian friendly so people of all abilities and ages can get to their everyday destinations. And although Main and Front streets have come a long way, there is more to do. The recommended projects outlined here all contribute toward strengthening

a network of active green spaces and walkable pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.

Quality open space has been shown to improve mental health, chronic disease, physical fitness, air quality, lower temperatures, and more. It also benefits our most vulnerable residents, who often have less access to open space. Access to green space is considered one

of the Social Determinants of Health in a community, especially in a downtown area with a lot of concrete.

Public space is also one of the best ways to celebrate and serve Waterville’s diverse community – it is the place that can bring people together for shared celebrations and events and just daily life.

# 1. SPRING STREET INTERSECTION



Existing Conditions of the intersection at Spring, Bridge, Main, Front, and Water streets (as of winter 2023)

# 1. SPRING STREET INTERSECTION

**Pedestrian-oriented improvements to this intersection can make a better, safer connection between the South End neighborhood and downtown.**

The Vision Plan recommends modest but strategic changes to the crosswalks and curbs as shown here in the short-term. A dialogue with MDOT should be initiated for long-term expanded improvements to meet pedestrian-friendly design goals, such as a roundabout.

- Expanded Sidewalks
- New High-Visibility Crosswalks
- New Pedestrian Refuge Islands



Workshop photo



Proposed intersection improvements



Zebra striping recently installed!

# 1. SPRING STREET INTERSECTION



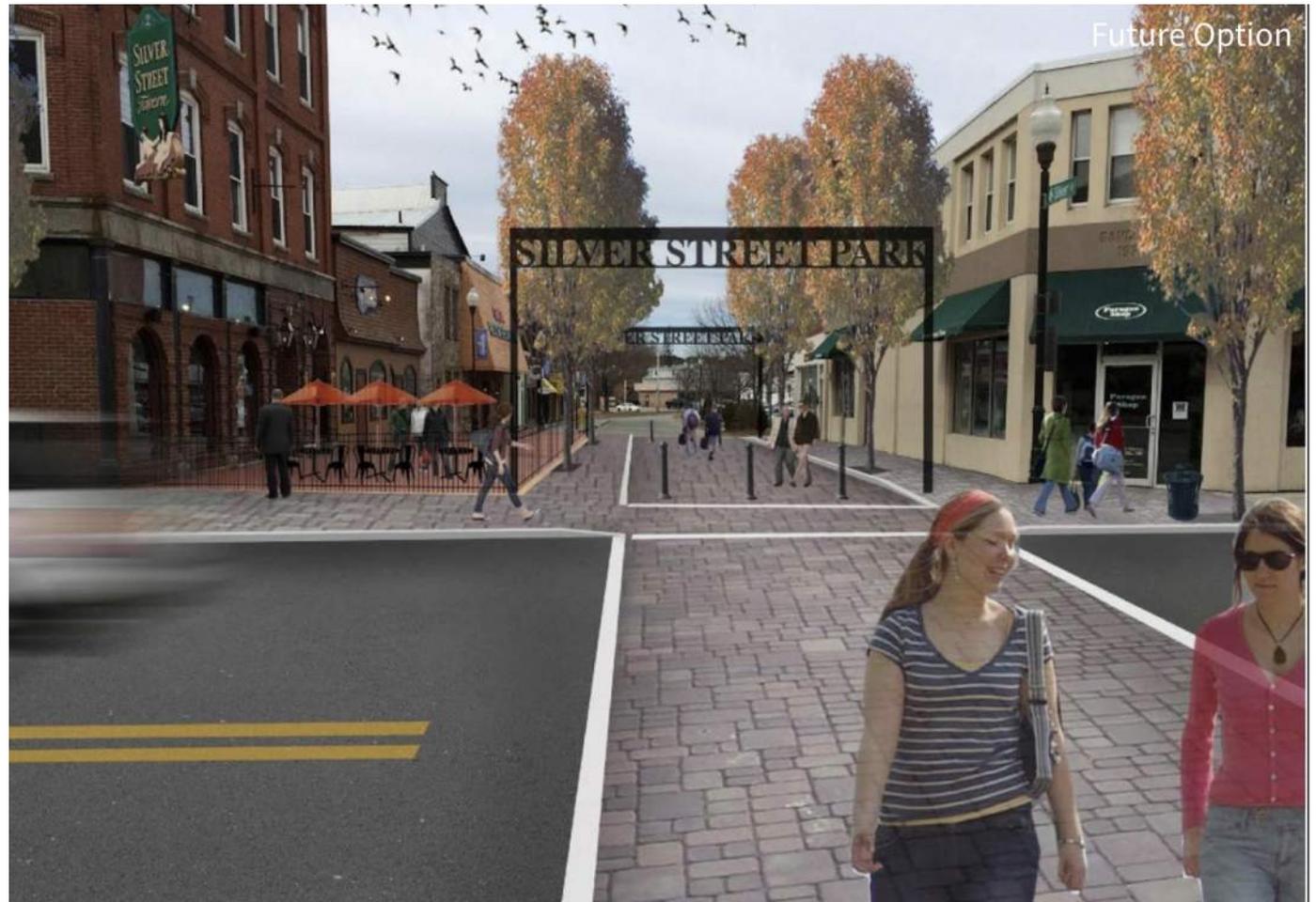
Conceptual view of improved intersection, including future redevelopment of the ballpark lot into new housing and parking

## 2. SILVER STREET PLAZA

Silver Street is an important connector between Main Street and the Concourse. During the pandemic, outdoor restaurant seating was expanded onto the sidewalk and has proven very popular. The Vision Plan recommends that Silver Street be redesigned as a pedestrian corridor, while allowing emergency access, with outdoor seating, signage, plantings, and lighting to create a new public pocket plaza.

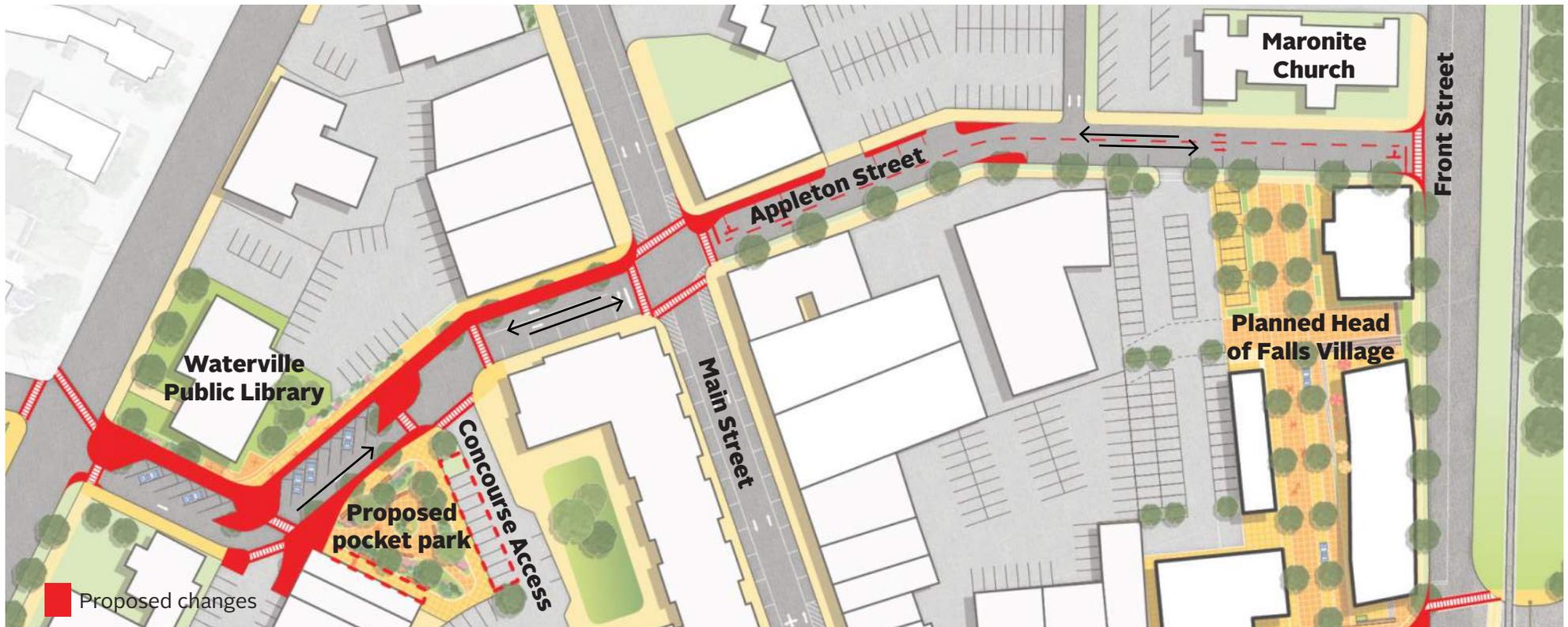


Existing Conditions (2023)



Conceptual view of improved Silver Street

### 3. APPLETON STREET CONNECTION



Proposed streetscape and roadway improvements

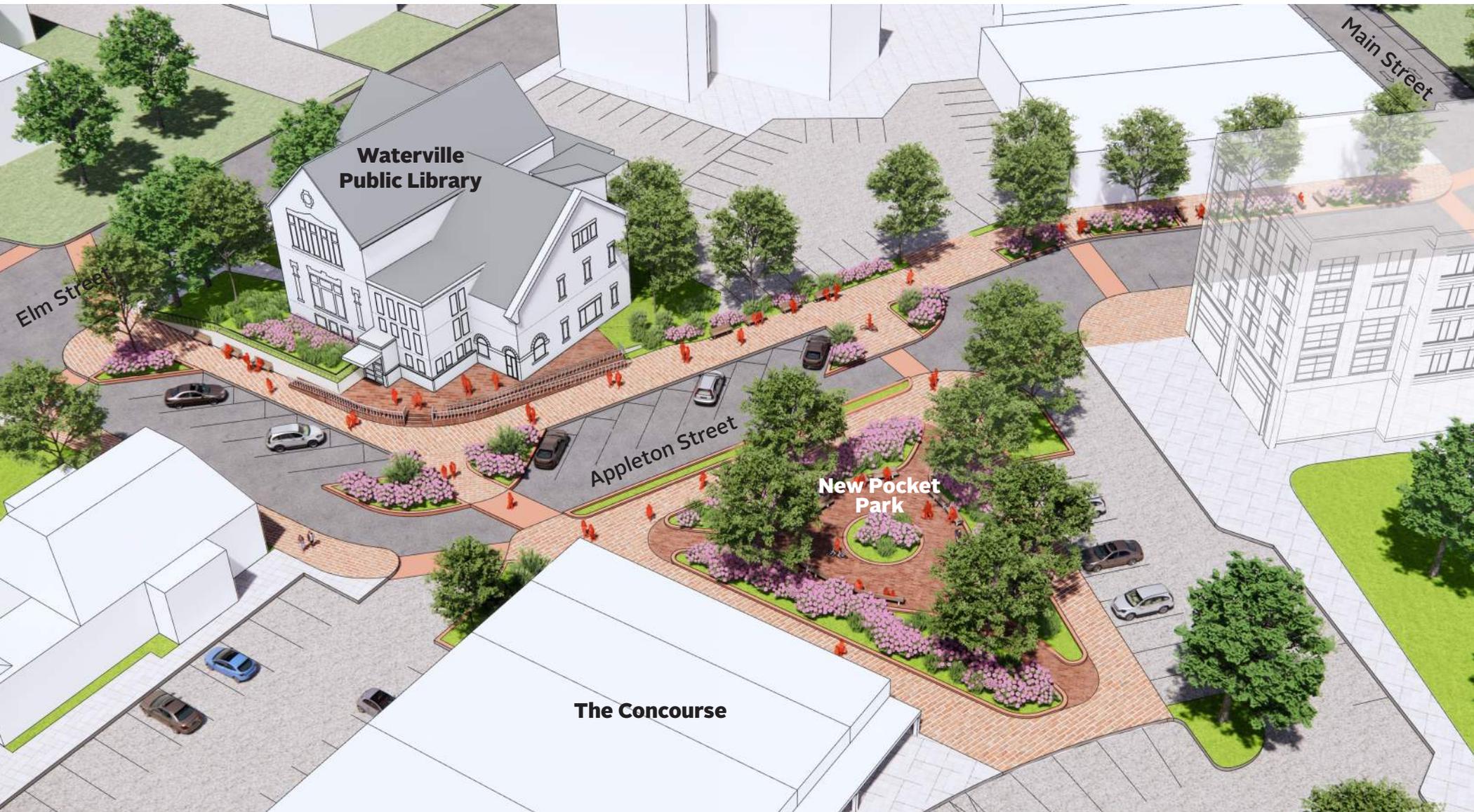
**Appleton Street is an important downtown connector, linking Elm Street and westward neighborhoods to the Waterville Public Library, Main Street, The Maronite Church, Front Street, and Head of Falls Park. It also provides access to Alfond Commons and Colby student parking area, and will provide access to the future planned Head**

**of Falls Village. However, due to existing topography, sight lines, and limited right-of-way width, the street is unsafe and unpleasant for pedestrians.**

West of Main Street, recommendations include formalizing the recent one-way directional change between the concourse access drive and Elm Street and widened sidewalks, crosswalks with bump-outs, and seating areas while maintaining on-

street parking alongside the library. A new pocket park can improve the underutilized area north of the concourse businesses. East of Main Street, recommendations include converting the street to two-way to facilitate movement to Front Street and the Colby student parking area, and expanding the sidewalk in strategic locations for safety and walkability.

# 3. APPLETON STREET CONNECTION



Conceptual view of improved Appleton Street with wider sidewalks, safer crossings, seating and planting areas, and an expanded and renovated pocket park

# 3. APPLETON STREET CONNECTION



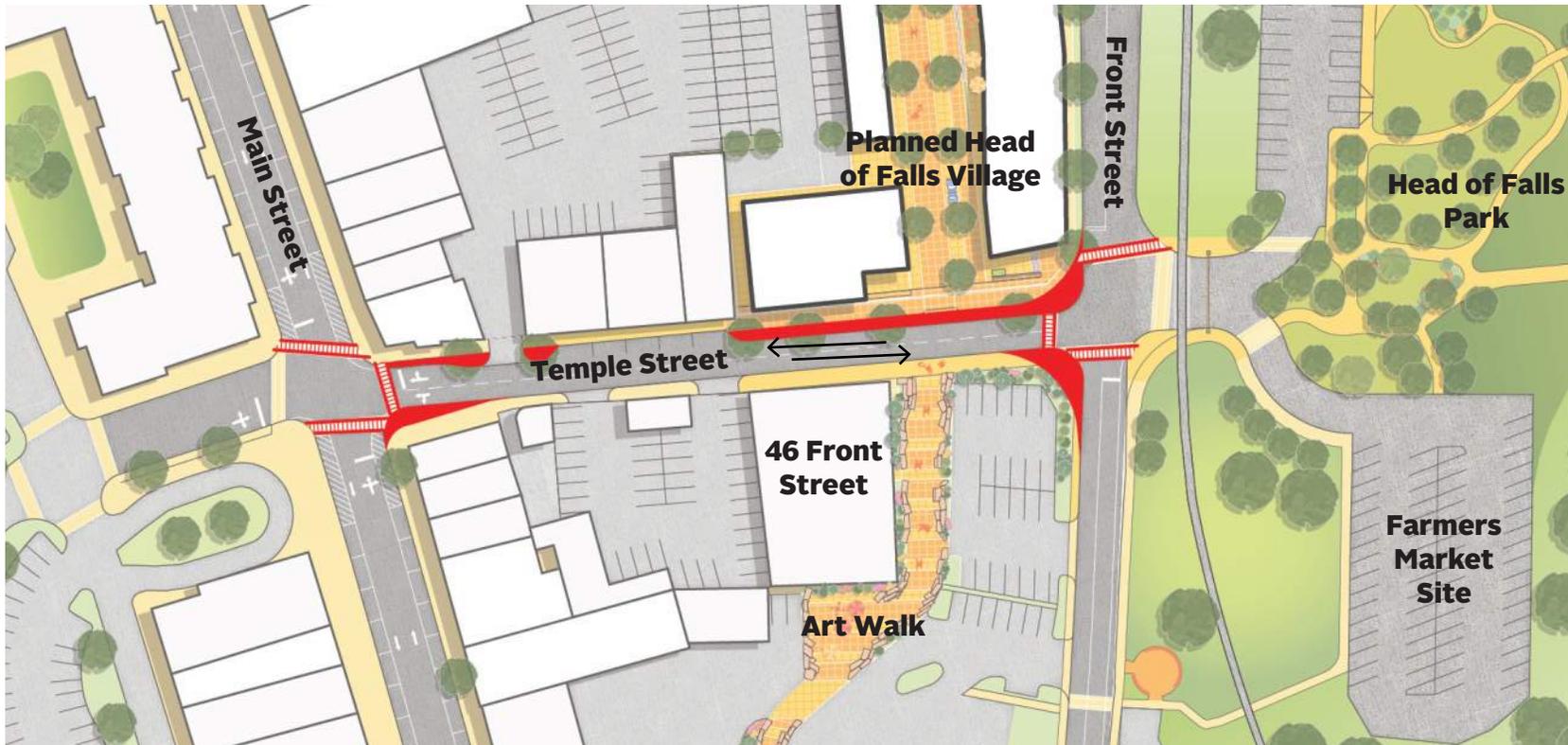
Existing conditions (as of winter 2023)

# 3. APPLETON STREET CONNECTION



Conceptual view of improved streetscape

## 4. TEMPLE STREET CONNECTION



Proposed streetscape and roadway improvements

**Improvements to Temple Street can be designed to reinforce the street as a key downtown connector – providing a walkable link between the Concourse, Main Street, and Head of Falls Park. Aligned with the entrance into Head of Falls Park, Temple Street should be designed as a gateway that is green, beautiful, and safe.**

The plan envisions pedestrian-oriented improvements including expanded sidewalk areas, new street trees, and better lighting as well as improved directional signage for vehicles intending to shift from southbound Main Street to Front Street to reach Bridge Street towards Winslow. Service access for existing businesses and the handful of on-street parking spaces are important

components to factor into the design. The planned Head of Falls Village redevelopment will be impactful for activating the street with residents, businesses, and visitors and should be coordinated with the streetscape redesign.

# 4. TEMPLE STREET CONNECTION



Existing conditions (as of winter 2023)

# 4. TEMPLE STREET CONNECTION



Conceptual view of improved streetscape

# 5. ART WALK

The Art Walk is an idea to create an interior block connector, in lieu of Front Street, that creates a festive and walkable link between some of downtown’s most important public parks and cultural destinations. The Walk would connect Main Street, Castonguay Square, City Hall, Waterville Opera House, Schupf Art Center, the new City Council chambers and potential community space at 46 Front Street, and Head of Falls Park – in addition to local businesses along the way.

The route of the Art Walk would also connect with the entrance into the Head of Falls Village shared plaza with access to planned co-working, community spaces, and retail.

The Art Walk itself is envisioned to be fully accessible and colorful, featuring murals, sculpture, plantings, and other works of art with ample shaded seating, and nighttime lighting for safety and festivity.



Conceptual plan of the Art Walk

# 5. ART WALK



Conceptual view of the Art Walk, creating a linked chain of public parks and cultural destinations

# 5. ART WALK



Existing conditions (as of winter 2023)

# 5. ART WALK



Conceptual view of new Art Walk

# 5. ART WALK

Murals on the ground or on walls, year-round plantings, lighting, and other elements can be playful, colorful, and can even be temporary installations that change over time. The examples here provide inspiration for the Vision Plan's Art Walk.



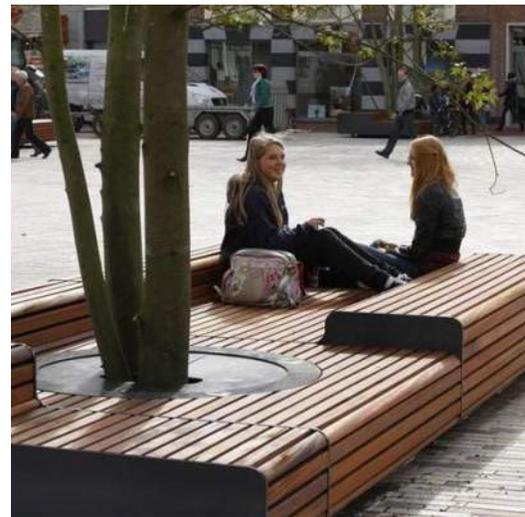
**Light Sculpture Plaza, Israel**  
Photography credit: Shlomo Aronson Architects, Dor Navon



**Vancouver Mural Festival, Canada**  
Image credit: The Georgia Straight



**6th Street Art Alley, Columbus, IN**  
Photography credit: Hadley Fruits



**Planter & Bench Seating**  
Image credit: slow Ottawa



**Murals & Events**  
Image credit: mural festival

## 6. CASTONGUAY SQUARE

Castonguay Square has been called, “the beating heart of the city”. Its location at the doorstep to City Hall, the Waterville Opera House, the new Schupf Art Center, as well as both Main and Front streets makes the square an ideal location for public gathering. In addition, the conversion of Main Street to two-way circulation restores visibility to the square for northbound travelers, making the square an even more prominent part of downtown.

The Vision Plan sees an opportunity to make modest improvements to the square that would make it greener, more accessible, and more resilient. A small plaza along the Main Street frontage could create a welcoming entrance and a place to host community programs and events with the Schupf, the Opera House, and other local institutions.

The Vision Plan recommends building on the prior community design process with a simplified design and fundraising effort to bring this incredible potential to reality.



Conceptual plan of improvements to Castonguay Square

# 6. CASTONGUAY SQUARE



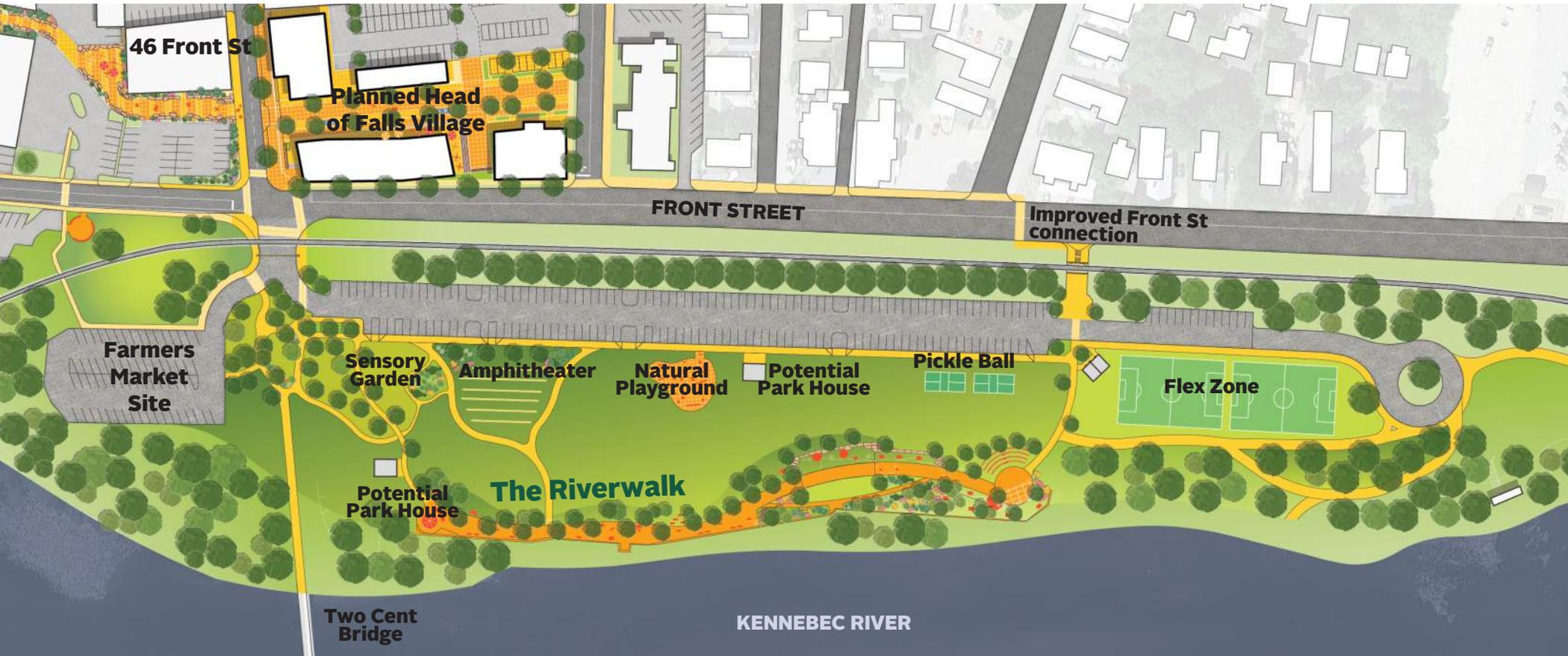
Existing conditions (as of winter 2023)  
DOWNTOWN WATERVILLE VISION PLAN

# 6. CASTONGUAY SQUARE



Conceptual view of improved entrance plaza of Castonguay Square

# 7. HEAD OF FALLS



Conceptual plan of improvements to Head of Falls Park

**The Vision Plan recommends that Head of Falls Park remain as a green, public, open space and not be developed.**

Although there were prior plans and city investment towards development, the Vision Plan looks at downtown holistically, strategically

prioritizing the waterfront as a public amenity and natural resource that “brings Waterville to the water” while focusing development energy and investment on Main Street and other areas where infill development is critical.

Specifically, the Vision Plan strives to fix the park’s current underutilization

and safety issues through activation, programming, and accessibility. Leveraging the success of the Riverwalk, a mix of active and passive destinations provide something for everyone, supported by infrastructure and restrooms. The location of the Farmers Market in the parking lot is already a great start toward the activation of this incredible resource.

# 7. HEAD OF FALLS



Conceptual view of improvements to Head of Falls Park

# 7. HEAD OF FALLS

The park is envisioned as a place for access to nature, with gardens and playful children's areas using local and native natural materials. The precedents here are inspiration for what the park could look and feel like.



Natural playground examples

# MOBILITY, PARKING, & TRANSIT

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES  
Implement equitable parking pricing.

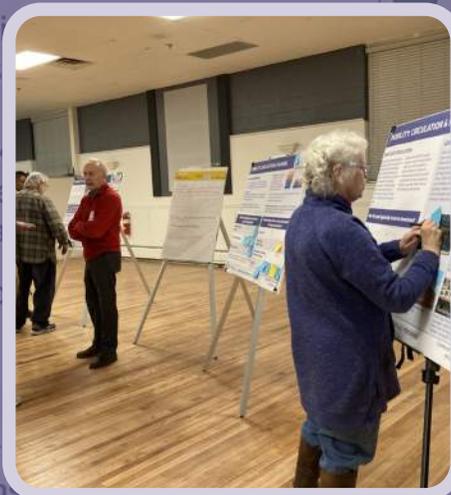
- Implement paid all-day parking permits in concourse to disincentivize all-day use

Handwritten note: "Handwritten notes should not have to pay to park and should be available for any length of time."

Handwritten note: "Handwritten notes should not have to pay to park and should be available for any length of time."

Handwritten note: "Short-term parking for visitors"

Handwritten note: "If you can't find a spot, don't park."



Consider parking improvement downtown with small parking structures

All revenues from increased parking improvement district stay in downtown

Handwritten note: "Only 2.5% of downtown parking is available for short-term parking. This is a major barrier to downtown activity."

## Statistics:

THURSDAY FEB 2, 2023

Maximum Occupancy*	Vacant spaces at peak occupancy
66%	177
66%	75
66%	252
10%	204

## STRUCTURED FOR MORE EFFICIENT LAND USE:

Compact parking structures and mixed-use buildings enable more activity per square mile of downtown area.

Palmer Sq, Princeton, NJ  
2 garages, 1,000 spaces  
Short-term & long-term, all shared parking

Fourth St Garage, Columbus, IN  
Wrapped with retail  
Architecture

**MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS,  
SHORT-TERM**

- 8 Bicycle facilities
- 9 Improved public transit
- 10 Parking management



**In addition to walkability throughout downtown, the Vision Plan proposes a series of comprehensive recommendations to improve accessibility, vehicular circulation, bicycle mobility, and the parking system for residents, businesses, and visitors.**

The plan provides a phased approach for the recommendations, understanding that some elements can be implemented quickly, while others on a longer-term timeframe will require time for pilot stages, funding, or additional discussion for policy changes and implementation. This phased approach allows changes in population

density, land-uses, and circulation patterns to occur over time and for the specifics of the recommendations and implementation to adapt accordingly.

## 8. BICYCLE FACILITIES

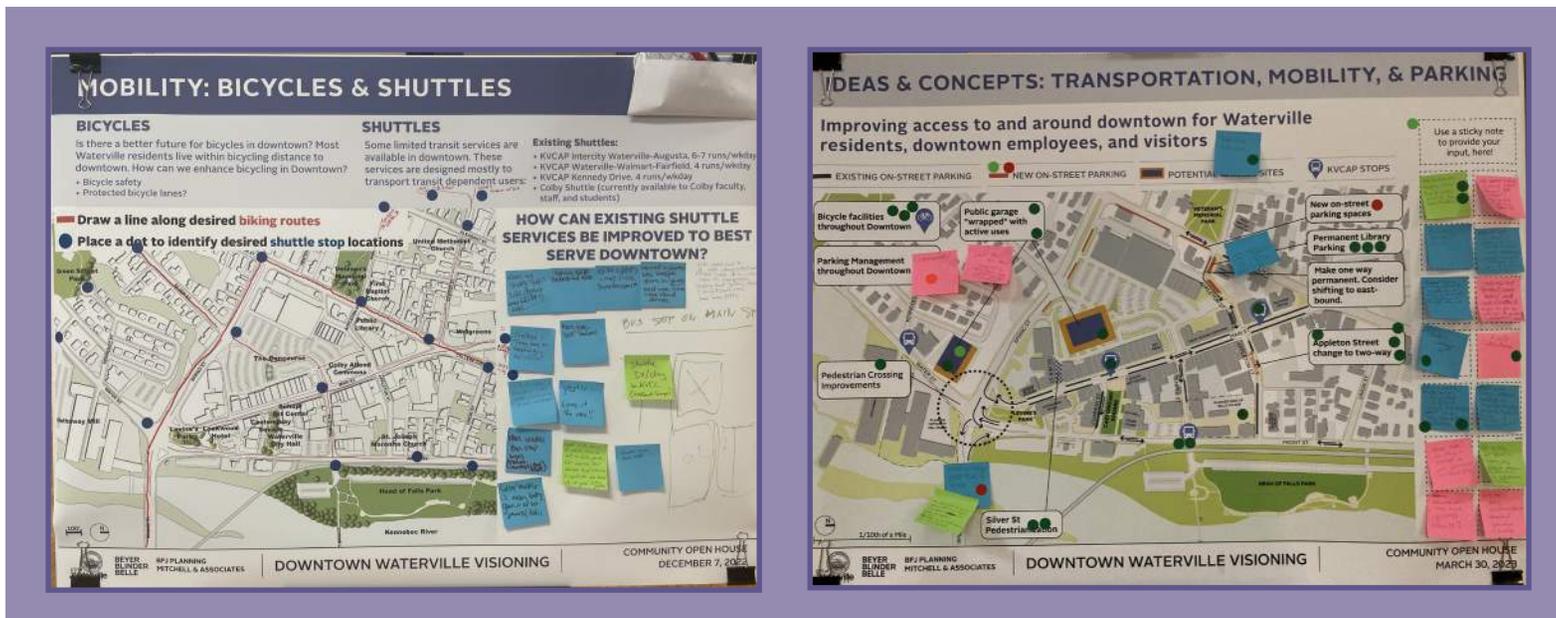
A robust network of bicycle infrastructure across downtown can make bicycling a safer, more appealing, and more common mode of transportation. Bicycling is a healthy activity for people of all ages and, as a carbon and pollution-free mode, is also good for the environment.

The Vision Plan recommends discrete infrastructure, such as lockable and covered bike storage, repair shops, and bicycle lanes (where possible) be designed into the streetscape of downtown to foster connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods.

## 9. IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSIT

Public transit, such as the KVCAP van services, provide critical infrastructure for people, reduce pollution and carbon emissions by replacing the use of multiple single occupancy vehicles, and also reduce parking demand. The planning process demonstrated significant public interest in increased transit services throughout downtown and beyond.

The Vision Plan recommends continuing to support KVCAP as an important social services partner in the region and working with local, state, and federal elected officials for increased funding support.



Mobility input from the December 2022 and March 2023 Community Open Houses

# 10. PARKING MANAGEMENT

Vision Plan recommendations for the parking system in downtown are guided by the following goals & principles:

## Parking System Goals:

- **Support the economic development of downtown**
- **Optimize use of municipal land**
- **Parking should always be available in core area**
- **Handicap accessible & user-friendly parking**

## Parking System Key Principles:

- **Continue the practice of municipal/shared parking**
- **Encourage park-and-walk behavior**
- **Replace parking displaced by development**
- **Prioritize short-term parkers in Concourse**
- **Encourage long-term parkers to park in Head of Falls**
- **Adjust zoning regulations for downtown parking**

# 10. PARKING MANAGEMENT

## Short-term Recommendations

### **Parking regulations in downtown Waterville should reflect actual parking patterns and behaviors:**

1. Maximum flexibility in terms of how parking demand is addressed for each development, either by providing its own parking, or by relying on a municipal parking system, or a combination of both. The municipal or shared parking system has the advantage of being more efficient and being able to maintain a more pedestrian-friendly environment.
2. Parking demand ratios in downtown are lower than in suburban areas because of the mixed-use nature and the higher density. In addition, because of the municipal parking system, ratios for each use only need to reflect the demand that occurs during the overall downtown peak - generally mid-day on weekdays, as opposed to the demand that occurs during the peak period for each use.

- **Establish Downtown Parking Overlay Zone**
- **Maintain & Encourage Municipal/Shared Parking System**
- **Right-Size Downtown Parking Ratios**
- **Eliminate Exclusive Use Requirement for Downtown Residential Developments**

When peak parking occupancies in the concourse reach levels of practical capacity (85 to 90% of the maximum number of parking spaces) on a consistent basis, the Vision Plan recommends that the City adopt paid parking for long-term (all-day) parkers. This fee would be a modest cost and require all-day parkers to obtain a monthly or quarterly permit from the City. The price could be adjusted based on the number of users purchasing

- **Encourage Reasonable In-Lieu Parking Fees for any New Development exceeding 2,000 SF**
- **Monitor Parking Occupancies and Discourage Long-term Parking in Concourse**
- **Establish Paid All-Day Parking in Concourse**

the permits. Long-term parking would continue to be free in the Head of Falls lot (with improved pedestrian access and safety). The intention of this payment is not to generate revenue but to influence behavior and optimize parking spaces in the concourse for short-term users.

**MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS,  
LONG-TERM**

- 11 Parking improvement district
- 12 Long-term structured parking



**Longer-term, additional and more robust changes to the parking management system can be implemented. A longer timeframe for these recommendations is important to enable lessons to be learned from the first stage, additional input from residents**

**and businesses, and updated parking demand data.**

As shown on the following slide, long-term recommendations include downtown-wide payment system, upgraded infrastructure for enforcement, as well as structured parking deck(s) if there is sufficient parking demand.

# 11 & 12. PARKING IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT & STRUCTURED PARKING

## Long-term Considerations

**As parking demand increases in the downtown, it is recommended that Waterville implement paid 2-hour parking in the concourse and for on-street parking in downtown. The purpose of this modest payment system is not to generate revenue, but to promote parking turn-over for short-term users. This payment can be managed with multi-space meters and a mobile parking app, enabling enhanced and effective enforcement. The use of virtual permits and license plate readers will increase enforcement efficiency.**

A Parking Improvement District, implemented in either the short or long term, would facilitate comprehensive management of parking throughout the downtown. It could function similarly to an overlay zone for parking purposes (and possible other functions), overlaid on the current CA and IND zones in that area. This area could also become the boundary for a Business Improvement District (BID). It would also allow a small property tax increment to fund parking capacity improvements, if desired.

- Paid Short-Term Parking in Concourse and On-Street
- User-Friendly Payment System
- Upgrade Parking Enforcement Technologies
- Consider Parking Improvement District
- Monitor Downtown Parking Demand
- Consider Parking Decks in conjunction with New Developments Downtown

Structured parking deck(s) are recommended in order to use land more efficiently by combining multiple land-uses on the same parcel. This can be achieved through the development of a parking deck, wrapped in housing, and layered over ground floor retail. This type of mixed-use



**Princeton, NJ**

*Downtown parking garage, “wrapped” with housing and ground floor retail. Provides 1,000 shared parking spaces for short-term and long-term uses.*

building generates more activity, provides more housing for residents, and maintains convenient and safe parking for residents, businesses, and visitors.

# HOUSING & COMMUNITY

“

*“We need to focus on supportive housing”*

*“Center the needs of the poorest among us - when we lift from the bottom everyone rises”*

## **DESIRE FOR MORE HOUSING IN DOWNTOWN:**

**senior**, affordable, **integrated**, workforce, **multi-story**, rental & condo, **above Main St stores**, studios for retirees... with daycare, multi-generational, etc.

**Revitalize without excluding people**

## **YOUTH & SOCIAL SERVICES:**

**community gathering spaces**, adult & teen classes, **public restrooms**, playground, **services for recovery groups with mental health and substance abuse**, housing & services for homeless.

**Make downtown kid and youth friendly**

## **CULTURAL FACILITIES:**

**celebration of local history and culture**, music, **black box theater**, walk-in art studios

”

# Housing & Community

Throughout the planning process community engagement, residents voiced a strong desire to provide housing for all people, regardless of income.

The ideas discussed and proposed by community members include affordable housing, housing with integrated social services, housing for the homeless, as

well as market-rate housing and a range of housing types – such as apartments, condominiums, multi-story residential buildings, live-work studios, and others. There was particular interest in increasing the housing supply along and near Main Street in order to generate more activity and put more people in the downtown.



Input and ideas from the community workshops and open houses

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY

**Significant housing projects are already being planned or currently underway!**



**Housing is an important economic development driver – it provides more people to support the businesses creating a virtuous cycle. There is already positive, significant, and growing interest in developing housing in the downtown area along Main Street in the upper floors, at the Head of Falls Village development on Temple Street, and at the Lockwood Mill.**

# A two-part strategy for achieving integrated housing

The Vision Plan proposes a two-part strategy in order to increase the stock and diversity of housing in downtown. This strategy is intended to leverage housing as an economic driver by bringing more residents to the downtown while also bringing forth much-needed upgrades to existing buildings and adding new construction to downtown's building stock.

**Strategy 1) Renovate existing buildings** specifically targets the upper floors of buildings along Main Street. These buildings typically have a range of 1-3 floors over the ground floor and are ideally located for housing within walking distance to the downtown retail and cultural destinations. Housing within walking distances reduces the need for parking and reduces vehicle traffic in downtown.

**Strategy 2) Build new housing** will diversify the variety of housing types in downtown, for different income levels, life stages, and other factors. This strategy is primarily directed to the concourse and other discrete infill sites, where a mixed-use strategy of housing around structured parking can be created.

## 1) Renovate existing buildings



image credit: Lincoln Square

### **Wilmington, DE**

*“Upstairs Fund” gap financing  
--Put more feet on Main Street*

## 2) Build new housing



image credit: Lincoln Property Management

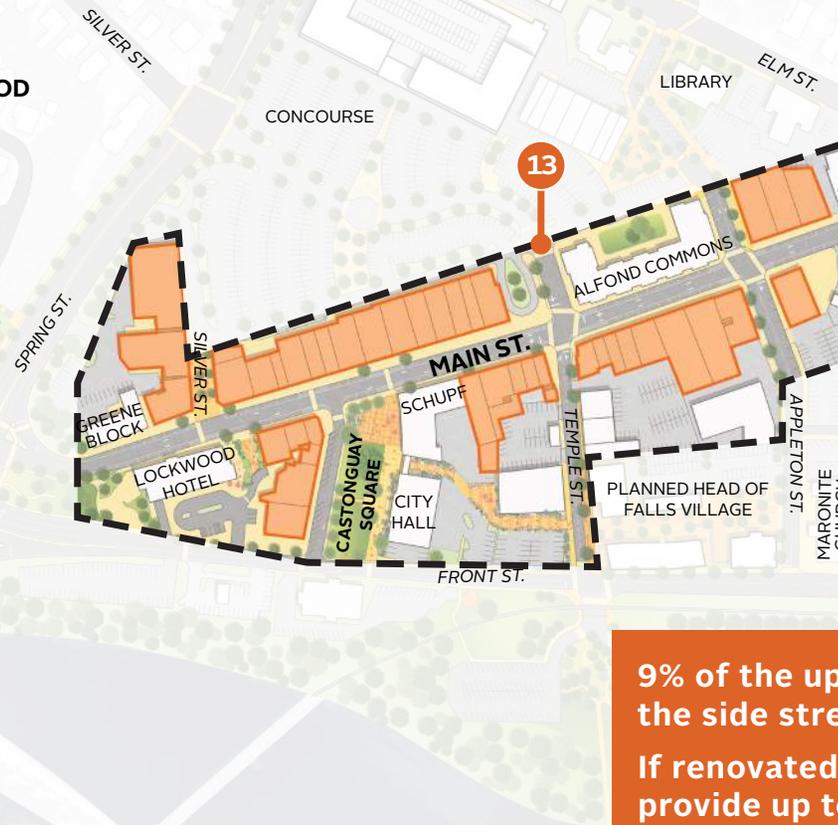
### **Greenville, SC**

*New Housing & Mixed-Use  
--Variety of housing types for different life stages & income levels*

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

### 13 Main Street Upper Floors

#### SOUTH END NEIGHBORHOOD



9% of the upper floor space on Main St and the side streets is currently vacant; If renovated, these vacant spaces could provide up to approximately 75 housing units.

Although there's already been incredible progress along Main Street since the completion of the 2017 plan, Main Street has continuing challenges and the Vision Plan recommends maintaining focus on the revitalization of Main Street. A critical component of progress along Main Street is the rehabilitation of the upper floors into housing. This strategy would have

multiple overlapping benefits including the increase of much-needed housing stock, upgrades to existing buildings, and more residents within walking distance to the local businesses.

However there are real barriers and challenges to upgrading these older existing buildings to meet today's life safety standards and codes, such as with elevators and other new systems.

Around the country, other towns have developed grant or loan programs to support the existing building owners in renovating upper floors for housing and the Vision Plan recommends that this be explored. Additionally, changes to the parking policies as described earlier, will help facilitate the creation of new housing along Main Street.

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

- 14 MEDIUM TERM**  
New Integrated Housing  
(above Retail & Parking)

### SOUTH END NEIGHBORHOOD

**Potential Future Project:**  
**Lockwood Mill Ph2**



**One important strategy for the creation of more and diverse housing is new construction. The Vision Plan identifies strategic sites that would help achieve multiple goals for downtown revitalization. Some of these sites could be developed in the medium term, while others will require more complex planning, community engagement, and policy changes and will therefore require a longer timeframe for implementation.**

The two priority and strategic sites identified for the medium term are above the existing big box stores of the concourse and at the ball field parking lot at the corner of Water and Spring streets. Both sites are privately controlled and will benefit from coordination between the developer and the city.

Over the big box concourse stores, the Vision Plan envisions building above the existing stores in order to retain those important businesses – this has been accomplished in other cities in Maine.

The new structure could accommodate additional parking wrapped with housing units, and with townhouses facing Elm Street.

The ball field parking lot site, due to the surrounding hill, is a great site for a parking structure below with housing on top that would be accessible from Spring St. This new housing would transform the character of the intersection, making it more active and walkable. Redevelopment of this site would improve connectivity from the South End and the Green Street Park and could incorporate stairwells and/or elevators for access up the hill.

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE EXISTING PARKING



Conceptual view of new housing, fronting Water and Spring streets, stacked over a parking garage on the ballpark lot

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE EXISTING RETAIL



Conceptual view of new housing and parking over the existing big box retail stores in the concourse

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE EXISTING RETAIL



Existing conditions

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE EXISTING RETAIL



Conceptual view of proposed housing over existing businesses in the concourse

**HOUSING & COMMUNITY  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS**

- 14 LONG TERM**  
New Integrated Housing  
(above Retail)



**Following additional public engagement, discussions of policy changes, as well as design and planning, the surface parking areas of the concourse can be redeveloped with a mix of uses including different housing types, structured parking, office, retail, community spaces and other uses to be determined.**

A phased parking strategy would add structured parking to replace and expand supply for existing and new uses and residents. New walkable streets and new green open spaces would add to the downtown and knit the area back into the urban fabric to create a walkable and welcoming area. Along the concourse side of the Main Street businesses, a new street could become a two-sided retail and shopping destination.

Redevelopment of this significant area should be done holistically through a comprehensive planning effort to ensure that the design and layout form a cohesive sense of place, adding vibrancy and vitality to downtown and supporting existing businesses.

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE NEW RETAIL



Conceptual view of new housing and structured parking in the concourse

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE NEW RETAIL



Existing Conditions

# 14. NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING: ABOVE NEW RETAIL



Conceptual view of proposed two-sided retail and shopping street along the concourse side of the Main Street businesses

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY

### Existing Community Spaces near Downtown

- Alford Youth & Community Center
- Chace Forum



- Greene Block + Studios
- Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter
- Muskie Center



- Public Library



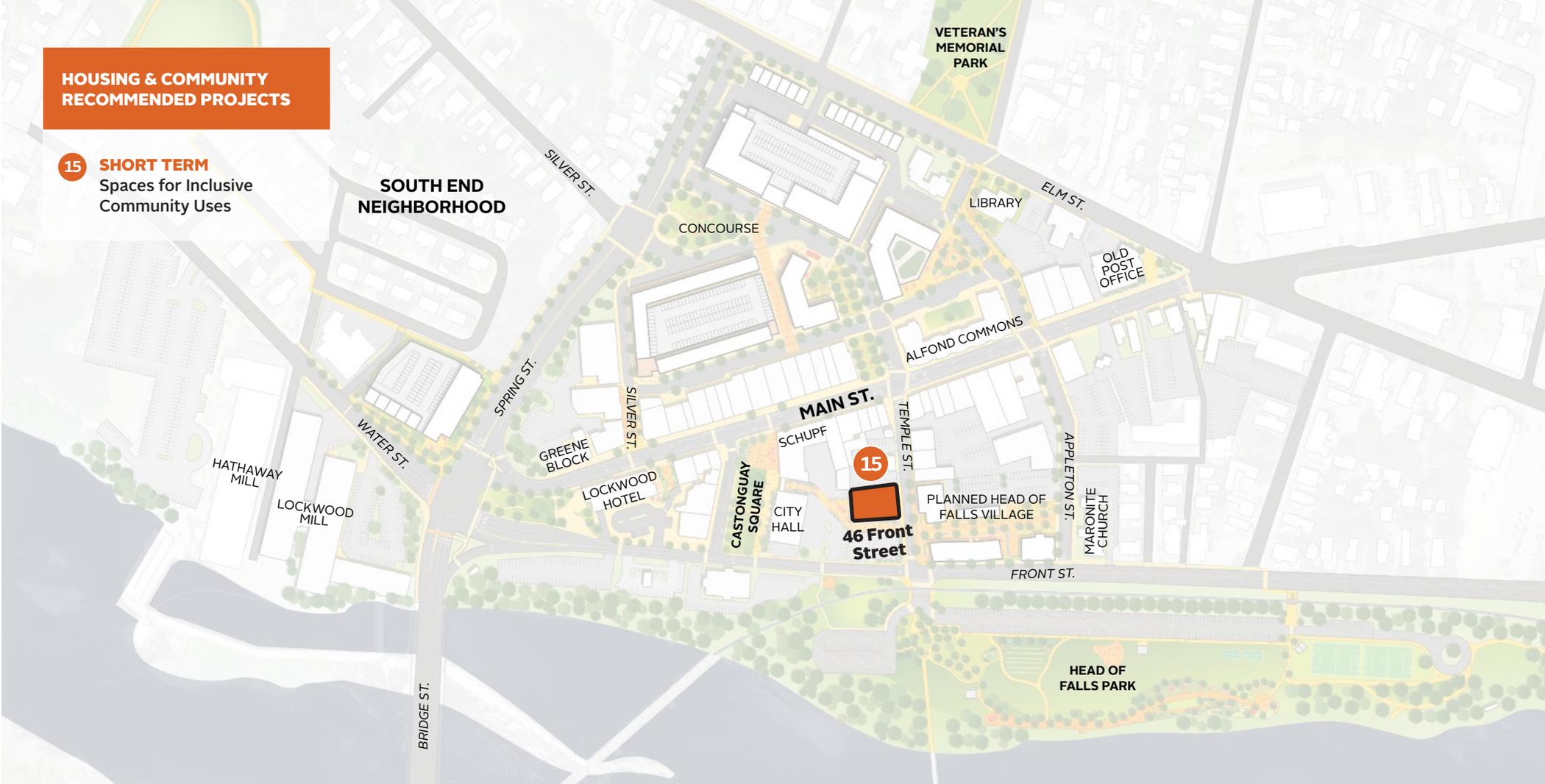
- Schupf Art Center



**Waterville has a rich and diverse portfolio of community-oriented spaces with ongoing programming events. During the planning process, there was a strong desire for additional spaces downtown for community groups to access for low or no-cost flexible or informal spaces.**

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

- 15 SHORT TERM**  
Spaces for Inclusive  
Community Uses



**In order to meet the community's expressed desire for additional community spaces in downtown, in the short-term, the Vision Plan recommends a space in 46 Front Street (leased by the City during the planning process for City Council chambers) be evaluated for community uses.**

Planning is in process for a public engagement process to identify the uses, functions, and access to the space. This location is strategically important because it fits into the plan's bigger picture of public, civic, and cultural land uses connected by accessible and walkable public open spaces and streetscapes in this immediate area.

Located along the proposed Art Walk with convenient access to City Hall, Waterville Opera House, Schupf Center, Head of Falls Park, and many other destinations, this area is a hub of community and public-oriented destinations.

# 15. SPACE FOR COMMUNITY USES: SHORT-TERM



Caption

**HOUSING & COMMUNITY  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS**

- 15 LONG TERM**  
Spaces for Inclusive  
Community Uses



In the longer term, the Vision Plan recommends that community facilities be incorporated into the future redesign of Head of Falls Park. Amenities such as a comfort station(s) or covered community space would be a great complement to new sports facilities, passive

recreational spaces, children’s spaces, as well as current and future events, such as the Farmers Market. Given the large size of the park, if funding is available, a larger community facility could be developed to anchor and activate the northern end of the park.

# BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

“Small businesses are the heart and soul of downtown”

“Planting and maintenance of green spaces and streetscapes”

“A downtown association is badly needed!”

“Affordable restaurants for families”

“Diversification of retail”

“Let’s close Main Street for events!”

“What can we do to get these buildings populated?”

“Wayfinding signage and increased walkability”

”

**BUSINESS & ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS**

- 16 Activate storefronts with diverse retail
- 17 Attract new employers
- 18 Wayfinding and signage
- 19 Support year-round events
- 20 Business Improvement District



**Downtown is many things, but one of its most important functions is a place where small businesses can start, grow, and thrive. People come to downtown Waterville for the local character, personal touch, and family-owned businesses, instead of chain stores.**

To support the local businesses we need as many sources of customers as possible – existing residents, residents of new housing, downtown workers, students, faculty, and staff from the colleges and hospitals, and visitors.

For visitors, the experience should provide ease of access, with convenient parking and effective wayfinding signage. Waterville also needs a strong brand as a

destination, with consistent marketing to attract visitors from other places.

Downtown successfully offers a unique experience - the great restaurants, the architecture, the culture and arts, the events, the atmosphere, and the wide variety of things to do all within walking distance. However there is a continued need for a greater diversity of business types and other challenges remain.

# 16. ACTIVATE STOREFRONTS WITH DIVERSE RETAIL

**The activation of Main Street is a priority for the Vision Plan by occupying vacant spaces before focusing on other areas.**

In order to renovate outdated spaces and attract tenants, the plan recommends study of a gap financing or loan program to support local businesses owners.

Then, in order to fill these spaces with the desired mix of small and local unique businesses will require a coordinated effort by the city and its partners. Additionally, the plan recommends preservation of the low-cost retail that is a lifeline for many in order to keep downtown inclusive and accessible, including a market or grocery store.

***8% of the ground floor space on Main St and side streets is currently vacant***

## DINING:

- Cafés/lunch
- Casual restaurants
- Fast & fresh
- Brewery/pub
- Ice cream shop
- Food trucks at Head of Falls

## DAILY NEEDS:

- Grocery store/market
- Low-cost retail
- Convenience Store
- Indoor farmers market
- Bodega
- Candy store
- Wine store

## SHOPPING & EXPERIENCE:

- Home & decor
- Bookstore
- Gift shop
- Electronics
- Gardening & hardware
- Indoor entertainment (bowling, rock climbing)
- Indoor playground
- Ninja warrior gym
- Art galleries
- Furniture store

# 17. ATTRACT NEW EMPLOYERS

**To support downtown retail, it is important to bring new workers downtown who will become customers during the day and after work. This will also create job opportunities, and grow downtown’s economic and tax base that will help make everything else in this plan possible.**

Building on the employer recruitment work that the Central Maine Growth Council and Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce already do, new employers on Main Street could include professional offices such as law, financial services, and architects, who want to be in a walkable place with amenities. They could also include creative, innovation or entrepreneurship divisions of larger companies in Maine or beyond, such as manufacturing or health care, or of our local institutions, who benefit from proximity to each other. Downtown could become an innovation cluster, allowing people to collaborate, share meeting space, and meet after work to keep discussing an idea.

More jobs downtown – and more residents would create a virtuous cycle generating demand for more retail, which makes downtown more attractive, which then attracts more jobs and more residents, etc. Although the amount of space on Main Street is limited, the plan recommends leveraging some vacant upper floors and industrial buildings - any space that does not become housing should support employment.



Photography credit: Eva Kolenko

Examples of work spaces in previously industrial buildings, similar to many downtown buildings



Photography credit: Integrated Studio



Image credit: Beyer Blinder Belle

# 18. WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

As part of making downtown more friendly for visitors, the plan recommends revamping the wayfinding signage system as part of a larger downtown Waterville branding and marketing campaign.

It is important to help visitors find convenient parking, and then as pedestrians, find major destinations like the Public Library, Opera House, or Head of Falls, with a coordinated and user-friendly signage and map system. A wayfinding system could include both physical and digital components, be fully accessible, and serve pedestrians, cyclists, as well as motorists.

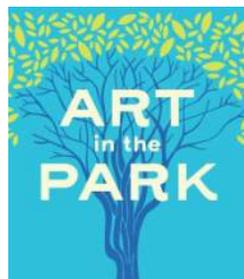


Examples of wayfinding and signage for downtowns and destinations

# 19. SUPPORT YEAR-ROUND EVENTS

Downtown events are one of Waterville’s incredible strengths. There are an incredible range of large and small events from Taste of Waterville to the Maine International Film Festival, to the weekly farmers market. Robust, coordinated events throughout the year are a critical ingredient for successful downtowns around the country.

While this is an area that is already doing well, it’s important to acknowledge the essential role this has had in downtown’s success to date, and its role in the future. The plan recommends building on the current range of events to fill out additional times of the year, and adding infrastructure and administrative support to help more organizations participate.



A sampling of Waterville’s already vibrant, diverse, and successful roster of events

# 20. BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)

One ingredient of other successful downtowns is a Business Improvement District (BID) to deliver enhanced services beyond what the city provides. Although the city provides services across all of Waterville, a BID is focused entirely on the commercial core of downtown.

A BID would build on the work that the Central Maine Growth Council, Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, Waterville Creates!, and others already do, as well as the groundwork set by the former Waterville Main Street organization.

Successful BIDs require a steady source of funding raised through multiple avenues, which could include a special service district of downtown property and business owners who contribute a percentage of property value or sales tax, grants, federal and state programs, permits, and sponsorships. BIDs use this funding exclusively on improvements within the zone that directly benefit area businesses. In other cities, this has resulted in increased property values, retail sales, and visitor engagement.

The Vision Plan recommends further study in order to obtain more community input and test the feasibility and benefits of a Waterville Downtown BID.

## MARKETING AND EVENTS

- Downtown branding and marketing
- Support and promote events
- Support farmers market
- Arts and culture

## PLACEMAKING AND EXPERIENCE

- Parking District management
- Transit and transportation
- Improve visual character
- Clean and safe programs

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

- Grant programs (storefronts, upper floors)
- Business & retail recruitment and retention
- Coordinate infrastructure improvements
- One-stop shop

Examples of what BIDs do, from around the country in similar small cities



**Downtown Columbus, Indiana (pop. 50,000)**



**Downtown Hendersonville, North Carolina (pop. 15,000)**



# Downtown Waterville Vision Plan - Short/Medium Term

## OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY

- 1 Spring St Intersection
- 2 Silver St Plaza
- 3 Appleton St Connection
- 4 Temple St Connection
- 5 Art Walk
- 6 Castonguay Square
- 7 Head of Falls Park

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY

- 13 Main Street Upper Floors
- 14 New Integrated Housing (above Retail & Parking)

## MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT

- 8 Bicycle facilities
- 9 Improved public transit
- 10 Parking management

## BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 16 Activate storefronts with diverse retail
- 17 Attract new employers
- 18 Wayfinding and signage
- 19 Support year-round events
- 20 Business Improvement District



# Downtown Waterville Vision Plan - Long Term

## OPEN SPACE & ACCESSIBILITY

- 1 Spring St Intersection
- 2 Silver St Plaza
- 3 Appleton St Connection
- 4 Temple St Connection
- 5 Art Walk
- 6 Castonguay Square
- 7 Head of Falls Park

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY

- 13 Main Street Upper Floors
- 14 New Integrated Housing (above Retail & Parking)
- 15 Spaces for Inclusive Community Uses

## MOBILITY, PARKING & TRANSIT

- 8 Bicycle facilities
- 9 Improved public transit
- 10 Parking management
- 11 Parking improvement district
- 12 Long-term structured parking

## BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 16 Activate storefronts with diverse retail
- 17 Attract new employers
- 18 Wayfinding and signage
- 19 Support year-round events
- 20 Business Improvement District



# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

**Planning Principle #8 of this plan states: “Keep the Momentum Going!” This is a collective charge for the community to move from planning to implementation and realize the goals of the downtown vision.**

The Themes and Actions in the plan are all interrelated, and mutually support one another to create a vibrant, inclusive, growing, economically sustainable downtown. Integrated planning is important to advance all four themes in parallel, ensuring a balanced range of improvements benefiting the entire community.

Some action items require targeted public investment, while others will be achieved through a mix of private, institutional, nonprofit, and philanthropic investment. Proposed investments are intended to spur economic development and increase revenues, jobs, residents, and visitors, while creating a more inclusive, supportive, affordable, and accessible downtown for the entire Waterville community.

This plan is not the end of a process, but a beginning: it is intended to be visionary while also being achievable. The next phase is to advance a strategy for implementation. In fact, several of the projects shown in this vision, including new market rate and affordable housing, are already in the works.

Next steps include individual actions that can be advanced directly by the city, actions that can be advanced by the city in partnership with other organizations, and more in-depth study of topics requiring further discussion and input. The plan recommends the formation of an Implementation Working Group to study specific topics requiring additional analysis. In addition, since this vision is based on community input, the next phase will continue to emphasize engagement with the public and stakeholders as ideas are further developed.

**Let’s keep the momentum going!**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Waterville wishes to gratefully acknowledge the incredible amount of interest, engaged participation, robust support, and thoughtful input provided by so many people during this effort.

- Waterville residents
- Local business and property owners
- City Councilors and Mayor Coelho
- City of Waterville staff
- Local and regional partner institutions, including the Central Maine Growth Council, Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, Waterville Creates!, Waterville Public Library, Muskie Center, KVCAP, Waterville Homeless Shelter, Farmers Market, REM, St. Joseph's Maronite Church, Schupf Art Center, Children's Discovery Museum, Alfond Youth Community Center, Maine General, Thomas College, and Colby College
- Bixby Chocolate Cafe, Educare, the Elm, Maine Film Center, Maine Pine Catering, Muskie Center, Schupf Art Center, and Selah Tea Cafe for event support
- The local development community
- and many others.



CITY of  
**Waterville**  
MAINE