A PLAN FOR FLORENCE CENTER

An Element of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan

Adopted by Northampton Planning Board: October 9, 1997

Endorsed by City Council: October 16, 1997

VISION STATEMENT:

***WE**, residents of Florence and community boards serving Florence, want to retain Florence Center's unique character, which defines Florence for many of us as the residential heart of Northampton. Although the center is a critical economic engine, it has, and should retain, a neighborhood commercial and civic and cultural focus.*

*Florence should encourage business expansion within the existing commercial and industrial areas, without **ANY** expansion into residential areas. **IF** we can prevent commercial and industrial displacement and land use conflicts, we prefer mixed uses within commercial and industrial areas.*

Maintaining housing and neighborhoods within walking distance of Florence Center is critical for a healthy Florence. We want Florence residents to be able to continue living within walking distance of the center without being threatened by urban problems and conflicting land uses. Florence must remain comfortable and safe for all its residents.

The city has a legal and moral obligation to insure that all people are welcome in all areas of the city. The city should strive, however, to prevent any housing from creating adverse impacts on neighborhoods and to address practical issues that arise from different housing types.

Florence should retain a mix of housing types and provide its fair share of all types of housing. Housing to address economic and social needs should be included in all appropriate areas of the city to avoid a perception that any area of the city is receiving an excessively high concentration of any housing type. Florence residents must feel that they are in control of their own community.

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This study is part of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Board will adopt the complete plan in accordance with Mass. General Laws, Chapter 41, §81D and submit all elements to the City Council for their consideration. The Planning Board has designed this process to help the city efforts to meet Northampton's goals and objectives.

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Councillor George E. Quinn*

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INTRODUCTION

This study is a comprehensive look at the commercial center of Florence and its surrounding industrial and residential neighborhoods. It examines city government's regulatory and non-regulatory actions that affect Florence Center and identifies areas where those city actions should be changed.

Although the planning process considered many city actions, it focused on land use issues in Florence Center and immediately surrounding areas. Some other city actions are beyond the scope of this study although they have a peripheral impact on Florence. For example, although public safety is critical for the continued success and health of Florence and the city, the plan does not focus on the provision of police, fire protection or building inspection services.

The Planning Board undertook this study because:

1. Florence residents requested a study of Florence land use issues.

2. The health of all of Northampton is integrally linked with the health of Florence.

2. Past planning studies have not addressed many of the relevant issues.

3. The Board will soon begin a citywide comprehensive plan. Completing a Florence Plan now helps the Board assemble a comprehensive plan made up of a series of plan elements. This allows the Board to have a strategic focus, without losing a citywide vision.

BACKGROUND

Florence Center provides commercial and cultural services for residents of Florence, other areas of Northampton and the surrounding hilltowns. Florence's historic pedestrian-scale commercial, industrial, residential development and "village center" help maintain Florence as one of the most attractive areas to live in the Pioneer Valley.

Florence has a very strong identity and character that set it apart from other areas of Northampton. It has a "sense of place" lacking in many other communities.

Most of Florence's Main Street retail businesses serve local needs, such as pizza and groceries. Many businesses, however, also serve clients throughout Northampton and the region.

Florence Center and surrounding industrial areas host a variety of industrial businesses, mostly in older mill buildings, and medical uses, including Kaiser Permanente and medical offices. As a result, Florence Center has a much greater economic presence than is typical for a small "village center." This helps diversify the economy and culture of the entire city.

Florence Center also includes a significant residential component, including several single room occupancy hotels (SROs) and dense housing developments. The center is surrounded by highly desirable housing in a wide variety of price ranges. Most of this housing was build before World War II and is in excellent condition.

Florence's successful village center fills a

critical economic and social niche. It provides a level of services to the community that downtown Northampton, with its high rents and density, and strip commercial areas, with their weaker sense of identity and high-volume focus, cannot provide.

Like other village centers, however, Florence's businesses face stiff competition from regional commercial centers and strip commercial areas, such as King Street. Florence Center businesses have maintained local-serving commercial uses as their niche, complementing other commercial areas rather than competing with them.

Florence's industrial areas are being challenged to face the dramatic change in industrial space demands. Located in multi-story traditional mill buildings, many industries have left for newer more efficient industrial spaces. Fortunately, because Florence and Northampton are such desirable places to locate, so far, each time an industry has left Florence, creative entrepreneurs have redeveloped the buildings to serve new uses.

The Planning Board, working with the Florence community and the three City Councillors whose wards include Florence, designed this plan to help Florence remain a desirable place to shop, work, visit and live.

While this plan focuses on Florence Center, the Planning Board will be integrating it into a citywide comprehensive plan. Each recommendation in this plan has been considered in light of existing plans and goals to ensure that the final comprehensive plan is "internally consistent." In addition, information unique to more than one plan has been copied from earlier plan elements.

HISTORY

The City of Northampton, which includes the villages of Florence and Leeds, is a dominant economic and cultural force in Hampshire County and the Pioneer Valley. Northampton is on the west side of the Connecticut River in Hampshire County and borders Easthampton, Westhampton, Williamsburg, Hatfield and Hadley. The city covers 35.7 square miles (22,880 acres) and has a stable population of 30,000.

Northampton was founded in 1654. The rich Connecticut River and associated floodplain agricultural resources that attracted the earliest Native American seasonal encampments also attracted its founders. The Connecticut River meadows and land adjacent to the Mill River, including in Florence, were among the first areas of Northampton that were developed for agriculture.

As the area developed, settlements along transportation routes, including in Florence, became increasingly important. With the industrial revolution, industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors eventually eclipsed agriculture as the most important sectors of the economy. Industrial mills in Florence, first along the Mill River and later close to the railroad, helped transform Florence.

As Florence's economy developed in the nineteenth century, its role as a civic and cultural center also grew. The Northampton Association for Education and Industry (1840s), for example, served as a conduit for ideas on social, political and economic change

to be explored and Cosmian Hall (1874-1948) served as a cultural center for the city.

Northampton's and Florence's economy have changed since the end of World War II. The commercial and service sectors of the economy have grown and the industrial sector has contracted. The role of the Northampton State Hospital and V.A. Hospital have been shrinking for a generation, while the roles of other institutions, especially Smith College, have remained stable or grown. Cooley Dickinson Hospital and other medical uses have become a major force in Northampton's and Florence's economy.

The center of Florence has served as a commercial center for most of its history. In its earliest days, when Florence was less accessible from Northampton Center, (because of the slow speed of transportation and communication systems) it served local needs and those of travelers on the Boston-Albany Stagecoach Road.

With industrial development, Florence developed a healthy industrial sector. The decline of Massachusetts' industrial sector and the rise of competing automobile-oriented commercial areas, however, threatened Florence and caused significant declines for Florence businesses. Today, however, Florence businesses have identified how to serve their core local area market, however, and Florence now has a stable commercial area.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

This plan draws on previous studies which provide a wealth of relevant information.

The Master Plan for The City of Northampton, August 1963: Technical Planning Associates wrote this plan with federal Urban Renewal Administration funding. At the time, the federal government was encouraging communities to modernize all urban core areas to compete directly with automobile-oriented commercial districts, and when planning was done without much public participation.

The plan recommended large-scale demolition of commercial buildings in Florence and replacing them with a supermarket and a large chain store. It predicted that "unless there is a very drastic rebuilding here, the Florence business center will become further deteriorated and will be a financial liability to the city." Fortunately, this recommendation was not implemented.

Comprehensive Plan for Northampton, Massachusetts, June 1972: This plan was written by Metcalf & Eddy with federal Urban Renewal Administration funding. The plan was adopted by the Planning Board and resulted in the city's 1975 rewrite of its zoning ordinance and the creation of the Office of Planning and Development. Although Northampton first adopted zoning in 1926, the 1975 ordinance corrected many problems from earlier ordinances.

The **1972 Comprehensive Plan** identified the importance of Florence as the "largest neighborhood shopping center in Northampton. Florence supplements the {Central Business district} by providing service and limited retail stores for its immediate area."

Florence Business Area Commercial Area Revitalization District (C.A.R.D.) Plan,

July 1980: This plan was written to identify how to revitalize Florence Center, "traditionally an important source of goods and services for the greater Florence area, the city as a whole and the hilltowns west of the city."

It identified that Florence "has for a number of years been the victim of increased customer mobility and the associated development of large, out-lying shopping areas... The streetscape is in poor condition... the facades of the buildings are covered by a wide variety of signage, much of it of a mass-produced nature."

Parking and Traffic in Florence, March 1985: This plan was written by LandUse, Inc., with the assistance of the Florence Task Force. It identified a healthy parking situation with adequate parking. It found no need to install parking meters and recommended that employees be encouraged to continue to park in off-street lots.

Mayor's Task Force on Land Use and Development, Final Report, February 1986: Former Mayor David B. Musante Jr.'s ad-hoc committee wrote this strategic plan. It provided findings and recommendations on housing, economic development and natural resources.

Goals of the **1986 Mayors Task Force** included "strengthen{ing} and improv{ing} commercial development in clearly defined and established commercial centers--...Florence Center. . . so as to maintain the traditional structure and character of the community and so as to avoid the uncontrolled spread of commercial uses into residential areas and along roadways throughout the city."

Florence Public Works Economic Development Grant (PWED) Application, August 1986: The city received this grant, with assistance from the Florence CARD Committee, to improve the Florence Center streetscape and infrastructure. It application stated that "Downtown Florence needs identity as a town center" that streetscape repair would help provide.

Strategic Plan for Resource Conservation, March 1987: Lozano, White and Associates, Inc prepared this plan with a state Strategic Planning Grant. It focused on maintaining historical residential development patterns and preserving sensitive ecological resources. The plan recommended "encourag{ing} the development of traditional Northampton housing types, that is, two- and three-family dwellings" and smaller lot sizes in the urban core.

Economic Development Component Strategic Plan, City of Northampton, April 1991: This plan focused on citywide actions. It identified the need to "strengthen and improve commercial development in clearly defined and established centers {including} Florence Center."

City of Northampton Local Historic Districts, Final Report, June 1991: This report, by a local historic district study committee created by City Council, recommended four local historic districts, including a Florence District.

"The proposed boundaries of the Florence Historic District reflect the history of the village... Included in the district are stores, mills, schools, churches, the library, cemetery and parks which serve as the focal points for the

community... The character of the {residential areas of} town remain homogeneous consisting primarily of modest late 19th century worker's homes and more elaborate homes of community leaders from the same period."

Streamlining the Zoning Process: How We Can Simplify Your Life Without Threatening Your Quality of Life, June 1994: The Planning Board, Zoning Board, Mayor Mary L. Ford, and the Office of Planning and Development sponsored this report. Many of the resulting procedural and zoning changes will simplify the regulatory process for Florence redevelopment.

Cooley Dickinson Hospital Rezoning Plan, February 1996: The Planning Board wrote this plan, relying in part on LandUse Inc's **Technical Memorandum on Impact-Related Inventories of Outpatient Facilities, CDH and Florence Center, January, 1996**. LandUse found that CDH complements the 65,655 square feet of office space zoned, used, or marketed for health care delivery in Florence Center.

FLORENCE ISSUES

A Plan for Florence Center reflects extensive public participation and consensus. To solicit public participation and decision making, the Planning Board and the three city councillors whose wards include Florence:

1. Sought public dialogue through media features and targeted outreach to residents, businesses, neighborhood groups and other identifiable "stakeholders."

2. Sponsored a series of six interactive workshops in which the Florence community identified and prioritized Florence issues and created a vision of what they want for Florence. Over 170 people, representing a cross-section of the community, including residents, business people and building owners, attended at least one of the six workshops. The workshops covered the following topics:

   A. The geographic extent and format of the plan.

B. Florence community issue identification.
C. Prioritization of issues.
D. Geographic analysis of what should go where.
E. Evaluation of draft plan and revisions (two workshops).

The participants identified and prioritized issues in each of several categories:

1. Traffic, safety and parking.
2. Economic development
3. Village character and land use.
4. Residential land use and open space.
5. Geographic issues: what goes where?

On the following pages, all of the issues raised in each of these categories are noted, ranked in order (and by print size) based on the priority given these issues by workshop participants.

The issues identified were the results of brainstorming by community participants.
The comments do not necessarily reflect city policy.

TRAFFIC, SAFETY and PARKING

- Maintain free parking in Florence.
- Provide signals &/or intersection improvements at Bridge/N. Main, N. Maple/Bridge and JFK School.
- Plan for all parking, including public & handicap parking.
- Improve bike path safety with lights at Casket Co. barriers, no motor vehicles, improved crosswalks, bike racks.
- Extended rail trail.
- Improve Pine & Park St. traffic and intersection signage, and continue Pine Street sidewalk by river to improve safety.
- Improve pedestrian safety, including crosswalks & longer walk lights. Crosswalk improvements, needed at Main, South Main, Pine and High Streets.
- Improve traffic enforcement for pedestrian safety, especially on Main Street.
- Provide better busing and transit service.
- Consider developing a park-and-ride lot at V.A. Hospital.
- Develop a Route 9 by-pass around Florence (see opposition under Economic Development).
- Improve traffic safety at Spring Street/Ryan Road intersection.
- End double sided parking on Pine Street, Park Street and small streets and only allow on one side.
- Improve parking enforcement.
- Install double strip down Rte. 9 between Look Park and N. Maple.
- Do not develop any additional parking in Florence.
- Provide motorist, pedestrian, and bicycle safety education.
- Study traffic and intersection volume and patterns, including use of streets as traffic bypasses and truck deliveries.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Reuse mill buildings/sites, as in Arts & Industry and Independence Hall.
- Encourage business growth, especially in center.
- Maintain traditional family-owned and small businesses, not chain stores.
- Do not allow super supermarkets in Florence.
- Ensure that economic development does not harm village character, residential land uses or traffic.
- Provide more screening and green space along commercial uses and sidewalks.
- Regulate types of businesses that are appropriate for Florence.
- Discourage & disburse SRO's and large multifamily uses.
- Prevent more commercial development (in conflict with earlier recommendation)
- Encourage coffee houses and restaurants, other than just pizza.
- Encourage a skating rink.
- Provide more informational signage for Florence for new residents and visitors to encourage use of retail businesses.
- Correct inconsistent zoning. (mills, mini-mall, Community Center)
- Provide Florence with its own zip code.
- Preserve business core. Stop conversion of commercial space to other uses (SROs, elderly housing, Kaiser), esp. from public-funded projects.
- Maintain pedestrian-scale of development.
- Preserve and enhance retail business & diversity. Preserve and create retail jobs & other job development, including for low-income workers.
- Do not develop a Route 9 bypass that bypasses Florence. Route 9 good for business.
- Retain old mill buildings with their current industrial, artist studio and business incubators uses by limiting residential uses and prohibiting retail.
- Preserve role as economic center for local area and hilltowns. Maintain infrastructure for development.
- Provide a stronger police presence. (drugs, vandalizes, break-ins, safety, kids hanging out)
- Understand business/residential interdependence and business cooperation are critical for economic strength .

VILLAGE CHARACTER and LAND USES

- Do not add to Florence's unfair share of group homes, Single Room Occupancy units and rooming houses. This hurts Florence's character and safety.
- Preserve Florence character (its not downtown Northampton).
- Florence Civic Association should create a Village Council to represent Florence.
- Encourage mixed uses and residential/business mix in Florence center.
- Reuse old buildings. (e.g. Norwood engineers).
- Limit corporate influx (e.g. McDonald's) which taints character.
- Encourage better design, signage and landscaping, especially at service stations.
- Add "chic stores" and inn, hotel or bed and breakfasts to business mix.
- Encourage private commercial development.
- City boards need to recognize character and neighborhoods in making decisions.
- Residents need to know about pending projects & have greater input in decision making; Community consensus is critical. (e.g. Sojourner Truth statue)
- Protect architecture, old buildings and character, without a historic district.
- Consider historical center/tours and historical information.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE and OPEN SPACE

- Preserve more open space, including Smith Voc. agricultural land, playgrounds, and other recreation. Improve maintenance.
- Discourage more than fair share of halfway and multi-family housing because of perceived character and safety problems.
- Maintain current village size. Protect neighborhoods from commercial encroachment and redevelopment of industrial buildings .
- Ordinances and boards must protect residential areas from impacts of commercial development (e.g. noise)
- Facilitate pedestrian-friendly Florence, including sidewalks.
- Encourage multi-use. (residential/commercial) in business district.
- Beautify Mill River & dams and build riverside walkway.
- Encourage SRO, halfway and multifamily housing, including through the use of public fund (in conflict with other recommendations).
- Enforce regulations protecting residential areas & landscaped buffers.
- Discourage multifamily housing turning into halfway housing.
- Develop more facilities for kids and teens.

GEOGRAPHIC ISSUES: WHAT GOES WHERE:

Downtown Florence (General Business District GB)

- No increase in the size of the General Business District (not even one lot).
- Rezone the one GB parcel on Pine Street to Urban Residential B to match surrounding neighborhood.
- Consider rezoning Keyes Field (north of bike path off Keyes Street) from General Business to Urban Residential-C if current plans to develop it as a parking lot fall through.

Florence Community Center (Florence Grammar)

- Encourage community programs, educational uses, arts and cultural events, artists studios and non-profits.
- Concern about noise from the Community Center
- Allow small private offices

Florence Mini-Mall

- Encourage retail & services
- Encourage mixed use with some offices
- Encourage mixed commercial and industrial uses (conflicts with next recommendation)
- Limit uses to commercial uses (i.e. retail) without allowing industrial uses

Old mill buildings (Ross Brothers, Independence Hall and Arts & Industry)

- Encourage mixed use including industrial, limited residential or live-work space, artisans, and commercial offices. Do not lose industrial potential. Remain flexible.
- Industrial or housing, but not both (except for artists space).
- Some retail at Ross Brothers on North Maple Street
- Encourage high-tech industrial and research uses

Nonotuck Street Vacant Industrial Space

- Encourage development as industrial space (GI or SI)
- Encourage residential-friendly light industrial and offices (SI)
- Affordable housing

Eastern Gateway to Florence (DPW to Silk Mill)

- Preserve agricultural use at Smith Vocational School
- No strip malls, strip commercial uses or uses that will increase traffic.
- Maintain existing uses
- Protect undeveloped buffer and wetlands along bike path

Between Mill River, Pine St. & Florence Road (NB)

- Limit to residential uses to prevent traffic problems
- Develop park along the Mill River
- Redesign entire area

POPULATION INVENTORY

Northampton, including Florence, has a population of 30,000 people (29,289 by 1990 U.S. Census, 30,779 by 1996 City Census). It has remained stable since 1950. The Office of Planning and Development projects that the population will increase less than 2.5% per decade over the next twenty years.

Northampton has high rates of in and out migration, but the rates appear to balance. College students contribute to the this pattern, but there is also a significant amount of turnover at other age levels. This turnover can reduce the sense of stable neighborhoods and residents' community commitment, but it may also contribute to the city's vibrancy.

Approximately 61% of employed Northampton residents work in Northampton, while most of the remaining 39% of the employed residents commute out of the city, mostly to Amherst and cities and towns in Hamden County. Northampton residents fill slightly over half the jobs in Northampton. (PVPC from 1990 U.S. Census)

POPULATION

City of Northampton	29,289
Florence	6,700
Florence Center (study area)	1,800

(Source: 1990 U.S. Census, with estimates of % of block groups)

RENTAL HOUSING (AS % ALL UNITS)

City of Northampton	48.6%
Florence	55%
Florence Center (study area)	34%

(Source: 1990 U.S. Census, with estimates of % of block groups)

ZONING INVENTORY

Zoning creates use, density and other standards for development. Religious uses, nonprofit uses with educational components, and many special needs residential uses are exempt from many of the restrictions.

Zoning divides Florence Center and its surrounding industrial areas and residential neighborhoods into the following districts:

General Business (GB): Florence Center is zoned General Business. GB encourages mixed use development. Retail, service and commercial uses with pedestrian traffic (including restaurants, stores, banks), commercial and mixed use buildings, and parking lots are all encouraged. To preserve pedestrian orientation, uses which generate heavy automobile traffic are regulated with a special permit (take-out restaurants and automobile sales and service). Residential uses are also encouraged, but only as part of mixed use buildings with retail, service and/or commercial uses.

General Business is the city's second densest zoning district, after the Central Business district. The district is similar in many respects to Central Business. GB, however, allows less pedestrian friendly uses, including automobile sales and service, one story buildings, large front-yard setbacks, and parking in front of buildings. GB uses must provide parking to accommodate their expected car traffic. Private parking and on-street parking, not paid municipal lots, currently meet Florence's parking needs.

Neighborhood Business (NB): NB encourages neighborhood shopping or village centers to serve local needs. Small and relatively low traffic businesses and convenience-commercial uses are allowed, along with most residential uses. NB uses must provide parking to accommodate the expected car traffic to the facility. NB dimensional requirements, although generally stricter than either CB or GB, are not very restrictive. Frontage requirement is less in NB than GB.

General Industrial (GI): GI is the city's traditional industrial zone. It includes light industrial uses, warehouses, and some limited automobile sales. Housing, retail and other commercial uses are generally not allowed. Old mill buildings zoned GI in Florence and Bay State have been successfully converted to smaller industrial and artists' space. These conversions can be difficult, however, because of the limited market for these uses and the restrictions of the zone.

Special Industrial (SI): SI was originally created as a catch-all for industrial areas that did not fit in any other district. SI allows a mix of business and industrial uses, but many of the uses in SI districts are pre-existing non-conforming. Housing, retail, and other commercial uses are generally not allowed.

Urban Residential-B (URB): URB is the city's second densest and permissive residential zoning district (of the five primarily residential districts). Single and two family homes and accessory apartments are permitted by right; three-family, nursing homes, townhouses, and cluster developments are permitted with a special permit. Minimum lot size is 10,000 square feet for single family homes. URB encourages development consistent with Florence's historic settlement patterns, and most of the historic residential core of Florence is zoned URB.

Urban Residential-A (URA): URA is the third densest district and is primarily comprised of single-family homes and accessory apartments. Nursing homes and cluster developments are permitted with a special permit. Minimum lot size is 20,000 square feet for single family homes.

There are no Suburban Residential (SR) or Rural Residential (RR) areas with the primary study area, although these exist in the more suburban sections of Florence.

In spite of the many aspects of zoning that have aided the health of Florence, the city needs to examine some aspects of our zoning. Among the areas examined are:

1. **Industrial zoning-** Many of Florence's industrially-zoned properties have undergone dramatic changes since they were zoned industrial. Few large scale industrial uses are interested in moving into old mill buildings.

6. **Locust Street entranceway to Florence-** This area is in transition. Its character will help define what Florence "feels" like to new visitors and long time residents.

2. **Sign and landscaping/buffer regulations** - The regulated community feels that the rules are too inflexible and many residents feel that there is not

enough control over "bad" signage and “ugly” projects.

7. **Zoning anomalies**- Florence has several areas where the zoning encourages a different type of direction many in the community appear to want. This includes Florence Grammar School, the Florence Min-Mall, and some Neighborhood Business and General Industrial properties.

DESIGN CHARACTER

Florence residents cite the human or pedestrian-scale nature of Florence, the accessibility of stores and parking, and the sense that stores and businesses sell things of use to residents as being more important than its historical resources. Nineteenth-century buildings help define Florence’s commercial core, although much of the historic nature of the core has been lost.

While there are some “dead” spaces with no commercial activity in Florence Center, the scale is small enough and inviting enough that these areas do not present a significant problem at this time.

The neighborhoods immediately surrounding Florence Center retain much of their 19th century historic character. Historic buildings, a liveable scale of development, densities high enough to support pedestrian scale activities, and easy access to parks, recreation areas, and the bike path all contribute to the liveability of Florence.

The Locus Street entrance way to Florence Center is in transition, at least as far as design and land use goes. This street serves as an entryway to Florence and contains attractive and desirable features, however, some of these features may be changing.

PARKING

There appears to be adequate on-street and off-street parking to serve Florence Center’s needs. As in most areas, on-street parking is far more limited than off-street parking.

Given the small scale of Florence, parking does not dominate the commercial core. There are, however, some parking areas in Florence Center that create psychological breaks to pedestrian movement and there is concern by neighborhood residents that new parking facilities are threatening the pedestrian scale and character of Florence.

There is very strong sentiment in Florence that parking meters should not be installed. There is relatively little problem with turnover of spaces which often creates the need to install meters.

TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION

Because Main Street, Florence is also Route 9, vehicle traffic is relatively high, in spite of what is effectively a Route 9 bypass that runs from the Coolidge Bridge to Look Park.

Pedestrian traffic is moderate in Florence. Because of the work under the Florence Commercial Area Revitalization District and PWED grant, sidewalks and crosswalks are adequate for pedestrian traffic. Pedestrian crosswalks are marked by standard painted lines and crosshatching and, usually, have wheelchair ramps. None of the crosswalks use pavers or raised elevations to set them apart

from the street.

The nearby Bike Path increased bicycle traffic to and through Florence Center. Except for the bike path, there are no special provisions for bicycle movement and no public all-weather bicycle storage facilities. The Bike Path, which currently extends from one-half mile from downtown Northampton, through Florence to Look Park, is planned for extension in 1999. It will be extended northwest to Leeds and Williamsburg, southerly to downtown Northampton and Easthampton, and easterly to connect with the Norwottuck Rail Trail to Amherst.

Florence traffic improvements have helped maintain adequate motor-vehicle circulation, even while the number of vehicles on the roads continues to climb. Unfortunately, these improvements have not stopped the increase of traffic on neighborhood streets. In some cases, traffic improvements have created additional traffic on neighborhood streets as motorists look for short-cuts and routes that avoid traffic signals.

Bridge Road is increasingly serving as a Route 9 alternative, especially for vehicles heading from Amherst to Leeds and the hilltowns beyond Florence. The city and the state have improved signage to help encourage Bridge Road's role as a Route 9 bypass. Several of the Bridge Road intersections, however, are dangerous, especially during peak traffic times.

Several years ago, the community discussed building a new Route 9 bypass north of Bridge Road. The bypass was rejected, however, because of concerns that the bypasses siphon away traffic from commercial areas and destroy neighborhoods and sensitive environmental resources.

Florence Center has a significant amount of pedestrian traffic. Residents walk to the center from the nearby residential neighborhoods and some of those who drive to the center park their car and walk to multiple destinations. Many of the visitors to Florence Center, however, drive to the center to visit a single destination and then leave.

PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES

Florence has a wide range of public outdoor spaces, although in Florence Center itself these spaces are relatively small parks. These parks get steady neighborhood use, but seldom draw people to Florence.

Arcanum Recreation Field, just north of the center, and Look Park, just northwest of the center, provide active recreation opportunities. Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area and the Saw Mill Hills provide large amounts of public or private but un-posted land for passive recreation.

The Mill River flows through one of Florence's industrial neighborhoods. Except for informal access on a parcel owned by the Massachusetts Electric Company, however, there is no public access to the river within the Florence Center study area.

OTHER PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the years the city has committed significant funds to public infrastructure. Commercial Area Revitalization District and Public Works Economic Development grant

funds have been used along with more traditional highway funds and general revenue. These funds have helped keep sidewalks and the streetscape from decaying.

Important public infrastructure improvements have included sidewalk improvements, street trees, and public spaces, as well as roads and municipal utilities.

FLORENCE CENTER LAND USE

Although retail and restaurant uses in Florence Center primarily serve local community needs, Florence has a regional market that is rare in villages its size. Industrial uses, businesses located in old mill buildings, medical uses, and high tech businesses all create a vital citywide and regional economic presence.

Office and housing uses share space in the commercial core with retail users, with a significant number of buildings containing a healthy mix of uses.

Florence Center contains a significant amount of housing, including several single room occupancy hotels and rooming homes. Florence Center is tightly rung by neighborhoods of single and multi-family homes within an easy walk of the center. The housing stock, for the most part, is in excellent condition and very well maintained.

There are three business or industrial zones in the Florence study area, besides the General Business District. These can complement Florence Center and provide room for expansion. Unfortunately, they also have the potential to weaken Florence with empty buildings, conflicting uses or images, or certain types of competition.

Locust Street gateway: Extending from the City of Northampton Department of Public Works facility to the Silk Mill Building at the edge of Florence Center, this area is in transition. On the north side of Locust Street, is the city and state public works' facilities, limited industrial uses, retail, offices, and housing. On the south side of the street, is Smith Vocational Agricultural School's fields. As a gateway to Florence, the use of this area influences the look and feel of Florence.

North Maple Street industrial area: This area contains older industrial buildings, some of which are being used for traditional industrial uses and some of which have been converted to mixed industrial/retail and compatible uses.

Pine Street/Nonotuck Street/Mill River industrial area: This area also contains older industrial buildings and a mix of industrial and mixed uses. The area includes a small retail shopping area and a small neighborhood business district with strictly residential uses.

Florence Center is clearly defined by its land uses and zoning, and its future is somewhat clear. The definitions and future of the three other business and industrial areas is not at all clear. These areas will clearly be undergoing the greatest transition, for better or worse, of any part of Florence.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

It is clear that the community is happy with Florence and Florence Center and does not want significant changes. Much of the work of this plan is based on defining what it is that the

community wants to preserve and ensuring protection for those elements, while not preventing desirable changes.

Building on other components of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan, the Florence community and the Northampton Planning Board identified goals and objectives for Florence Center and its surrounding residential and industrial neighborhoods.

These long term goals and objectives should help guide the community even after the shorter term actions have been accomplished.

GOAL 1: Maintain Florence Center as Florence's commercial and civic "village center" while maintaining its mix of land uses and preserving its character. Florence businesses should continue to complement those of downtown Northampton and King Street and serve local needs in a way that those other areas cannot.

Goal 1 Objectives:

1-1. Maintain the size of Florence Center's business zone (General Business) to preserve its compact pedestrian-scale and its clearly defined residential neighborhoods. Do not rezone any Florence residential properties to business.

1-2. Examine Florence Center/General Business zoning text to reflect current physical conditions, reduce non-conformities and anomalies, and encourage reuse consistent with existing conditions.

1-3. Channel commercial growth into pedestrian-scale urban areas, including Florence Center. Commercial growth in Florence Center, however, should only be encouraged if it can be accommodated without encroaching on residential areas or changing the character of Florence Center. Commercial development in previously undeveloped areas (greenfields), such as the planned business park, and on the "strip" section of King Street are appropriate for those businesses that are not practical in pedestrian-scale urban areas.

1-4. Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and urban design compatible with traditional Florence and Northampton development.

1-5. Encourage mixed used developments in Florence Center, but ONLY if residential development will not displace any commercial or institutional uses.

1-6. Provide coherent development of industrial areas surrounding Florence Center to provide for local residential needs and to complement Florence Center development.

See also objectives:

2-1. Preserve existing patterns of housing density around Florence Center.
2-3. Encourage new mixed residential/commercial/industrial development.
4-1. Develop business retention strategy.
4-2. Encourage redevelopment of existing buildings.
4-3. Encourage mixed use of old mill buildings.
5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.
5-8: Encourage Florence Center cultural events.

GOAL 2: Preserve the attractiveness and vitality of residential neighborhoods in and around Florence Center.

Goal 2 Objectives:

2-1. Preserve existing patterns of housing density within walking distance of Florence Center. Avoid commercial development that could threaten the integrity of these areas and avoid expanding any business district into residential neighborhoods.

2-2. Preserve a range of housing options, including both housing cost and housing type, throughout Florence and the city. Including these options in all appropriate areas helps avoid the perception that any area of the city is receiving an excessively high concentration of any housing type.

2-3. Encourage new mixed residential/commercial/industrial development in business and industrial areas, but only if that development does not threaten to displace and commercial, industrial or artist's space.

See also objective:
1-5: Encourage encouraged mixed uses in Florence Center.

GOAL 3: Improve Florence Center's entranceways and satellite commercial areas.

Goal 3 Objectives:

3-1. Encourage pedestrian-scale urban design in all Florence commercial and industrial areas, including buffers and entranceways.

3-2. Encourage new development at the entranceways to Florence Center that better defines the center and does not compete or conflict with the character of the center. Entranceways should not become commercial strips.

3-3. Preserve the Smith Vocational Agricultural Farm. Place conservation restriction on the property or otherwise ensure long term protection for the land both as open space and as an economically viable farm.

3-4. Ensure that zoning in and around Florence Centers' entranceways is consistent with the community's vision for those areas and other community goals and objectives.

See also objectives:
1-1: Maintain the size of Florence Center.

5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.
5-2: Better define the character of downtown.
5-9. Ensure that city actions encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

GOAL 4: Encourage economic expansion, job creation and stability, including locally-grown, non-franchise businesses.

Goal 4 Objectives:

4-1. Develop and implement a business retention and expansion strategy, including emphasis on small businesses.

4-2. Encourage redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial parcels and buildings through zoning and other means.

4-3. Encourage mixed use of old mill buildings to maximize their potential. Redefine one or more zoning districts to address the best potential for these properties and similar properties.

See also objectives:

5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.

GOAL 5: Preserve and enhance the character and the amenities that draw people to Florence Center and keep it safe and pedestrian friendly. Ensure that development is sustainable and environmentally sensitive.

Goal 5 Objectives:

5-1. Encourage infill development and preservation and reuse of historical and architecturally significant buildings

5-2. Better define and preserve Florence Center's design character for the regulatory process. Encourage new construction to match the best of Florence Center, including building facades, maximum and minimum setbacks, signage and lighting.

5-4. Improve public and private signage on buildings and public ways so that it is both aesthetic and functional.

5-5 Improve maintenance of parks and green space, including pocket parks, playgrounds and corridors of green spaces. Create better access to the Mill River.

5-6. In partnership with the private sector, maintain or provide amenities such as landscaping, rest rooms, benches, user guides, pay phones, public art, and utilities.

5-7. Improve "walkability" to encourage people to walk to Florence Center and walk within the center once they park their cars.

5-8. Encourage cultural events and activities and work with the community to insure that space is available for community and cultural gatherings.

5-9. Ensure that zoning and other city regulatory and non-regulatory actions encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

See also objectives:

- 1-4: Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and compatible urban design.
- 3-3: Preserve Smith Vocational Agricultural Farm.
- 3-4. Ensure that zoning around Florence Centers' entranceways is consistent with community goals and objectives.
- 4-3: Encourage reuse of old mill buildings.
- 6-2: Improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation.

GOAL 6: Improve the circulation system to accommodate development and traffic and to encourage bicycle, pedestrian and transit circulation.

Goal 6 Objectives:

6-1. Improve signage, visibility and safety of pedestrian crosswalks and intersections.

6-2. Improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation and alternative transportation systems, such as better transit, park-and-ride facilities, and improved bicycle facilities.

6-4. Evaluate existing major intersections and all future intersection and road improvements in Florence Center to determine how they enhance or harm the character of Florence, not just the immediate intersection area, and evaluate these tradeoffs.

6-5. Minimize conflict between pedestrians and cars and minimize pedestrian "dead-spaces" at intersections, crosswalks and parking lots.

See also objectives:

1-5: Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and compatible urban design.
5-7: Improve walkability.

GOAL 7: Ensure that parking is available, accessible and free without harming the pedestrian nature of Florence Center.

Goal 7 Objectives:

7-1. Improve the use of existing parking resources and encourage shared use of private parking lots to meet parking needs from multiple land uses, each of which may generate peak parking demands at different times.

7-2. Encourage development patterns that minimize need for additional parking, especially by encouraging foot or bicycle traffic and transit into and around Florence Center.

See also objectives:

1-5: Encourage pedestrian scale development patterns
1-6: Preserve housing within walking distance and encouraged mixed uses.
2-1. Preserve the density of housing within walking distance of Florence Center.
2-3. Encourage mixed development in business and industrial areas.
5-7: Encourage walkability.

ACTION PLAN

The Florence community and the Planning Board, working through a series of interactive workshops, identified the following actions to implement the above goals and objectives. Unlike the goals and objectives of this plan, the action plan has a strategic focus. Most of the actions are short and medium term actions designed to take advantage of opportunities. The community will need to take more actions in the future to fully implement the goals and objectives.

ZONING TEXT CHANGES

1. To encourage community programs, educational uses, arts and cultural events, artists, and related uses, the zoning should allow Florence Community Center and similar programs in residential districts (Urban Residential-B and C).

2. Lot size averaging, although recently revised, needs further revisions to clarify the language and ensure residents that projects will not be allowed if they harm the character of a neighborhood.

3. The zoning should expand efforts to encourage commercial buildings to be more than one story (through General Business parking requirements and floor area ratios).

4. In Florence Center (General Business District) consider reducing the minimum setback to zero, creating a **maximum** setback, and prohibit parking between any new building and the street to preserve the pedestrian scale. (This will also affect Pleasant Street.) As an alternative to prohibiting parking in front of a building, zoning could provide bonus densities to encourage parking behind or next to a building.

   Florence Center should **not** be zoned Central Business. CB is inconsistent with the goal of preserving a community-serving center.

5. The zoning should relax dimensional requirements in Florence Center (General Business District) to match the existing pattern of development, reduce the number of nonconforming buildings and lots, and encourage mixed residential/ commercial uses while preserving the character of the district, landscaping, and buffers.

6. Zoning should no longer set a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) in any zoning district. FAR (the ratio of floor area to lot size) limits the intensity of a development, but it is confusing and can discourage some desirable projects. Dimensional requirements for building heights, setbacks, building coverage, open space, and landscaping can provide adequate control.

7. General Industrial Districts should be further defined as traditional industrial, wholesale and research and development areas. Uses which are either not compatible with those

traditional uses or which will compete for Northampton's limited industrial land should not be allowed in GI.

8. Special Industrial Districts, originally created to cover areas that did not fit into any other category, should be redefined as mixed use areas with industrial uses as the primary use. SI should encourage some mixed uses, arts and crafts manufacturing, limited residential/work spaces, and other compatible uses in the Special Industrial district. It should **not** encourage retail, high traffic commercial uses or large residential populations.

   Mixed residential/work spaces (a variation on home occupations) should be allowed **when** residential space is clearly secondary to work space. This could be controlled by limiting the percent of building in work space (e.g. residential space may be no more than 20% of the building's floor space nor more than 50% of each residential/work space unit). As an alternative, given that the first floor is most valuable to industrial and job generating uses, residential/work space could be limited to upper floors of a building. Residential uses that are **not** connected to a work space should not be allowed. (This affects Florence and downtown and is consistent with the Downtown Plan.)

   The market will not support many of these uses, but zoning should not prohibit uses that the community is happy to host.

9. Special Industrial district dimensional requirements should be liberalized to match those of the General Industrial district.

10. To encourage Florence Center businesses to focus more on the street, do not require parking for temporary and seasonal uses in unheated outdoor space. (This is already done in the Central Business district.)

11. The zoning already allows and encourages mixed commercial/ residential uses in the General Business district provided residential uses are located above the first floor. Although this is generally desirable, some special permit exception should be allowed for unique opportunities.

12. The city should continue working on revising sign regulations to ensure that on-site private signs are adequate to provide directions and business exposure without detracting from Florence's appearance.

13. Screening and buffer requirements for commercial and industrial districts and uses should be strengthened.

14. Consider encouraging single-family homes in residential districts by allowing smaller lot sizes for single family homes, by-right, but not for other residential uses.

15. The city should correct inconsistencies

in the dimensional requirements and clarify unclear zoning language.

ZONING MAP

See proposed zoning map.

1. Florence Center's General Business district should **not be expanded** into any residential areas to avoid threatening residential areas and reducing the dense, compact nature of Florence Center.

2. Most of the Special Industrial district on North Maple Street should remain SI to preserve its industrial/mixed use character. The first building in that district (Ross Brothers), however, could be rezoned to General Business district if appropriate GB uses were desired.

3. The General Industrial district on Locust Street should be rezoned to Special Industrial. With the proposed text changes to Special Industrial, this is more consistent with the area's gateway character.

4. To encourage neighborhood retail and services, the Florence Mini-mall should be rezoned from General Industrial to Neighborhood Business. NB is consistent with the current use of the site.

5. The small Neighborhood Business district on Pine Street on the west side of the Mill River should be rezoned to Urban Residential B. A commercial site is not needed here given the closeness of the Florence Mini-mall. Given the sensitivity of the adjoining Mill River, the underlying drinking water aquifer, and a difficult intersection, this site is not appropriate for commercial uses.

6 Rezone from General Industrial to Special Industrial the Nonotuck and Pine Street properties undergoing transition from historical industrial uses to mixed uses, including the Arts & Industry Building and possibly the lots on the North Side of Pine Street.. Rezoning will ease the transition and allow uses that complement the industrial areas, surrounding neighborhoods, and nearby Florence Center.

In the future, rezone GI properties in this area to SI whenever mill buildings or industrial properties undertake or have the potential to undertake similar transitions.

7. Rezone the small section of the General Business district that extends to Pine Street to Urban Residential B, in keeping with the residential character of the area.

8. Consider rezoning any portion of Keyes Field (the vacant field north of the bike path off Keyes Street) that is not developed from General Business to Urban Residential-B. This rezoning would preserve the residential character of the neighborhood.

9. Rezone the area north of the bike path between North Elm, Bridge Road and Chestnut Street Urban Residential-B. Although part of this area is outside of Florence, having this entire area in URB clarifies the communities vision of this area and allows reasonable density. The area to be rezoned was orginally zoned GI and is currently RR.

10. Rationalize the boundaries of the industrial districts along the Mill River, including:
    A. Residential properties in the floodplain and the city's drinking water aquifer should be Urban Residential-A, consistent with surrounding residential areas.
    B. Existing industrial buildings should be in an industrial district.

CITY POLICIES & IMPROVEMENTS

1. The city should continue to encourage efforts of the Florence Civic Association and the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce to market Florence.

2. The city should continue to work with banks, the non-profit sector, business groups and others to help small business development. In particular, the city should expand efforts to encourage occupancy of vacant space above store fronts, provide micro-loans for new businesses, encourage reuse of old mill buildings, and take advantage of unique opportunities.

3. In addition to the above two items, within the next two years, the city, working with the Chamber of Commerce, Florence Civic Association, the non-profit sector and area banks, needs to prepare an economic development strategy with a strong emphasis on business retention and expansion. This strategy should pay special attention to the opportunities and threats in Florence.

4. Housing strategies and funding should focus on providing a full range of housing opportunities and should encourage both a good geographic mix and full inclusion of all housing types. This will avoid the perception that any neighborhood has a disproportionate share and will integrate affordable housing with surrounding neighborhoods.

   The city should ensure that any housing developer or manager receiving city funds has demonstrated that it can develop and manage the property effectively, so that the housing developed will provide decent affordable housing to people in need while maintaining the quality of life for other neighborhood residents.

   The city should continue to analyze the location and distribution of special needs housing and identify under-served areas and opportunities for a better geographic mix. Any analysis, however, must address the needs of

facilities which are only viable within walking distance of urban areas or at least are located on bus lines.

5. It is perceived by some Florence residents that Florence Center has a disproportionate share of SROs and lodging homes. City funding for the creation of SROs and lodging homes should address the distribution and concentration of this type of housing in the community's housing mix. (The city has no control over the location of most private or state-funded facilities.)

   Funding for improvements to existing SROs and lodging homes is appropriate regardless of issues of distribution. Such funding should address reducing any adverse impacts that may exist and improving overall impacts on the community.

6. The city should continue to pursue tax-title auctions for **unused commercial properties** that are not paying taxes to get them back into active use.

7. If the Massachusetts Highways Department facility on Locust Street is sold by the Commonwealth, the city should work to ensure that its redevelopment is consistent with the gateway character of this area and the site's environmental constraints.

8. The city should continue an ongoing review of street signs to ensure they are adequate to provide directions without detracting from Florence's appearance.

9. The city should work with the Honor Court and other volunteers to ensure that streets and public areas are clean and that trash barrels and benches are maintained and replaced as needed.

10. The city should work with the Florence Civic Association and any future village councils or similar Florence organizations on issues affecting Florence. Florence residents should continue to serve on city boards to maintain a voice in city affairs.

11. The city should work to improve public access to and along the Mill River in Florence wherever possible.

12. Smith Vocational Agricultural School should place a conservation restriction on the Smith Voc Farm and/or otherwise take steps to ensure the land remains in open space.

13. Community policing efforts should continue, with on-going realization that perception of safety is often as important to urban vitality as what crime statistics indicate.

PARKING

1. Parking in Florence is adequate to meet present demand and zoning is adequate to ensure that new parking demands are met. The city does not need to make any parking policy changes. In particular, there is no need to add parking meters to control the use of on-street parking spaces

The city and private developers should, however, update previous parking demand and supply studies as needed.

2. Encourage the private sector to avoid creating excessive parking lots that create dead, low-interest areas for pedestrians, ugly seas of asphalt, and which discourage people from walking to and within Florence Center.

3. All new road projects should minimize or mitigate the loss of on-street parking spaces. Short-term on-street spaces are in very short supply and are the most important spaces for certain types of businesses.

TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION

1. The city, including the Department of Public Works, the Police Department and ward councillors should examine traffic safety and identify needed improvements throughout Florence. Top priority has to be improving the intersection of Bridge Road and North Main . The analysis should also include intersections at Bridge Road/JFK and Bridge Road/North Maple, signage on Pine and Park Streets, on-street parking and traffic enforcement.

2. The Department of Public Works should investigate improving the marking and/or signage of Main Street and other Florence Center crosswalks to identify them better for drivers. DPW and City Council should investigate installing audible signals at the Main Street/Maple Street intersections.

3. Any future proposed traffic improvements should be analyzed to consider the effect of the proposed improvement on area roads.

4. The city should continue to expand the Northampton Bike Path, to link it to Williamsburg, the Norwottuck Rail Trail, downtown Northampton, and Easthampton.

5. The city should make any other needed improvements to ensure that Florence Center is easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists, including improved crosswalks. Both the city and business owners should provide bicycle racks at convenient locations.

6. Whenever streets are repaved and whenever else practicable, DPW should cut wheelchair ramps at crosswalk curbs lacking them.

7. The city should consider developing a Park-and-Ride facility at the VA Hospital or other locations to reduce the number of cars driving on area roads. Park-and-Ride facilities should minimize loss of open space and should be designed to accommodate dual uses to the extent possible.

8. The city should install a "Florence, ___ miles" sign at the Route 9 downtown and Bridge Road by King Street.

A PLAN FOR FLORENCE CENTER

An Element of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan

Adopted by Northampton Planning Board: October 9, 1997

Endorsed by City Council: October 16, 1997

Vision 2020 Workshop Summary

VISION STATEMENT:

***WE**, residents of Florence and community boards serving Florence, want to retain Florence Center's unique character, which defines Florence for many of us as the residential heart of Northampton. Although the center is a critical economic engine, it has, and should retain, a neighborhood commercial and civic and cultural focus.*

*Florence should encourage business expansion within the existing commercial and industrial areas, without **ANY** expansion into residential areas. **IF** we can prevent commercial and industrial displacement and land use conflicts, we prefer mixed uses within commercial and industrial areas.*

Maintaining housing and neighborhoods within walking distance of Florence Center is critical for a healthy Florence. We want Florence residents to be able to continue living within walking distance of the center without being threatened by urban problems and conflicting land uses. Florence must remain comfortable and safe for all its residents.

The city has a legal and moral obligation to insure that all people are welcome in all areas of the city. The city should strive, however, to prevent any housing from creating adverse impacts on neighborhoods and to address practical issues that arise from different housing types.

Florence should retain a mix of housing types and provide its fair share of all types of housing. Housing to address economic and social needs should be included in all appropriate areas of the city to avoid a perception that any area of the city is receiving an excessively high concentration of any housing type. Florence residents must feel that they are in control of their own community.

TRAFFIC, SAFETY and PARKING

- Maintain free parking in Florence.
- Provide signals &/or intersection improvements at Bridge/N. Main, N. Maple/Bridge and JFK School.
- Plan for all parking, including public & handicap parking.
- Improve bike path safety with lights at Casket Co. barriers, no motor vehicles, improved crosswalks, bike racks.
- Extended rail trail.
- Improve Pine & Park St. traffic and intersection signage, and continue Pine Street sidewalk by river to improve safety.
- Improve pedestrian safety, including crosswalks & longer walk lights. Crosswalk improvements, needed at Main, South Main, Pine and High Streets.
- Improve traffic enforcement for pedestrian safety, especially on Main Street.
- Provide better busing and transit service.
- Consider developing a park-and-ride lot at V.A. Hospital.
- Develop a Route 9 by-pass around Florence (see opposition under Economic Development).
- Improve traffic safety at Spring Street/Ryan Road intersection.
- End double sided parking on Pine Street, Park Street and small streets and only allow on one side.
- Improve parking enforcement.
- Install double strip down Rte. 9 between Look Park and N. Maple.
- Do not develop any additional parking in Florence.
- Provide motorist, pedestrian, and bicycle safety education.
- Study traffic and intersection volume and patterns, including use of streets as traffic bypasses and truck deliveries.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Reuse mill buildings/sites, as in Arts & Industry and Independence Hall.
- Encourage business growth, especially in center.
- Maintain traditional family-owned and small businesses, not chain stores.
- Do not allow super supermarkets in Florence.
- Ensure that economic development does not harm village character, residential land uses or traffic.
- Provide more screening and green space along commercial uses and sidewalks.
- Regulate types of businesses that are appropriate for Florence.
- Discourage & disburse SRO's and large multifamily uses.
- Prevent more commercial development (in conflict with earlier recommendation)
- Encourage coffee houses and restaurants, other than just pizza.
- Encourage a skating rink.
- Provide more informational signage for Florence for new residents and visitors to encourage use of retail businesses.
- Correct inconsistent zoning. (mills, mini-mall, Community Center)
- Provide Florence with its own zip code.
- Preserve business core. Stop conversion of commercial space to other uses (SROs, elderly housing, Kaiser), esp. from public-funded projects.
- Maintain pedestrian-scale of development.
- Preserve and enhance retail business & diversity. Preserve and create retail jobs & other job development, including for low-income workers.
- Do not develop a Route 9 bypass that bypasses Florence. Route 9 good for business.
- Retain old mill buildings with their current industrial, artist studio and business incubators uses by limiting residential uses and prohibiting retail.
- Preserve role as economic center for local area and hilltowns. Maintain infrastructure for development.
- Provide a stronger police presence. (drugs, vandalizes, break-ins, safety, kids hanging out)
- Understand business/residential interdependence and business cooperation are critical for economic strength .

VILLAGE CHARACTER and LAND USES

- Do not add to Florence's unfair share of group homes, Single Room Occupancy units and rooming houses. This hurts Florence's character and safety.
- Preserve Florence character (its not downtown Northampton).
- Florence Civic Association should create a Village Council to represent Florence.
- Encourage mixed uses and residential/business mix in Florence center.
- Reuse old buildings. (e.g. Norwood engineers).
- Limit corporate influx (e.g. McDonald's) which taints character.
- Encourage better design, signage and landscaping, especially at service stations.
- Add "chic stores" and inn, hotel or bed and breakfasts to business mix.
- Encourage private commercial development.
- City boards need to recognize character and neighborhoods in making decisions.
- Residents need to know about pending projects & have greater input in decision making; Community consensus is critical. (e.g. Sojourner Truth statue)
- Protect architecture, old buildings and character, without a historic district.
- Consider historical center/tours and historical information.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE and OPEN SPACE

- Preserve more open space, including Smith Voc. agricultural land, playgrounds, and other recreation. Improve maintenance.
- Discourage more than fair share of halfway and multi-family housing because of perceived character and safety problems.
- Maintain current village size. Protect neighborhoods from commercial encroachment and redevelopment of industrial buildings .
- Ordinances and boards must protect residential areas from impacts of commercial development (e.g. noise)
- Facilitate pedestrian-friendly Florence, including sidewalks.
- Encourage multi-use. (residential/commercial) in business district.
- Beautify Mill River & dams and build riverside walkway.
- Encourage SRO, halfway and multifamily housing, including through the use of public fund (in conflict with other recommendations).
- Enforce regulations protecting residential areas & landscaped buffers.
- Discourage multifamily housing turning into halfway housing.
- Develop more facilities for kids and teens.

GEOGRAPHIC ISSUES: WHAT GOES WHERE:

Downtown Florence (General Business District GB)

- No increase in the size of the General Business District (not even one lot).
- Rezone the one GB parcel on Pine Street to Urban Residential B to match surrounding neighborhood.
- Consider rezoning Keyes Field (north of bike path off Keyes Street) from General Business to Urban Residential-C if current plans to develop it as a parking lot fall through.

Florence Community Center (Florence Grammar)

- Encourage community programs, educational uses, arts and cultural events, artists studios and non-profits.
- Concern about noise from the Community Center
- Allow small private offices

Florence Mini-Mall

- Encourage retail & services
- Encourage mixed use with some offices
- Encourage mixed commercial and industrial uses (conflicts with next recommendation)
- Limit uses to commercial uses (i.e. retail) without allowing industrial uses

Old mill buildings (Ross Brothers, Independence Hall and Arts & Industry)

- Encourage mixed use including industrial, limited residential or live-work space, artisans, and commercial offices. Do not lose industrial potential. Remain flexible.
- Industrial or housing, but not both (except for artists space).
- Some retail at Ross Brothers on North Maple Street
- Encourage high-tech industrial and research uses

Nonotuck Street Vacant Industrial Space

- Encourage development as industrial space (GI or SI)
- Encourage residential-friendly light industrial and offices (SI)
- Affordable housing

Eastern Gateway to Florence (DPW to Silk Mill)

- Preserve agricultural use at Smith Vocational School
- No strip malls, strip commercial uses or uses that will increase traffic.
- Maintain existing uses
- Protect undeveloped buffer and wetlands along bike path

Between Mill River, Pine St. & Florence Road (NB)

- Limit to residential uses to prevent traffic problems
- Develop park along the Mill River
- Redesign entire area

GOAL 1: Maintain Florence Center as Florence's commercial and civic "village center" while maintaining its mix of land uses and preserving its character. Florence businesses should continue to complement those of downtown Northampton and King Street and serve local needs in a way that those other areas cannot.

Goal 1 Objectives:

1-1. Maintain the size of Florence Center's business zone (General Business) to preserve its compact pedestrian-scale and its clearly defined residential neighborhoods. Do not rezone any Florence residential properties to business.

1-2. Examine Florence Center/General Business zoning text to reflect current physical conditions, reduce non-conformities and anomalies, and encourage reuse consistent with existing conditions.

1-3. Channel commercial growth into pedestrian-scale urban areas, including Florence Center. Commercial growth in Florence Center, however, should only be encouraged if it can be accommodated without encroaching on residential areas or changing the character of Florence Center. Commercial development in previously undeveloped areas (greenfields), such as the planned business park, and on the "strip" section of King Street are appropriate for those businesses that are not practical in pedestrian-scale urban areas.

1-4. Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and urban design compatible with traditional Florence and Northampton development.

1-5. Encourage mixed used developments in Florence Center, but ONLY if residential development will not displace any commercial or institutional uses.

1-6. Provide coherent development of industrial areas surrounding Florence Center to provide for local residential needs and to complement Florence Center development.

GOAL 3: Improve Florence Center's entranceways and satellite commercial areas.

Goal 3 Objectives:

3-1. Encourage pedestrian-scale urban design in all Florence commercial and industrial areas, including buffers and entranceways.

3-2. Encourage new development at the entranceways to Florence Center that better defines the center and does not compete or conflict with the character of the center. Entranceways should not become commercial strips.

3-3. Preserve the Smith Vocational Agricultural Farm. Place conservation restriction on the property or otherwise ensure long term protection for the land both as open space and as an economically viable farm.

3-4. Ensure that zoning in and around Florence Centers' entranceways is consistent with the community's vision for those areas and other community goals and objectives.

GOAL 4: Encourage economic expansion, job creation aud stability, including locally-grown, non-franchise businesses.

Goal 4 Objectives:

4-1. Develop and implement a business retention and expausion strategy, including emphasis on small businesses.

4-2. Encourage redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial parcels and buildings through zoning and other means.

4-3. Encourage mixed use of old mill buildiugs to maximize their potential. Redefine one or more zoning districts to address the best potential for these properties and similar properties.

See also objectives for village character, especially in-fill recommendations.

GOAL 2: Preserve the attractiveness and vitality of residential neighborhoods in and around Florence Center.

Goal 2 Objectives:

2-1. Preserve existing patterns of housing density within walking distance of Florence Center. Avoid commercial development that could threaten the integrity of these areas and avoid expanding any business district into residential neighborhoods.

2-2. Preserve a range of housing options, including both housing cost and housing type, throughout Florence and the city. Including these options in all appropriate areas helps avoid the perception that any area of the city is receiving an excessively high concentration of any housing type.

2-3. Encourage new mixed residential/commercial/industrial development in business and industrial areas, but only if that development does not threaten to displace and commercial, industrial or artist's space.

GOAL 5: Preserve and enhance the character and the amenities that draw people to Florence Center and keep it safe and pedestrian friendly. Ensure that development is sustainable and environmentally sensitive.

Goal 5 Objectives:

5-1. Encourage infill development and preservation and reuse of historical and architecturally significant buildings

5-2. Better define and preserve Florence Center's design character for the regulatory process. Encourage new construction to match the best of Florence Center, including building facades, maximum and minimum setbacks, signage and lighting.

5-4. Improve public and private signage on buildings and public ways so that it is both aesthetic and functional.

5-5 Improve maintenance of parks and green space, including pocket parks, playgrounds and corridors of green spaces. Create better access to the Mill River.

5-6. In partnership with the private sector, maintain or provide amenities such as landscaping, rest rooms, benches, user guides, pay phones, public art, and utilities.

5-7. Improve "walkability" to encourage people to walk to Florence Center and walk within the center once they park their cars.

5-8. Encourage cultural events and activities and work with the community to insure that space is available for community and cultural gatherings.

5-9. Ensure that zoning and other city regulatory and non-regulatory actions encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

GOAL 6: Improve the circulation system to accommodate development and traffic and to encourage bicycle, pedestrian and transit circulation.

Goal 6 Objectives:

6-1. Improve signage, visibility and safety of pedestrian crosswalks and intersections.

6-2. Improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation and alternative transportation systems, such as better transit, park-and-ride facilities, and improved bicycle facilities.

6-4. Evaluate existing major intersections and all future intersection and road improvements in Florence Center to determine how they enhance or harm the character of Florence, not just the immediate intersection area, and evaluate these tradeoffs.

6-5. Minimize conflict between pedestrians and cars and minimize pedestrian "dead-spaces" at intersections, crosswalks and parking lots.

GOAL 7: Ensure that parking is available, accessible and free without harming the pedestrian nature of Florence Center.

Goal 7 Objectives:

7-1. Improve the use of existing parking resources and encourage shared use of private parking lots to meet parking needs from multiple land uses, each of which may generate peak parking demands at different times.

7-2. Encourage development patterns that minimize need for additional parking, especially by encouraging foot or bicycle traffic and transit into and around Florence Center.

SHORT TERM--STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

ZONING TEXT CHANGES

1. ~~To encourage community, educational uses, arts and cultural events, and artists, and related uses, the zoning should allow Florence Community Center and similar programs.~~ **DONE**

2. ~~Lot size averaging needs revisions to ensure residents that projects will not be allowed if they harm the character of a neighborhood.~~ **DONE**

3. ~~The zoning should expand efforts to encourage commercial buildings to be more than one story (General Business parking and floor area ratios).~~ **DONE**

4. ~~In Florence Center & General Business, reduce the minimum setback to zero and prohibit parking between any new building and the street to preserve the pedestrian scale.~~ **DONE**

5. ~~The zoning dimensional requirements in Florence Center & General Business should match the existing development pattern and encourage mixed residential/ commercial uses.~~ **DONE**

6. ~~Zoning should no longer set a maximum floor area ratio (FAR), which can discourage some desirable projects. Other dimensional requirements can provide adequate control.~~ **DONE**

7. General Industrial should be traditional industrial, wholesale and research and development areas. Uses which are either not compatible with those traditional uses or which will compete for Northampton's limited industrial land should not be allowed in GI. **ON-GOING**

8. ~~Special Industrial should be redefined as mixed use areas with industrial uses as the primary use. SI should encourage some mixed uses, arts and crafts manufacturing, limited residential/work spaces, and other compatible uses, but **not** encourage retail, high traffic commercial uses or large residential populations.~~ **DONE** (more can be done in time)

9. ~~Special Industrial dimensional requirements should match General Industrial.~~ **DONE**

10. ~~Encourage Florence Center businesses to focus on the street by not requiring parking for temporary and seasonal uses in unheated outdoor space.~~ **DONE**

11. ~~The zoning allows and encourages mixed commercial/ residential uses in the General Business district **provided** residential uses are located above the first floor. Some special permit exception should be allowed for unique opportunities.~~ **DONE**

12. Continue working on revising sign regulations to ensure that on-site private signs are adequate to provide directions and business exposure without detracting from Florence's appearance.

13. Strengthen screening and buffer requirements for commercial and industrial districts and uses.

14. ~~Consider encouraging single-family homes in residential districts by allowing smaller lot sizes for single family homes, by-right, but not for other residential uses.~~ **DONE**

ZONING MAP (See proposed zoning map.)

1. Florence Center's General Business district should **not be expanded** into any residential areas to avoid threatening residential areas and reducing the dense, compact nature of Florence Center. **ON-GOING**

2. Most of the Special Industrial district on North Maple Street should remain SI to preserve its industrial/mixed use character. The first building in that district (Ross Brothers), however, could be rezoned to General Business district if appropriate GB uses were desired.

3. ~~The General Industrial district on Locust Street should be rezoned to Special Industrial to be consistent with the area's gateway character.~~ **DONE**

4. ~~Consistent with current use and to encourage neighborhood retail and services, the Florence Mini-mall should be rezoned from General Industrial to Neighborhood Business.~~ **DONE**

5. The Neighborhood Business district on Pine Street on the west side of the Mill River should be rezoned to Urban Residential B. A commercial site is not needed here and, given the sensitivity of the adjoining Mill River, the underlying drinking water aquifer, and a difficult intersection, this site is not appropriate for commercial uses. **DIED IN CITY COUNCIL**

6 ~~Rezone to Special Industrial the Nonotuck and Pine Street properties undergoing transition from historical industrial uses to mixed uses, including the Arts & Industry Building~~. **DONE**

   In the future, rezone GI properties in this area to SI whenever mill buildings or industrial properties undertake or have the potential to undertake similar transitions. **ON-GOING**

7. Rezone the small section of the General Business district that extends to Pine Street to Urban Residential B, to preserve the residential character of the area. **DIED IN CITY COUNCIL**

8. Consider rezoning any portion of Keyes Field (the vacant field north of the bike path off Keyes Street) that is not developed from General Business to Urban Residential-B. This rezoning would preserve the residential character of the neighborhood.

9. Rezone the area north of the bike path between North Elm, Bridge Road and Chestnut Street Urban Residential-B. Although part of this area is outside of Florence, having this entire area in URB clarifies the communities vision of this area and allows reasonable density. **DONE**

10. ~~Rationalize the boundaries of the industrial districts along the Mill River to keep residential properties in the floodplain and the city's drinking water aquifer residential, consistent with surrounding residential areas and keep existing industrial areas industrial~~. **DONE**

CITY POLICIES & IMPROVEMENTS

1. The city should continue to encourage efforts of the Florence Civic Association and the Chamber of Commerce to market Florence.

2. The city should continue to work with banks, the non-profit sector, business groups and others to help small business development. In particular, the city should expand efforts to encourage occupancy of vacant space above store fronts, provide micro-loans for new businesses, encourage reuse of old mill buildings, and take advantage of unique opportunities.

3. ~~The city needs an economic development strategy with a emphasis on business retention, expansion, including attention to the opportunities and threats in Florence~~. **DONE– IMPLEMENTATION NEEDED.**

4. Housing strategies and funding should focus on providing a full range of housing opportunities and should encourage both a good geographic mix and full inclusion of all housing types. This will avoid the perception that any neighborhood has a disproportionate share and will integrate affordable housing with surrounding neighborhoods.

   The city should ensure that any housing developer or manager receiving city funds has demonstrated that it can develop and manage the property effectively, so that the housing developed will provide decent affordable housing to people in need while maintaining the quality of life for other neighborhood residents.

   The city should continue to analyze the location and distribution of special needs housing and identify under-served areas and opportunities for a better geographic mix. Any analysis, however, must address the needs of facilities which are only viable within walking distance of urban areas or at least are located on bus lines.

5. It is perceived by some Florence residents that Florence Center has a disproportionate share of SROs and lodging homes. City funding for the creation of SROs and lodging homes should address the distribution and concentration of this type of housing in the community's housing mix. (The city has no control over the location of most private or state-funded facilities.)

   Funding for improvements to existing SROs and lodging homes is appropriate regardless of issues of distribution. Such funding should address reducing any adverse impacts that may exist and improving overall impacts on the community.

6. The city should continue to pursue tax-title auctions for **unused commercial properties** that are not paying taxes to get them back into active use.

7. If the Massachusetts Highways Department facility on Locust Street is sold by the Commonwealth, the city should work to ensure that its redevelopment is consistent with the gateway character of this area and the site's environmental constraints.

8. The city should continue an ongoing review of street signs to ensure they are adequate to provide directions without detracting from Florence's appearance.

9. The city should work with the Honor Court and other volunteers to ensure that streets and public areas are clean and that trash barrels and benches are maintained and replaced as needed.

10. The city should work with the Florence Civic Association and any future village councils or similar Florence organizations on issues affecting Florence. Florence residents should continue to serve on city boards to maintain a voice in city affairs.

11. The city should work to improve public access to and along the Mill River in Florence wherever possible. **ON-GOING**

12. Smith Vocational Agricultural School should place a conservation restriction on the Smith Voc Farm and/or otherwise take steps to ensure the land remains in open space.

13. Community policing efforts should continue, with on-going realization that perception of safety is often as important to urban vitality as what crime statistics indicate. **ON-GOING**

PARKING

1. Parking in Florence meets present demand and zoning ensures that new parking demands are met. The city does not need to make any parking policy changes. In particular, there is no need to add parking meters to control the use of on-street parking spaces. The city and private developers should, however, update previous parking demand and supply studies as needed.

2. Encourage the private sector to avoid creating excessive parking lots that create dead, low-interest areas for pedestrians, ugly seas of asphalt, and which discourage people from walking to and within Florence Center.

3. All new road projects should minimize or mitigate the loss of on-street parking spaces. Short-term on-street spaces are in very short supply and are the most important spaces for certain types of businesses.

TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION

1. The city, including the Department of Public Works, the Police Department and ward councillors should examine traffic safety and identify needed improvements throughout Florence. Top priority has to be improving the intersection of Bridge Road and North Main . The analysis should also include intersections at Bridge Road/JFK and Bridge Road/North Maple, signage on Pine and Park Streets, on-street parking and traffic enforcement.

2. The DPW should investigate improving the marking and/or signage of Main Street and other Florence Center crosswalks to identify them better for drivers. DPW and City Council should investigate installing audible signals at the Main Street/Maple Street intersections.

3. Any future proposed traffic improvements should be analyzed to consider the effect of the proposed improvement on area roads.

4. The city should continue to expand the Northampton Bike Path, to link it to Williamsburg, the Norwottuck Rail Trail, downtown Northampton, and Easthampton.

5. The city should make any other needed improvements to ensure that Florence Center is easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists, including improved crosswalks. Both the city and business owners should provide bicycle racks at convenient locations.

6. Whenever streets are repaved and whenever else practicable, DPW should cut wheelchair ramps at crosswalk curbs lacking them.

7. The city should consider a Park-and-Ride facility at the VA Hospital or other locations to reduce the number of cars. Park-and-Ride facilities should minimize loss of open space and accommodate dual uses.

8. The city should install a "Florence, ___ miles" sign at the Route 9 downtown and Bridge Road by King Street.