

A CITY-BUILDING VISION FOR THE
HAMILTON CANAL DISTRICT
 AND **THE NEIGHBORHOODS**

AUGUST 2009

GOODY CLANCY
 ARCHITECTURE
 PLANNING
 PRESERVATION

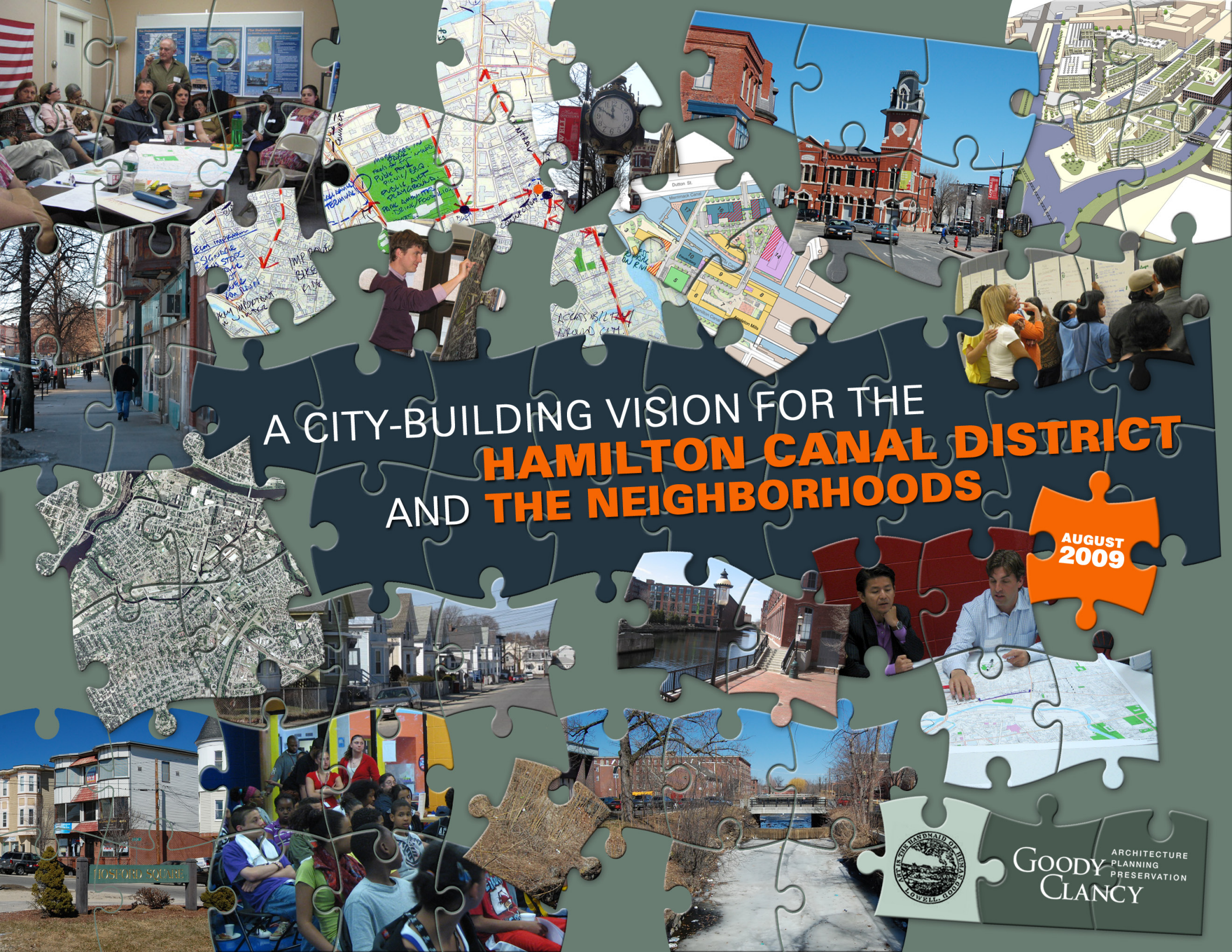
THE HANDMAID OF HAMILTON
 1831-1832

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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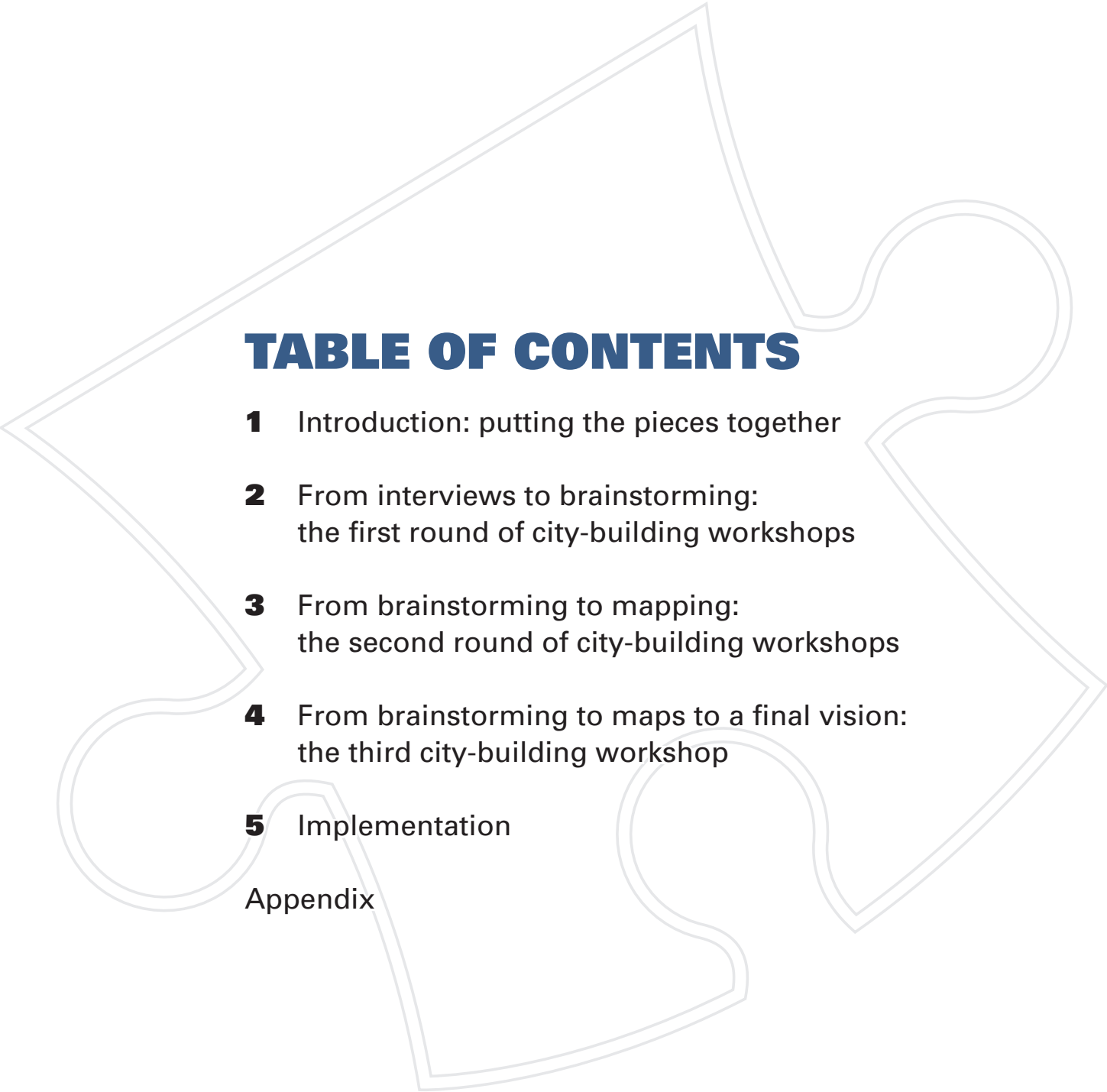


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1

INTRODUCTION: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER



The 14 acres comprising Lowell's Hamilton Canal District occupy an area of singular importance geographically as well as—potentially—economically and socially. With hundreds of new housing units, hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial, retail, institutional and office space, approximately 400 permanent jobs, and new parks and

public walkways, this *place-making* initiative will strengthen Lowell's downtown hub, with impacts both city- and region-wide. (*See plan below and map on the following page of the Hamilton Canal District.*)

Planning for the District included significant amounts of citizen input generated during

a series of design workshops. Now, with a focus on the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the District, the City of Lowell, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and its *Gateway Plus Action Grant* program,

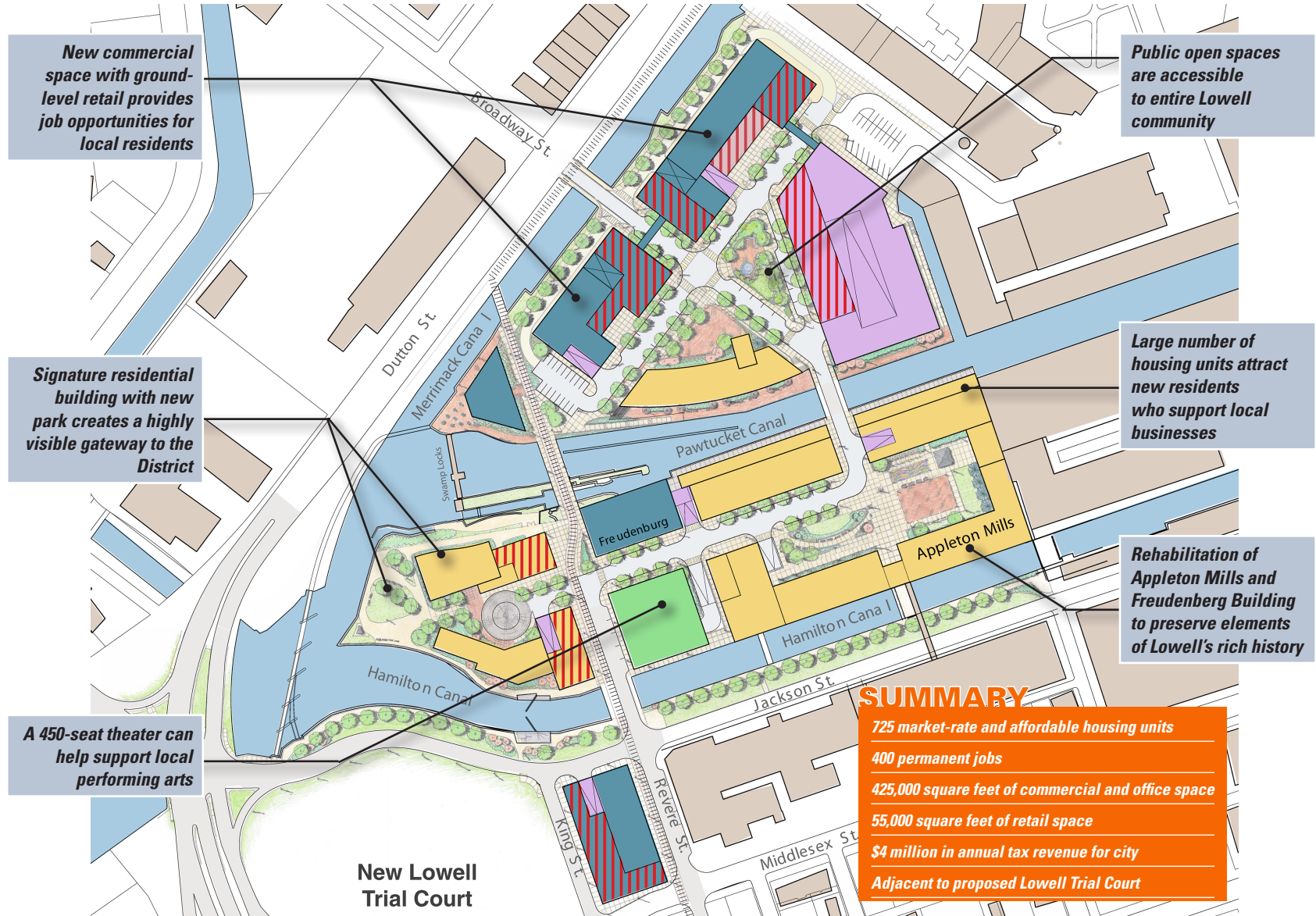


Aerial view of proposed full build-out of Hamilton Canal District

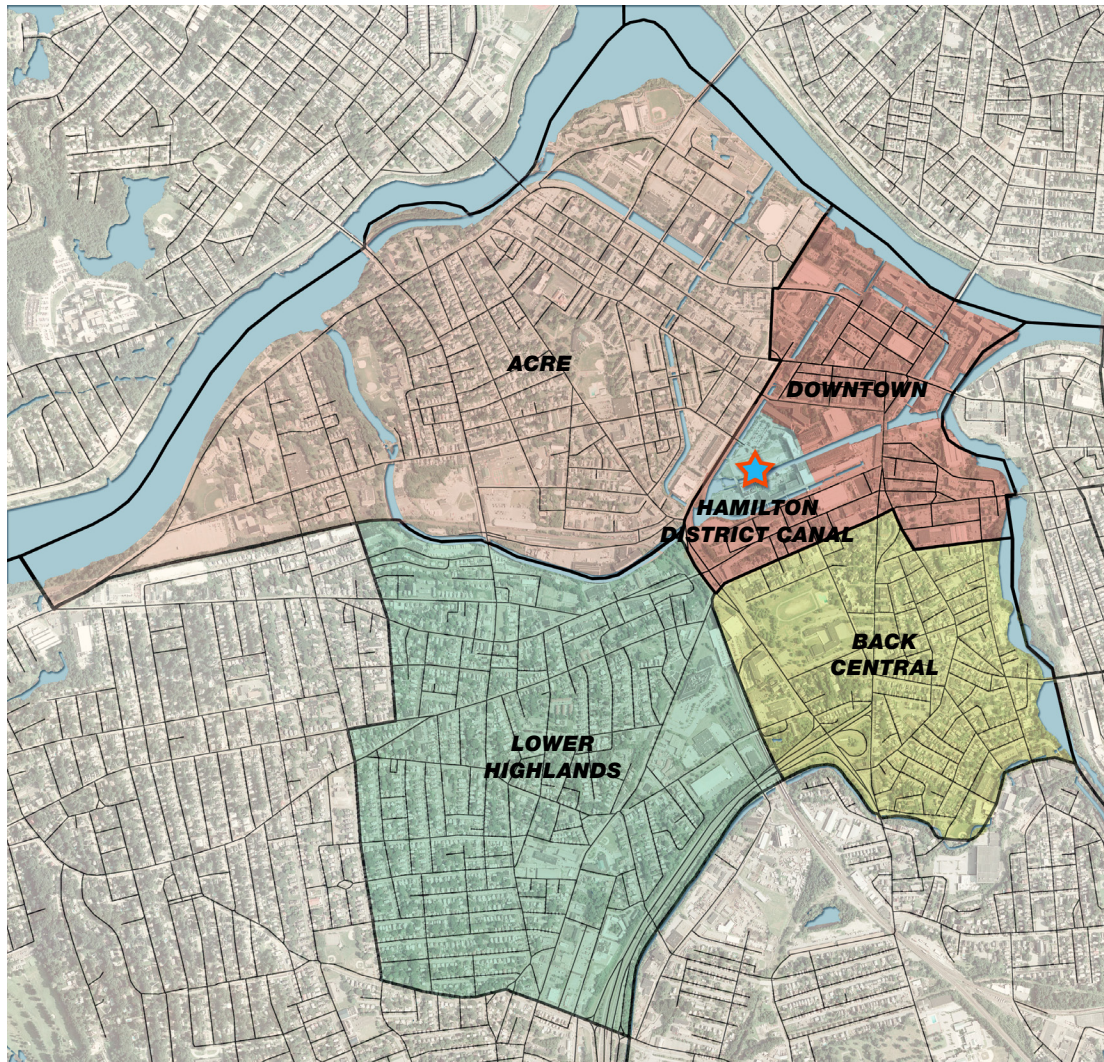
project timeline



THE PROJECT: PROPOSED HAMILTON CANAL DISTRICT



project timeline



The Hamilton Canal District lies at the center of the four neighborhoods which were the focus of the city-building workshops.

initiated a series of visioning sessions, or “Citybuilding Workshops,” within each of these neighborhoods—Downtown, The Acre, Lower Highlands, and Back Central. A cross-section of residents, businesspeople, community and institutional leaders, and others with a stake in the future of their neighborhood applied their local knowledge to the identification, within their respective neighborhoods, of opportunities and challenges that could—or should—be triggered by the District’s development.

For the City, this became an opportunity to further explore the ways in which the Hamilton Canal District could provide the catalyst for economic development, public sphere improvements, support for initiatives and events within and among the four neighborhoods, as well as other potential linkages among the neighborhoods. In that light the initial agendas for the workshops emphasized:

- Improved connections to the HCD district and between the neighborhoods;
- Improved economic opportunities for residents and businesses in the neighborhoods;
- Preservation and enhancement of cultural and ethnic resources;
- And, overall, an improved quality of life for residents and business owners and proprietors within these neighborhoods.

project timeline



Given Lowell's extraordinarily complex and rich ethnic make-up as represented in these four neighborhoods, it was imperative that a diversity of opinion, culture, age, and background be reflected in the level and depth of participation in these visioning sessions and, ultimately, in the emerging recommendations. A particular effort was undertaken to bring into the conversations representatives from Lowell's numerous immigrant populations; for many, these meetings provided new opportunities to become truly engaged in a civic process and to join with the larger community in creating a future for not only for their neighborhoods but for Lowell as a whole.

This latter point is worth underscoring: as detailed in the following pages, a number of common themes emerged from the individual neighborhood visioning sessions.

In a larger sense, however, the process and, ultimately, the output, served both to uncover new—and to strengthen existing—institutional and political connections between neighborhood residents and the City, and to explore opportunities for new physical connections between the neighborhoods themselves.

These opportunities, and the relative importance assigned to each during a final all-neighborhood workshop, comprise a kind of road map for action by the City administration regarding new initiatives that can be linked to or that are suggested by the Hamilton Canal District project. What began as a series of conversations regarding the impact of the Hamilton Canal District became, ultimately, an exploration of the implicit *citymaking* opportunities embedded in HCD's origins as a *placemaking* effort of singular ambition.

2 FROM INTERVIEWS TO BRAINSTORMING

FIRST ROUND OF CITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS



Initial interviews

One of the major goals of the visioning workshops was to ensure participation by the widest possible range of residents, businesspeople, and community and institutional leaders, particularly those for whom these events would represent an introduction to a public planning process. To undertake outreach at this scale and to this depth, the consulting team began with a series of one-on-one meetings and interviews with representatives of community and interest groups from each of the four neighborhoods.¹ The goal in each case was three-fold: (1) to understand each neighborhood's social and ethnic dynamic, its physical assets and challenges, and its priorities; (2) to elicit early thoughts regarding the opportunities presented by the Hamilton Canal District; and (3) to take advantage of word-of-mouth, in addition to

flyers, e-mail, and other media, as a means of promoting the workshops.

It rapidly became clear that, especially for non-English speaking members of the neighborhoods, the consulting team needed to meet with them at their convenience and at their familiar locales—whether the Casey Family Services that serves members of the Cambodian community or at a Lower Highlands church that serves members of the Latino community. In all instances, interpreters were on hand to serve as intermediaries, as the team explained the project and each community's role in making the project a success.

Moving to the workshops

Results from the interviews and early meetings generated clusters of ideas, issues, and insights regarding each of the neighborhoods that—along with City-provided output from

¹ See the Appendix for a list of individuals and organizations interviewed.

project timeline



earlier charrettes held during the planning for the Hamilton Canal District itself—framed the first of two series of workshops held in each of the four neighborhoods over a period of approximately six weeks.

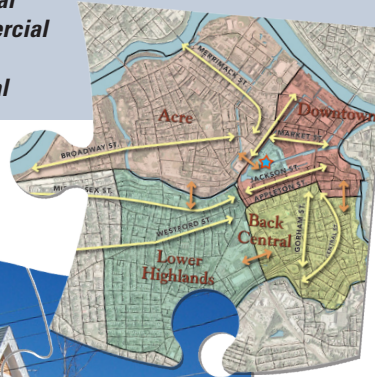
Following an overview of the Hamilton Canal District project itself and its major goals and features, the first round of workshops focused on an examination of four of the major elements that contribute to making a city—and a neighborhood—work.

- Access and connections
- Decent housing
- Business and economic development opportunities
- Strong arts, cultural, and civic institutions

THE CITY: WHAT CAN MAKE LOWELL WORK

CONNECTIONS

- Enhance access to and from the Hamilton Canal District.
- Improve links between neighborhoods
 - > *Physical*
 - > *Commercial*
 - > *Social*
 - > *Cultural*



ARTS, CULTURE, AND CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

- Expand visibility throughout the city of Lowell's cultural past, present...and future.
- Honor each neighborhood's unique character and contribution to Lowell's rich fabric.
- Strengthen collaboration among the city's multiple community-based organizations to further the city's civic life.



HOUSING

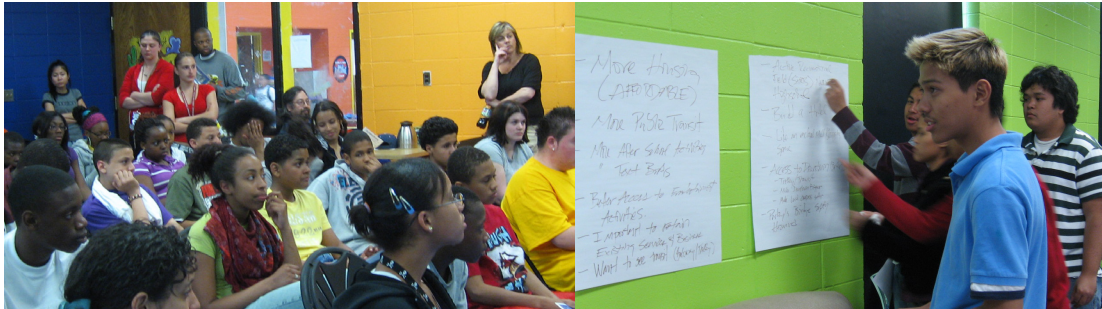
- Provide a range of housing choices that continue to support a diverse population.
- Promote mixed-use, mixed-income approaches in response to housing challenges.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Encourage free flow of residents and visitors citywide to existing enterprises.
- Increase the opportunities for improving existing businesses...and starting new ones.

The four components of citymaking served as a jumping-off point for the first vision session.

project timeline



Participants in the youth workshop engaged in serious discussion regarding their future and the future of the Hamilton Canal District.

Participants then discussed these elements within the context of their respective neighborhoods and in relation to the opportunities they saw as a result of the development of the Hamilton Canal District. This first round also included an special workshop in the Lower Highlands, at the Boys & Girls Club, for approximately 50 local youth under the sponsorship of both the Club and the United Teen Equality Center.



The workshops attracted a cross-section of participants from throughout the neighborhoods.

The workshops resulted in a series of neighborhood-specific recommendations under each of the four major categories, with participants “voting” with sticky dots for those they considered the most urgent or most significant. The following pages provide the neighborhood-by-neighborhood summaries of the workshops, along with their voting results. The two or three most popular recommendations, as indicated by the “voting,” are highlighted with check marks.

what we heard in **BACK CENTRAL**



CONNECTIONS

Ensure ease of pedestrian access to the Hamilton Canal District

- ✓ Improve pedestrian access to the Gallagher terminal.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

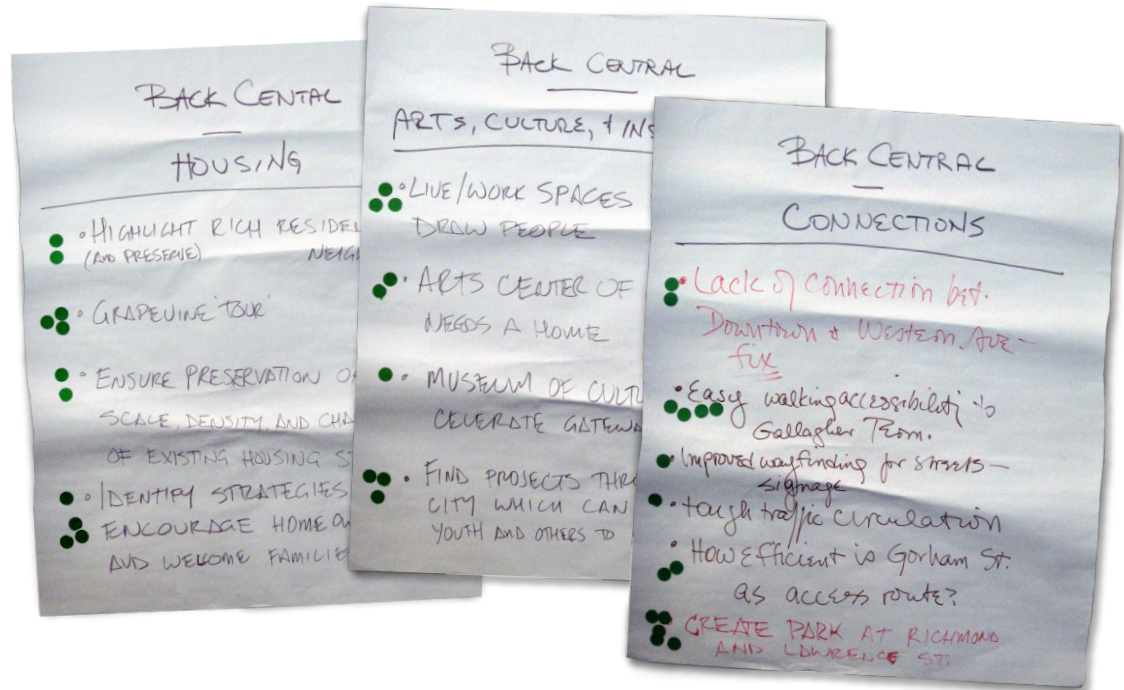
- ✓ Identify potential economic links between the Hamilton Canal District and existing Back Central business areas (Hosford Square, Gorham Street) and a revitalized Church Street Plaza.

ARTS, CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS

Identify arts/cultural initiatives by which to engage neighborhood youth.

HOUSING

- ✓ Preserve scale, density, character of existing housing stock.



what we heard in **LOWER HIGHLANDS**



CONNECTIONS

- ✓ Improve pedestrian/bike environment for easier, safer access to Downtown, Gallagher Terminal, Market Basket, etc.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Identify opportunities for business improvements in key areas such as Cupples Square and the Branch/Middlesex Streets intersection:

- > Façade improvements
- > Streetscape improvements
- > Etc.

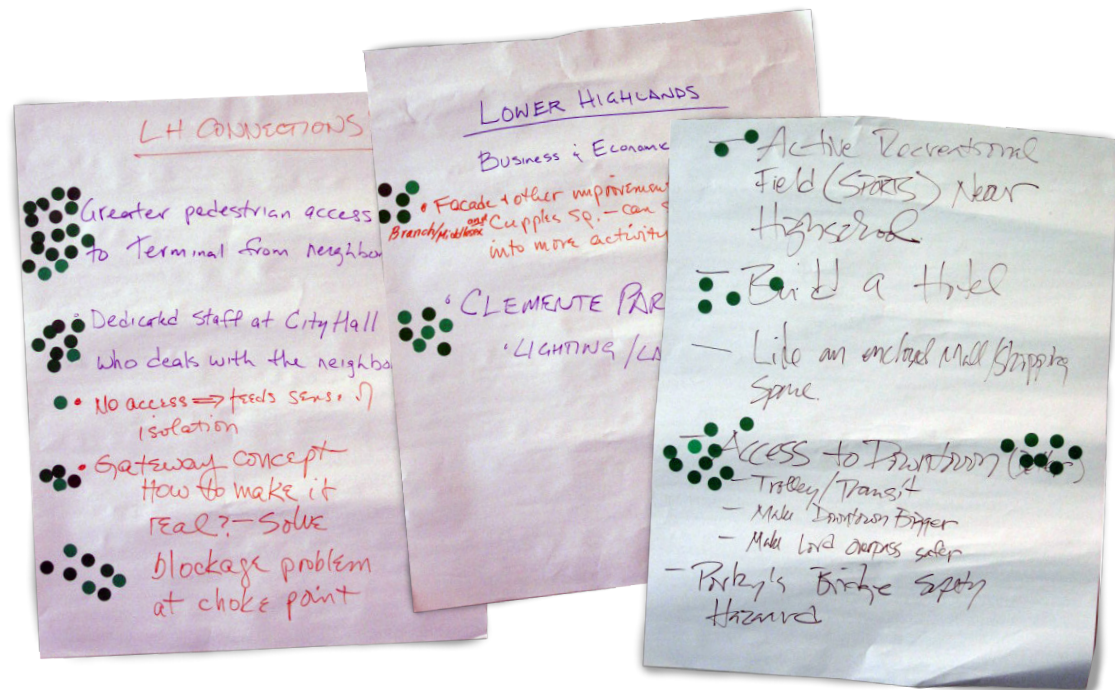
ARTS, CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS

- ✓ Identify cultural benefits to Lower Highlands neighborhood from the Hamilton Canal District—and vice versa

Strengthen inter-neighborhood organizational links

HOUSING

Maintain affordable housing



what we heard in DOWNTOWN



CONNECTIONS

- ✓ Improve pedestrian connections, including canal crossings, from Downtown to Hamilton Canal District, other neighborhoods, Gallagher Terminal, etc.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

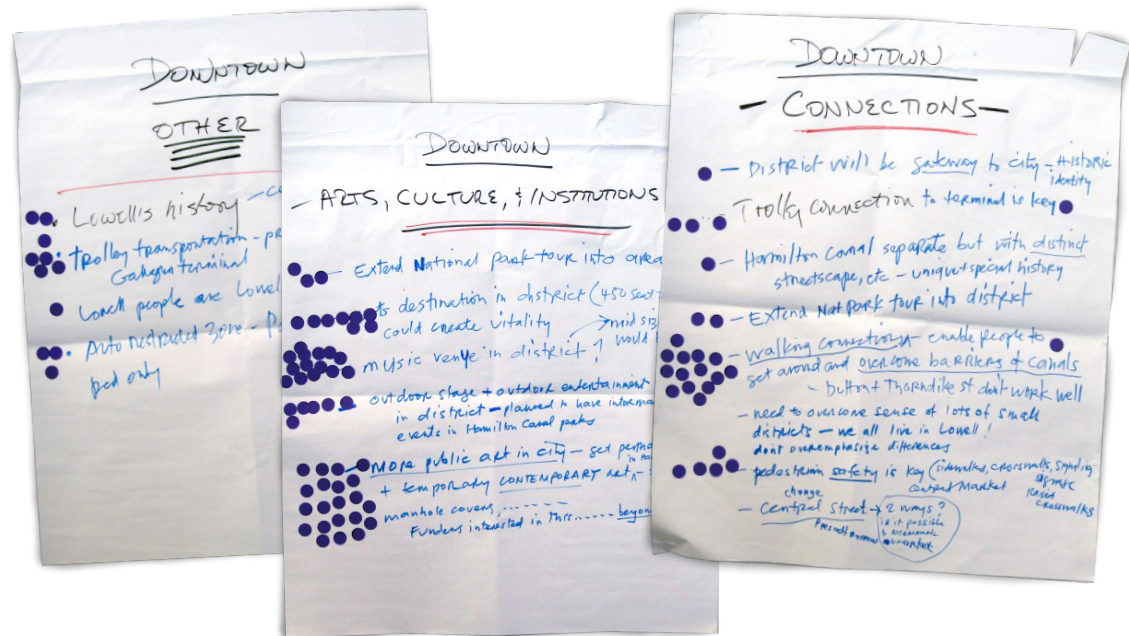
Attract more locals, including students, to Downtown, with appropriate businesses, venues

ARTS, CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS

- ✓ Consider development of a small-to-midsized performance/music venue.
- ✓ Increase public art throughout the Downtown.

HOUSING

Provide a diverse range of housing opportunities that attract new residents without driving out current residents.



project timeline

○ BACKGROUND

● VISION SESSION 1

○ VISION SESSION 2

○ RECOMMENDATIONS

○ IMPLEMENTATION

what we heard in **THE ACRE**



CONNECTIONS

Strengthen connections among organizations throughout the city

- ✓ Increase safety, attractiveness, and pedestrian-friendly quality of the streets

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Increase opportunities for ethnic food businesses

Support business development and encourage investment outside of Downtown and the Hamilton Canal District

Explore opportunities for inviting minority business owners into the Hamilton Canal District

ARTS, CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS

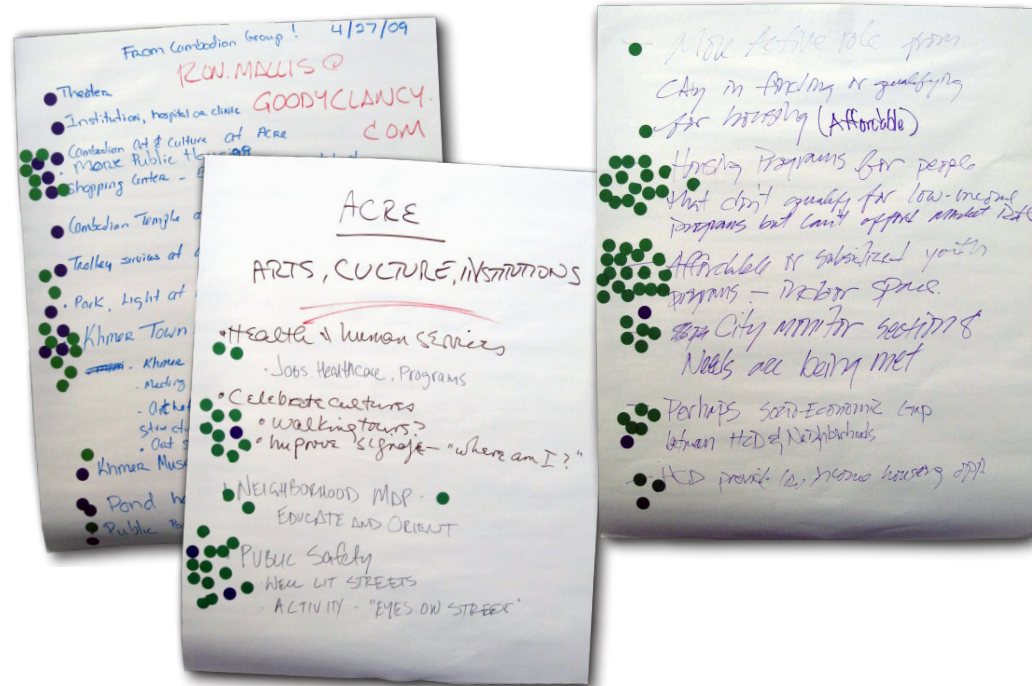
Create a Khmer Cultural District

- ✓ Celebrate Lowell's multiple cultures

HOUSING

- ✓ Ensure continuation of programs that help meet diverse housing needs in terms of affordability and family size

Identify opportunities for new low-income housing



Each workshop did understandably identify priorities that were entirely neighborhood-specific. There was nevertheless significant overlap among many of the recommendations, and a resulting increased awareness of how individual interests could be served by attention to the common interests, and how the planning for a new initiative in one neighbor-

hood needs to take into account the impact of that initiative on the other neighborhoods. This last idea was explored further in the final cross-neighborhood workshop.

In sum, the first round of workshops produced the following set of common themes:

COMMON THEMES FROM CITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP 1

Connections

- Physical
 - > Easier, safer, well-lit, pedestrian-friendly access to and from downtown and the Hamilton Canal District
 - > Improve links to Gallagher Terminal
 - > Improve links between the target neighborhoods
- Institutional
 - > Link cultural/ethnic organizations across neighborhoods
 - > Link the city more closely to neighborhood organizations
- Programmatic
 - > Connect with youth throughout the city with affordable/subsidized youth programs

Arts, Culture, Institutions

- Support the growth of a multi-cultural presence in the Hamilton Canal District.
- Use the Hamilton Canal District as a catalyst within the neighborhoods for permanent celebration of Lowell's cultures and its history

Business/ Economic Development

- Identify opportunities for both job- and business-growth benefitting the neighborhoods that will be generated by development of the Hamilton Canal District.

Housing

- Support diversity of housing opportunities, affordable as well as market-rate
- Avoid displacement in the face of needed new residents



3

FROM BRAIN- STORMING TO MAPPING SECOND ROUND OF CITY- BUILDING WORKSHOPS

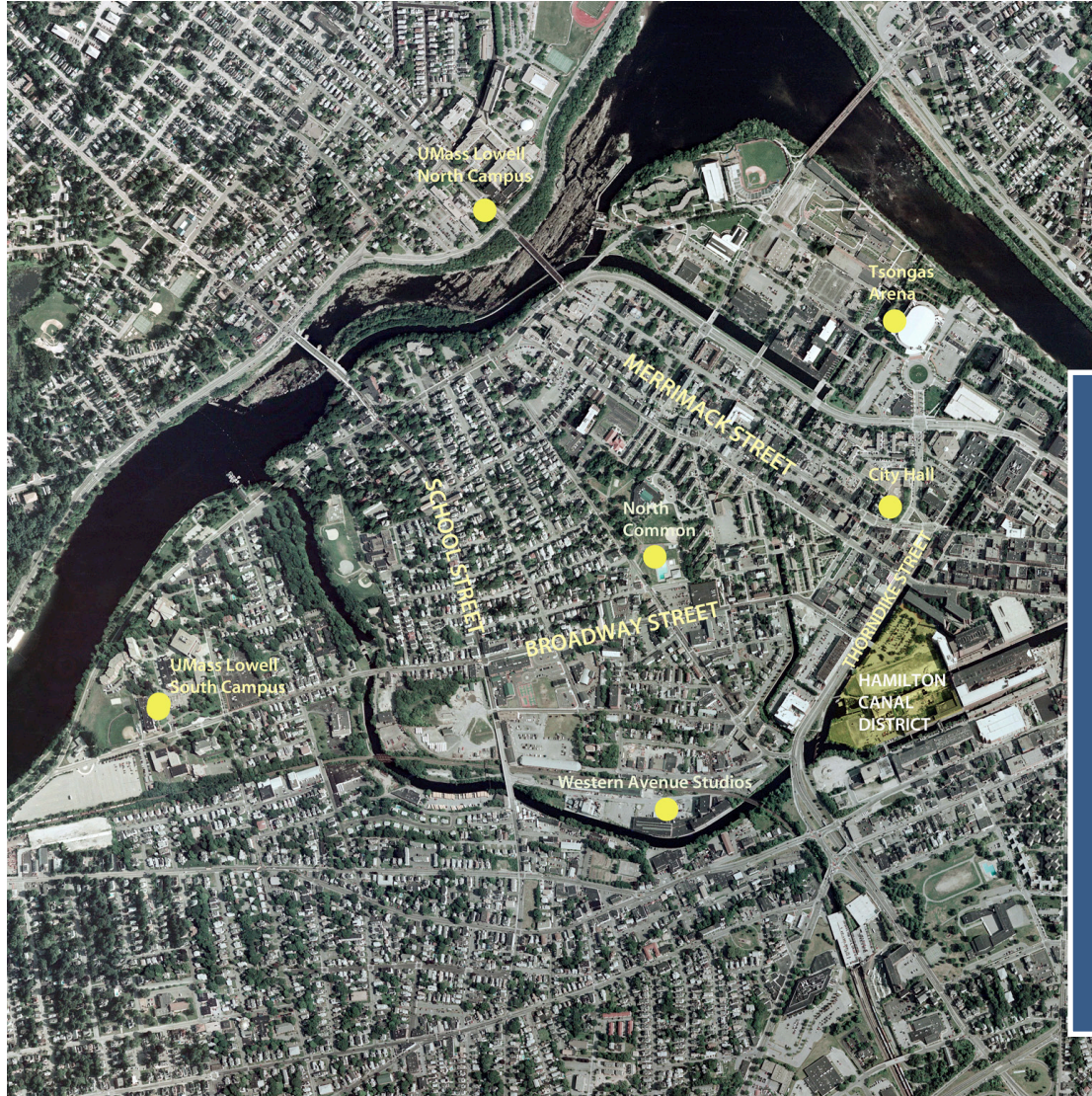
At the second round of workshops participants “mapped” their ideas, marking where and how the results of the first round could be made real. The mapping exercise, and the questions that framed it, essentially gave participants the opportunity to envision physical and social change within their neighborhood. The questions that served to frame their priorities were developed from the ideas that emerged during the first round of workshops.

Results of the mapping exercise: what—and where—are the priorities?

This phase led to the creation of eight so-called priority maps: one each from Lower Highlands and Downtown and, because of larger numbers of participants, two from Back Central and four from The Acre.

As the transcribed text adjacent to each of the maps indicates, the common interests and themes that surfaced during the first workshop were reinforced through this exercise. They became the basis for a cross-neighborhood Vision Statement that organized the many ideas captured during the first two rounds of workshops into a set of seven core principles applicable to all four neighborhoods. These principles provided the content for the final workshop, described more fully in the following section.

framing questions for **THE ACRE**



How and where can The Acre and the Hamilton Canal District work together for mutual benefit to take advantage of The Acre's cultural richness and its businesses?

How can The Acre be made more pedestrian-friendly in linking to the Hamilton Canal District as well as to other neighborhoods?

What are the best development options—housing, retail, mixed-use—for the city-owned properties in The Acre?

mapping priorities **THE ACRE 1**

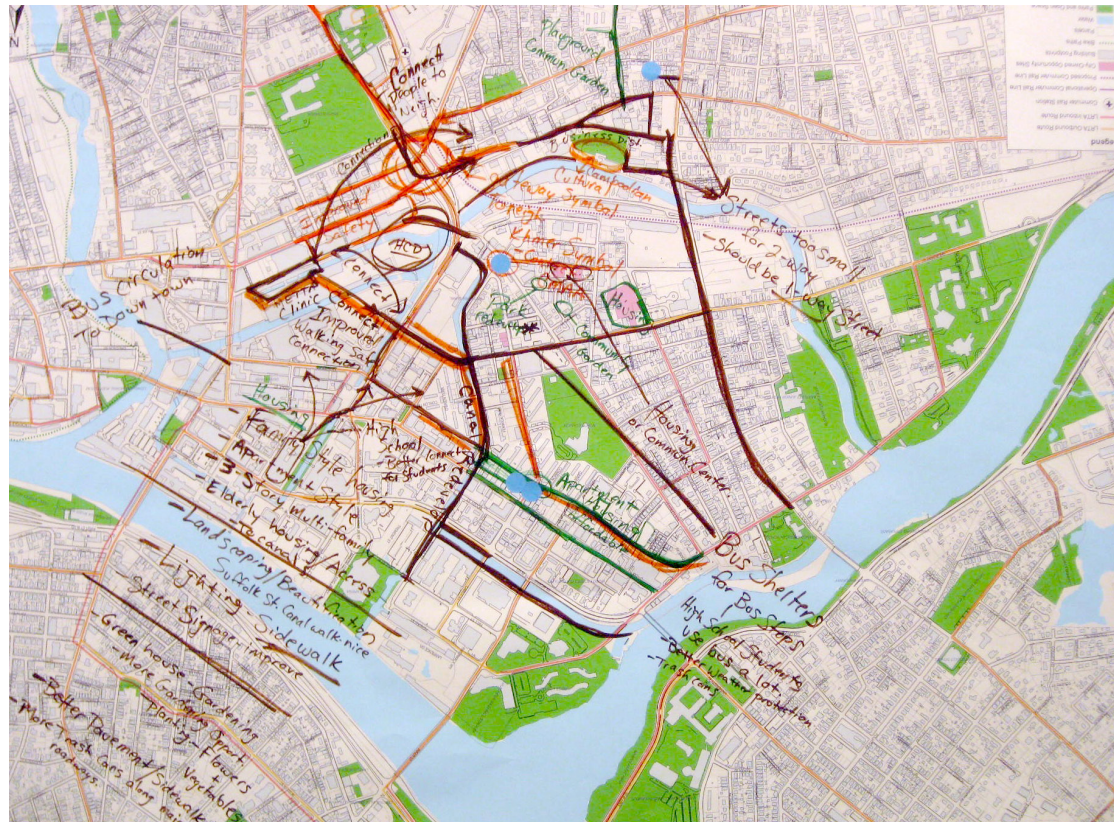


Address housing needs for those already here

Improve lighting, safety, crosswalks, pedestrian connections overall

Clean and improve maintenance of the Western Canal

New connections between The Acre and Lower Highlands across the canal?



mapping priorities **THE ACRE 2**

Better signage, directional and interpretive

Involve institutions (e.g., St. Patrick's Church) in canal improvements

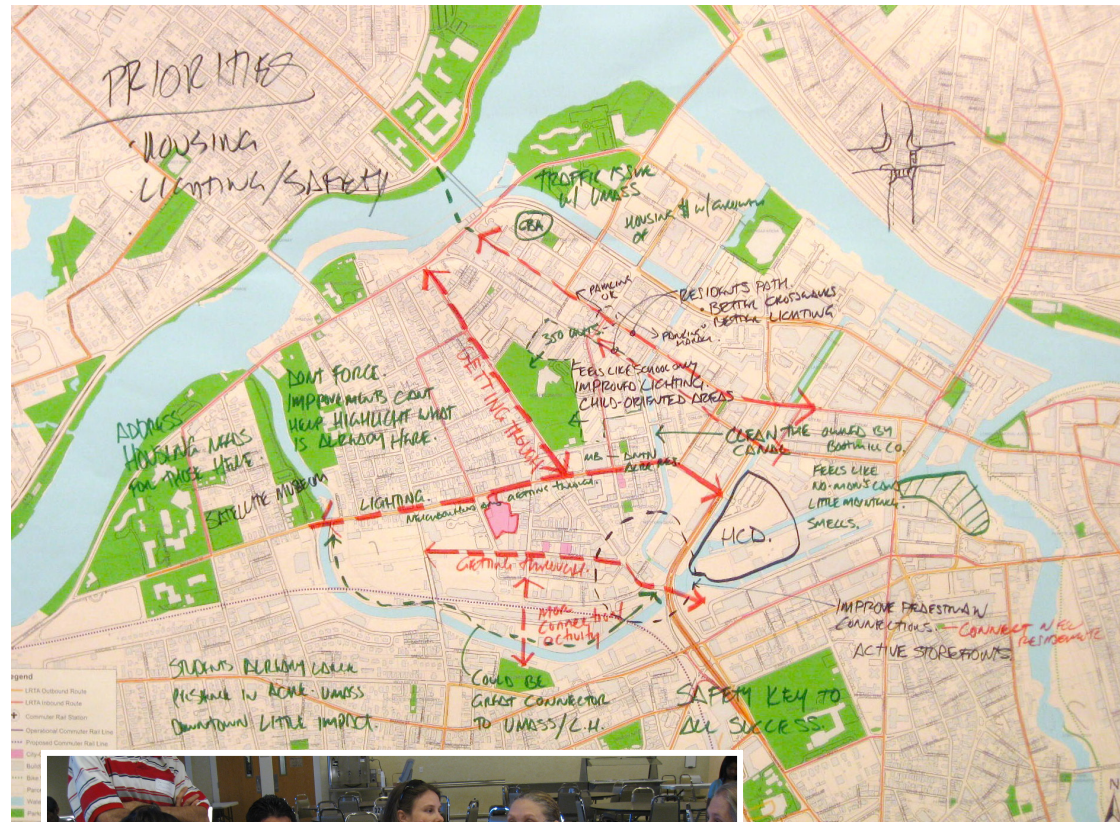
Partnership with Community Gardens Greenhouse to create new pocket parks/community garden?

Need low-income, large-family housing

Improve Ecumenical Plaza

Expand use of activities on and near North Common—Heart of The Acre?

Possible gateway/memorial arch at intersection of Broadway and Fletcher Streets



Housing

- *Family-style*
- *3-story multi-family*
- *Elderly housing with access to the canals*

Better lighting, repaired sidewalks, new street signage

- *More trashcans along major streets*

Bus shelters at bus stops

*Possible creation of community center
at one of the City-owned properties*

Clear, walkable connections between health clinic and The Acre

Physical marker as gateway between The Acre and Lower Highlands

Khmer memorial at Fletcher and Rock Streets intersection

*New community garden off
Brook Street*



Housing

- *Need better rental options*
- *More affordability*
- *Family-sized unites*

New public plaza/gathering place

Street improvements

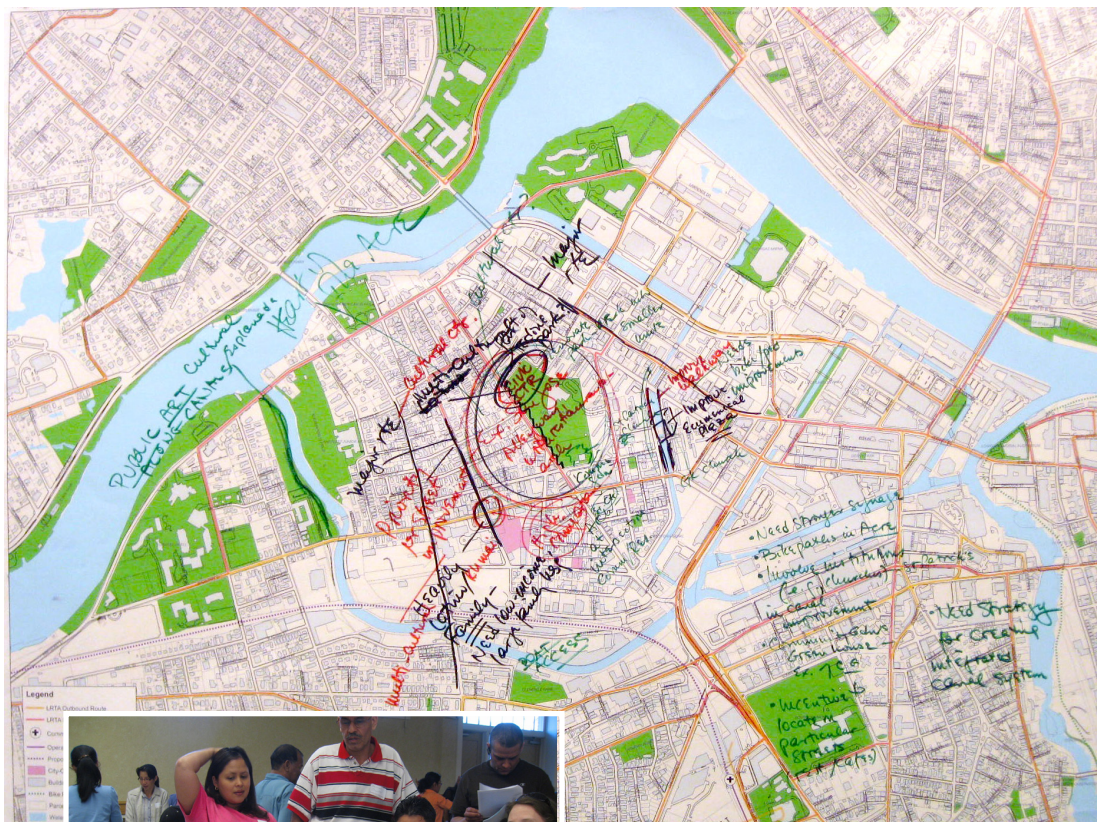
- *Clearly-marked bike lanes*
- *Repaired sidewalks*
- *Marked crosswalks*
- *Benches*
- *Plantings*
- *Better lighting*
- *Stopsigns*
- *Public restrooms*

Easier links to Lower Highlands

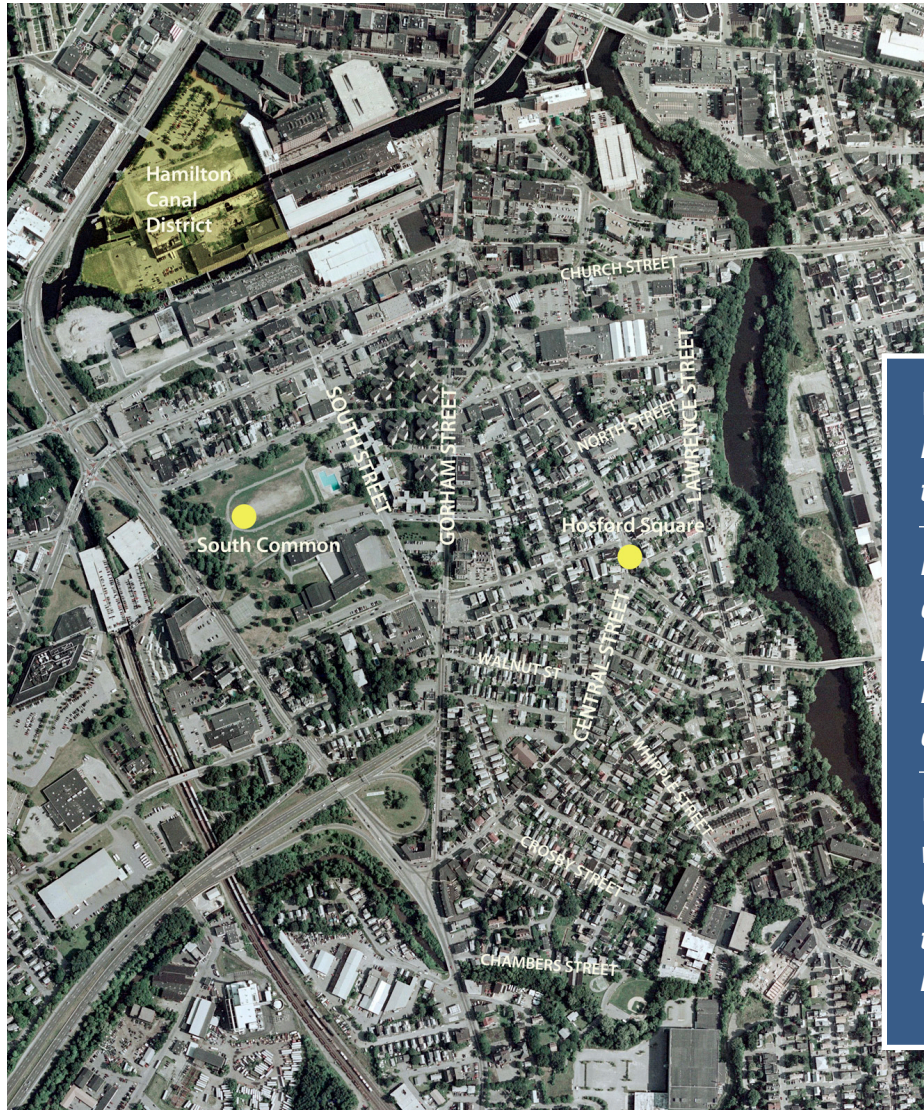
More bus stops, with better signage

Restaurants along the canal

Kiosks/interpretive signage (multi-lingual) regarding neighborhood's multi-cultural history and present



framing questions for **BACK CENTRAL**



Where are the significant connectors linking Back Central to the Hamilton Canal District? To the Gallagher Terminal?

How can the potential from any future economic development of the Church Street Plaza benefit from the Hamilton Canal District? How should it relate to the Hosford Square commercial area?

What specific pedestrian improvements will have the greatest impact on Back Central's links to the Hamilton Canal District, to the Gallagher Terminal, and to other neighborhoods? What are the priority areas?

mapping priorities

BACK CENTRAL 1

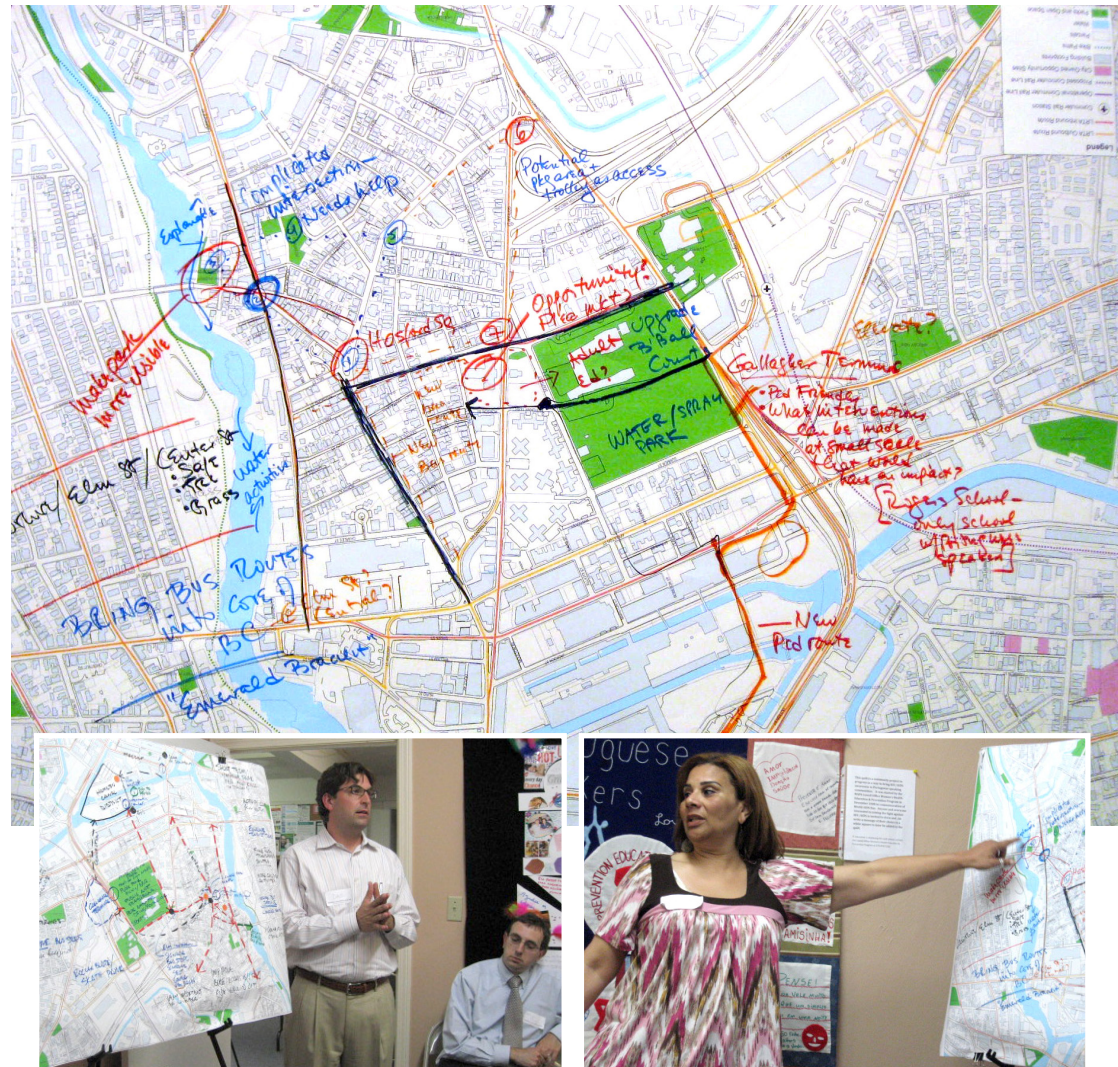
South Common as venue for new uses, including possible Flea Market, water park, new community uses for remaining space in Rogers School

Look at area near Connector cloverleaf as potential for off-site parking, with access neighborhood and city via trolley

Bring bus routes into core of Back Central

Make Dubner Park more visible, with adjacent esplanade along the river and water activities in the river

Easier, more visible access to Gallagher Terminal



Increase activities in South Common to draw more residents and others, including kids, reduce feeling of “distance” from heart of neighborhood

- *Roller blade/skate park*
- *Food/drink kiosk*

*Improve Elm Street with new signage,
bus shelters*

Treat Central Street as major access point to/from Hamilton Canal District

Improve bike accessibility throughout

New signage for MAPS

Create information center in Hosford Square



framing questions for **DOWNTOWN**



What specific initiatives should be undertaken in the Hamilton Canal District—and where—to draw more people Downtown: public art? music/performance venues? public spaces?

What kinds of pedestrian improvements will have the greatest impact on Downtown's livability and links to the Hamilton Canal District and other neighborhoods? Where are the priority areas?

Possible near-term pedestrian improvements through HCD site?

*Create new destination/plaza for all
near Doubletree, with cafes, rehabbed
sculpture, etc.*

*Longer term, seating along the canals,
with interpretive signage*

*Involve Downtown businesses/
institutions in Adopt-an-Art program to
support/maintain public art throughout
the Downtown*

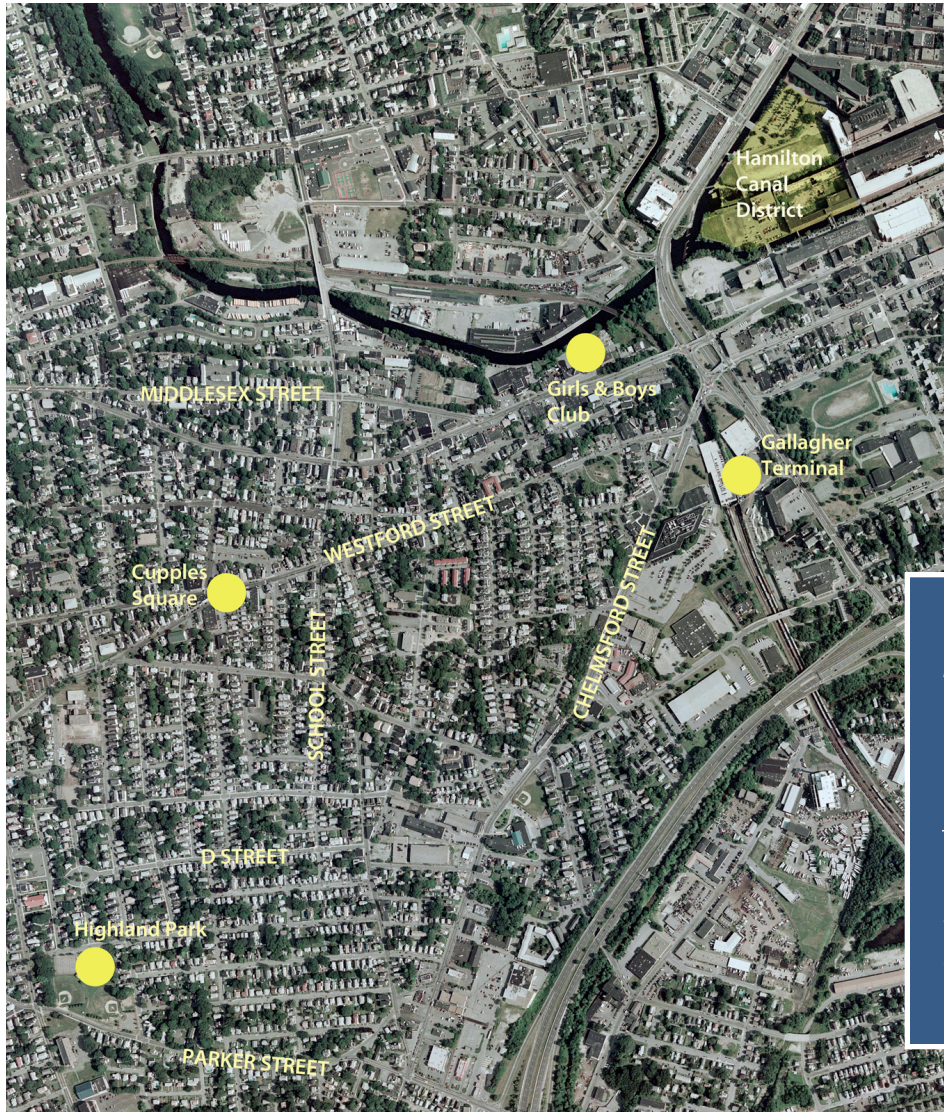
Map existing pieces of public art

Need better lighting, safety, well-maintained sidewalks, accessibility

Take more advantage of canals as venues for festivals, boating



framing questions for **LOWER HIGHLANDS**



How can Lower Highlands become more pedestrian-friendly in linking to the Hamilton Canal District, Downtown, Gallagher Terminal, other neighborhoods? Where are the priority sites?

What kind of new social connections can be established that link organizational in Lower Highlands to their counterparts in other sections of the city?

mapping priorities **LOWER HIGHLANDS**

*Pedestrian connection to
Gallagher Terminal*

*Expand pedestrian connections already
planned as result of Hamilton Canal
District development*

Clean up the Lord Overpass

- Lighting
- Landscape
- Sidewalks

*Improve wayfinding and directional
signage*

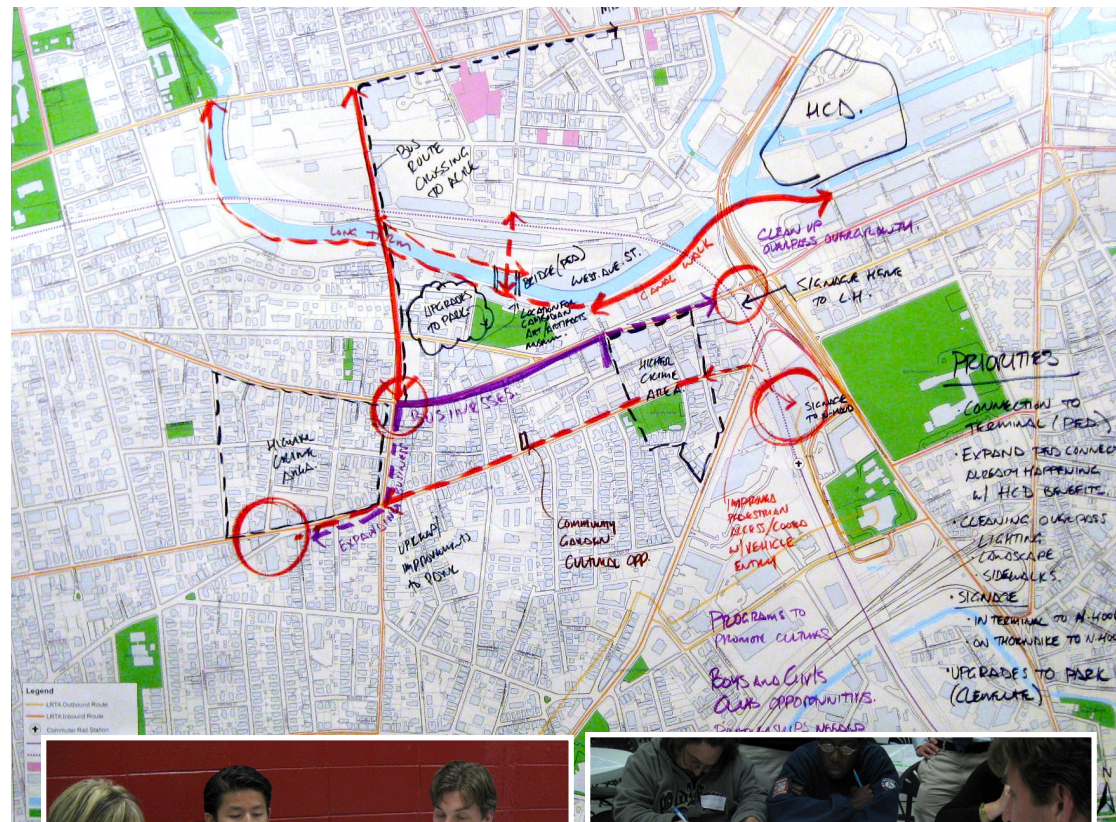
- From Terminal to neighborhood
- On Thorndike to neighborhoods

Upgrade Clemente Park

*Investigate programs to promote
neighborhood's cultures*

*Opportunities for new partnerships
through Boys & Girls Club*

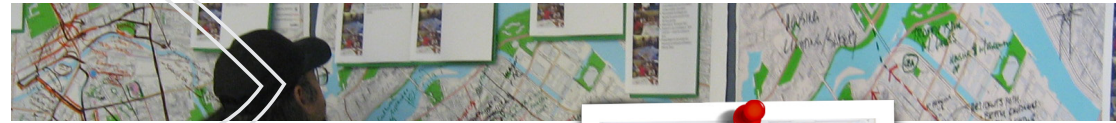
*School Street as major entry point
to/from The Acre*



project timeline



4 FROM BRAIN- STORMING TO MAPS TO A FINAL VISION THE THIRD CITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP



The final workshop, with the maps from the second round of vision sessions on display, was designed as an all-neighborhood opportunity to compare and discuss common interests regarding such topics as safety and walkability; improved access to the Gallagher Terminal as well as the Hamilton Canal District itself; revitalized parks; institutional partnerships; and housing. Examples of successful spaces from other cities were shared as examples of possibilities for Lowell. Participants were provided with Khmer, Spanish, and Portuguese translations of the text accompanying each of the maps.



project timeline



LOOKING AT POSSIBILITIES

Prior to beginning the mapping exercises at Vision Session 2, participants were able to review images of successful urban spaces which addressed similar themes to those emerging from the planning process.



PROVIDENCE

Special events along the canals and rivers can celebrate the unique history of Lowell and provide economic development opportunities for local businesses.



BOSTON

Pedestrian crossings can provide opportunities for artful expressions and create a special identity for a place.



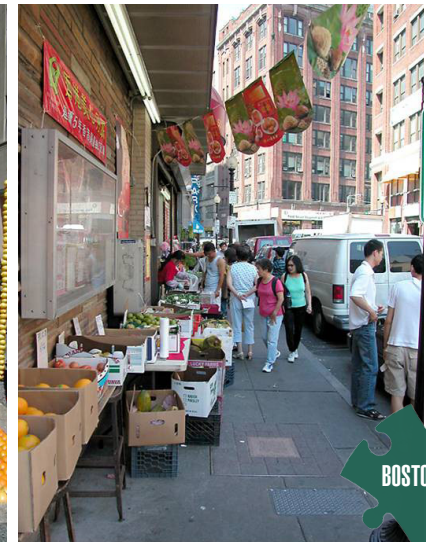
CAMBRIDGE

Well-designed affordable housing can be seamlessly integrated with the existing character of Lowell's historic neighborhoods.



NEW YORK

The streets can become a place for temporary public art or marketplaces which can attract people from throughout the neighborhood, city, and region.



BOSTON

project timeline



At the center of the discussion was a proposed cross-neighborhood Vision Statement reflecting these common interests and priorities and providing a roadmap for future development initiatives in the neighborhoods. The Vision Statement is structured around six major principles, as follows:

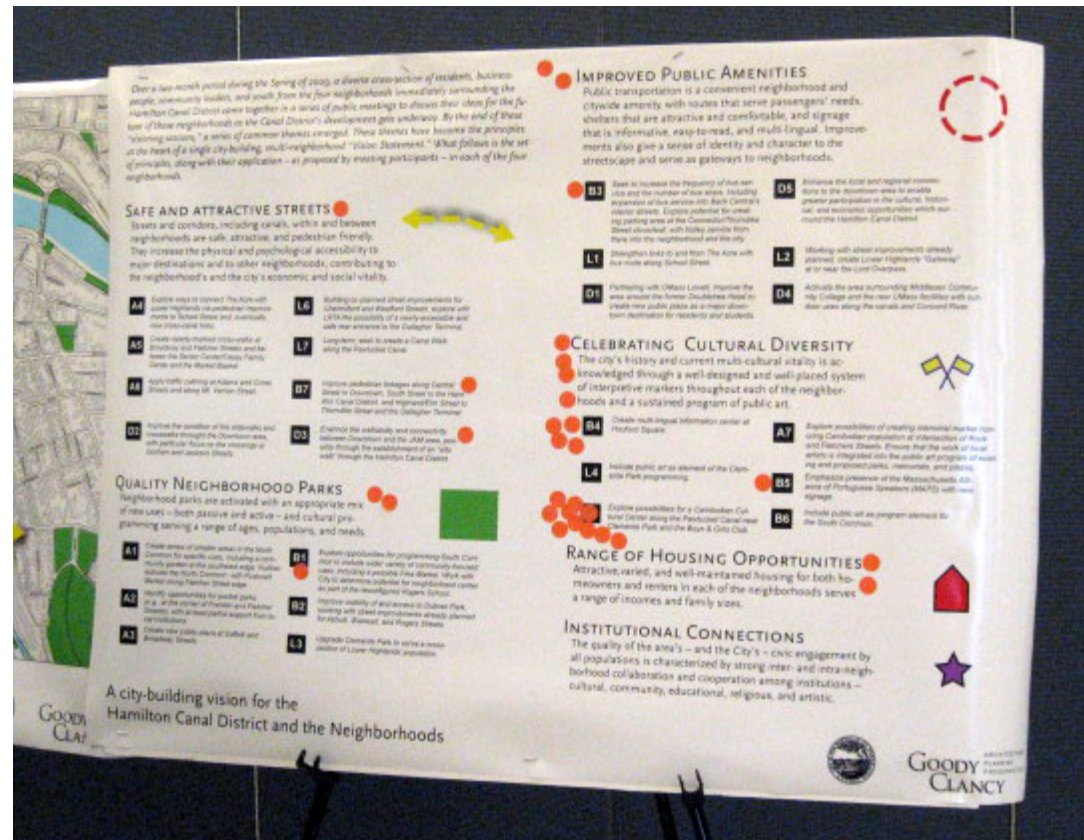
1. **STREETS AND CORRIDORS**, including canals, within and between neighborhoods are safe, attractive, and pedestrian friendly. They increase the physical—and psychological—accessibility to major destinations and to other neighborhoods, contributing to each neighborhood's—and to the city's—economic and social vitality.
2. **NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS** are activated with an appropriate mix of new uses—both passive and active—and cultural programming serving a range of ages, populations, and needs.
3. **PUBLIC AMENITIES** including public transportation, easy-to-read signage, and landmarks and gateways, help residents and visitors take full advantage of all the city has to offer while enhancing the public realm. Public transportation, with routes that serve passengers' needs, is a key example of an important neighborhood and city-wide amenity.
4. The city's **HISTORY** and current vitality is acknowledged through a well-designed and well-placed system of interpretive markers throughout each of the neighborhoods. The city's **MULTI-**
5. Attractive, varied, and well-maintained **HOUSING** for both homeowners and renters in each of the neighborhoods serves a range of incomes and family sizes.
6. The quality of the area's—and the City's—**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT** by all populations is characterized by strong inter- and intra-neighborhood collaboration and cooperation among institutions—cultural, community, educational, religious, and artistic—as well as between City agencies and the neighborhoods they serve.

The Vision Statement principles and the neighborhoods

To illustrate the relevance of the core principles to all neighborhoods, the Vision Statement was accompanied by a composite map (see p. 34) that brought together the various initiatives proposed during the earlier vision sessions and recorded on the individual neighborhood maps. These initiatives formed the basis for the final set of recommendations and accompanying action plans, recorded in the report's next section.

A final vote for celebrating cultural diversity

At the conclusion of the final workshop, participants again voted with sticky dots, this time for the one initiative, or principal, deemed the most important. With strong attendance at this meeting (as at the previous workshops) by members of the Cambodian community, the majority of voters targeted the celebration of cultural diversity as a priority, with particular emphasis on the idea of a Cambodian Cultural Center possibly located along the Pawtucket Canal. Scattered votes were cast for improved public amenities, quality neighborhood parks, safe and attractive streets, and a range of housing opportunities.





5

IMPLEMENTATION

This section links each of final recommendations to the appropriate principle expressed in the Vision Statement. It identifies potential opportunities to link a particular recommendation – particularly those requiring capital investment – to other initiatives already, or soon to be, underway. Most prominently, these latter include the various infrastructure projects currently or soon to be underway as part of the early stages of the Hamilton Canal District’s development. They represent but one aspect of a project whose scope and reach can help propel a number of the recommendations that surfaced during the visioning sessions and that are recorded in this implementation section.

Because of the continuing focus on housing during the visioning process, the report also provides an overview of the City’s housing strategy and a sample of the steps currently being taken to address the concerns raised during the public meetings – as well as during

the planning process for the Hamilton Canal District itself. As stated earlier, the need to provide a range of housing opportunities serving a range of household types, sizes, incomes, and ages, particularly as development of the Hamilton Canal District gets underway, was expressed repeatedly during the workshops and became one of the fundamental city-building principles of the Vision Statement.. In outlining steps toward implementation of the project’s recommendations, therefore, this document includes an overview by Lowell’s Department of Planning and Development of the relevant Citywide housing policies and housing-related resources, and their applicability to this all-important housing principle.

Overview of Hamilton Canal Initiatives

Lowell in partnership with Trinity Financial is currently working with consultants to make public improvements in relation to the

Hamilton Canal District that are likely to have positive impacts on the target neighborhoods. To mitigate traffic impacts expected from the development of the District, 13 traffic intersections are under study for ways to improve vehicle circulation and pedestrian accessibility. Also, the proposed Jackson Street extension, along with intersection improvements at the Lord Overpass, is expected to provide much improved access to, and from, the Hamilton Canal District and Downtown for both the Acre and Lower Highlands.

During the master planning process for the Hamilton Canal District it was determined that extending the existing trolley route from downtown through the district to the Gallagher Terminal was critical to the District's development. With improved regional and inter-neighborhood connections, it will sustain the vitality of both the neighborhoods and the District itself, while enhancing the quality of life of the city as a whole. A study is currently under way examining various route options and feasibility of an extension, including the extension west of downtown towards UMass/Lowell's Fox Hall. Extending the trolley will help improve accessibility and cross connections between the neighborhoods, downtown, the Hamilton Canal District, and beyond. It will also drive economic development in these and in adjacent neighborhoods.

Other initiatives not directly related to the Hamilton Canal District that share commonalities to ideas received during the City-Building Workshops include a recently completed downtown traffic study that seeks to improve vehicle circulation and pedestrian accessibility. Finally, the Division of Planning and Development will manage a master planning process for revitalization of the South Common, where feedback from the Workshops is likely to help shape its future.

A review of Lowell's housing strategy

The Citywide master plan states in its vision for the future that Lowell should strive to be a "lifetime city," where a variety of people can enjoy all stages of life at a variety of income levels. Since the master plan was adopted in 2003 this principle has guided housing and land use policy to provide quality affordable housing, preserve and enhance the character of existing neighborhoods, and rehabilitate the existing building stock.

During the City Building workshops we heard that (1) affordable housing remains an important aspect of quality of life for residents, and that (2) affordable housing must be made available to a variety of households at a variety of income levels. Feedback from the workshops also pointed out the need to maintain existing housing stock, to strike a balance between

owner-occupied and absentee landlord-owned buildings, and in all cases to preserve neighborhood character. In short we heard a clear reaffirmation of concerns expressed by participants in the 2002 city-wide master planning process.

The following summary provides a sample of actions carried out in the current strategy to address housing concerns and will continue to play an important role in ensuring that quality, affordable, and diverse housing types are made available:

- City administration currently manages several programs designed to encourage home ownership for Lowell residents, and in the process seeks to rehabilitate aging housing stock. Through the *First Time Homebuyer Program*, loans and technical assistance are made available to qualified low-to-moderate income households. When possible, buildings taken through the tax title process are rehabilitated and offered for sale to first time homebuyers. Loans as well as down payment and closing cost assistance are provided to first-time homebuyers purchasing two to four-unit residential buildings.

Households participating in the *First Time Home Buyer Program* are required to have completed pre-purchase counseling

through the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership. This partnership ensures that qualified households are acquiring secure loans that they can afford and thereby avoid foreclosure. With the exception of one incident that resulted in a short sale, none of the more than 500 households assisted to date through the program has been foreclosed upon. The program has also placed a number of homebuyers in foreclosed properties, helping to reduce the number of vacant and abandoned properties in Lowell's neighborhoods.

- Through the *Home Rehabilitation Loan Program* the City offers zero interest loans to low- and moderate-income households to fund home repair projects with the purpose to improve living conditions for the homeowner.
- The *Lead Abatement Program* provides grants to low income homeowners or owners of investment property renting to low income tenants to remove lead in order to provide a safer living environment.
- The five-year consolidated plan, which provides a framework and strategy for allocating federal funds administered by the City, consistently designates housing programs as a high priority. Approximately 44% of the funds received from federal agencies target-

ing low-to-moderate income households is used to support affordable housing, with a goal of allocating \$8.9 million towards these efforts over five years. A portion of \$3.6 million allocated to homelessness and AID/HIV programs is used to support rental assistance and housing related programs.

- The City recently created the *Downtown Smart Growth Overlay Zoning District* which provides incentives to developers to set aside 20% of the residential units as affordable to moderate income households. Without having to provide any supplemental funding. This strategy provides a unique opportunity to create workforce housing for city residents who, while not qualifying for low income assistance, nevertheless have difficulty affording market rate housing,
- Downtown Lowell has experienced a significant amount of development activity over the past 10 years, with just over \$180 million in private investment. During this time approximately 1,600 residential units have been created, up from 517 total units, an increase of over 400%. The City's commitment to affordable housing in the downtown area remains: as of this date, none of the subsidized affordable units have been eliminated. This increase in market rate units in the downtown has reduced the disproportionate number of low-income

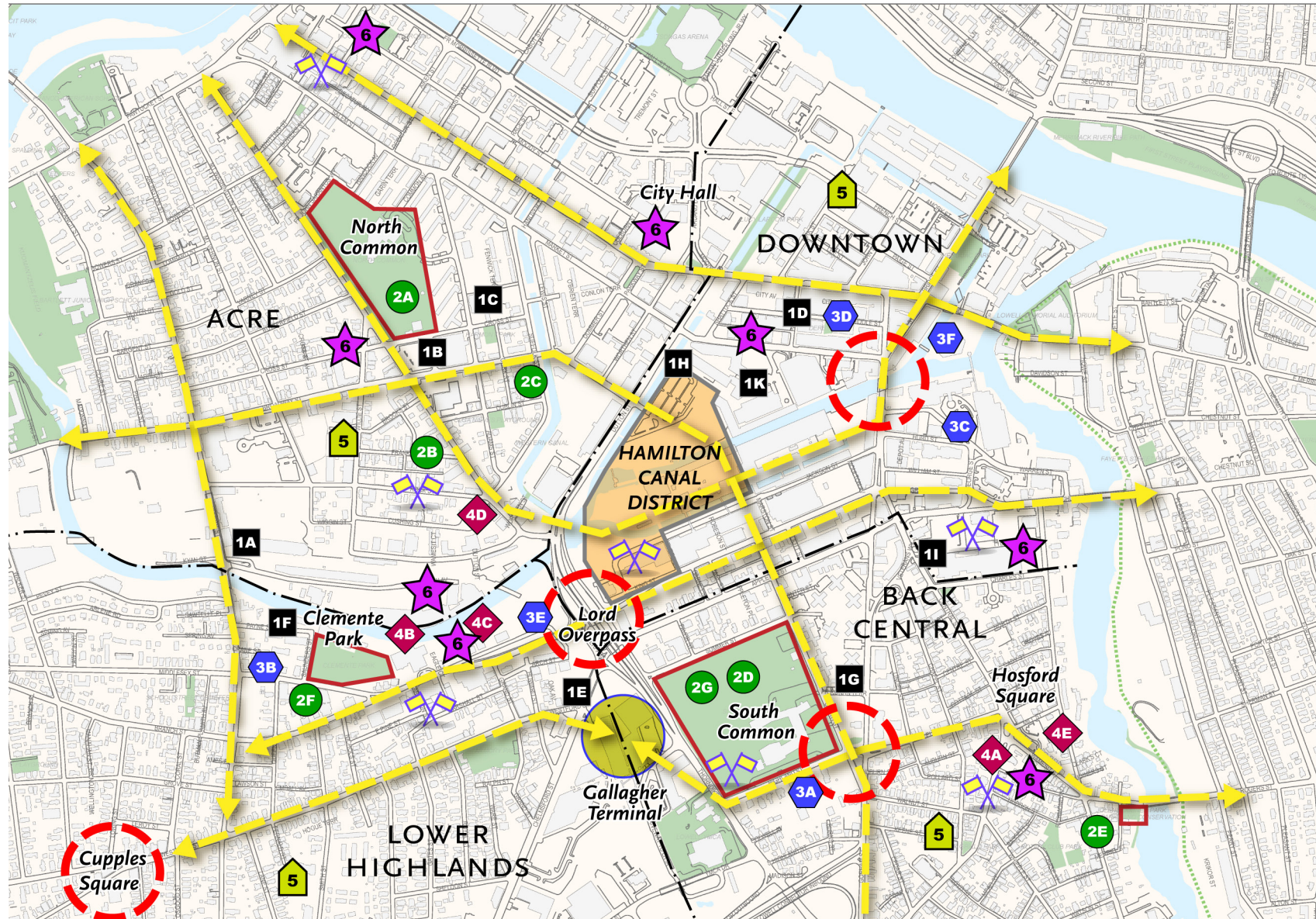
units that, along with development of affordable units in some of Lowell's higher-income neighborhoods, has helped address the goal of deconcentrating poverty – a goal discussed in Lowell's *Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice* (2005).

- Lowell recently initiated a 10-year plan to end homelessness and is currently looking to leverage numerous funding sources to provide permanent supportive housing to Lowell's homeless population by securing very low income housing with services to help move the homeless into housing. This "housing first" strategy aims to reshape the "shelter-based" culture around homelessness into a system that will provide rapid re-housing of homeless individuals and families followed by services to stabilize them in the new homes. Significant State and federal resources are now available and the City is working with a regional consortium to establish strategies to best invest these funds to impact the homelessness situation.
- The redevelopment of the Appleton Mills building located in the Hamilton Canal District will also include residential units of varying levels of affordability.

project timeline



Implementing the recommendations: short-, medium-, and long-term



This composite map marks the location of each of the recommendations that emerged from the visioning process. The charts beginning on page 36 summarize these recommendations and propose initial steps toward – as well as participants in – their implementation. Numbers in brackets reference locations on the composite map where each recommendation is applicable. In the case of Housing Opportunities and Institutional Connections, the recommendations were in general less place-specific and more applicable across neighborhoods.

Each of these recommendations is also keyed to the six major principles defined in the vision statement and described on page 29. For instance, symbols beginning with a 1 refer to the principle “Safe and Attractive Streets”, while those beginning with a 2 refer to “Quality Neighborhood Parks”.

The following Graphic Legend describes the other various symbols on the map.

Graphic Legend



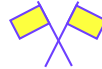
SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE STREETS: A network of vibrant streets can provide connectivity within and between the neighborhoods.



NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS: Public open space amenities are vitally important to residents, particularly families with children.



IMPROVED PUBLIC AMENITIES: City-wide public transportation, easy-to-read signage, and establishment of landmarks and gateways can help residents feel empowered to take full advantage of all the city has to offer.



HISTORY AND CULTURE: The unique asset of a long and rich history of industry, innovation, arts, and ethnic diversity should be reflected in interpretive markers and programs throughout the city.



HOUSING: Attractive, varied, and well-maintained housing for both homeowners and renters should be part of each neighborhood’s future.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: The many diverse civic and cultural institutions located throughout the city can strengthen their relationships not only within the neighborhoods they serve, but also city-wide.

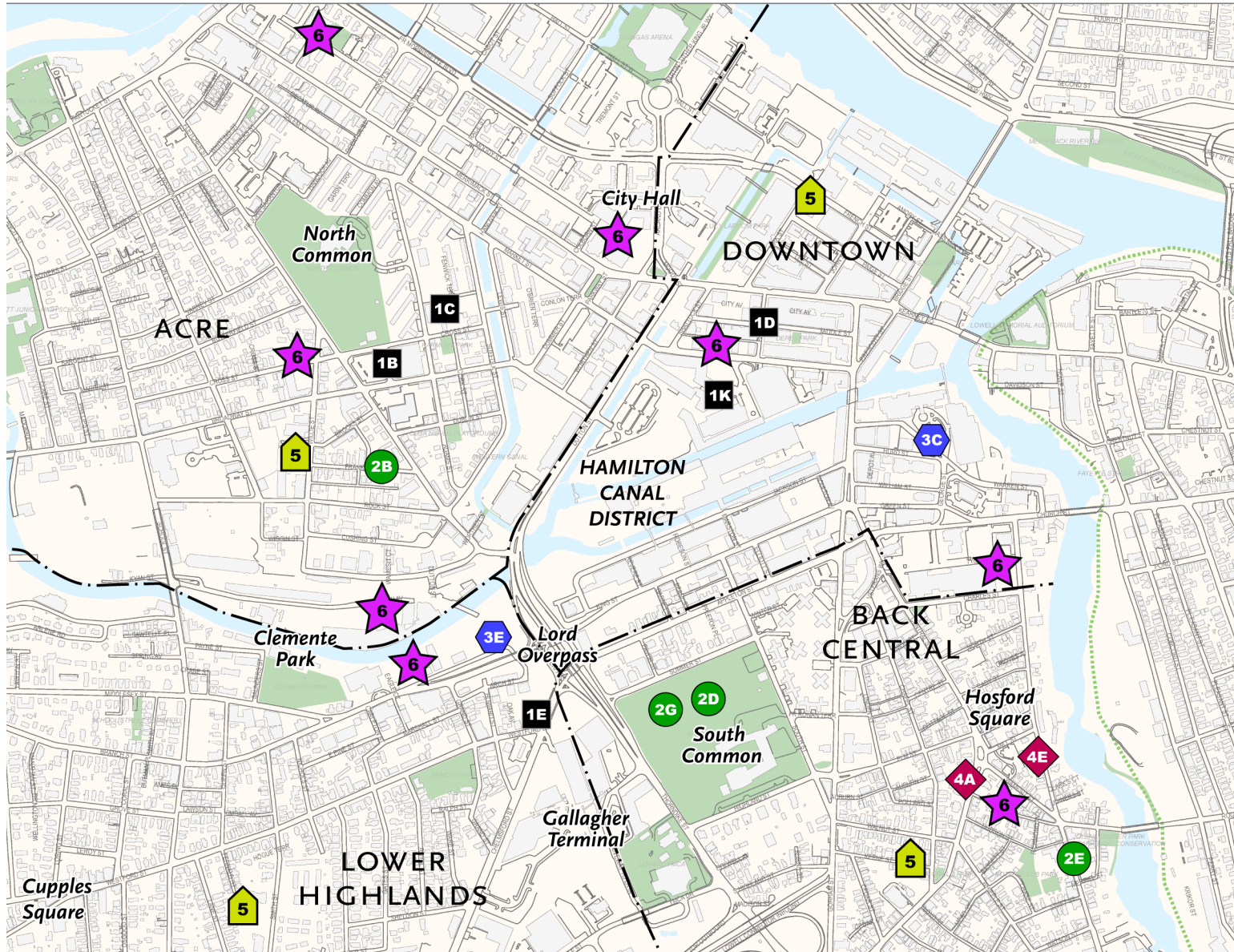


RECOMMENDATION KEYS: These symbols are related to the short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations defined in this chapter.

project timeline



Short-term recommendations



SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (2009-2010)

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
<i>Safe and attractive streets</i>	Create clearly-marked crosswalks at Broadway and Fletcher Streets and between the Senior Center/Casey Family Center and the Market Basket. [1B] Apply traffic calming at Adams and Cross Streets and along Mt. Vernon Street. [1C] Improve the condition of sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the Downtown area, with particular focus on the crossings at Gorham and Jackson Street. [1D] Building on planned street improvements for Chelmsford and Westford Streets, explore opportunities for newly-accessible and safe rear entrance to the Gallagher Terminal. [1E] Improve pedestrian access between Downtown and the Hamilton Canal District [1K]	Investigate opportunities for incorporating this – and/or other streetscape improvement recommendations – into infrastructure initiatives proposed as part of the Hamilton Canal District mitigation effort. Explore feasibility of providing an additional pedestrian bridge crossing over the Pawtucket Canal northwest of the Hamilton Canal District. Evaluate possible application of Community Development Block Grants or stimulus funds to bring relatively quick change to neighborhood streets, including application of Streets and Sidewalks Reconstruction Program. For key intersections, evaluate possibilities of applying funds from Traffic Calming Program. Work through local neighborhood groups and business communities, the Lowell Development Finance Corporation, and the City's Economic Development Office to identify potential recipients of funding to improve appearance of retail operations. Similarly, identify potential recipients of funding through the Best Retail Practices Program to help retailers improve marketing, energy efficient, and overall operations.

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
Quality neighborhood parks	Explore opportunities for programming South common to include wider variety of community-focused uses, including a possible Flea Market, community garden, etc.. Work with City to determine potential for neighborhood center as part of the reconfigured Rogers School complex. [2D] Include public art as program element for the South Common. [2G] Identify opportunities for pocket parks (e.g., at the corner of Franklin and Fletcher Streets), with at least partial support from local institutions. [2B] Improve visibility of and access to Dubner Park, working with potential street improvements already planned for Abbott, Wamesit, and Rogers Streets. [2E]	Led by the Division of Planning and Development and working with Parks and Recreation and the School Department, organize a neighborhood workshop to determine specific community uses – outdoor and indoor – for the reconfigured Rogers School and the South Common itself, beyond the uses already assigned to the School Department. Encourage local neighborhood groups, working with local schools, to determine feasibility, location, and sponsorship/maintenance of a garden, taking advantage of the infrastructure improvements already planned for the corner of Broadway and Fletcher Streets. The Economic Development Office should work with local organizations to explore feasibility of a Fletcher Street Pushcart Market. Provide advisory assistance to local neighborhood institutions (e.g., non-profits such as the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association) to determine optimal location(s) for – and strategies for maintenance of – small neighborhood parks and/or community gardens. Investigate possible sources of funding for both initial investment and on-going operations from foundations or similar entities. In collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Parks and Recreation, examine ways in which Dubner Park improvements can take advantage, at low or minimum cost, of already-planned infrastructure initiatives. With Dubner Park as the centerpiece of an ad-hoc system – or “Emerald Bracelet” – of small parks within Back Central, initiate planning to improve possible linkages among, access to, and use of these neighborhood open spaces.
Improved public amenities	Working with street improvements already planned, create Lower Highlands “Gateway” at or near the Lord Overpass. [3E] Partnering with UMass Lowell, improve the area around the former Doubletree Hotel to create new public plaza as a major downtown destination for residents and students. [3C]	Explore current workplan for the Lord Overpass to determine opportunities to create a physical “gateway” or similar marker as entrance to Lower Highlands. With the Cultural Organization of Lowell (COOL) in the lead, engage entities such as the Center City Committee, the Lowell Plan, and the Downtown Neighborhood Group in joint effort with the University and other relevant City agencies to plan for public plaza as hotel conversion gets underway. Map existing public art installations.
Celebrating cultural diversity	Create a multi-lingual information kiosk at Hosford Square. [4A] Emphasize presence of the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers in Back Central with new signage. [4E]	Working with the City’s Economic Development Office in collaboration with the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) and the Back Central Neighborhood Association, identify opportunities to provide information services at the MAPS location, or explore possible new storefront locations in Hosford Square or nearby (e.g., Church Street Plaza). Explore possibility for quick-action approval strategy to enable new signage for MAPS.

project timeline

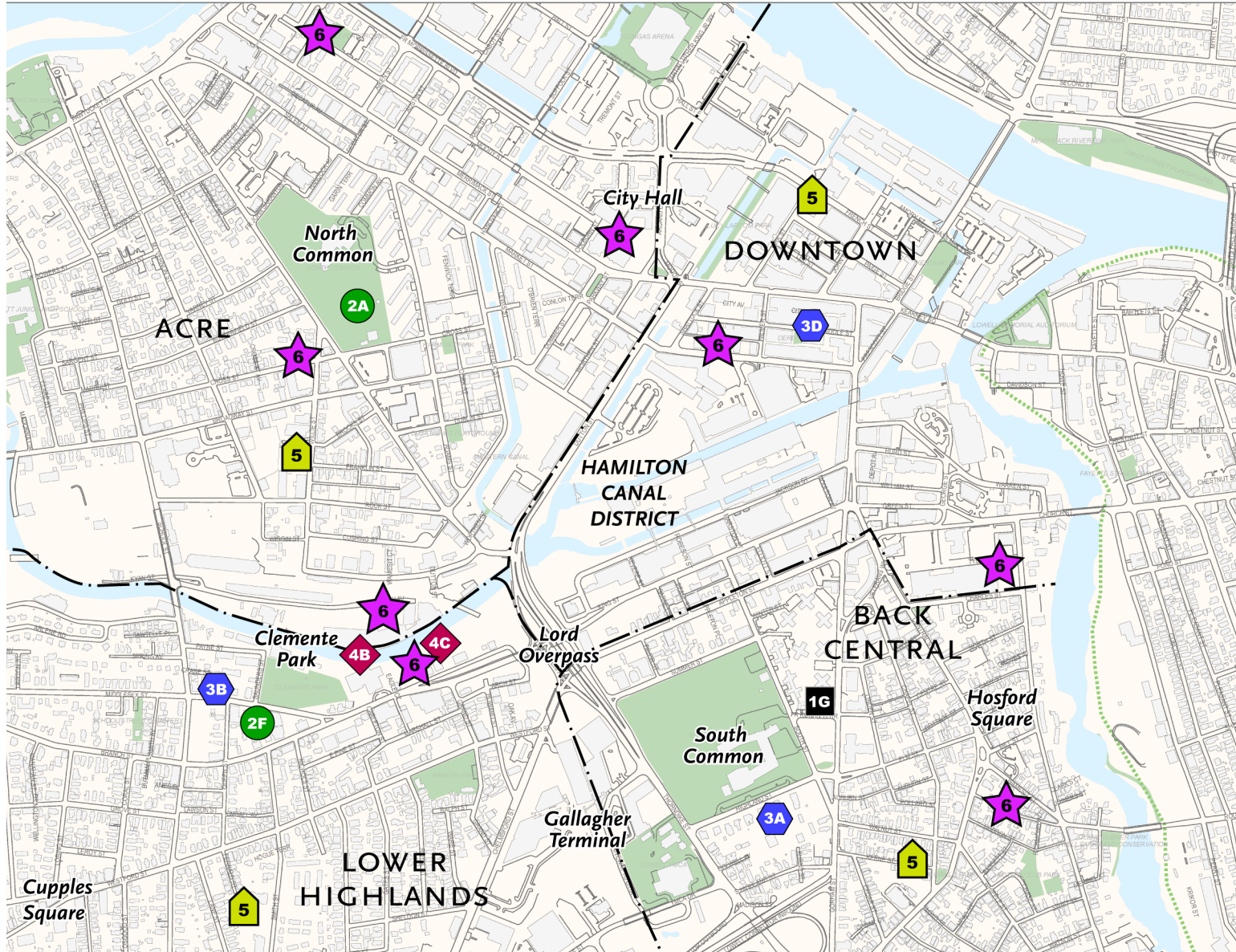


CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
Wide range of housing opportunities	Maximize the creation of affordable residential units on parcels identified in Phase II of the Acre Urban Renewal Plan as residential opportunities. Increase building code enforcement within the target neighborhoods to ensure proper maintenance and adequate safety standards for residents. Target existing homeownership programs to neighborhoods experiencing low rates of owner-occupied housing.	With the Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA) in the lead, work with other local neighborhood organizations and residents to re-evaluate the plan and program for city-owned parcels identified for redevelopment in Phase II of the Acre Urban Renewal Plan. While strengthening, with Inspectional Services, current enforcement strategies in the context of constrained resources, explore the feasibility of partnering with local neighborhood groups to determine how they might play a role in ameliorating maintenance and safety issues. Determine feasibility of supplementing existing programs with funds distributed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).
Strengthened institutional connections	Institutionalize and/or strengthen the links among the city's arts organizations, festivals, and local community groups to determine opportunities for collaboration. Strengthen partnerships between the City and local neighborhood organizations through dissemination of an inventory of City resources.	Develop easily accessible and readable how-to manual for residents as a "City-Making Handbook: A Guide to Services and to Making Things Happen in Lowell"; information to range from setting up a mini-festival in a public park to possible creation of a Play Street. Build on the results of the third Vision Session by engaging all neighborhoods in a quarterly "Issues and Ideas Exchange: Continuing the Vision." Create a "Neighborhood Network Task Force" among appropriate City agencies to act as resource to local organizations in their efforts to ensure and sustain culturally and ethnically diverse participation.

project timeline



Medium-term recommendations



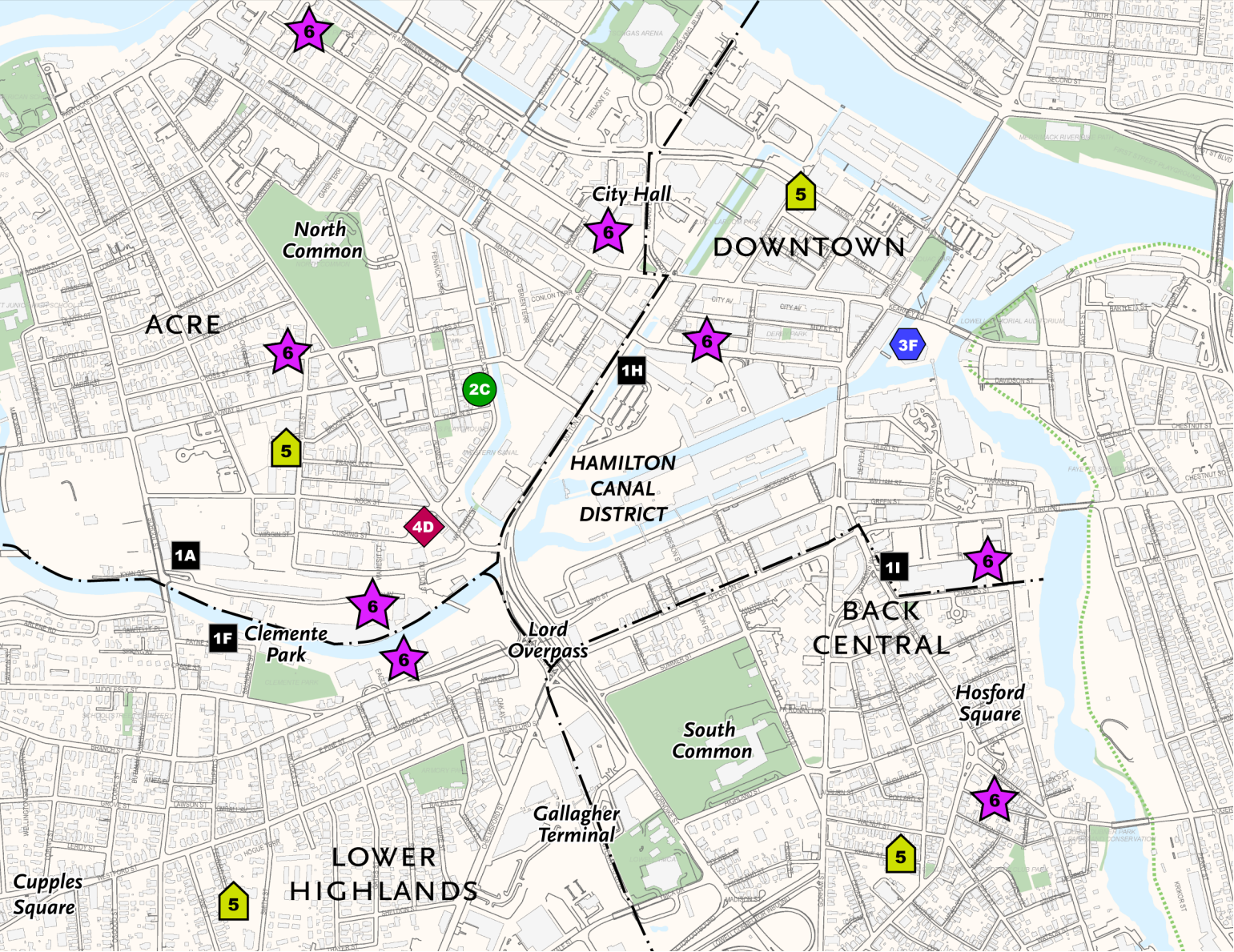
MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGIES (2010-2012)

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
<i>Safe and attractive streets</i>	Improve pedestrian linkages along Central Street to Downtown, South Street to the Hamilton Canal District, and Highland/Elm Street to Thorndike Street and the Gallagher Terminal. [1G]	Work with the Lowell Regional Transit Authority and the Lowell Police Department, as well as the Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association and the Cupples Square Business and Property Association, to determine feasibility of enhanced access and to mitigate permanently the public safety concerns regarding intrusions into the parking garage. Seek out potential funding courses to accommodate additional infrastructure improvements, taking advantage of not only of the Hamilton Canal District project, but other projects of a similar magnitude.
<i>Quality neighborhood parks</i>	Upgrade Clemente Park to serve a cross-section of Lower Highlands' population. [2F] Explore opportunities for new and varied programming with park enhancements that will activate the park and surrounding areas and will better serve the needs of Acre residents. [2A]	With the Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association in the lead, the Department of Planning and Development should help facilitate a joint effort among the Lowell Boys & Girls Club, the Cupples Square Business and Property Association, the Pailin Plaza merchants, and the nearby police substation in the design of a workshop to identify and prioritize a roster of specific improvements for the park.

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
<i>Improved public amenities</i>	Seek to increase the frequency of bus service and the number of bus stops, including expansion of bus service into Back Central’s interior streets. [3A] To ease the influx of auto traffic into Back Central and the Downtown continue to pursue plans to extend the National Park Trolley route, and operating hours, to adequately serve visitors travelling to Lowell by commuter rail or desiring off-site parking facilities. [3A] Strengthen links to and from The Acre with a bus route along School Street [3B] Support proposed Jackson Street Extension and Lord Overpass improvements to provide critical links between target neighborhoods and the Hamilton Canal District. [3D]	Engage the Lowell Regional Transit Authority and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments in an examination of current – and future – bus (and trolley) routes that address the need for improved linkages within and from neighborhoods.
<i>Celebrating cultural diversity</i>	Include public art as element of the Clemente Park programming [4B] Explore feasibility for a Cambodian Cultural Center along the Pawtucket Canal near Clemente Park and the Boys & Girls Club. [4C]	See above regarding workshops for Clemente Park and South Common. Create a special task force with representation from all relevant neighborhood associations and community groups, including the Cultural Organization of Lowell, Western Avenue Studios, the Boys & Girls Club, the Casey Family Center and the Lowell Community Health Center, along with Parks and Recreation, to participate in a feasibility study regarding optimal location, programming, and financing for the Center.

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
<i>Wide range of housing opportunities</i>	Develop regulatory strategies in support of new housing initiatives. Expand neighborhood capacity for affordable market rate housing options. Inventory troubled and abandoned properties in target neighborhoods and establish priorities for rehabilitation according to feasibility, density of blight, and location on major pedestrian/vehicular links between neighborhoods.	Study applicability for expansion of the existing—or creation of additional—Smart Growth Overlay Zoning Districts that provide additional affordable housing units and take advantage of State grant funds. Study the feasibility and impacts of relaxed land use standards for districts that historically exhibit an urban character, while working to ensure preservation of neighborhood character through detailed design review. Study applicability for expansion of the existing – or creation of additional – Smart Growth Overlay Zoning Districts that provide additional affordable housing units and take advantage of State grant funds. Study the feasibility and impacts of relaxed land use standards for districts that historically exhibit an urban character, while working to ensure preservation of neighborhood character through detailed design review.
<i>Strengthened institutional connections</i>	Establish joint City/University/neighborhood Standing Committee to explore opportunities for ongoing collaboration of mutual benefit to the University, the neighborhoods, and the city as a whole.	Build on initiatives emerging from redevelopment of the Doubletree Hotel by creating a temporary City/University/multi-neighborhood task force to explore feasibility of, and possible agendas for, permanent Standing Committee.

Long-term recommendations



LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (2012-2016)

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION PLAN/STAKEHOLDERS
<i>Safe and attractive streets</i>	Seek to create a Canal Walk along the Pawtucket Canal. [1F] Explore ways to connect The Acre with Lower Highlands via pedestrian improvements to School Street and, eventually, new cross-canal links. [1A] Animate the streets around the Church Street Plaza by supporting new commercial uses in the Plaza while maintaining the strengths of the Hosford Square commercial district. [1I] Enhance the walkability and connectivity between the Downtown and JAM area, possibly through the creation of an “arts walk” near the Hamilton Canal District. [1H]	Engage the National Park Service, working with The Department of Planning and Development, in an examination of the Pawtucket Canal as the site for an attractive, pedestrian-friendly, and amenity-rich Walk, building on the results of the (proposed) bus circulation enhancements along School Street and improvements to Clemente Park. With the Lowell Regional Transit Authority and the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, coordinate pedestrian improvements to School Street with improved bus service that would include new bus stops. If not already in process, the Back Central Neighborhood Association, working with the Economic Development Office, should develop a strategy for the Church Street Plaza’s reuse.
<i>Quality neighborhood parks</i>	Create a new public plaza at Broadway Street near the Western Canal. [2C]	With stakeholders such as the Western Avenue Studios, the Revolving Museum, the Art League of Lowell, the National Park Service, the Cultural Organization of Lowell, and key neighborhood groups, organize a design charrette for a new plaza, focused on programming and amenities.
<i>Improved public amenities</i>	Activate the area surrounding Middlesex Community College and the new UMass facilities downtown with outdoor uses along the canals and the Concord River. [3F]	Explore with the Center City Committee and UMass the opportunities for a City-University joint venture focused on newly activated public spaces.
<i>Celebrating cultural diversity</i>	Explore possibilities of creating memorial marker honoring Cambodian population at a prominent location within the neighborhoods. Ensure that the work of local artists is integrated in the public art program of existing and proposed parks, memorial, and plazas. [4D]	The process for creating the Cambodian memorial should build on the process used to create similar projects in honor of Lowell’s other immigrant communities.

APPENDIX

Deepest thanks and appreciation to the many individuals who participated in the workshops and whose ideas helped shape the process by which “A City-Building Vision” was achieved.

We wish also to acknowledge the insights and ideas provided by Lowell’s extraordinary array of local organizations and institutions, as well as by representatives from the State Department of Housing and Community Development.

RASY AN | Coalition for a Better Acre

KAREN BELL | Jackson Appleton Middlesex Business Residents Association

GREG CROTEAU | United Teen Equality Center

TAYA DIXON MULLANE | Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association

MAXINE FARKAS | Western Avenue Studios

JOHN FITZGERALD | Urban Development Coordinator, Department of Housing and Community Development

SUZANNE FRECHETTE | Coalition for a Better Acre

JEFF FUGATE | Coalition for a Better Acre

DORCAS GRIGG-SAITO | Lowell Community Health Center

VICHENNY KEO-SAM | Casey Family Services

DAVID KOCH | Back Central Neighborhood Association

MARIA KOZOMBOLIS | Cupples Square Business and Property Association

JIM LICHOULAS | Center City Committee

BILL LIPCHITZ | Center City Committee

ROBYN LONG-NAVAS | Coalition for a Better Acre

ANGELA LOTITO | Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association

KATHLEEN MARCIN | Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association

BRIAN MARTIN | Office of Rep. Nikki Tsongas

MICHELLE MEEHAN | Boys & Girls Club of Lowell

ELKIN MONTOYA | Coalition for a Better Acre

MADELINE NASH | Coalition for a Better Acre

HEDDI NIEUWSMA | Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association

SHEILA OCHS | Lowell Community Health Center

SOUDY OUCH | Lowell Alliance of Families and Neighborhoods

ROCIO PEREZ | One Lowell

OSVALDA RODRIGUEZ | Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers

VONG ROS | Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association

MAURA SMITH | Lowell Community Health Center

LINDA SOU | Lowell Community Health Center

STEVE SYVERSON | Arts League of Lowell

JUNE TAING | Casey Family Services

DIANE TESTA | The Revolving Museum

RENA THEUM | Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association

CAROL WOLFE | Manager, Community Assistance Unit, Department of Housing and Community Development

