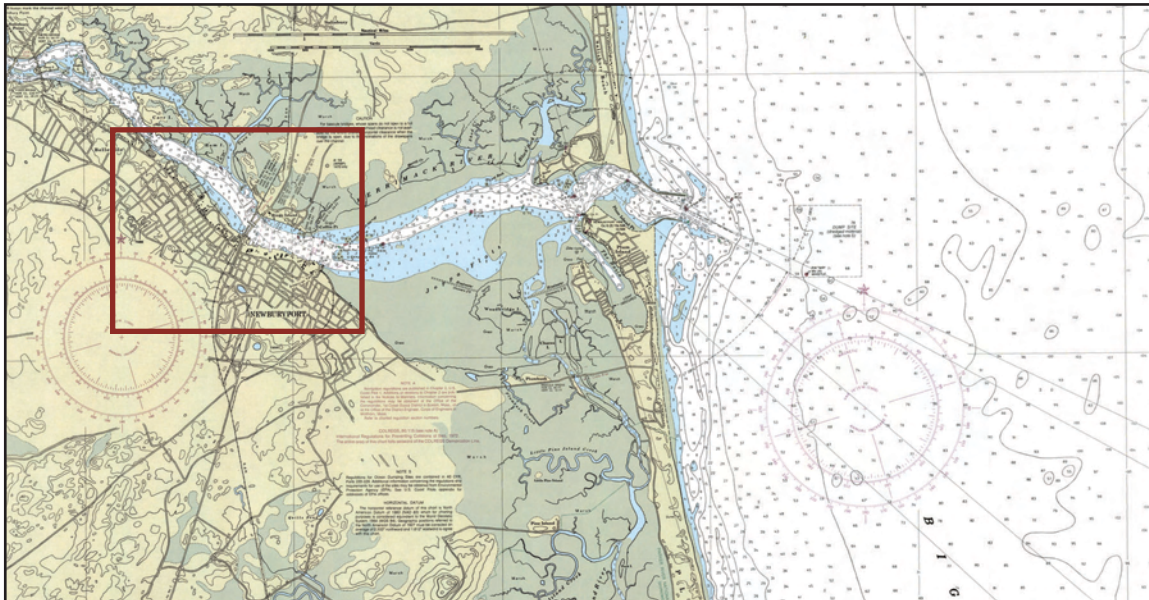


Newburyport Waterfront

Strategic Plan

Newburyport, Massachusetts
December 2003



Prepared for the **City of Newburyport, Massachusetts**

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with the Bluestone Planning Group and Vine Associates

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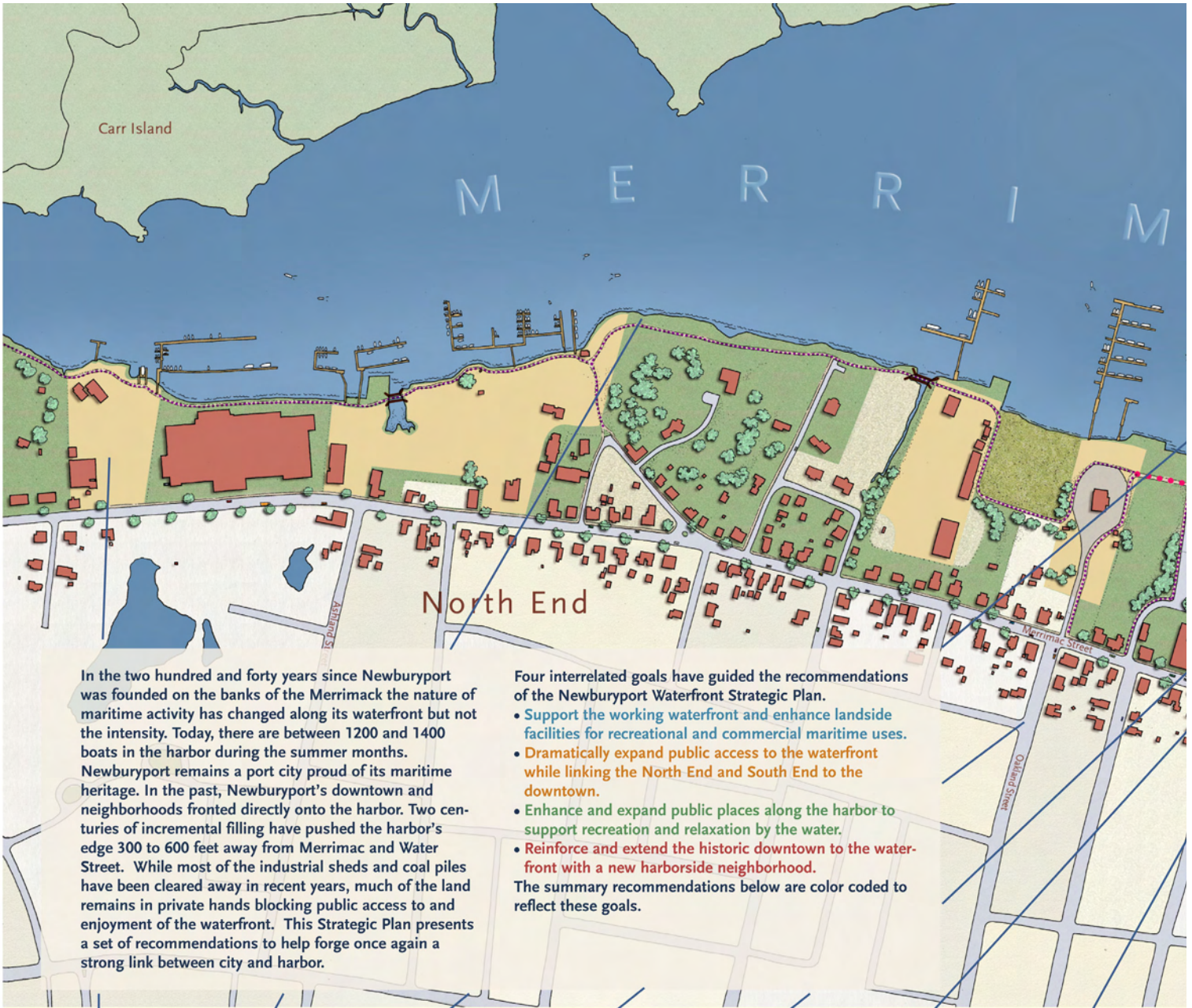
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In the two hundred and forty years since Newburyport was founded on the banks of the Merrimack the nature of maritime activity has changed along its waterfront but not the intensity. Today, there are between 1200 and 1400 boats in the harbor during the summer months. Newburyport remains a port city proud of its maritime heritage. In the past, Newburyport's downtown and neighborhoods fronted directly onto the harbor. Two centuries of incremental filling have pushed the harbor's edge 300 to 600 feet away from Merrimac and Water Street. While most of the industrial sheds and coal piles have been cleared away in recent years, much of the land remains in private hands blocking public access to and enjoyment of the waterfront. This Strategic Plan presents a set of recommendations to help forge once again a strong link between city and harbor.

Four interrelated goals have guided the recommendations of the Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan.

- Support the working waterfront and enhance landside facilities for recreational and commercial maritime uses.
- Dramatically expand public access to the waterfront while linking the North End and South End to the downtown.
- Enhance and expand public places along the harbor to support recreation and relaxation by the water.
- Reinforce and extend the historic downtown to the waterfront with a new harborside neighborhood.

The summary recommendations below are color coded to reflect these goals.

Support Working Boatyards in the Waterfront Marine Dependent (WMD) Zone and protect from further encroachment by non-water-dependent uses.

Extend shore line access upriver of Cashman Park over time as outlined in the City Master Plan.

Allow marina expansion in front of the former Towle Building site as it redevelops and explore harbor walk extensions and a future public boating program for rowing and/or sailing.

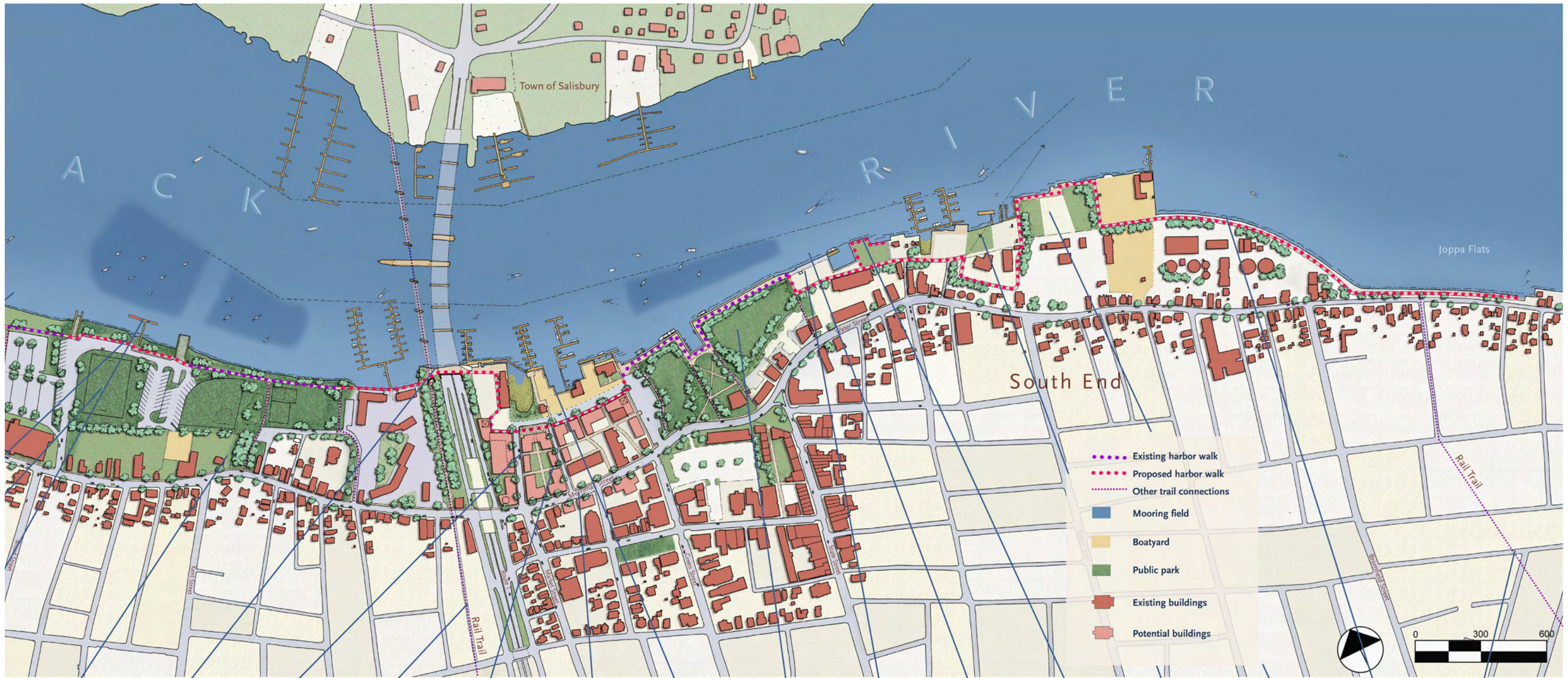
Protect historic view corridors down public streets to the water by setting waterfront development back from these sight lines.

Expand and improve the harbor walk and reconfigure parking to improve shoreline access.

Improve athletic facilities including a new larger soccer field. Explore shared parking arrangements with the former Towle building during busy weekends.

Extend a new fishing pier upstream from the existing municipal pier with support from the Massachusetts Public Access Board.

Newburyport Waterfront



Expand Cashman Park to Merrimack Street in the vicinity of Kent Street to forge better links with the neighborhood.

Extend the Harbor Walk underneath the Route 1 bridge linking the North End to the Central Waterfront.

Establish a system of public ways extending the historic street pattern of Newburyport to the water.

Establish a Rail Trail connection south to the MBTA railroad station and Newbury and north to Salisbury.

Extend the scale and character of downtown Newburyport to the waterfront by establishing a vibrant harbor side neighborhood.

Improve the pedestrian character of Merrimack Street with trees, walks, and infill redevelopment from the North End to the Downtown.

Support maritime activities in the Waterfront Mixed Use (WMU) Zone while supporting a healthy mix of uses set back from the shore.

Expand the Central Waterfront Park and explore options for accommodating replacement public parking.

Establish a new Waterfront Visitor's Center to serve transient boaters and others.

Expand and improve the Fish Pier for the working fishing fleet.

Install a new public boardwalk in conjunction with a new integrated fish processing and sales facility. Provide interpretive materials on the Atlantic fisheries.

Improve public access to the range lights and interpret their role as aids to navigation.

Explore future reuse of underutilized deep-water frontage for maritime use.

Dramatically expand direct access to the waterfront for residents and visitors through the establishment of a continuous two-mile Harbor Walk from Joppa Flats to Cashman Park.

Complete the Rail Trail loop from the waterfront through the South End to the MBTA railroad station and Newbury.

Strategic Plan

NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

AUGUST, 2003

Introduction

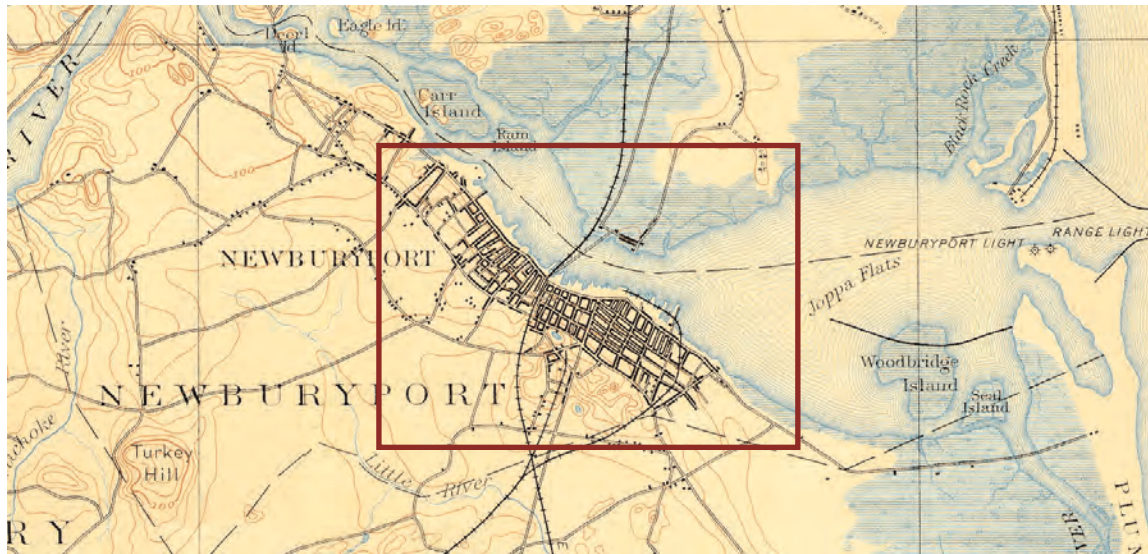
The City of Newburyport undertook a strategic planning effort for Newburyport Waterfront in the spring of 2003. This work was directed by the Office of Planning and Development and supported by the Newburyport Harbor Commission for water-related issues. This final report summarizing the findings and recommendations of that effort will help guide City policy regarding waterfront access and development - both landside and waterside - for the next ten years. The Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) is not a formal update of the comprehensive Harbor Management Plan last done in 1989 which is the responsibility of the Harbor Commission. While it builds on the Harbor Management Plan and on the 2001 Newburyport Master Plan, the Strategic Plan is targeted to produce specific near term results. It also provides a framework for the ongoing discussion of what the waterfront should be like in the future. A significant increase in harbor side public access, which will link improved waterfront parks, is now within reach. Development of some key privately held waterfront properties abutting the central waterfront appears imminent and represents a significant opportunity to extend the streets and character of historic Newburyport to the waterfront. Decisions made and initiatives taken over the next few years will be critical to the future of Newburyport's waterfront.



Newburyport Waterfront Study Area

Background

The study area focuses on the waterfront zone between Merrimac Street, Water Street and the harbor running from Joppa Park to the Yankee Marina. Over two miles long (11,600') and 300 to 600 feet wide, much of the waterfront study area was created from the incremental filling of tidelands and tidal marshes over two hundred years. The central portion of the waterfront was crowded with marine industrial buildings and coal piles for much of 20th century until urban renewal cleared them away in the 1960s. Newburyport no longer has the same relationship of city to harbor that it had in the early 1800s when the Federal-style commercial blocks were built down to the water's edge and tall ships towered over Water Street. The City began to rebuild this vital link between city and harbor beginning in the 1980s with the creation of Market Landing Park and the Peter J. Matthews Boardwalk. The boardwalk has been recently expanded and new walkways built linking the downtown to the harbor's edge. The Strategic Plan focuses primarily on the task of reconnecting city and harbor by means of parks, public streets, walkways, bike trails, architecture, and a vibrant mix of community uses.



Newburyport Plan, 1894

Planning Process

The City of Newburyport hired Goody Clancy to head up a consultant team with assistance from the Bluestone Planning Group for zoning issues and Vine Associates for marine infrastructure issues. Beginning in the spring of 2003 the planning team reviewed all past planning documents and undertook a thorough reconnaissance of the study area by land and water. Key stakeholders were interviewed one on one to help frame the planning issues. In addition meetings with staff at the Department of Environmental Protection, Mass. Highway Department, MBTA, and Public Access Board were conducted to discuss waterfront areas under their jurisdiction.

Three public meetings were held in April, May, and June and were attended by numerous citizens representing a broad spectrum of interests. They included members of the boating community, yacht club members, Friends of Cashman Park, residents from nearby neighborhoods, the Newburyport Chamber of Commerce, the Planning Board, the mayor's office, the planning office, the Newburyport Harbor Commission, and other groups. Summary notes from these meetings are included in the appendix.

The first public meeting focused on Goals and Objectives for the waterfront and revolved around a series of open questions.

One of the key directions emerging from this first meeting was the decision not to recommend a city marina at Cashman Park but instead to focus on improvements to the park, public access along the waterfront, and preserving and extending the character of downtown Newburyport as new development occurred.

The second public meeting focused on a twelve-foot annotated plan of the Waterfront that presented draft recommendations for consideration. Strong consensus emerged around



Range light

the value of a continuous harbor walk linking the South End and North End to the central waterfront, improvements to Cashman Park that better integrated diverse uses, and the importance of shaping new development through zoning and design standards to reflect the historic character of the downtown. A limited number of condominium owners voiced concern over the potential impact of increased public access and development on their private views of the waterfront.

The third public meeting turned to design details and strategies for implementing the emerging public vision for the Waterfront. Plan and perspective sketches were presented showing a feasible schematic design for extending the harbor walk past the Riverview Condominiums and under the Route One Bridge. Potential changes to waterfront zoning to ensure conformance of new construction to the downtown historic Newburyport development patterns were discussed. While details remain to be worked out the great majority of participants agreed on the overall goals of the strategic plan and many of the specific initiatives to achieve those goals. The ongoing and sustained participation of these individuals will be critical to the success of these initiatives.

Vision and Goals

Building on existing strengths, a shared vision for Newburyport's future waterfront emerged from the public meetings. This is a working waterfront that will continue to support commercial fishermen, tour boats, and recreational boater while accommodating a rich mix of public and private uses. It is a waterfront where city streets lined with active uses extend the character and charm of Newburyport to the water's edge. It is a waterfront where children from the South End can bicycle to visit North End friends without having to leave the waterfront. It is a waterfront where well-designed and maintained parks linked by the harbor walk serve a variety of people from soccer players and sunbathers to fishermen and sightseers.

Four interrelated goals have guided the recommendations of the Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan.

1. Support the working waterfront and enhance facilities for recreational and commercial maritime uses.
2. Reinforce and extend the historic downtown to the waterfront with a new mixed-use neighborhood.
3. Dramatically improve public access to the waterfront while linking the North End and South End to the downtown.
4. Enhance and expand public parks and civic spaces along the harbor for relaxation and recreation.



Overview and Recommendations

The following section considers waterfront wide issues and recommendations addressing maritime uses, public access to the shore, and public parks and civic spaces. A subsequent section will address three focus areas: the Waterside West district, the harbor walk bridge connection, and Cashman Park.

Maritime uses

Existing conditions

Resource: The Newburyport waterfront is located opposite Salisbury where the Merrimack River broadens into a wide estuary of close to 4,000 acres. The beaches of Plum Island and the open Atlantic are accessible through the mouth of the Merrimack River two miles to the



American Yacht Club

east. The islands and marsh creeks of Salisbury are a short paddle across the channel. There are abundant recreational opportunities for a broad range of boaters.

Use: Fishermen, sailors, wind surfers, power boaters, kayakers, jet skiers, and others crowd the wharves and waters of Newburyport harbor. During the peak months 1150 to 1200 recreational boats are based out of Newburyport. There are around 18 to 20 commercial fishing boats operating out of Newburyport harbor as a whole during the summer months. Most of the fishing vessels are less than 50 feet in length though vessels up to 70 feet in length have operated out of the harbor in the past.

Two tour boats, one 90' whale watch vessel, and six to seven charter boats for sport fishing offer trips during warm weather months. Most of these vessels are under 40' in length. Three larger charter boats operate out of Plum Island. The tour boats and whale watch lease space at the commercial pier from the Newburyport Waterfront Trust. A new kayak rental operation, Plum Island Kayak based at the Central Waterfront, began operations in 2003. Newburyport does not have a public rowing or sailing program for children or adults. Lowell's Boat Shop is part of the Newburyport Maritime

Museum and keeps a dory in the central embayment during summer months. It offers rowing opportunities at its shop upriver.

European fishermen had been frequenting the Merrimack shores for hundreds of years before Newburyport was founded and fishing became part of Newburyport's identity. At one time State Street was known as Fish Street. Though a fraction of its former size the fishing industry is alive and well in Newburyport today. Around 6 to 7 fishing boats are berthed in Newburyport year round and this number increases in the summer. They include lobster boats, scallopers and draggers. These have access to the fish pier owned by the City and some winter over in the central waterfront embayment. The ground fishing industry has gone through a contraction in the last two decades. It is hoped that when the ground fish stocks rebound more fishing boats will find Newburyport a supportive and convenient place from which to fish. The ability to berth their vessels, service their boats, store their gear, and sell their fish will be the deciding factor for commercial fishers.

Though sometimes overlooked, shoreline fishing is a marine dependent use and the Merrimack River is a one of the best fishing grounds on the coast. Virtually every unclaimed stretch of shore along the waterfront is lined with sport fishers on summer weekends. These fishers, most of them local, impose limited demands on the City and derive great enjoyment from this activity. There can be conflicts with pedestrians on shore and with boaters close to the shore in some instances, however.

Facilities and services: Eight private marinas serve the needs of the boating public and maintain a healthy degree of competition for clients. From west to east they are the Yankee Landing, Merri-Mar Yacht Basin, Ferry Landing, Boat Works, Windward I (at River's Edge), Windward Yacht Yard, Hilton's, and Channel Marker at McKenzie's wharf. Most of these service larger boats of 25' and over. Smaller boats appear to be underserved. There are two private boat clubs in Newburyport, North End Boat Club and the American Yacht Club. Five of the Newburyport marinas have boatlifts



Kayaks on the Waterfront

Photograph by Plum Island Kayak



Fishing boat at mooring

and provide limited marine services. Only one of the marinas - Merri-Mar - provides full marine services such as engine overhauls, however. Hilton's marina caters to commercial vessels, both passenger and fishing vessels, with its 75 ton hoist. George Hilton intends to continue providing this lift service for large vessels in the future even as he develops the inland portion of his yard for mixed uses.

Winter storage is provided at ten or more sites along the waterfront. Four additional winter storage sites are available on the Salisbury side of the river. Additional inland sites are available for boats that can be hauled by trailer.

Two public mooring fields, with approximately 63 and 15 moorings respectively, are located off of Cashman Park and the central waterfront. The American Yacht Club maintains around an additional 110 moorings. The Central Waterfront has a public float system with close to 1000 linear feet of tie up space. Water and power are now provided at the floats but the floats themselves are in need of renovation. The estimated cost of full renovation is between \$250,000 and \$290,000. There are two public launch ramps for trailers - Cashman Park and Hale Park - and one for car top boats at the central waterfront. A fourth ramp at Cashman is chained off and only used on occasion for commercial boats or for emergencies.

Newburyport is major attraction for transient boaters yet it lacks basic facilities to support their stay in port. Comparable ports along the eastern seaboard (e.g. Southwest Harbor in Maine) have welcome centers with amenities such as showers, Internet access, and laundry facilities.

In the absence of maintenance dredging a number of historic embayments along the waterfront have filled in with river sediment over the decades. Once wetland plants take hold it is difficult to get permits to dredge. The embayment between Tournament Wharf and McKay Wharf is almost entirely filled in



Collapsed seawall

and the smaller embayment at the McKenzie Wharf is partially filled in. In addition, ledge outcroppings limit use of the fish pier embayment. Compounding this problem is the structural breakdown of a number of seawalls next to these embayments. The seawall east of the fish pier has fallen apart and caved in. The cost of dredging and seawall repair is prohibitive to many of the pier owners. However, the ongoing loss of these seawalls and embayments continues to erode the accessibility of the waterfront and the maritime heritage of Newburyport.



Central Waterfront

Capacity: Given the variety and intensity of watercraft use it is the sense of some boaters who attended public meetings that the river is at or close to capacity on summer weekends. Some old time users remembering quieter times refuse to embark on harbor boat trips during summer weekends and consider the crowded waterways as "down right dangerous." There is, however, no obvious mechanism to control the number of boaters using the river and this number will increase over time. While Newburyport marinas have expanded over time to fill all available mooring space on the water sheet, additional marinas are being built or expanded upstream at Haverhill and Amesbury. Much of this boat traffic will funnel past the Newburyport waterfront on its way to the ocean. With the growth in kayaking there are many more hand-launched boats entering the harbor now than there have ever been. Given this variety and density of boating activity it is surprising that there are not more conflicts on the water.

Recommendations

- Protect marinas in the Waterfront Marine Dependent (WMD) zone from further encroachment by non-marine dependent uses.
- Some limited expansion of marinas should be permitted on a case-by-case basis.
- As a policy a municipal marina should not be established at Cashman Park. The public has consistently opposed the establishment of floating marinas on the watersheet in front of public parks.

- Preserve adequate room for maritime uses such as marinas in the Waterfront Mixed Use (WMU) zone while promoting a mix of non-marine dependent uses that are set back from and compatible with the working edge of the waterfront.
- Preserve sites with deep-water access for long-term maritime use such as the Massachusetts Electric Company substation, which has direct access to deep water.
- Identify public and private funds for the long-term restoration of crumbling seawalls and the dredging of embayments.
- Improve the fish pier in ways that will sustain the fishing industry in Newburyport. Improvements under consideration include an extension of the fish pier to the east, a new gear shed, and blasting and dredging to open up the embayment. Reclamation of the embayment may require private investment in return for shared use of the berthing space.
- Support expansion of the proposed fish processing, market, and restaurant facility to support the fish pier. This will reinforce the maritime identity of this portion of the waterfront.
- Welcome transient boaters to port by building a staffed waterfront visitor center in the vicinity of the harbormaster's office with services such as laundry, showers, and Internet service.
- Identify public and private sites for possible use as winter boat storage yards.



Windward Yacht Club

- Support the establishment of a public rowing and sailing program based in Cashman Park or in a location where public safety can be assured.
- Ensure unobstructed access for small hand powered boats close to shore by requiring that all floats and ramps provide clearance at all tides as stipulated by Chapter 91 requirements. This is particularly important given the currents and boat traffic on the Merrimack River.



Board walk at the Black Cow

Public Access to the Waterfront

Existing conditions

Newburyport has achieved significant public access along its waterfront with a half-mile of pathways along Joppa Park, the Central Waterfront, and Cashman Park combined. While informal access is possible along a few other stretches most of the remaining two miles of shore between Joppa Park and the Yankee marina is largely inaccessible. Good lateral connections from Merrimac Street and Water Street to the shore are provided along the Central Waterfront, some of them recently built, but are missing or difficult to find in other parts of the waterfront. The broad waterfront by and large still feels remote and inaccessible especially for first time visitors who are not familiar with the historic ways to the water.

The City's ongoing Rail Trail initiative proposes a continuous four mile loop trail linking Newburyport's train station with the waterfront by way of existing rail road right of ways through the North End and South End. A key component of this trail is the one mile section along the waterfront. Starting at the east side of the waterfront and moving west the City's Rail Trail initiative has worked out a proposed alignment that would link Joppa Park and the South End to the Central Waterfront (see illustrative plan). The shoreline segment near Joppa Park provides panoramic views of the Joppa Flats tidal basin with Plum Island in the distance. The alignment passes behind the American Yacht Club and skirts the edge of the Massachusetts Electric Company site along the water before returning to the old railroad corridor that leads to the central waterfront. The 1100-foot boardwalk at the central waterfront is the heart of the harbor walk and will be the place from which many visitors begin and end their explorations. Close to two and a half million dollars worth of

improvements have been made in 2002 and 2003 including an extension of the boardwalk and two new pedestrian connections from Merrimac Street and Water Street to the water's edge. The 2001 Newburyport Central Waterfront Feasibility Study suggested that the multiuse path split at this point and that a bicycle path separate from the crowded boardwalk be established to avoid future conflicts. Further study is needed.

The critical link between the Central Waterfront and Cashman Park offers some of the greatest benefits and challenges of the harbor walk as a whole. Route 1 and the railroad corridor have long separated the North End from the downtown. The main Route 1 underpass at Merrimac Street is

uncomfortable and perceived as dangerous for pedestrians.

A harbor walk extension for pedestrians would help bridge this barrier, unite the city, and appears to be quite feasible.



Cashman Park harbor walk

The shore land between the Black Cow Restaurant and the Route 1 bridge is controlled by several private owners and occupied by restaurants, marina operations and a working boat yard. Crossing these properties with a public path along the shore would normally be extremely difficult, however, the group of property owners in question has been cooperating and will be coming to the city with a coordinated development proposal in the future.

Establishing a well-designed harbor walk in addition to the

public streets that such a development needs should be of interest to this group.

The Route 1 Bridge, railroad embankment, and River's Edge Condominium frontage pose a serious barrier to linking the North End and the Central Waterfront. The challenges and opportunities of this harbor walk segment are described in detail on page 30. In brief, the imposing height of the highway and railroad embankments is an asset. There is sufficient height to accommodate pedestrian underpasses beneath them. Existing decks and setbacks of the River's Edge condominium complex are sufficient to accommodate public shoreline access - a basic requirement of Chapter 91 regulations.

Access to the shore along Cashman Park is uneven. A new section of harbor walk and armored embankment has been recently built between the Rivers Edge condominiums and the new boat ramp, a distance of some 700 feet. The narrow 500-foot segment that follows is inadequate, however. The portion next to the parking lot is only 5 to 6 feet wide and overhung by car and truck



Custom House Way

bumpers reducing it further. This narrow path can be crowded with shore fishermen who spread out along the path to cast their lines into the river without getting tangled. Beyond the old boat ramp lies a 400-foot segment of harbor walk built by the developer of the former Towle Building as part of a Chapter 91 mitigation package. This path segment has a higher level of finish with concrete pavement, decorative lights and benches. The harbor walk currently dead ends at the North End Boat Club forcing walkers and joggers to

cut back through the Towle building parking lot to return to the neighborhood. (The North End Boat Club has a Chapter 91 license requirement to allow pedestrian access through its property.)

Recommendations

Expanding the harbor walk to embrace the entire waterfront will reconnect the neighborhoods with the central waterfront and will broaden people's experience and image of Newburyport as a pedestrian friendly city.

- Establish a continuous harbor walk accessible to all between Joppa Park and Cashman Park
- Provide clearly marked lateral paths linking the harbor walk back to Merrimac and Water Street.
- Provide consistent sign posts identifying these access points as has been done for some of the historic ways to the water at the Central Waterfront.
- Establish trail spurs that provide access to overlooks and piers.
- Link the harbor walk to the regional Rail Trail system with access to Newbury, Salisbury, and beyond.
- Extend the harbor walk west along the shore towards Maudslay State Park in the future.
- Ensure that the harbor walk is sufficiently wide for multiple uses (10 to 12' on average), handicapped accessible (5% grade or less), and safe.
- Address the deteriorating bulkhead supporting the Central Waterfront boardwalk in the near future.
- Provide the harbor walk with benches, lights, and landscaping appropriate to the location.



McKay Wharf

Waterfront Parks and Civic Spaces

Existing Conditions

Newburyport has established three public parks along its waterfront: the Joppa Park promenade in the South End, Market Landing Park in the Central Waterfront, and Cashman Park in the North End. Joppa Park and Market Landing Park are passive parks focused on the water while Cashman Park is primarily an active park supporting a variety of land and water based recreation.

Joppa Park

The Joppa Park promenade provides a sweeping view of the tidal basin with Plum Island in the distance. The walk is shielded from the brunt of winter storms by a concrete seawall which cuts off these views for pedestrians seated on the park benches. Short of lowering the wall one potential approach to correcting this deficit is to add fill along the wall and elevate the walk. The landscaped edge would then slope back towards Water Street offering a verdant view to drivers. Further design study is needed.

Market Landing Park / Central Waterfront

The Central Waterfront has been the subject of numerous past studies including most recently the Newburyport Central Waterfront Feasibility Study in 2001. The current study has relied to a great extent on the conclusions reached in these earlier planning efforts. For this reason few additional recommendations for the Central Waterfront are made here. Planning for the Central Waterfront



Joppa Park

undertaken in 2001 came to the conclusion that this area should remain open with a balance of passive green space and surface parking lots of sufficient size to meet demand. Changes to the existing zoning (WMU) will be needed to accomplish this goal. Forming a developed and active edge along either side of the park will help

support the extensive open space that is recommended. There is some concern that the expansion of park uses and reduction of parking lots will deprive the downtown of much needed parking supply. The costs and benefits of a public parking garage is under consideration at this time.

Cashman Park

Cashman Park is the only active recreational park fronting on the river and is intensively used during the summer months when the boat ramps and athletic fields are fully used. With 1500 feet of frontage on the river Cashman Park is a tremendously important resource. It is the setting for major civic celebrations such as July 4th. (More detailed analysis and recommendations specific to Cashman Park are presented on page 32).



Playground at Cashman Park

Recommendations

- Celebrate the unique qualities of each park.
- Link the parks together as a network and avoid duplication of functions.
- Provide continuous and generous access along the water for passive enjoyment in every case.
- Maintain open flexible spaces for changing uses.
- Encourage a mix of park uses that maintains activity in the park at most times of the day.
- Accommodate only those uses that are enhanced by or directly benefit from association with the water.
- Encourage mixed-use development overlooking parks to enhance security and activity day and night. Reinforce the pattern of open spaces and developed edges along the Newburyport harbor. This pattern provides a variety of experiences for pedestrians traversing the waterfront as water views are held back and revealed in a dramatic way.

- Create a fourth public space along the waterfront - an urban square market place and/or plaza facing the water and lined with active uses. The desire for such a space emerged in discussion at the public workshops. The idea of a new public plaza fronting on the waterfront came from workshop participants who referenced other examples of urban spaces that face the water.

The following section presents existing conditions and recommendations for three strategic areas where change is anticipated. These areas are the Waterside West District just to the west of the Central Waterfront, the harbor walk bridge connection past the Route 1 bridge, and Cashman Park.



Covent Gardens Market, London

Focus Areas

Waterside West District

Existing Conditions

The relatively undeveloped district just to the west of the Central Waterfront is a focus area of the Newburyport Waterfront strategic plan. For planning purposes we have called it Waterside West as Newburyport was referred to as "Waterside" before it separated from Newbury in 1764. This district will undergo significant development in the years ahead and, if done well, could add greatly to Newburyport's downtown character and experience.

Downtown Newburyport is widely considered to be one of the most historic and distinctive downtowns in New England and a wonderful place to live, work, and visit. The Federalist style commercial blocks built in the early eighteenth centuries line the streets of Newburyport with brick facades and sloping roofs that strike a wonderful balance between variety and continuity. The human scale evident in the 2 to 3 story buildings and the short blocks of the downtown make walking a pleasure. Equally important is the mix of downtown uses that have been cultivated over time. The residential uses above stores insure that there is life on the streets after hours. Along with the tourist gift shops are businesses and shops that cater to the local residential community. Though it welcomes visitors Newburyport's downtown has resisted the trend to become exclusively a tourist destination.



Pleasant Street



Waterside west district (outlined in red)

The area west of the central waterfront is occupied by a handful of commercial buildings that are the remains of a once dense district, fenced storage yards, and unpaved parking lots. New development is beginning to be planned for this western portion of the waterfront mixed-use zone - the Waterside West district. There is a potential danger that future development in this area would fail to maximize public access.

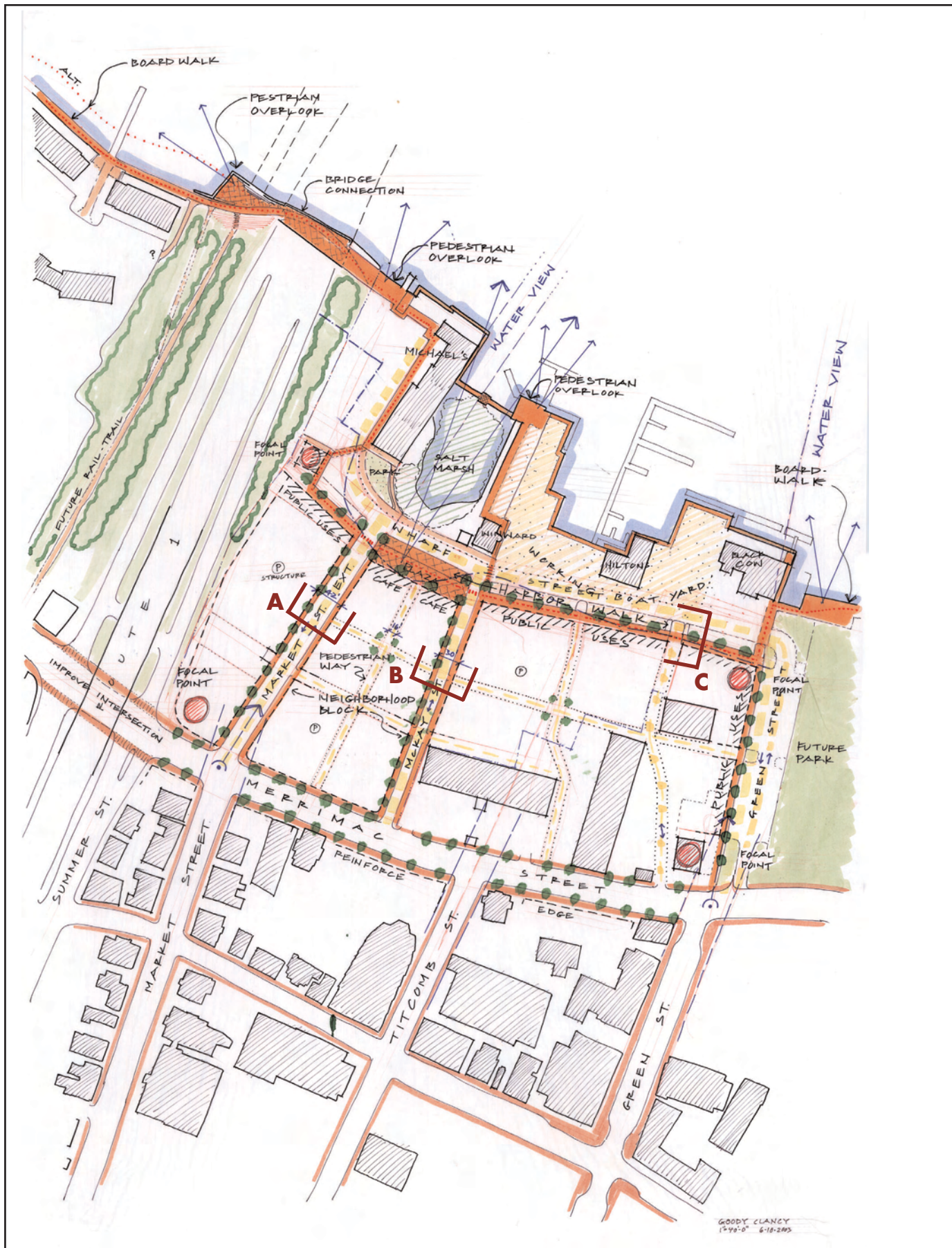
This has happened elsewhere along the waterfront with unfortunate results. Current zoning does not help. An as of right development following current zoning regulations would result in a suburban style development bearing little resemblance to the historic core. There is little incentive for developers to build on the historic pattern of public roads and sidewalks today. Indeed, one could not build Newburyport's downtown under the current zoning regulations. This can be changed, however, for the better. By adapting the zoning regulations within the limited area of the waterfront mixed use zone and adopting design guidelines, developers can be prompted to build in a way that respects and reinforces the special character of the downtown and provides tangible public benefits such as access to and along the waterfront. The following recommendations reflect this alternative approach.

Recommendations

- Require all new development to conform to and reflect the historic character and quality of downtown Newburyport.

Land uses

- Ensure a healthy mix of uses that serve the downtown community and support a vibrant mix of activities year round.
- Ensure that active ground floor public uses front onto major streets (Merrimac, Green, and "Wharf") and anchor the corners of blocks.
- Allow residential uses on upper floors above these public uses.
- Allow some ground floor residential uses along secondary streets leading to the waterfront (Market and "McKay").
- Consider ground floor uses such as a small green grocer, a hardware store, and a chandlery (nautical supplies) that will serve the residential as well as boating community.
- Ensure that there is sufficient parking for all new uses and encourage structured and underground parking to avoid large surface parking lots.
- Create a framework of streets, walks and squares that are clearly public and controlled by the City (on pages 19 - 20).

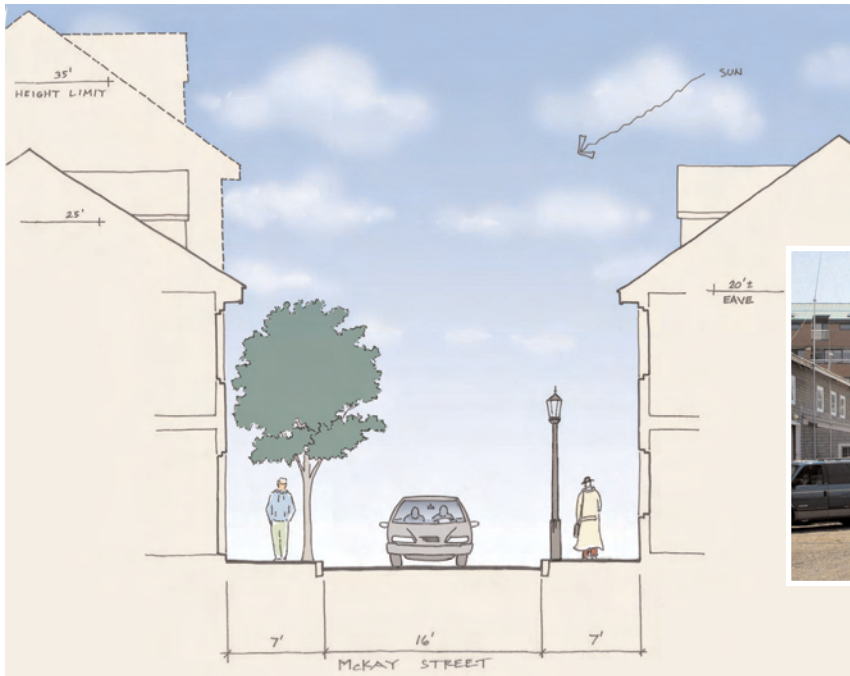


Waterside West public realm framework

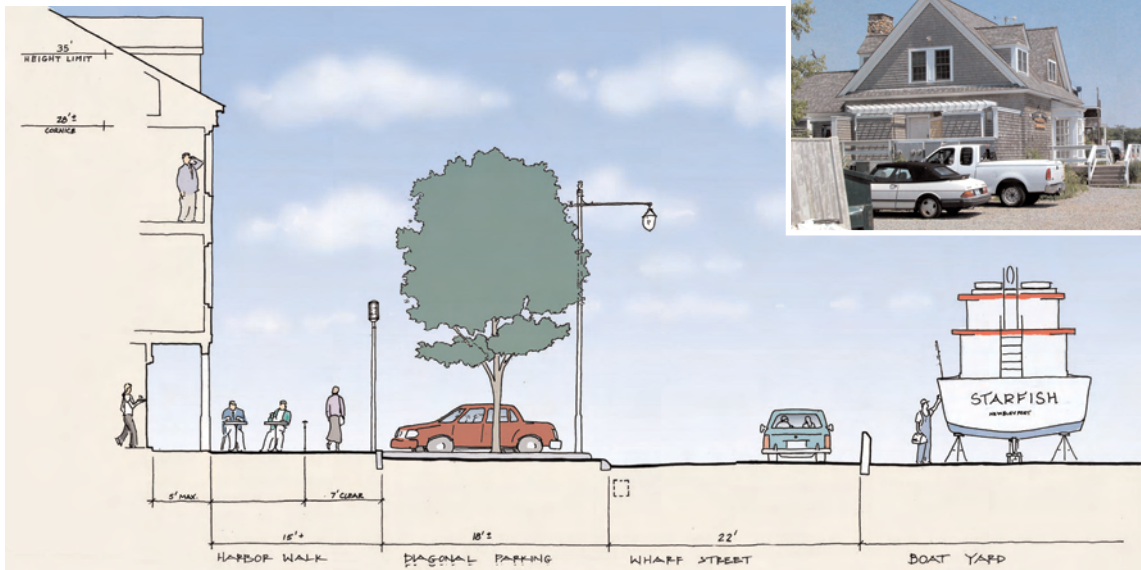


A Market Street section





B McKay Street section



C Wharf Street section

Public Streets and Walks

- Extend the existing pattern of streets and blocks to the waterfront. These lateral streets should be tightly framed by buildings similar to the older streets in Newburyport (i.e. Inn Street) and should frame views of the water wherever possible.
- Extend the Green Street sidewalk to the waterfront in front of the buildings facing the parking lot. Reinforce the western edge of this Green Street extension by encourage infill development facing the central waterfront park. Consider recommending the removal of the modern cinderblock additions to the Davis Auto Electric building and restoring it as a landmark building at the edge of the Waterside West district.
- Create an extension of Market Street to the water. Reorient this extension to lead directly to and frame views of the embayment and the Merrimack River. Remove invasive reeds blocking views of the river and replace with low growing native plant materials.
- Create a third street to the waterfront in between the Market and Green Street extensions. This middle street is intended to provide additional public access to the waterfront and avoid the creation of a "superblock" that would be out of scale with historic Newburyport. For planning purposes we have called this middle street "McKay Street" as it leads to historic McKay Wharf.
- In addition to these three streets, encourage a system of mid block alleys and pedestrian passageways reminiscent of those found in the downtown core.
- Establish a new frontage street facing the harbor to provide access, complete city blocks, and define the edge of the working waterfront. For planning purposes we have called this street "Wharf Street." Wharf Street should be completely public in nature and have public parking along it for increased waterfront access. Line the south side of Wharf Street with public uses that support pedestrian activity along the



Inn Street



State Street

waterfront. Provide a wider sidewalk to accommodate café tables and consider a raised angled parking zone with specialty paving that can be used for special events such as sidewalk art shows.

- Create a 400-foot sidewalk extension along the south side of Wharf Street and line it with active public uses facing the harbor. This portion of the harbor walk should be accessible and inviting day and night and in every season.



Threadneedle Alley

- In addition to the harbor walk develop a secondary system of public paths and boardwalks to provide point access to the ends of existing piers and onto floats on a seasonal basis where possible. The possibility of a pedestrian bridge crossing the embayment between McKay Wharf and Tournament Wharf should be further explored as a central feature of this secondary system of paths.
- At the heart of the Waterside West district create a public plaza for public events, activities, and vendors. This plaza should be lined with public uses such as a public market, shops, a hotel, and the like. Consider locating this plaza between Market and McKay Street with an opening view of the river and embayment between McKay Wharf and Tournament Wharf. A well-designed urban space such as this would provide a public destination and anchor for the west side of the downtown waterfront.

Zoning and municipal regulations

- Adapt zoning and subdivision regulations to support this strategic waterfront vision. (Draft zoning language will be provided in a separate appendix.)
- Establish general design guidelines enforced by municipal site plan review.

Design Guidelines

- Require zero front yard set backs and allow zero side and back yard set backs to achieve the look and feel of the downtown. Allow 5' front yard set backs by special permit to encourage some variety at key locations along the street.
- Encourage continuous street facades with firewalls between adjacent buildings. Discourage long monotonous facades by limiting the apparent length of buildings and changing the fenestration. Encourage the use of arched passageways to provide access to rear lots similar to State Street and Inn Street.
- All buildings should front on the public streets with front doors. Service access should be provided to the rear wherever possible.
- Where buildings front on sloping streets they should step down the slope and have entrances at grade. There should be no blank basement walls emerging from the slope.
- Maintain height restrictions of 35 feet to the mid point of sloped roofs. This should result in the 2 1/2 to 3 story buildings typical of the downtown. Where buildings are sited on sloping terrain allow the height measurement to be taken at the highest grade to permit greater building heights facing down slope towards the water. This will permit underground parking in these instances.
- A traditional pattern of framed windows and doors facing all public ways should characterize buildings.
- Materials: The use of red brick and slate colored roofing should predominate, and may be supplemented with other materials for a contemporary treatment.



The North Row, Market Square

Parking

- Remote parking should be allowed within 500' of new buildings in order to avoid extensive surface parking lots that would interrupt the historic development pattern. Underground or structured parking should be encouraged to consolidate parking lots.
- Where parking garages front on public streets, 50% of their ground floor should be occupied by active public uses such as retail shops and the design of their façade should harmonize with abutting buildings.
- Ramps to underground parking should be limited to the rear of buildings and accessed from alleyways.



Parking garage with ground floor retail

Harbor Walk Bridge Connection

Achieving a 700-foot harbor walk connection under the Route 1 bridge and in front of the Rivers Edge condominiums would link Cashman Park with the central waterfront and dramatically expand Newburyport's waterfront access. No other Harborwalk improvement would have as large an impact on how people view and use the waterfront.

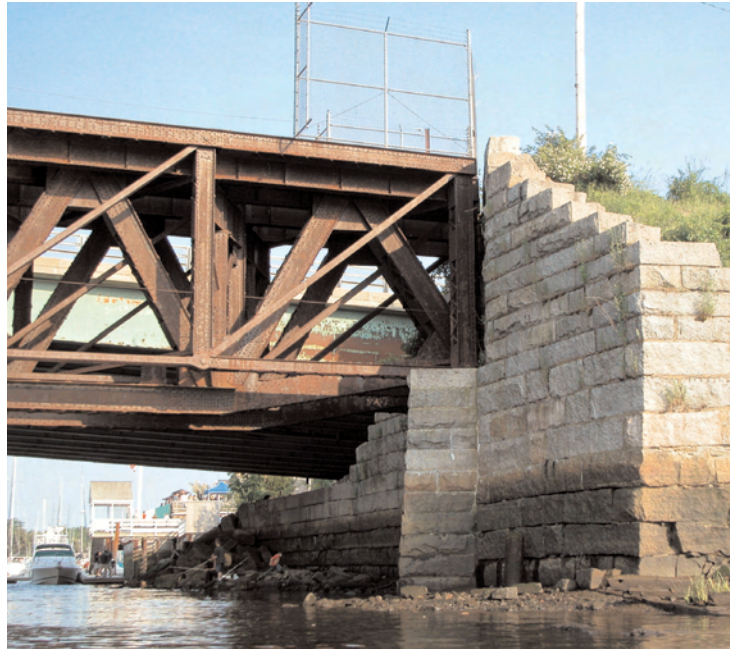


Route 1 bridge

Existing Conditions

Route 1 bridge

An existing underpass below the Route 1 bridge is sufficiently wide (15'+) to accommodate a multiuse path and has sufficient headroom (8'+) for bicyclists. The ground surface is relatively level and compacted. The granite block retaining wall next to the river channel appears to be in sound condition with blocks of granite piled against it to protect it from erosion and undercutting. The concrete bridge abutment on the



Railroad embankment

landward side is covered with graffiti. The low overhead steel beams, the subdued lighting, and the lack of a clear exit at the west end are uninviting. This area is currently an occasional hang out for young people and fishermen who scale down the slope to reach the channel. The lack of a handrail and adequate lighting poses a hazard.

Railroad embankment

Rail service was discontinued on this coastal line decades ago. Since that time the 1200-foot trestle bridge which crosses the Merrimack River at this point has deteriorated. Should rail service ever be reactivated it is likely that this bridge and its abutments would have to be rebuilt or entirely replaced according to MBTA staff. While the railroad embankment is currently a substantial barrier to shore line access the 16 to 18 foot height of the railroad bed above the proposed pathway elevation is actually an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Its elevation would allow a pedestrian underpass to be constructed with sufficient headroom.

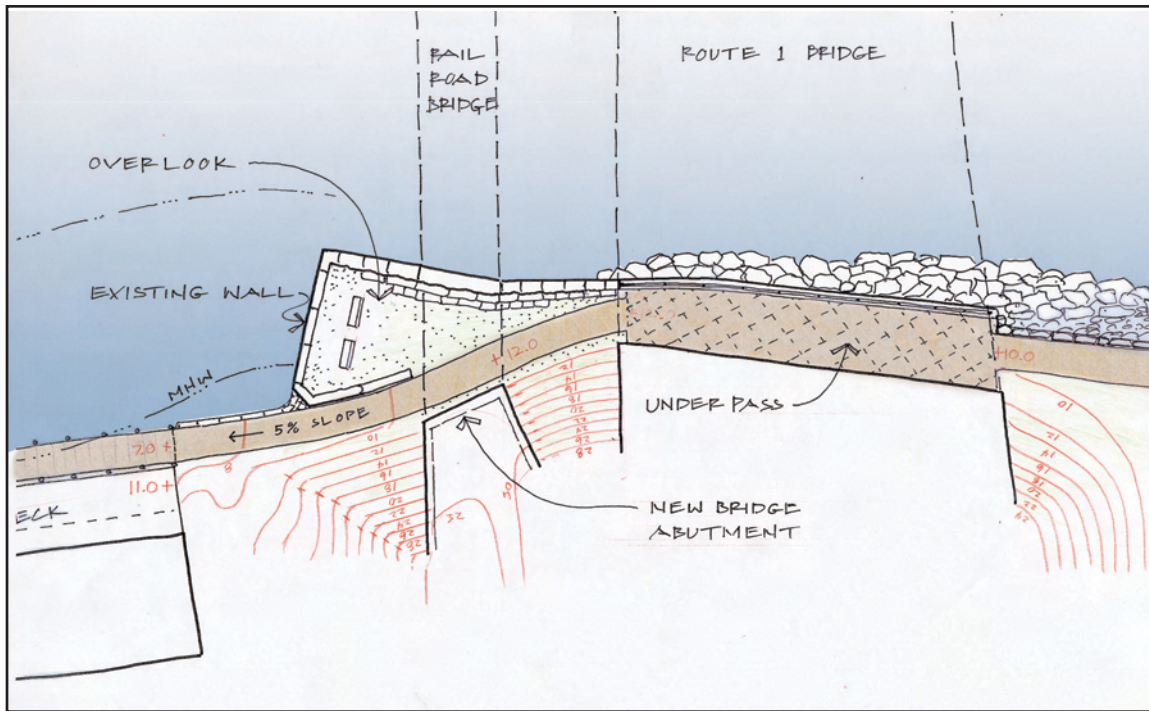
Rivers Edge frontage

The Rivers Edge condominium complex was built just west of the rail corridor on filled tidelands. The bulkheads for the condominium decks were built right up to the mean high water mark effectively

cutting off public access along the shore. This would not be possible today under more stringent Chapter 91 requirements. The condominium association is in the process of acquiring a Chapter 91 license under an amnesty program and will very likely be required to provide public access along the shore in front of the complex as a condition. The condominiums look out onto a very active marina during the summer months. Accommodating a public walk at the same elevation as the marina pier would bring additional activity to this area. Linking the condominium complex directly to the Central Waterfront and downtown could significantly enhance the value of these properties. In addition, a roadway extension of Pop Crowley Way ending in a cul-de-sac interrupts shoreline access just west of the Rivers Edge complex.



River's Edge deck



Proposed Harbor Walk at Route 1 bridge



Perspective sketch of Route 1 underpass

Recommendations

For a harbor walk in this location to be fully successful and to overcome the psychological as well as the physical barriers, it is crucial that it be attractive, safe, and seamlessly designed. Anything less may discourage some people from using the connection. (See illustration on page 28)

Route 1 bridge connection

- Work with the Massachusetts Highway Department to obtain permission for establishing a public right of way.
- Transform the 110-foot long underpass with new pavement, a railing along the seawall, and lighting for safety. (see illustration)
- Treat the broad concrete bridge abutment wall as an opportunity for an artistic treatment to brighten the location.



Route 1 underpass (see perspective)

Railroad embankment connection

- Work with the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority to gain permission to establish public access through this area.
- Reshape the embankment and extend a pathway from the end of the Route 1 underpass to the Rivers Edge boardwalk. Preliminary grading studies show that a handicapped accessible grade of 5% or less is achievable throughout this segment.
- Because rail service could conceivably be restored some day, current MBTA policy requires that the railroad bed remain in place. Unless a waiver can be granted from the MBTA, a short bridge section or box culvert may have to be constructed to accommodate the harbor walk. Further study is needed as any future reconstruction of the railroad bridge across the Merrimack River would have an impact on this infrastructure, however.
- Provide steps and/or a sloping path to connection the harbor walk to the proposed rail trail atop the rail embankment.

Note: Several other alternatives for achieving a connection were considered and rejected for technical

and design reasons. They included alternatives to climb up and over the embankment, and to build an elevated boardwalk out over the river and under the railroad trestle. The recommended access strategy is the only one that achieves an accessible, simple and clear route.

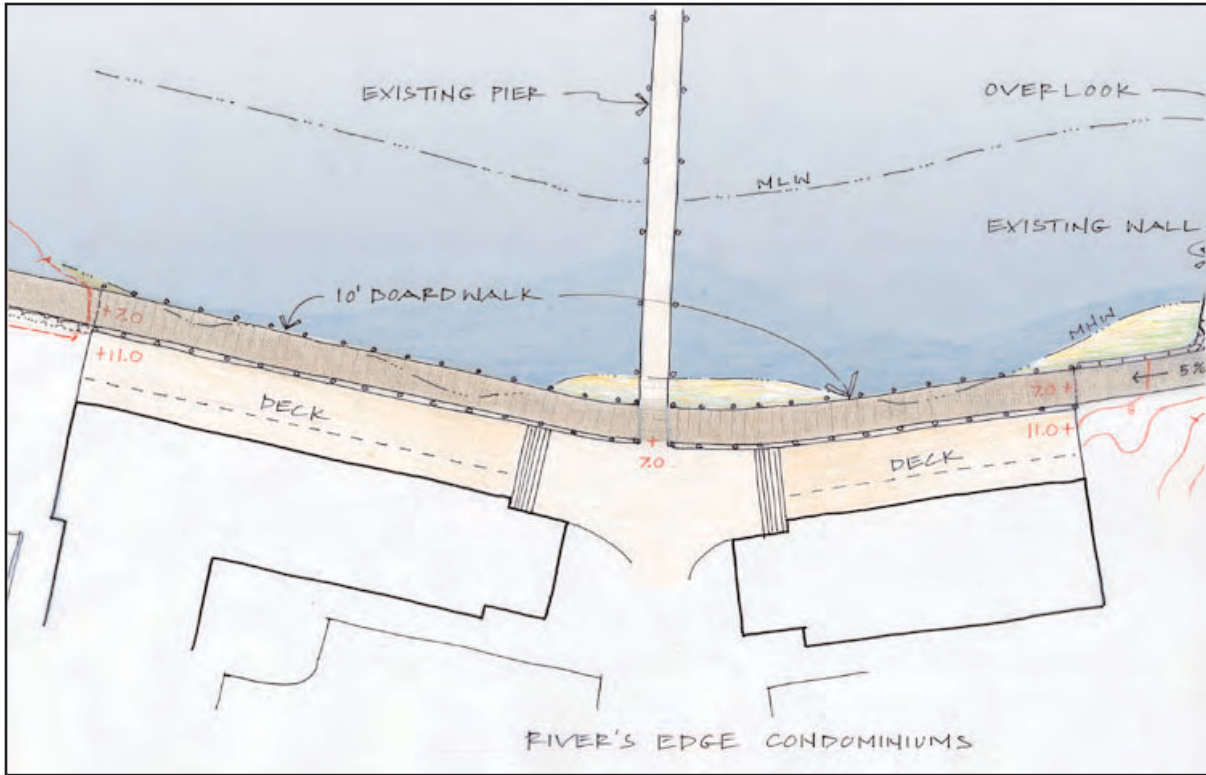


River's Edge (see perspective)

Rivers Edge connection

- Provide a new 10' wide boardwalk with railings adjacent to and in front of the existing bulkhead.
- Place this boardwalk at the lower elevation of the marina pier so as to screen pedestrians from view of the first floor condominiums. Provide additional privacy if needed by increasing the height of the railing wall at the deck edge.
- Provide a sloping path at the west end of the boardwalk linking to the existing Cashman Park harbor walk.
- Establish a lateral walkway along the west side of the condominium complex back to Merrimac Street following the park drive and Pop Crowley Way. A reconfiguration of the park drive alignment can reduce pavement near the shore, rationalize the parking (where parked cars intrude onto the public way), and provide room for the new path.

Several alternatives for providing access across the front of the Rivers Edge condominium complex were examined. One alternative under consideration was an elevated boardwalk or pier in the intertidal zone off shore. In addition to being very expensive this alternative would have trapped flotsam and jetsam behind the pier structure and subject it to damage. Another alternative would provide access across the existing front deck of the condominium association where there is currently a right of way shared by the condo owners. This would be the least expensive option and most easily accomplished, however it would intrude upon the privacy of the condominium owners.



Proposed harbor walk at river's edge



Perspective sketch of new board walk

Cashman Park

Cashman Park was identified as a focus area for the strategic plan early in the planning process. The following existing conditions and recommendations should be considered within the context of an integrated master plan for the entire park. Given the importance of Cashman Park to the entire Newburyport community and the increasing diversity and intensity of water and land based uses at the park, a master plan is needed to guide redevelopment and management.

Existing conditions



Fishermen mix with sight seers along shore path

Use: Cashman Park serves the needs of the entire Newburyport community and beyond. It is large enough to accommodate the thousands of people who come to see the July 4th fireworks. Its 1500-foot shoreline affords unobstructed views of the water and is an excellent place from which to fish. Cashman Park is crowded with active uses all competing for a piece of its 12 1/2 acres. It has a playground, a basketball court, a tennis court, a softball field, a soccer field, and one small

lawn at the east end for passive use. It also has one of the two busiest boat ramps and trailer parking lots in the Commonwealth.

The new boat ramp has ample capacity for the launching and hauling of boats. When the new ramp was completed the old boat ramp, just up stream, was chained off. It is used on occasion for hauling commercial boats and has become a launch site for car top boats including kayaks and canoes. The posts and chain make access for hand carried boats difficult, however, and no parking spaces have been provided for these users. Fishermen lined up along the narrow harbor walk near the old boat ramp space themselves out 15 to 20 feet to cast their lines into the channel. State regulations prevent use of the short boat pier for fishing. The City signed an agreement with the Massachusetts Public Access Board several years ago to provide fishing improvements at Cashman Park. This agreement is still in effect. Local residents rejected a fish pier alternative for the east end of the park and no further alternatives have been explored so far. Despite the intensity of use there are no visitor services such as public bathrooms, drinking fountains, or phones at Cashman Park.

Access and parking: Access to the park - both visual and physical - is obscure. Unless you were from the neighborhood it would be hard to find Pop Crowley Way. Only a small portion of the park fronts directly onto Merrimac Street near Kent Street. Parking for park users is very limited with approximately 16 spaces at the end of Pop Crowley Way and only 8 spaces in the boat ramp parking lot. The private parking lot in back of the former Towle building contains over 250 spaces and is largely empty during weekends.



Parking overlooking river

The Public Access board created the new boat ramp, pier, and parking lot in the 1990s. There are no other sizable boat ramps on the Merrimack below the falls at Lawrence, and this quickly became one of the two busiest boat ramps in the state. On peak summer weekends trucks and trailers can line up to get into the parking lot according to the harbormaster. Nevertheless the 23 trailer parking spaces facing the river are often used by standard cars and pick up trucks belonging to fishermen, boater's guests, and park visitors. Of 132 spaces in the parking lot only 8 are sized for standard cars and two of these are handicapped spaces. Operators of the park have long recognized the shortcoming of this arrangement and have allowed standard vehicles to occupy the river edge spaces. This amounts to an 80% / 20% split between trailers and cars.

Condition: Cashman Park has resulted from a series of ad hoc design decisions to accommodate one use after another. For example when the parking lot was built for the new boat ramp a soccer field was substituted for a lost softball field. The soccer field was not sized or graded properly resulting in flooded and muddy conditions during rainy periods. Cashman Park lost much of its landscape character as more facilities were added and more ground paved. There are few mature trees and even fewer shrubs. The shore is devoid of plant materials to soften the edge.

Recommendations

Use

- Designate the old ramp as a hand-carried boat launch and improve it by, among other things, replacing the chain with bollards and posting signs. Maintain its function as an emergency boat ramp during storms.
- Consider the creation of a public rowing and/or sailing program based out of a public boathouse sited in front of the former Towle building. Provide park support services such as public bathrooms in this facility.
- Consider the creation of a handicapped accessible fishing pier by extending the existing boat pier up stream. The cost and benefits of this fishing facility should be weighed against the costs and benefits of improving the existing harbor walk to serve fishers.



Access

- Fill in the critical gap in the harbor walk between the new boat ramp and the former Towle Building site by converting a limited number of trailer spaces along the shore to standard spaces. Simply acknowledging the use pattern and shortening the trailer parking spaces to accommodate cars would gain fifteen feet for a new wider harbor walk. Include benches, trash receptacles, and lights along the harbor walk for evening use and consider wooden tables or benches for shore fishermen's use in designated areas along the path.
- Provide a trail connection back to Merrimac Street along side the Rivers Edge Condominium complex.
- Provide a trail connection back to Merrimac Street through the North End Yacht Club or through the planned development on the Towle Building site. (Note: The developer of the Towle building site is planning to undertake a phase two development that will require site review and a Chapter 91 license in the future.)



Harbor walk at Towle Building site

Parking

- Negotiate with the owners of the former Towle Building to allow public parking in their parking lot during periods of peak park use. Provide an access drive gate from the park to the parking lot.
- Look for additional trailer parking opportunities either through shared parking lots or over flow parking on turf.
- Explore possible use of the parking area near the boat ramp as winter boat storage with private supervision. Revenues derived from this could be dedicated to parks maintenance.

Condition

- Reduce excessive pavement and reintroduce trees and shrubs to create a more park-like character.
- Consider the long-term acquisition of additional parkland at the terminus of Kent Street to secure views, provide additional parking, and provide a public gateway to the park.
- Enlarge and improve the soccer field with better drainage and irrigation.
- Work with the Friends of Cashman Park to consider these recommendations and next steps.



Kent Street water view



Cashman Park buoy

Implementation: Initial Steps

Recommendations contained in the Strategic Plan include capital improvements to public infrastructure, land use and design guidelines for private development, and revisions of municipal regulations and procedures. Implementation of these varied recommendations will involve several tools and initiatives. Responsibility for advancing these initiatives lies primarily with the City of Newburyport, however the ongoing support and involvement of interested citizens and friends groups will be key to success. Early action steps are highlighted below.

Regulatory

- Amend certain provisions of the WMU and WMD zoning districts to reflect the goals and desired outcomes identified in this Strategic Plan.
- Revise or add to subdivision regulations for waterfront sites to permit the construction of new waterfront streets and alleyways that reflect the time-tested historic widths and proportions of the city's downtown streets.
- Ensure that the City's zoning regulations and design guidelines for the WMU and WMD districts are supportive and complementary to the State's Chapter 91 regulations regarding required waterfront uses, public access and public open space on filled tidelands sites.



Threadneedle Alley

Urban Design

- Prepare more specific graphic Design Guidelines to be utilized by the Special Permit Granting Authority in Newburyport when reviewing proposed waterfront development projects that require Special Permits. These should work with and supplement the zoning code.

Capital Improvements

HARBOR WALK BRIDGE CONNECTON

- Secure access agreements from the Massachusetts Highway Department and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority for a harbor walk right of way. Submit formal applications with letters of support from local leadership.
- Coordinate with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and encourage enforcement of Chapter 91 regulations.

- Secure first phase funding for design and permitting.
- Initiate design and engineering study leading to cost estimate.
- Secure funding for construction.

CASHMAN PARK IMPROVEMENTS

- Clarify park purpose and program elements
- Undertake schematic design and cost estimate
- Study expansion of the municipal pier and/or shore side access for fishing use
- Coordinate with Massachusetts Public Access Board



Dory near public boat ramp

CENTRAL WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

- Formalize design for bulkhead repair
- Explore Fish Pier improvements, including design of extension, improvements to hoist, and building a gear shed
- Develop program and schematic design and location of proposed visitor center
- Continue to pursue park expansion and parking lot improvements

Funding Mechanisms

- Identify potential financing mechanisms to help fund and maintain planned public improvements on the waterfront - including new streets and streetscapes, walkways, parks, plazas, and public parking sites.
- Continue to seek State and Federal funding and grants for public improvements and maintenance. Track the federal Intermodal Transportation Act (T-21) reauthorization legislation. Potential state grants or appropriations include: Community Development Action Grants, Public Works Economic Development Funds, Community Development Block Grants, Ready Resource Funds, and the Seaport Bond Bill which targets waterfront infrastructure.

- While public financing of improved public access to the shore is crucially important, future private development of the waterfront holds a key to improved public access. State Chapter 91 requires developers of filled tideland sites to provide continuous public access up to and along the shore as well as other public benefits. This more than anything else will make the harbor walk a reality.
- Consider Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to create incentives for private developers to build public infrastructure.
- Consider developer contributions to a public parking fund in lieu of providing required on-site private parking spaces on dimensionally restrictive sites.
- Identify elements of the vision around which a friends group could build a private fundraising campaign.
- Determine if municipal general revenue "gap-financing" will be necessary to cover revenue shortfalls.
- Consider municipal bond issues supported by dedicated taxes (i.e. hotel room tax) or fees (i.e. parking fees). (See 2001 Newburyport Central Waterfront Feasibility Study, appendix VI for discussion)



Gathering at sidewalk cafe,
Inn Street

Management and Maintenance

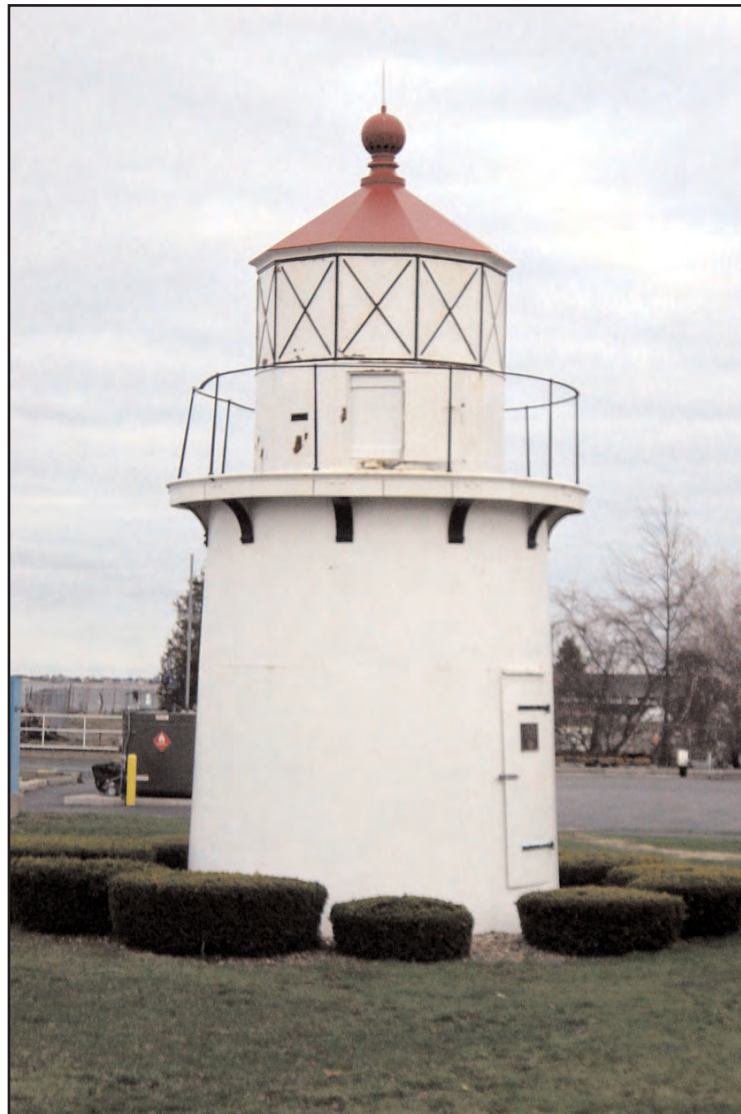
- Consider the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) that would encompass the downtown business district and the Waterfront Mixed Use district including the central waterfront parks.
- Establish a dedicated revenue stream for parks and harbor walk construction and maintenance through boat storage fees, parking fees, facility rental fees, or other sources.
- Consider establishment of a city parks department to take on management and maintenance of city parks, rail trails, and the harbor walk.

Advocacy

- Establish a harbor walk citizens advisory committee and support the establishment of an independent harbor walk friends group to help guide and raise funds for full implementation of the harbor walk concept.

Conclusion

The Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan has focused on certain key areas where progress can be made towards a more functional, attractive, and accessible waterfront. It is the hope and expectation of all those who contributed to this plan that rapid progress can and will be made on waterfront zoning changes and public realm improvements. There is a broad public understanding of and support for the vision outlined in this report. The potential for a continuous harbor walk from the south end to the north end, an improved Cashman Park, a reinforced and expanded downtown district, and better boating and fishing opportunities is both ambitious and feasible. Newburyport should have the resources, the public support, and the leadership to achieve a fully accessible waterfront for future generations.



Appendix I

Newburyport Strategic Waterfront Plan

Meeting Notes #1

April 17, 2003

This first of three public workshops focused on Goals and Objectives for the Newburyport Strategic Waterfront Plan. Over 40 people attended representing a balanced spectrum of interests: including the, the boating community, yacht club members, Friends of Cashman Park, residents from nearby neighborhoods, the Newburyport Chamber of Commerce, the mayor's office, the planning office, the harbor commission, and other groups.

A broad consensus emerged on a range of issues from the conversations and comments recorded below.

North Water Marine Dependent Zone (NWMD)

Question: Currently one third of marina land in the WMD zone can be developed as residential. Is residential encroachment onto Boat yards in the NWMD a problem? Should zoning be changed?

- Boat Storage space is needed. If lost boats will go elsewhere.
- The multiple marinas create competition and serve the boating community well.
- Residential use in WMD district triggers CH 91 license for filled tidelands, however, filled tidelands may be limited in the north WMD area due to historic marshes. Would have to pay into a linkage fund for public access improvements.
- Strictly limit residential development within the WMD. (Might consider limited upper floor condominiums if they did not compete for limited land.)
- Allow ancillary restaurants as a supporting use for marinas.

Central Water Marine Dependent (CWMD)

Question: What do you like about Cashman park?

- Cashman Park is a very successful open space already and is highly valued by the community. It is a mixed-use park.
- There is a strong sense of community around Cashman Park

- July 4th fireworks are fired from here.
- During the non- boating season it is a very nice passive park.
- It is used for emergency boat storage during major storms.

Question: Can Cashman Park be made better for land and water based recreation?

- It should be connected to the central waterfront and on to the South end by a path.
- A path should be extended to the west past the Towle building as well.
- It is a place where everyone wants to put a project. We cannot fit 10 pounds into a 5-pound bag here.
- Virtually all of the parking is for boat trailers. Only 6 spaces are for automobiles.
- Should explore shared parking with the Towle Building.
- Preliminary plans are in place to redesign the soccer field and add up to 30 parking spaces
- Plans are underway to fix up the basketball court. Cashman hoops.
- Need better links from Merrimack Street businesses to the Park. Need food and services for the park.
- Open to modest improvements to the shoreline path and access to the water for fishing, etc.
- Explore acquisition of the oil company land for park benefits: visual access, parking, etc.
- Need to support businesses along Merrimack Street. Zoning is forcing the businesses out of business in the face of residential conversions

Question: Should a city marina be considered?

- A large marina could overwhelm the park and could take up valuable open space for parking
- The city should stay out of the business of managing marinas. Private operators are better at this.
- Allow / encourage private marinas to accommodate transient boaters – a needed public benefit.
- There are too many boats on the Merrimack River already. Do not increase the number by building a new marina here.

- As for a public small boat rental operation, the currents and heavy boat traffic here would limit operations

Question: Should the harbor walk be extended from Cashman Park underneath the Route 1 Bridge to the Central Waterfront?

- We need an attractive and safe walk to the central waterfront from the north end and this would help. The Merrimack / Route 1 underpass is dangerous. Linking a major downtown park with the downtown is very important thing to do.

The Railroad bridge

- It is a major barrier to completing the connection. Water comes up to within a few feet of it lower truss and floods the existing dock structure at the Riverside Condominiums.
- Counterpoint: It is an asset and could support a deck out into the river as well as support boardwalks, etc. Consider an observation tower on the embankment. *(Explore full range of options for Railroad Bridge; may need more than one route to accommodate handicapped access).*
- There are good connections at 5% grade along the entry ramps to the Route 1 Bridge.

Use

- Few people would use such a walk if were built because many Cashman Park users drive to the park.
- Counterpoint: Actually lots of kids bicycle or walk to the park. Some would come from the south end to the park along the harbor walk if it were completed.
- Elderly people live on the ground floor of the Riverside Condominiums and are worried about privacy. *(Explore strategies for lowering path and screening views into the condominiums)*

Water Front Mixed Use (WMU) – Central Waterfront

Question: Owners of the central waterfront WMU parcels west of the boardwalk plan to develop their land in the near future. Some of the existing land intensive uses (e.g. boat storage) will be phased out. How should these parcels be developed to most benefit the neighborhoods and downtown?

Opportunities

- Any new development should feel like and be a part of downtown. It should not be isolated as it is today.
- Develop same small intimate scale as the downtown with access corridors to the water. Create alleyways like Inn Street
- Development should not be a single use but, rather, mixed use with some upper floor residential mixed in to keep the area safe and alive at night.
- It should feel accessible and have a walkable intimate scale of development.
- Merrimack Street is dangerous today and should be improved for pedestrian and bicycle use.
- Create a special urban plaza or square with a view of the water.
- There is little space for transient boaters to tie up. Encourage restaurants and marinas to provide spaces for transient boaters.

Concerns:

- To the extent possible maintain maritime uses. The Windward repair yard is one of two in Newburyport that can handle large boats.
- Encourage the retention of marinas here.
- This will displace boatyards. Could lose boats from Newburyport harbor. *(Need to protect boat yard capacity in the MWD zone. Identify other private and public areas for storage during the winter?)*
- The water view from up to twelve residential units in the Horton yard building would be affected. *(Study elevations.)*
- The traffic at the intersection of Route 1 and Merrimack is difficult and hazardous to pedestrians trying to cross from the North End to the Central Waterfront. Future development should help to mitigate this situation.

South Water Front Marine Dependent (SWMD)

Question: Should the fishing industry be supported in Newburyport Harbor?

- Yes! Federal regulations could reduce the fishing industry further. But when the fishing stock

comes back it would be important for the fishing fleet to have a dock to come back too.

- The embayment should be dredged for the fishing fleet or other boats.
- The increase in clamming on the Joppa flats could help revive the industry
- The proposed fish store would be a welcome addition the waterfront and should be supported.

Rail Trail update

- Progress is being made on the rail trail with new links through the Mass Electric site and along the Coast guard site.
- No AYC would be needed or taken to accommodate the pathway.
- Concerned about the potential conflicts between trail users and the club. Would like t avoid the necessity for a fence and locked gate that members would have to open every time. It is important to send clear visual messages to trail users about what is public access and what is private land.

Flip chart notes taken by Larry Bluestone and summarized by Herb Nolan. Comments in italics are project team responses.

Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan

Meeting Notes #2

May 8, 2003

This second of three public workshops focused on the Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan. Over 35 people attended representing a balanced spectrum of interests: including the boating community, yacht club members, Friends of Cashman Park, residents from nearby neighborhoods, the mayor's office, the planning office, the harbor commission, and other groups. A number of these comments echo ones heard at the first public meeting and are reflected in the draft plan. These notes are summarized directly from the flip charts. Additional comments in italics are by the project team.

Working boat yards in the North Water Marine Dependent Zone (NWMD)

- Continue to explore methods to protect existing boat yards from encroachment by residential uses

Cashman Park

Cashman Park can be significantly improved through a series of initiatives including:

- Improve pedestrian access from the neighborhoods to Cashman Park and the shore. Pay particular attention to improving Pop Crowley way at the eastern end of the park.
- Reconfiguring parking and roadways to reduce pavement
- Accommodating a new soccer field
- Providing additional parking for automobiles without increasing pavement
- Shared parking with the Towle building
- Consider long term acquisition of land for park expansion (terminus of Kent Street)
- Protect key views to the park from Merrimac Street
- Extend and improve the path along the shore between the boat ramps; would require reconfiguring the parking area.
- Add pathway improvements including benches and lights similar to those provided by the Towle Building developer.

- Improve the existing pier for fishing. Provide fishing locations that avoid conflicts with other users.
- Support open flexible space for large gatherings such as the July 4th fireworks
- The concept of boat storage on the boat launch parking lot was discussed as a way to support maritime uses and generate some revenue for park maintenance. This would require temporary fencing and monitoring. Potential challenges include security, liability, and the need to move boats out earlier than the owners may like. Despite these potential pit falls there was support for further study.

Harbor Walk Connection to Downtown

- Representatives of the River's Edge Condominium Association endorsed the concept of public access in front of their complex linking Cashman Park to the Central Waterfront
- Alternatives need to be studied and their feasibility understood.
- The pathway connection could have some impact on parking patterns in the park.
- The Rail Trail group has announced a competition, "Newburyport Pathways," to name the Rail trail loop.
- The terminus of the rail trestle commands excellent views upstream overlooking the marina in front of River's Edge.
- Allowing pedestrian access to the existing rail trestle bridge to view the mouth of the harbor was suggested. The MBTA has been reluctant to allow pedestrians onto the trestle bridge for liability reasons.
- Locating the harbor walk BELOW water level in one segment to permit views underwater was mentioned. This creative idea raises serious feasibility issues given the tidal range and harsh conditions. Other means of interpreting underwater marine life may be possible.
- Pedestrian improvements to the Merrimac Street underpass are needed to strengthen this east west link as well and better links from Merrimac Street to the shore.

Downtown Waterfront West

- A new waterfront district was outlined and discussed. Several broad goals emerged:

Access

- Any new district should avoid the look and feel of a “private enclave.”
- Any new district should be clearly accessible and welcoming to the public
- Extend Market Street and Green Street down to a “wharf” street to ensure public access
- Preserve views along public streets to the waterfront. A new proposed alignment of the Market Street extension in particular could capture a water view.
- Extend additional pedestrian paths through the development blocks linking Merrimac Street to the waterfront
- Extend the harbor walk from the end of the existing boardwalk to the Route 1 Bridge and line it with active uses.
- Explore the potential of additional access on the waterside of the Black Cow and other existing uses.

Uses

- Encourage uses that support resident life in the downtown. Neighborhood oriented retail businesses such as a green grocer or hardware store, for example, should be accommodated. Limit the extent of seasonal tourism attractions that close up I in the off-season.
- Preserve and support ongoing maritime uses at the water’s edge including the boat repair facility. Examine the travel lift operation to avoid potential conflicts.
- Existing boat yards act as parking lots for boats in the winter and cars in the summer.
- Do not suggest artificial regulatory rules to support private marinas. The current private boat storage yards are inefficient uses of space.
- Supply needed parking demand through multiple means including small parking lots. Avoid large parking lots. Consider alternative approaches to vehicle storage that consolidate parking lots: i.e. structured parking, robotic parking, etc.

Character

- New Development should extend the quality and character of the downtown. It should relate to the scale and massing of historic Newburyport buildings.
- At the same time new development should also reflect our times. Avoid mimicking the past.

Downtown Waterfront East

- Look for opportunities to repair and maintain marine infrastructure including the dredging of the embayment near the Fish Pier and the repair of crumbling seawalls.
- Support enhancements to the fishing pier.
- Look into the location of the Harbor Line. Should it be moved north away from the shore?
- Find ways for visitors to better see and learn about the historic range lights.
- A “visitor center” with public bathrooms, showers, and other features to support transient boaters is needed.
- Look for opportunities to reflect the history of Newburyport along the harbor walk.
- To ensure access to water views and the harbor walk provide parking spaces near by.

Summarized by Herb Nolan, GCA, from notes taken by Larry Bluestone, BPG

Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan

Meeting Notes #3

June 12, 2003

This third and last public meeting focused on the Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan. Around 40 stakeholders representing property owners and abutters attended and participated in the discussion. Herb Nolan, Larry Bluestone, Geordie Vining, and Nick Cracknell made a joint presentation of the draft recommendations. Recommendations covered the preservation of existing boatyards and marinas west of Route 1 and Cashman Park from encroachment by non-maritime uses,

proposed improvements to Cashman Park and the emerging harbor walk at the Route 1 Bridge, zoning changes to insure that any future development conforms to the historic character of Newburyport, and improvements to the fish pier. Having gone over this material more than once participants focused their comments on a few key issues. See earlier meeting notes for a fuller discussion of issues.

Cashman Park – public boating program

- The possibility of a future public boating program staged out of Cashman Park was revisited and concerns about the hazards of boat traffic and swift currents were addressed. Any public boating program, whether rowing or sailing, should not place novice boaters on the water unaccompanied. With the presence of an experienced instructor it should be possible to launch from the Cashman Park shore, however. The islands and creeks of the Salisbury marshes across the channel are a wonderful resource for rowers and kayakers. The proponent of any future public boating program operating from Cashman park will need to demonstrate to the Coast Guard and Harbor Commission that basic public safety can be maintained.
- Concern was voiced over the parking supply needed to support such a program. Additional parking will be required for standard cars. Utilizing the empty parking lot at the Towle Building during weekends could address this concern.
- The logical location for a potential public boating facility would be close to the old ramp.

Harbor Walk Connection to Downtown

- The concept drawings for the proposed link between Cashman Park and the downtown were received with great enthusiasm. In particular, the transformation of the Route 1 underpass was an eye opener for many.
- A representative of the River's Edge Condominium Association reviewed the preliminary sketches with an eye towards preserving a degree of privacy along the decks. It appears that locating the walkway lower down in elevation and closer to the existing bulkhead (rather than off shore) would largely screen the walkway and the users from the private terrace. It was felt that such a walkway, if done well, could enhance the desirability and value of the condominium complex.

Downtown Waterfront West

- A wide water dependent zone as defined by chapter 91 regulations has been defined. Talks with local marina operators indicate that they have every intention of continuing to operate in that locale. While much but not all of the storage space for the smaller boats would be eliminated in time by future development, Hilton Marine would continue to haul large boats for routine maintenance. Many of the large boats are from out of state. The strategic plan recommends steps to protect boat storage areas in the Water Marine Dependent Zone elsewhere along the waterfront and identifies areas of potential boat storage expansion.
- Potential draft zoning recommendations were presented to ensure that any future development in the Waterfront Mixed Use district conform to the character of historic downtown Newburyport. (See Zoning Recommendations below.)
- A "Public Realm" plan for streets, alleyways, public plazas, and pedestrian passages was presented. It showed a street and block pattern similar in scale to downtown Newburyport and preserved views along public streets and passages toward the water.
- It was pointed out that the new Downtown Waterfront West and its many stores, restaurants and businesses, as well as its sidewalks and plazas, should provide an accessible-friendly environment to all including those with limited mobility.
- Increased parking demand created by new development needs to be accommodated on or near the development sites in ways that do not erode the character of the downtown. Developers should be encouraged to explore the more expensive underground or structured parking solutions.

- Condominium owners at Horton's continue to be concerned about protecting the water views they enjoy from the backside of their upper floor units. These understandable concerns have been brought to the attention of the owners of abutting parcels. It should be understood that the open land parcels in question were zoned for potential development before the Horton's complex was built. It was pointed out that the land naturally slopes down a full story towards the waterfront and that future development would be lower in elevation. Lowering the height limit within the WMD further and while allowing site coverage that matches historic development patterns might have the added benefit of preserving upper floor views from buildings further back from the waterfront.
- The Newburyport Waterfront Strategic Plan is focused on improving public access to and along the waterfront and on preserving views down public ways to the water. Newburyport is blessed with numerous public streets that lead to and frame views of the river. Buildings that block these public ways and framed views should be avoided.

Downtown Waterfront East

- It appears that the range light at the coast guard station, once thought to have been moved, is in its original location. It still aligns with the second range light to mark the entrance to Newburyport Harbor. Moving it in the future would sever its relationship to the second light and the geography of the harbor. Once the rail trail is completed there will be an opportunity to interpret the range lights as a pair and the history of maritime navigation and life saving at the coastguard station.

Implementation

- The question was asked: if you had \$500,000 to spend what would be the first thing you undertook. How would you phase public improvements? With a public/private partnership in place involving the River's Edge Condominium Association and the downtown waterfront east property owners extending the Harborwalk under the Route 1 bridge would be an ambitious but possible early action.

Potential Zoning Recommendations

It was observed in the Downtown Waterfront West area that though Newburyport's citizens support redevelopment in a building pattern and scale reflective of downtown Newburyport, current zoning (the WMU District) would not now allow such patterns. Therefore, to implement some of the recommendations emerging from this Study, a number of zoning changes may be required. Some of those changes now being considered include:

In the WMU District (mixed use)

- Encourage “mixed uses”. Explicitly define a mixed-use category in the zoning code Use Table and assign it specific dimensional requirements.
- Allow certain uses not now permitted in the WMU, such as outdoor café’s. Conversely, eliminate other uses now allowed - such as “shopping centers - but which are not appropriate or reflective of creating the downtown fabric in the WMD district.
- Eliminate current yard setback requirements of 10 to 20 feet so buildings can be built at or close to the sidewalk edge, as they do in downtown Newburyport.
- Allow height limits of approximately the same heights that prevail in downtown Newburyport. Do not increase height limits beyond those currently allowed in the WMU.
- Allow greater lot coverage of buildings than now allowed to reflect the prevailing lot coverage patterns in downtown Newburyport.
- Consider reducing the parking requirements in the zoning code for certain uses in the WMU – such as retail uses or offices – which are excessive and currently reflect suburban parking standards rather than urban standards.

In the WMD District (marine dependent)

- Discourage new housing on existing boatyard and marina properties.
- Eliminate certain currently allowed uses – such as “shopping centers” – since they are not supportive of maintaining maritime uses in the WMD District.
- Allow restaurant uses in the WMD, but only if they are associated with marinas and yacht clubs which will permit them to have minimal parking requirements.

These and all other recommendations of the Strategic Plan will be refined and presented in the final draft plan due out this summer. Efforts will be made by city staff to post the document to the city’s new web page for broad dissemination.

Notes taken by Herb Nolan, GCA, and Larry Bluestone, BPG

Credits

City and Commission

Nick Cracknell, Director, Office of Planning and Development

Geordie Vining, Senior Project Manager, Office of Planning and Development

Hans Erwich, Chair, Newburyport Harbor Commission

Edward Barz, Newburyport Harbor Commission

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Special thanks to the many Newburyport citizens who attended the public meetings and directly shaped this strategic plan for the future of their waterfront.

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