

Downtown and its Urban Gateways

This study is part of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan, in accordance with Mass. General Laws, Chapter 41, §81D.

OPD Project Staff:

Wayne Feiden, AICP, Director of Planning and Development
Carolyn Misch, AICP, Senior Land Use Planner

Northampton Planning Board:

Chairperson:

Kenneth Jodrie (2005)

Vice Chairperson:

Paul Diemand (2004)

David Wilensky (2005)
Julie Hooks Davis (2006)
George Kohout (2003)
Francis Johnson (2004)
Keith Wilson (2006)

Associate Member:

Paul Voss (2007)

**Office of Planning and Development
City of Northampton – City Hall
210 Main Street – Room 11
Northampton, MA 01060**

(413) 587-1265

Introduction

Northampton has an extremely successful downtown and Central Business District. The downtown serves as the cultural and shopping hub center of Northampton and is a draw on many throughout the upper Pioneer Valley. Main Street retail vacancy rates are extremely low and even the upper floors of Main Street buildings are filled largely with offices and residences. Although there is a declining demand for offices in the upper floors of staircase-only buildings, the increasing demand for downtown residential uses is filling these vacancies.

Around the country, many similar sized communities have decaying downtowns with high vacancy rates. Even in communities with healthy downtowns, success often means a bustling downtown from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., with relatively little evening and weekend activity. Fortunately Northampton's downtown is bustling day and evening, weekdays and weekends.

A large part of the success of downtown, however, is due to its ability to find market niches that either compete successfully or avoid direct competition with strip-style shopping malls along King Street, regional shopping malls and other shopping opportunities. This strategy has, unfortunately, created some problems. For many residents, the "new" downtown does not meet community needs the way the "old" downtown did.

To develop a successful market niche, the retail and service sectors have had to define their products differently than in the past, and Northampton has lost many traditional department stores, hardware stores and similar establishments that historically anchored downtown. Northampton will probably continue to lose some downtown local retail stores to competition from national chains. While this trend is inevitable and is found in many a successful Central Business District, a valuable element of downtown has been lost.

The city has designed this plan to help insure the continued success of downtown and to ensure that downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods remain desirable places to shop, work and live for all Northampton residents while remaining inviting for the visitor.

The study is a comprehensive look at the Northampton Central Business District and the surrounding residential neighborhoods and Urban Gateways. This study examines municipal regulatory and non-regulatory actions that affect the downtown and surrounding areas and identifies areas where those city actions should be changed.

Regulatory actions include zoning, design review, sign standards and other city regulations. Non-regulatory actions include public investment in city streets, sidewalks, lights and the streetscape, policies on the use of city property and other city policies.

Although the plan looks at many city actions, it focuses on issues determining the use of public or private land downtown and in the surrounding areas. Other city actions are beyond the scope of this study despite their peripheral impact on downtown. For example, although having a safe downtown is critical for the continued success and health of downtown and the city, the plan focuses neither on the provision of police or fire protection services nor on enforcement of building or health codes.

Ultimately, Northampton's health is integrally linked with the health of downtown.

Downtown Definition

There is no exact geographic boundary to downtown. Downtown as seen by residents, downtown as seen by store owners, the Central Business District, the areas where the city has invested in underground lighting and so on, each tell a slightly different story about our values, our goals and our opportunities. It is a primary goal of this downtown plan to better define downtown through expanding and improving the pedestrian scale of downtown and through building new Urban Gateways at entryways to downtown on Bridge Street, Pleasant Street and King Street.

Vision Statement for Downtown

We envision downtown Northampton strengthening its role as the commercial, cultural and institutional center of the city and the county. Downtown is, and should remain, vibrant and pedestrian-oriented. Maintaining this vitality requires strong neighborhoods in and around downtown, a safe pedestrian-friendly urban core and a healthy city.

The vibrant commercial city center consists of Main Street, the side streets off Main Street and the entire Central Business District. We envision an expanded Central Business District that encourages business expansion while ensuring that the expanded Central Business District develops the character that has made the existing core so successful. If the city does not expand the Central Business District, more businesses will become part of the strip development of King Street, to currently undeveloped areas or abandon Northampton altogether.

The vitality of commercial, business, industrial and residential areas surrounding the Central Business District is also critical to the health of the city. These areas complement the Central Business District and help make downtown vibrant.

We believe that maintaining the neighborhoods in the downtown and within walking distance of downtown is a critical ingredient for a vibrant downtown. Residents living in and near the downtown supply a steady source of revenue for downtown businesses and supply foot traffic that helps keep downtown vibrant and safe. Residents living near downtown, who can walk downtown, need less downtown parking than visitors from out of the downtown area.

Downtown is a critical part of the engine that drives the economic and social health of Northampton. Because of its economic and social repercussions, even residents who never shop or work downtown benefit from its health and vitality. Likewise, downtown can only remain vibrant if the rest of Northampton retains the attractions and economic health that make Northampton such a desirable place to live. Downtown, Florence and other commercial areas of the city must continue to complement each other in the type of economic activities that they provide and they must all continue to provide needed services to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Vision Statement for Urban Gateways

New Urban Gateways should welcome visitors along entryways to downtown with well-designed and attractively landscaped Urban Gateways. New Urban Gateways should also serve to better define the limits of downtown for a more cohesive development and of the downtown cityscape.

Public Outreach for Downtown and its Urban Gateways

Downtown Plan Charrette	1995 Downtown Plan
Vision 2020—6 workshops	1998 Vision 2020
Pleasant Street Forum	May 7, 2001
Retail Development Forum	June 20, 2001
King Street Forum	December 13, 2001
Transportation Forums	Various Dates
Final Forum on Draft Plan	To Be Scheduled

Bridge Street Gateway:

Bridge Street is the primary entryway into downtown from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the county's most powerful single economic entity. It is heavily residential, with some limited commercial and municipal properties, until just before it enters downtown. This corridor provides vital market-rate affordable housing stock for the city.

Traffic is congested near the Coolidge Bridge and Damon Road, but is generally free flowing from I-91 up to the edge of downtown.

Because of heavy traffic, there are strong pressures to convert residential properties to non-residential uses. If poorly done, this has the potential for traffic congestion, additional traffic safety problems and loss of needed affordable housing near downtown. The city should take advantage of opportunities to better define the street by creating a single commercial focal point and discourage unplanned strip-style development away from that focal point.

Bridge Street Gateway Summary

	Action	Rationale
1	Create a mixed-use residential cluster centered at Old Ferry Street. Provide a focal point for the development of a pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods center.	A commercial cluster at an intersection will provide a neighborhood focal point with access to the Three County Fairgrounds and the Northampton Airport, both of which should play a stronger economic role to the city. It also prevents any strip-style development.
2	Expand the Central Business District east one block onto Bridge Street	An expanded Central Business District will guarantee the continuation of pedestrian-oriented development.
3	Limit new commercial development to limited mixed-use residential development in existing mixed-use sites and in NB zoning districts.	Channeling the location of commercial development and better defining commercial districts will reduce the potential sprawling commercial development and the traffic congestion it must necessarily entail.

Bridge Street Gateway Actions

Public Investment	Who and How	When
Install a traffic signal at the intersection of Bridge Street and Old Ferry Street.	OPD, DPW, MassHighway	5-15 years
Improve streetscape to make the street more attractive and to calm traffic.	OPD, DPW, and CDBG	5-15 years
Regulatory Changes	Who and How	When
Rezone Bridge Street and Old Ferry Street from URC to Neighborhood Business.	OPD, Planning Board, City Council	1-5 years
Rezone Bridge Street and Old Ferry Street for mixed-use residential development.	OPD, Planning Board, City Council	1-5 years
Expand Central Business to Post Office.	OPD, Planning Board, City Council	1-10 years
Public/Private Partnerships	Who and How	When
Include in new National Historic District.	Historic Commission and property owners	1-5 years
Improve Three County Fairgrounds to accommodate future compatible uses.	City, property owners, partners	5-20 years
New commercial and infill development on and near Market Street and Hawley Street.	Encourage property owners and banks, limited CDBG	5-20 years

Pleasant Street Gateway

Pleasant Street is the primary entryway into downtown for other visitors. It carries more Interstate 91 traffic to downtown Northampton than any other entryway. It should be transformed into an attractive gateway, with expanded commercial activity, additional housing, and more pedestrian-scale activity.

Working northward from Interstate 91, Pleasant Street currently provides some limited highway-oriented business, then transitional low land rent business and housing opportunities with easy access to downtown and finally more traditional downtown business activities in the Central Business District. With more intense new and infill development, Pleasant Street can support a greater concentration of all of these critical economic functions.

The new Urban Gateway should occur where Pleasant Street crosses over the historic Mill River. From the Interstate to this gateway, Pleasant Street should be made into a more attractive commercial entryway with smoother and safer traffic flow.

From the gateway into downtown, Pleasant Street should become a lower intensity extension of downtown; an extension that takes advantage of its lower residential and commercial land rents, its subsidized and market-rate affordable housing and its access to downtown amenities as well as recreational resources.

New development should be of compact design and built up to the street where possible and Pleasant Street should be transformed into an attractive Urban Gateway.

Pleasant Street Gateway Summary

	Action	Rationale
1	Build Urban Gateway at Hockanum Road with improved streetscapes.	To provide a transition into a pedestrian-scale downtown environment from a highway environment.
2	Create quality infill development.	Infill development prevents sprawling development.
3	Rezone Service Center as General Business for more intensive commercial development options.	Commercial development at and within Urban Gateways is consistent with a more cohesive pedestrian-oriented downtown development.

Pleasant Street Gateway Actions

Public Investment	Who and How	When
Expand on-street parking to slow traffic, serve businesses and buffer sound with a municipal takeover of Pleasant Street to the Urban Gateway at Hockanum Road.	OPD, DPW, MassHighway, Parking Commission, City Council	0-5 years
Improve streetscape, including landscaping, closing historic and current curb cuts, repairing sidewalks, improving crosswalk safety.	CDBG/OPD, DPW, and Parking	0-10 years
Close Dike Road or one-way in if farmer needs can be addressed.	DPW and OPD	1-5 years
Gateway Park at Pleasant Street and Hockanum Road with Urban Gateway design and appropriate signage.	CDBG/OPD	1-5 years
Develop Manhan Rail Trail with raised crosswalk at Pleasant Street crossing.	OPD, DPW, and MassHighway	1-15 years
Future bike lane I-91 to Hockanum Road.	DPW and MassHighway	5-15 years
Better align Pleasant Street intersections with Conz Street and Hockanum Road.	DPW and MassHighway	5-15 years
Restore flow of historic Mill River with increased flow by removal of culverts.	CDBG/OPD, Army Corps of Engineers, Greenways grant program	5-15 years
Regulatory Changes	Who and How	When
Expand General Business district to the Service Center in conjunction with either including area in street grid system or improving pedestrian access and amenities.	CDBG/OPD, property owner, Planning Board, City Council	0-5 years
Reduce or remove General Business minimum lot size and frontage requirements to encourage commercial infill development.	OPD, Planning Board, City Council	0-5 years
Public/Private Partnerships	Who and How	When
Rehabilitate Kirkland Avenue alleyway into a quality pedestrian way to shorten walking distances and to better serve businesses.	CDBG/OPD, property owners, DPW, City Council, Parking	0-10 years
Commercial infill.	Property owners and banks	1-20 years
Downtown commercial rehabilitation and façade improvements.	Property owners, banks and limited CDBG	1-20 years
Preserve and expand affordable housing.	CDBG and non-profit sector	1-20 years

King Street Gateway:

King Street is the most important entryway into the city, providing more commercial activity than any other entryway and, along with downtown, is one of the two most important retail areas of the city. King Street has a unique commercial niche and provides much of the automobile-oriented retail and commercial activity not practical for downtown locations. King Street also provides an increasingly significant volume of retail and commercial activity that may be in direct competition with downtown.

Most of King Street does have sidewalks. Moving north from downtown, however, King Street becomes increasingly hostile to the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists; it has few safe pedestrian crosswalks or bicycle lanes and many businesses with expansive front parking hostile to pedestrian passage from sidewalk to storefront. Excessive curb cuts, alignment hazards, excessive lane changes and a highway environment all create high risks for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers as well as the highest number of accidents per linear mile of any section of the city.

Working southward from I-91 and Damon Road, King Street provides a dominant highway environment, then a slow transition into an urban environment from North Street into more traditional downtown business activities of the Central Business District. This perceived Urban Gateway should be moved up to the site of the electric substation and the new bike trail crossing. Whether the bike trail crossing is a surface or overhead crossing will largely dictate the character of this project. From the new Urban Gateway south, King Street should become a pedestrian-scale urban neighborhood with high-density mixed-use developments, both new and infill.

From the new Urban Gateway north to Hatfield Street, King Street will retain its primarily automobile-oriented highway environment. This area should, however, be friendlier to pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users as well as drivers, so that all may safely shop and obtain services in this area.

Improving the streetscape through landscaping, bike lanes, traffic-calming measures and, most importantly, moving new development up to the street and moving parking to the rear will dramatically improve the appearance and safety of King Street. These changes will encourage infill development as well as retail, office and residential development on upper floors. With infill and new development up to the street, upper floor activity, a safer street and more attractive streetscape, the street will better serve drivers, transit users, bicyclists, and pedestrians while increasing the walkability the potential municipal tax base from King Street.

King Street Gateway Summary

	Action	Rationale
1	Encourage attractive development up to the street with rear parking.	Make the streetscape and businesses safer, more accessible and more inviting for pedestrian shoppers.
2	Reduce traffic lanes and add bicycle lanes and pedestrian crosswalks.	Fewer traffic lanes means less weaving, bicycle lanes and pedestrian crosswalks mean calm traffic patterns.
3	Encourage building reuse, second floor additions and other for an increased density of development.	High-density development provides more space for mixed-use commercial and residential development as well as improves the potential for a vibrant street life.

King Street Gateway Actions

Public Investment	Who and How	When
Improve streetscape, including landscaping, closing curb cuts, buffering sidewalks and improving pedestrian crosswalk safety.	CDBG/OPD, DPW, and Parking	0-10 years
Develop Norwottuck Rail Trail with an at-grade crossing over King Street by Stop & Shop and an overhead crossing by the Mass Electric substation.	OPD, DPW, and MassHighway	0-15 years
Consider reducing King Street traffic lanes from two lanes each way to one lane each way and turning lanes and bicycle lanes.	OPD, DPW and MassHighway	1-15 years
Use future rail trail crossing for public art as part of an alternative Urban Gateway.	OPD and Arts Council	5-15 years
Improve intersection at King Street, Bridge Street and Damon Road.	DPW and MassHighway	5-15 years
Add pedestrian crosswalks at all signals.	CDBG, DPW and MassHighway	5-15 years
Regulatory Changes	Who and How	When
Revise Highway Business district to encourage, and sometimes require, that development be mixed-use, multi-story and built up to the street.	OPD, Planning Board, and City Council	0-5 years
Change site plan standards to encourage emphasis on streetscape impact.	OPD, Planning Board, and City Council	0-5 years
Change site plan standards for responsible energy efficiency requirements.	OPD, Planning Board, and City Council	1-5 years
Rezone former quarry north of Hatfield Street to Special Industrial exclusive of big box retailers.	OPD, Planning Board, and City Council	1-5 years
Public/Private Partnerships	Who and How	When
Encourage mixed-use residential uses.	OPD, property owners, developers	1-20 years
Commercial infill.	Encourage property owners and banks	1-20 years

Relationship of Actions to Goals for Downtown and its Commercial Gateways

Public Investment	Urban Center	Econ. Develop	Housing Neighbor-hoods	Multimodal Circulation	Calm Traffic	Open Space	No Sprawl	Services	Nat. Res. Culture
On-street parking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Streetscape	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Dike Rd.				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Gateway Park	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Manhan Rail Trail	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Bike lane	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Intersections				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Historic Mill River	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Norwottuck Rail Trail	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
King St. to 2 lanes			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Rail trail for art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
King/Damon/Bridge				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Pedestrian phases			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Old Ferry Street signal		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Regulatory Actions	Urban Center	Econ. Develop	Housing Neighbor-hoods	Multimodal Circulation	Calm Traffic	Open Space	No Sprawl	Services	Nat. Res. Culture
Expand GB	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
GB dimensions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
HB revisions		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Site Plan HB		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Bridge St. NB			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Bridge mixed use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Expand CBD Bridge	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
Energy efficiency									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Public/Private Partnerships	Urban Center	Econ. Develop	Housing Neighbor-hoods	Multimodal Circulation	Calm Traffic	Open Space	No Sprawl	Services	Nat. Res. Culture
Kirkland Ave.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Commercial infill	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Commercial rehab.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Affordable housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Mixed use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Historic district									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3 County Fair		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

c:\wfeidenfiles\comprehensive planning\land use element--comp plan\northampton vision 2020 downtown and its commercial gateways.doc 2/24/2003

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers through Mixed-Use Development

- 1-1 Maintain role of downtown as the commercial, cultural and civic center of the region; assist growth of non-franchise locally based downtown retail and service businesses, cultural and community centers and state and local government offices downtown.
- 1-2 Preserve and increase the density of housing opportunities within walking distance of downtown including affordable housing and mixed-use developments; increase walking routes to make downtown more accessible for residents in surrounding neighborhoods.
- 1-3 Expand the Central Business District to encourage new and expanding businesses, especially offices, to locate downtown. Encourage infill development or reuse of preexisting buildings where possible and that compact design of any new development better suit pedestrian needs. An expanded CBD should share a common urban design.
- 1-4 In commercial areas outside the CBD, meet resident needs by protecting and enhancing the livability of neighborhoods by providing a pedestrian-scale design and providing housing and shopping and employment opportunities to meet neighborhood needs.
- 1-5 Channel automobile and truck-intensive businesses away from pedestrian-scale development like Main Street and toward strip-style development like King Street whereby automobile and truck-intensive businesses are assured better circulation and highway access and pedestrian-intensive areas can preserve their pedestrian character.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life	See Objectives 1, 2 and 4
Goal 3: Encourage Economic Growth & Job Creation	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods to Resist Gentrification	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
Goal 5: Preserve Local Resources and Character	See Objectives 3 and 5
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 5
Goal 7: Ensure Abundance of Pedestrian-Friendly Parking	See Objective 5
Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development:

Encourage development of commercial buildings on vacant urban spaces and in unused or underused urban structures.
Increase the number of walking routes through downtown to reduce walking distances and to facilitate street life.
Channel pedestrian-intensive businesses to urban and village centers and automobile-intensive growth to King Street.
Convert strip-style development at the edges of downtown into styles more consistent with the Central Business District.
Maintain parks and green spaces in urban and village centers to facilitate pedestrian, recreational and civic use.

Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life

- 2-1 Encourage people to walk to and in the downtown and help provide incentives to walk downtown like walking routes, green spaces, cultural and community events and a cityscape enhanced by greater public amenities, improved public and private signage, continued preservation and reuse of historic buildings as characteristic models for the rest of downtown; downtown character should be aesthetically and functionally better defined for the regulatory process in terms of facades, setbacks, signage and lighting.
- 2-2 In partnership with the private sector, maintain or provide downtown amenities such as signage, landscaping, rest rooms, benches, user guides, pay phones, bus shelters, art and information kiosks, bike racks, public art, period streetlights and underground utilities - all of which provide incentives to walk downtown and facilitate street life.
- 2-3 Enhance use of walking routes through and between buildings to reduce walking distances within downtown; walking routes should incorporate areas near parking lots to encourage walking once visitors to downtown have parked their automobiles.
- 2-4 Allow for more outdoor public spaces like pocket parks and green spaces, but also more public and private streetscape spaces like steps, walls, ledges and rails as well as outdoor café seating where practical to allow more opportunity for street life.
- 2-5 Continue to encourage street life and neighborhood identity through community events.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objectives 2 and 4
Goal 5: Preserve Local Resources and Character	See Objectives 1, 4 and 5
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4
Goal 7: Ensure Abundance of Pedestrian-Friendly Parking	See Objectives 1, 4 and 5

Goal 3: Encourage Responsive Economic Expansion and Job Creation

- 3-1 Encourage economic growth, especially for locally based non-franchise businesses and those offering a wide range of products and services at a wide range of prices.
- 3-2 Leverage capital to finance investment in economic growth and retention of essential economic sectors as well as in new jobs and new marketplace opportunities.
- 3-3 Encourage job creation, especially ones suiting the local labor force and at a living wage.
- 3-4 Ensure that development is sustainable over the long-term and is low-polluting.
- 3-5 Ensure that economic growth conforms to community goals, vision and Vision 2020.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objectives 1 and 4
Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods to Resist Gentrification	See Objective 5
Goal 5: Preserve Local Resources and Character	See Objectives 2 and 3
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objective 2

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development:

Increase number of small businesses through efforts to both develop and retain locally based non-franchise businesses.
Increase downtown commercial development geared to meeting both local needs and the need for export dollars.
Encourage sustainable development initiatives led by the city and in partnership with actors in the private sector.
Ensure that commercial development outpace residential development to meet resident employment and shopping needs.
Encourage development of commercial buildings on vacant spaces and in unused or underused urban structures.

Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods & Housing Opportunity to Resist Sprawl & Gentrification

- 4-1 Preserve vibrant urban and suburban neighborhoods throughout the city; mitigate impact of CBD expansion on urban neighborhoods and of new commercial development on suburban neighborhoods.
- 4-2 Maintain high-density and medium-density urban neighborhoods and preserve a range of housing opportunities in terms of cost and housing type in throughout the city.
- 4-3 Maintain an array subsidized and market-rate affordable housing opportunities; encourage dispersed affordable units to allow for mixed income neighborhoods and to resist the income stratification of gentrification and ghettoization.
- 4-4 Engage in smart growth development; allow housing supply to meet demand without sprawling beyond the efficient reach of costly municipal infrastructure and services.
- 4-5 Help build neighborhood cohesion and identity; encourage neighborhood retail to meet neighborhood needs and encourage neighborhood communication through social events.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objectives 2 and 4
Goal 3: Encourage Economic Growth and Job Creation	See Objective 1
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objective 5
Goal 7: Ensure Abundance of Pedestrian-Friendly Parking	See Objective 5
Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways	See Objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development

Increase amount of subsidized and market-rate affordable housing; keep subsidized affordable housing over ten percent.
Increase amount of mixed-use residential developments if no vital cultural or commercial uses will be displaced.
Improve transitions from commercial corridors to residential neighborhoods to encourage walking from residential areas.

Goal 5: Preserve Recreational, Environmental and Historical Resources

- 5-1** Improve recreational green space in urban and village centers and create new Urban Gateways to downtown to welcome visitors and better define the limits of downtown.
- 5-2** Protect important ecological resources like surface water and wildlife; preserve greenbelt land linkages and bluebelt water linkages through sensitive areas.
- 5-3** Channel new development from undeveloped greenfield sites to reusable brownfield sites to protect sensitive areas and open spaces and to encourage infill development
- 5-4** Protect historic and architectural character of the downtown cityscape and traditional development patterns; work toward a better understanding of the character of the downtown cityscape and traditional development patterns.
- 5-5** Improve cityscape through quality new urban design and landscaping consistent with the character of the downtown cityscape and traditional development patterns.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objectives 3 and 5
Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life	See Objectives 1, 2 and 4
Goal 3: Encourage Economic Growth and Job Creation	See Objective 4
Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development:

Encourage traditional development patterns along commercial corridors in terms of setbacks, scale and architectural style.
Encourage development of brownfield sites rather than on greenfield sites or environmentally sensitive areas.
Improve stormwater discharges.

Goal 6: Improve Circulation, Transportation Choices and Traffic-Calming Measures

- 6-1** Ensure smooth flow of people, goods, services and information throughout the city; reduce traffic congestion downtown and, especially, on the strip-style section of King Street and at the Coolidge Bridge end of Bridge Street.
- 6-2** Discourage automobile dependency; encourage a compact urban design to ease passage for pedestrians, bicycles and mass transit users with improved downtown walking routes to encourage all visitors to walk once they have arrived downtown.
- 6-3** Encourage and make available transportation choices and intermodal travel; explore potential projects like more parking near more mass transit facilities, more bike racks on more buses, more signage and visibility for more pedestrian crosswalks and more bicycle lanes and encouragement of more community-based carpooling and ridesharing.
- 6-4** Minimize conflict between pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles; improve areas hostile to the safety of pedestrians and bicycles like parking lots and intersections and protect pedestrians and bicycles with improved signage and visibility of pedestrian crosswalks and bicycle lanes and encourage that business with front parking move parking to rear.
- 6-5** Slow automobile traffic to retain safe and livable urban and suburban neighborhoods; explore traffic-calming measures like speed-limit enforcement, traffic lights, stop signs, one-way streets, speed bumps, median strips, turning lanes, righted intersections, on-street parking, bicycle lanes and pedestrian crosswalks when appropriate.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objective 4 and 5
Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life	See Objectives 1 and 3
Goal 3: Encourage Economic Growth and Job Creation	See Objective 4
Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods to Resist Gentrification	See Objective 1
Goal 7: Ensure Abundance of Pedestrian-Friendly Parking	See Objectives 1, 4 and 5
Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways	See Objectives 3, 4 and 5

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development

Encourage that commercial development locate in areas capable of supporting pedestrian, bicycle and transit access.
Create a new multimodal transportation system that envisions walking, bicycling and transit-use as a part of any trip.

Goal 7: Ensure Pedestrian-Friendly Parking is Available, Accessible and Affordable

- 7-1 Expand parking opportunities downtown without creating areas hostile to the safety of pedestrians or bicyclists; provide all visitors with easy walking routes from parking lots to the street as well as accessibility of bike rack and bus stops for other visitors.
- 7-2 Encourage efficient use of current parking resources; better inform the public on available parking resources and encourage sharing of parking spaces between land uses with different hours of operation to meet more demand with fewer parking spaces.
- 7-3 Create a second structured parking facility and additional or expanded surface lots; encourage that public and private parking facilities in the Central Business District locate to meet demand and that land uses outside the CBD provide more on-site parking.
- 7-4 Discourage driving with a pedestrian-scale urban design to encourage walking downtown; shorten walking distances with improved downtown walking routes and provide amenities like bike racks and bus shelters for bicyclists and transit users.
- 7-5 Preserve the density of housing within walking distance of downtown and encourage new urban mixed-use residential developments to minimize the need to drive downtown.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objective 2
Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life	See Objectives 1 and 2
Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods to Resist Gentrification	See Objectives 1 and 2
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways	See Objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5

Relevant Policies of the Office of Planning and Development

Encourage that commercial development occur near public or private parking facilities towards the edges of downtown.
Expand public parking near Main Street without creating areas hostile to the safety of pedestrians or bicyclists.

Goal 8: Improve Urban Gateways on Bridge Street, King Street and Pleasant Street

- 8-1** Welcome visitors to downtown with well-designed and landscaped Urban Gateways
- 8-2** Better define the limits of downtown for a more cohesive urban design and cityscape.
- 8-3** Improve the Urban Gateway on Bridge Street by creating a single commercial focal point to avoid strip-style development and by working to make commercial development on the edge of Central Business District look more like the core of the Central Business District.
- 8-4** Improve the Urban Gateway on Pleasant Street through more intensive pedestrian-scale development in commercial areas on the edge of the Central Business District and through the creation of landscaped green space linkages to the historic Mill River.
- 8-5** Improve the Urban Gateway on King Street through extending pedestrian-scale development further up King Street from the Central Business District and through an urban design aimed at traffic calming and increased safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Relevant Goals and Objectives to Downtown and its Urban Gateways:

Goal 1: Maintain Vibrant Urban and Village Centers	See Objectives 3, 4 and 5
Goal 2: Enhance Opportunities for Quality of Public Life	See Objective 4
Goal 4: Preserve Neighborhoods to Resist Gentrification	See Objective 5
Goal 5: Preserve Local Resources and Character	See Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 5
Goal 6: Improve Circulation and Transportation Choices	See Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
Goal 7: Ensure Abundance of Pedestrian-Friendly Parking	See Objective 4

Action Plan (short-term to long-term)

The Planning Board identified a range of actions to implement the goals and objectives identified above. These actions include both regulatory and non-regulatory actions.

Many actions we identified are short-term and medium-term actions. We will need more long-term actions in the future to fully implement the goals and objectives.

Zoning Text Changes

1. Encourage mixed-use residential and commercial development within the Urban Residential-C areas of Gothic Street, Conz Street and possibly some sections of Fruit Street, State Street, Hawley Street and Old South Street. These areas should *not* be zoned business, but are well suited for a greater concentration of mixed residential and business uses because the commercial uses will complement the residential component of the neighborhood and the pedestrian nature of downtown all with adequate parking available nearby. Using either a set distance from municipal parking or by using overlay district can help define these areas where:
 - A. Zoning should allow residential uses by right.
 - B. Zoning should allow mixed-use residential and commercial developments by right in buildings standing as of January 1, 1996 and with a special permit in accordance with existing site plan thresholds for newer construction.
 - C. Zoning should both encourage businesses compatible with residential uses and also allow for businesses that may attract higher automobile traffic than appropriate in other areas of URC.
3. As previously adopted for CB and GB, City Council and the Planning Board should consider reducing the minimum setback to zero and creating a *maximum* setback in the Neighborhood Business Districts. Parking should be prohibited between any new building and the street to preserve the pedestrian scale and to minimize areas hostile to safety of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.
4. Zoning should encourage building up to the front yard setback in the Highway Business district, including on King Street, to match those in General Business. The zoning should prohibit parking in front of the setback line with the practical exception of gas station.

Zoning Map Changes

1. Expand the Central Business District primarily into areas previously zoned General or Neighborhood Business. This expansion will provide:
 - A. An opportunity to channel new and expanding businesses to the Central Business District rather than to strip-style developments, previously undeveloped greenfields or sites altogether outside of Northampton.
 - B. An opportunity to expand and further define the pedestrian scale of downtown up to and including its Urban Gateways.
 - C. An opportunity for more efficient use of existing public and private parking lots and for the more sharing of parking lots outside the traditional CBD between daytime, nighttime and weekend uses.
 - D. An opportunity for more infill development and reuse of historic buildings.
2. The Central Business District *should not* expand into areas where access to housing and parking would be threatened. Rather, CBD expansion should encourage mixed-use residential development in areas with available parking.

Long-Term Map Changes

1. The city could expand the Central Business District and other commercial zoning districts to allow for future growth of pedestrian-scale commercial areas. This expansion should encourage appropriate commercial development downtown rather than in strip-style developments, on developed greenfield sites or at locations altogether outside of Northampton.

The city should consider further expansion of the Central Business District or other business district if:

- A. There are nearby and adequate shared parking facilities nearby.
- B. Downtown continues to grow and demand more space downtown
- C. Expansion will encourage compact and pedestrian-scale development.
- D. Expansion will sooner enhance than threaten nearby neighborhoods.

City Policies

1. Existing public facilities downtown should continue to be maintained or replaced.
2. The city should continue to encourage and sometimes help the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce to market the Central Business District.
3. The city, using federal Community Development Block Grant funds and staff time, should continue to work with banks, the Valley Community Development Corporation, the Community Trust, the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center, the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce and others to help the development of small businesses. In particular, the city should recruit tenants for vacant space above storefronts and to provide micro-loans for new businesses.
4. Restrooms in City Hall and any other existing or future municipal buildings should be available to and accessible to public during normal opening hours. The city should consider how to best provide public restrooms on evenings and weekends.
5. The city should continue to allow and encourage street musicians as a vital element of the vibrant street life enjoyed in Northampton
6. The city should continue to work to fund and construct a municipal skate park.
7. The city should continue to pursue tax-title auctions for unused properties downtown not paying taxes and put them back into active use to generate revenue and to add the vibrant pedestrian scale of downtown.
8. The city should determine the ownership of green areas downtown, especially the area in front of the granite wall at the First Churches and Fleet Bank (109 and 129 Main Street.
9. The city should work to ensure clear pedestrian and wheelchair circulation after winter storms. Specifically:
 - A. The City, the honor court, abutting landowners, volunteers downtown improvement district should maintain sidewalk curb ramps for winter accessibility by removing snow from curbs.
 - B. Merchants and landowners, including the city for Pulaski Park and Memorial Hall, should remove snow and ice in front of their properties in keeping with the Code of Ordinances §19-19.
10. Any future road reconstruction in the Central Business District up to and including its entryways should seek to include burial of electric, phone and cable utilities.

Future Planning Needs

1. The Planning Board should address design review, signage, landscaping and other issues in a strategic plan for Northampton's Urban Gateways. The Board should consider whether new structures and major renovations within the Central Business District as marked by Urban Gateways should be subject to design review by the Planning Board to preserve the character of downtown.
2. The city should continue an ongoing review of public and private signage and regulations to ensure that downtown street signage is clear and that parking facilities are well marked. Signs should not detract from the appearance of downtown, its surrounding neighborhoods or its entryways. Most comments the city receives about inappropriate signage relate to awnings, signage lighting and to signage along King Street.
3. The Office of Planning and Development should prepare a long-term plan for bicycle circulation throughout downtown. The plan should improvements that would complement and strengthen the bicycle planning efforts and provide connections for rail trails through well-marked bike routes and bike lanes.

Parking

1. Avoid parking lots that are either boring or dangerous for pedestrians and discourage people from surrounding neighborhoods to walk downtown.
2. Site identification and examination of funding for a second structured parking facility should begin now. A structured facility should be placed where it serves development in all directions and not just current restaurant and shopping areas.
3. The Transportation Commission should continue to use its rate structure and monthly passes to encourage long-term employee and resident parking in parking lots near the periphery of the Central Business District.
5. All new road projects should minimize the loss of on-street parking spaces and, ideally, create new on-street spaces. Short-term on-street spaces are in very short supply and are critical for certain types of downtown businesses.
6. Demand for downtown parking should be decreased by encouraging and facilitating pedestrian, bicycle and transit access to downtown. The Transportation Commission should continue to examine its policies and other tools to ensure optimal use of existing parking space.

Circulation

1. Improving the compound Main Street/New South Street/State Street/West Street/Elm Street intersection is critical for smooth circulation and to end a major barrier to pedestrian and bicycle access to downtown from Smith College and other points west. This very complex intersection poses a formidable challenge.
2. The Department of Public Works should improve visibility of crosswalks on Main Street and throughout the Central Business District crosswalks for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. DPW and City Council should investigate installation of audible signals at both signalized Main Street intersections.
3. The city should work with Easthampton for final acquisition and construction of the recreational rail trail over the old railroad bed from the Roundhouse parking lot in downtown Northampton to downtown Easthampton. The city should lay out the trail to allow for an eventual shared use of the railroad bed with a road as far as West Street and then a dedicated rail trail through to Easthampton.
4. The city should seek to connect downtown with the Northampton Bike Path with marked bike routes and a potential painted bike lane along State Street.
5. Once the Norwottuck Rail Trail Extension is complete, the city should incorporate parts of the Northampton Bike Path to mark a bicycle route from downtown to the end of the Norwottuck Rail Trail Extension at Woodmont Avenue.
6. With funding from Community Development Block Grants, the Department of Public Works should continue to cut more wheelchair ramps at crosswalk curbs.
7. The city should shorten the walking distance within the downtown and reduce the need for new parking spaces with:
 - A. Improved public and private lighting and signage in alleyways that connect streets to parking lots.
 - B. Improved public passage through buildings between Main Street and the parking lot on Armory Street to shorten walking distances and improve access for those walking to downtown and for drivers after they have already parked.
 - C. Increased commercial activity alleys and tunnels to make these shortcuts more inviting, livelier and safer for frequent pedestrian use.
8. The city should work with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to improve mass transit in and to downtown. The city should support:
 - A. The creation of a bus stop on Main Street near Thornes Market for all buses passing by that location.
 - B. The creation of a better bus transfer station near the Academy of Music or elsewhere downtown.
9. Public and private landowners should install improved and additional bicycle lockers at convenient locations downtown.

Other Actions and Improvements

1. The city should continue to maintain old streetlights and should use period lights of similar style when replacing lights in the Central Business District.
2. The city should install signage for a Downtown Shopping and Restaurant District at the highway entrances to Northampton and continue efforts for signage of I-91.
3. Downtown businesses could found a Business Improvement District to better fund streetscape improvements and maintenance of downtown amenities.

Population Characteristics

Northampton's population was 29,089 people at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, approximately 30,000 at the time of the 2002 City Census and has remained relatively stable since 1950. The Office of Planning and Development projects that the population will increase very slightly over the next twenty years (1.0 to 2.0% per decade).

The migration rates of people moving into and out of Northampton are high, but in and out migration appears to balance. College age students contribute to the population turnover, but there is also a significant amount of turnover at other age levels. Sometimes this turnover reduces the sense of a stable neighborhood and commitment of residents to their community, but may also contribute to the vibrancy of Northampton.

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 Hampden County. Northampton residents fill slightly over half of the jobs in Northampton. (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Journey-to-Work statistics, prepared by the PVPC)

The number of people who live within walking distance of downtown is extremely high for a city the size of Northampton. Approximately 41% of Northampton's population lives within one mile of the center of downtown.

Downtown Residents (% of all residents)

Live within one mile of center of downtown	12,050	41%
Live within one-half mile of center of downtown	6,750	23%
Live in or abutting Central Business District	1,000	3.4%

(Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census. All figures approximate.)

The downtown population, especially with the wide variety of incomes that exist, may be the most important single factor in allowing for a healthy downtown. This population provides a base of customers for downtown businesses and helps provide the vibrancy that is critical to the health of downtown. It also generates a need for a variety of housing types and opportunities.

There are a wide variety of incomes and housing stock in the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Downtown also has a much higher proportion of rental units than the rest of Northampton.

Rental Units (% of all units)

City of Northampton	48.6%
Within 1 mile of CBD	68.4%
Within 1/2 mile of CBD	80.8%

(Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census. The presence of Smith College does skew these figures. These figures include all Smith College and private rental housing except dormitories.)

Zoning Inventory

Northampton's zoning has encouraged a healthy downtown and a healthy city. The zoning divides downtown and its surrounding residential neighborhoods into the following zoning districts:

Central Business (CB):

CB is the highest-density business district in the city and preserves a pedestrian-oriented downtown. Retail, service and commercial uses with very high pedestrian traffic (restaurants, stores, banks), commercial and mixed-use buildings, municipal parking, private parking, and heavy pedestrian traffic are all vital for a healthy CB district.

To preserve pedestrian orientation, uses that generate heavy automobile traffic are regulated with a special permit (take-out restaurants) or prohibited (automobile sales and service).

Residential uses are encouraged, but only as part of mixed-use buildings with retail, service and/or commercial uses.

Parking requirements in the CB are the least restrictive in the city. They are designed to encourage use of private and public parking lots by different users at different times of the day. Changes in the use of existing building space neither need to provide new parking nor do they get credit for parking, regardless of whether they are changing to a more or less intensive use. Parking is required for new construction and expansions, except when a second floor is added to a one-story building (to encourage one-story buildings to build up). Building owners can pay a modest fee to the parking fund for future parking in lieu of providing parking spaces.

No street frontage is required and there is no minimum lot size for commercial uses in the CB.

General Business (GB)

GB is similar to Central Business in many respects and can be either pedestrian-oriented or automobile-oriented businesses. Business and mixed-uses allowed in CB are generally allowed in GB. Automobile sales and service are allowed in GB, but are not permitted in CB.

As with all other non-CB districts in the city, GB uses must provide parking to accommodate the expected automobile traffic to the facility.

The GB district has far less stringent dimensional regulations than any commercial district other than CB and has no frontage or minimum lot size requirements.

Neighborhood Business (NB)

NB was designed to serve as neighborhood shopping or village centers to serve local needs. In the downtown area, many of the buffers around downtown are NB. Because these buffers generally have lower rent than CB (given their location and restrictions) but are located relatively close to the center of the city, they have attracted many uses that draw business from a much wider area than the immediate neighborhood. Some NB zones cover only one building, typically a building that was convenience commercial (or mom-and-pop store) in under zoning from 1975.

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 are stricter than either CB or GB, but are not very restrictive.

General Industrial (GI)

GI is the city's traditional industrial zone. It includes light industrial uses, warehouses, and some limited automobile sales. Housing and retail are generally not allowed.

Special Industrial (SI)

Special Industrial includes industrial areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods and old mill buildings and allows a mix of business and industrial uses.

Urban Residential-C (URC)

URC is the highest-density and most permissive residential zoning district in the city. Single to multifamily homes are permitted. While pure commercial uses are not allowed, mixed uses are with a special permit. The standards for when these uses are appropriate are not clear. In addition, there are no standards for what percent of a site should be residential to be considered mixed use.

The key provisions of the zoning ordinance that have aided downtown are:

1. Mixed use (including retail, restaurant, office and housing) is encouraged. This has helped create a downtown vibrancy that is very rare in communities of similar size to Northampton.
2. The zoning has encouraged the preservation of housing in the Central Business District and surrounding neighborhoods at relatively high densities. Housing is one of the most important ingredients of downtown vitality. Housing density is high enough to create a pedestrian scale and provide a base of customers for downtown retailer, all while remaining at a level desirable to many residents.
3. Zoning allows the reuse of existing downtown building space without any new parking facilities when the reuse does not increase the floor area within a building. This zoning allows use changes without needing to provide additional parking or getting credit for unused parking spaces.
4. Zoning does not require additional parking when a second floor is added to a one-floor building. This has allowed a very small expansion of downtown space while encouraging building size and height more similar to the rest of downtown, without the loss of any parking or potential parking spaces.
5. Through height restrictions and parking requirements, the zoning avoids creating any incentive to demolish historic buildings and replace them with taller buildings.
6. Other aspects of zoning strike a balance between the need to allow redevelopment and avoid unnecessary regulations and the need to preserve those aspects of downtown, the surrounding neighborhoods and the city that the community has identified as important. Over the years, there has been an ongoing discussion about this balance and whether it needs any adjustment.

In spite of the many aspects of zoning that have aided the health of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods, the city needs to examine some aspects of our zoning. The Zoning Anomalies map shows some of these zoning issues. Among the areas that we examined are: The slow and steady expansion of commercial uses (primarily offices) into residential areas surrounding downtown is a concern for some and an opportunity for others. This expansion meets a need for office space, maintains mixed-use neighborhoods, and encourages downtown investment. On the other hand, many residents of the neighborhoods surrounding downtown see these changes damaging the fabric of their neighborhoods.

Historic and Design Resources

Nineteenth-century buildings dominate downtown, which retains the architectural features and pedestrian scale of that period. The design integrity and pedestrian scale of downtown is one of the strongest unifying features of downtown.

Most of downtown Northampton is in a National Register Historic District. The 1975 nomination to place downtown on the National Register notes:

The district is a mixture of commercial and institutional architecture. In general, the institutional and religious buildings form the jewels in the more modest settings of stores or restaurants with offices or dwellings above.

The institutions include the courthouse, City Hall, Memorial Hall, churches, a theater, banks, and educational buildings. There is thus a rich mixture of function, which creates a lively and diverse area.

Also noteworthy is the shape of the district. None of Northampton's streets are straight, because of the topography, and Main Street is no exception. It is not only its curving shape that creates the sense of a natural and even intimate town center, but also the fact that one can never look up or down the street for any distance without having the vista closed off. The streets that lead off Main Street share these characteristics of irregularity and closed off views. The area is therefore physically as well as functionally distinct.

In downtown Northampton, even the vernacular, or ordinary, nineteenth century commercial buildings provide great architectural details and a respect for the other buildings that form the downtown setting. More than a place where significant historical events occurred, downtown Northampton is historic because it retains the best of the character and vibrancy of a nineteenth century downtown.

The design integrity of downtown is as significant as its historical integrity. Northampton residents cite the pedestrian-scale nature of downtown, the architectural detail, few areas hostile to the pedestrian, the vibrant street life and the integration of commercial and institutional land uses with the surrounding neighborhoods as all being extremely important to the downtown.

The neighborhoods surrounding the downtown also contain a rich collection of historical and design features. Historic buildings, rich architectural detail, a livable scale of development, densities high enough to support pedestrian-scale activities and an attractive streetscape all contribute to the livability of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods and, with some exceptions, the attractiveness of commercial areas surrounding the downtown.

Although downtown and its surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods retain some very positive design features, both King Street and Pleasant Street remain areas in transition, at least as far as design goes. Although these streets serve as entryways to downtown and contain some attractive and desirable features, neither has a particularly clear identity.

Parking Inventory

The Central Business District has approximately 3,186 parking spaces. Approximately 1,329 of these spaces are in off-street municipal parking lots and in the parking garage; 477 are on-street metered spaces and 1,380 are reserved for residents and public and private workers.

Unlike many cities, which have lost the livability of their downtowns by allowing parking to become the dominant theme, Northampton provides parking without creating seas of asphalt or undermining the pedestrian scale of downtown. Northampton's parking has remained pedestrian friendly because most off-street parking is hidden from Main Street by buildings, curving streets and topographic relief. In addition, buildings have not been demolished to make room for parking. The downtown parking structure fits into the fabric of downtown while mixed uses and nearby residential uses have remained healthy.

The availability of public and private spaces has grown steadily for forty years, but it has barely kept up with the demand.

	1953	1985	1994	1995
Public	838	1222	1763	1806
Private	477	1209	1423	1380
Total	1315	2431	3186	3186

(The 1994, 1995, and 2003 Office of Planning and Development studies include Old School Commons. It is unclear whether these 128 spaces in earlier parking studies were counted.)

The construction of a parking structure in 1989 provided a major improvement in the availability of downtown parking. Of critical importance to the success of downtown is that structured parking allows for high-density parking without creating areas hostile to pedestrians in the downtown streetscape. The design of the structure fits into downtown and provides a much more friendly face than any surface parking lot ever could.

Even with the parking structure, parking, especially short term parking, can be extremely tight in Northampton. In particular, parking problems occur because:

1. There is a severe shortage of short-term on-street parking spots that allow people to run into a store quickly.

(Each new traffic circulation and safety project usually results in a net loss of some on-street parking. This is particularly a problem for stores, such as video stores, which rely on people making brief stops).
2. Along lower Main Street, near the highest concentration of downtown restaurants, finding evening parking spots is especially difficult.
3. During the Christmas shopping season, all downtown lots can be close to capacity.
4. Most private parking lots are typically underutilized at night, when parking is most difficult.

Since 1953, most planning studies have identified the need for parking spaces. As noted above, we must balance the need for more parking spaces careful not to create an asphalt city hostile to pedestrians. Additional structured parking avoids the loss of valuable land to parking lots.

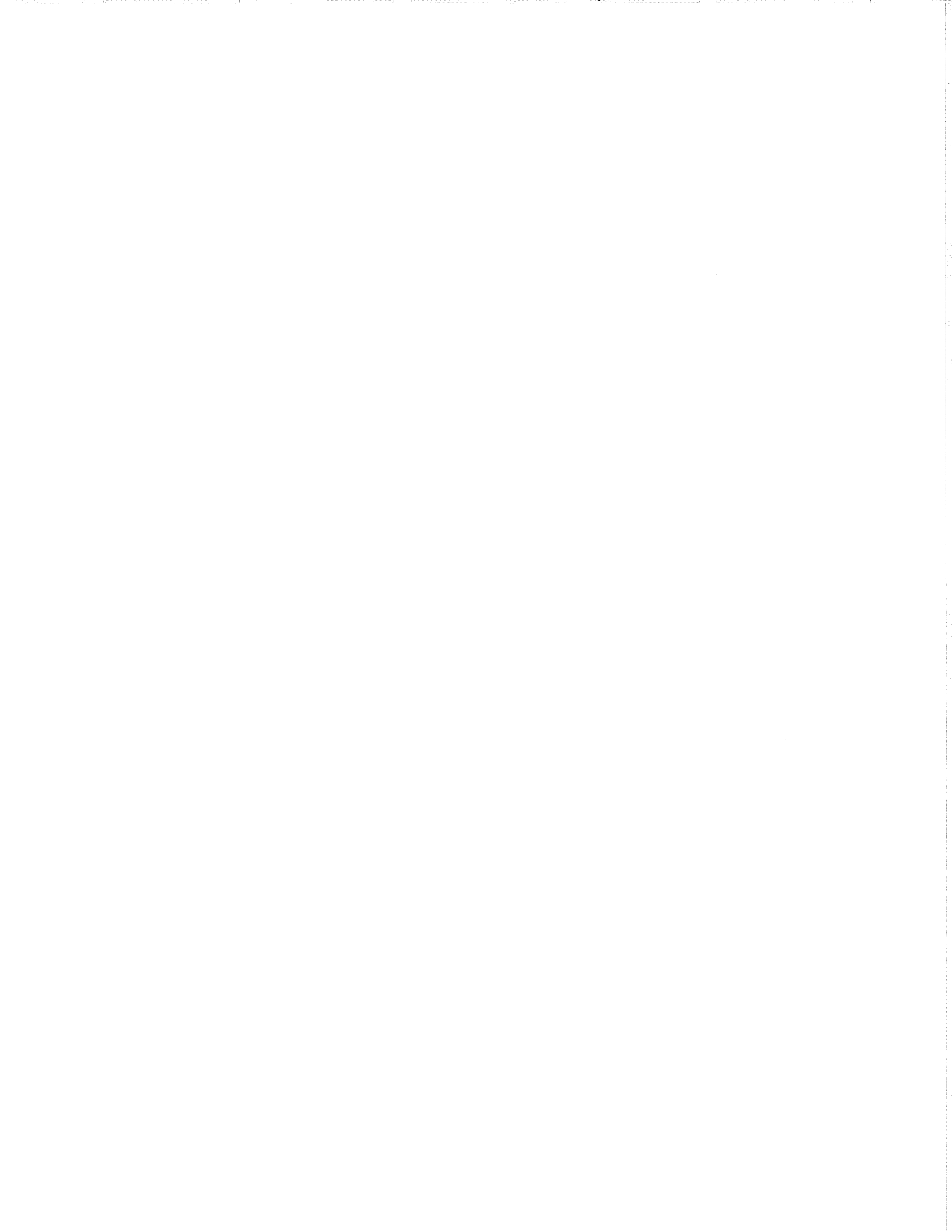
The demand for parking spaces is growing both because of the health and vibrancy of the downtown and because of a general increase in automobile usage.

Besides building more parking lots and structures, the city effectively uses *soft* solutions to create more parking spaces. These include:

1. Metering previously free parking lots to create a higher turnover and provide much needed short-term parking spaces.
2. A parking reserve fund allows developers of new downtown space to pay into the fund in lieu of creating required parking spaces. This has funded the creation of parking spaces that can serve multiple needs at different times.

Other possible *soft* solutions include:

1. Encouraging the use of private parking lots at night when they are available.
2. Encouraging better lighting, signage and use in alleys to encourage pedestrian access. This access could shorten the walking distance from available parking to existing stores and restaurants.
3. Encourage new stores to locate in alleys near parking lots and in the rear of buildings facing parking lots to provide greater access to nearby parking.



Circulation Inventory

Circulation includes the movement of pedestrians, bicycles, automobiles, trucks and buses throughout the city.

Pedestrian traffic in downtown Northampton is very high for a city of 30,000. Previous investments in downtown sidewalks have made them wide enough to accommodate this traffic.

Pedestrian crosswalks downtown are designed well to hold the flow of pedestrians. The crosswalks are marked by standard painted lines (sometimes with crosshatching) and, usually, have wheelchair ramps. None of the crosswalks are designed to send a message that they are part of the sidewalk, instead of the street. Circulation on city streets and to municipal properties for people with disabilities is generally quite good. There are some areas, however, where access is poor. In particular, wheelchair access along streets or to stores is limited in a two areas by steps within the city right-of-way and by a lack of audible signals at the traffic signals.

Within the Central Business District, there are no special provisions for bicycle movement and no public all-weather bicycle storage facilities. There are, however, several links and proposed links to bring bicycles downtown. The Northampton Bike Path, which ends less than one-half mile from downtown, provides a link from downtown to Florence and Look Park (and planned links to Leeds and Williamsburg). The planned extension of the Norwottuck Rail Trail, which will end approximately three-quarters of a mile from downtown, will link with Hadley and Amherst. A proposed rail trail on the south side of downtown could eventually provide a link to Easthampton and Southampton.

Downtown traffic improvements over the past decades have helped improve or maintain automobile circulation, even while the number of vehicles on the roads continues to climb. Unfortunately, many of these improvements have reduced the number of on-street parking spaces, which are the parking spaces in greatest demand.

Planned improvements to Route 66/West Street, South Street/Old South Street and, eventually, a possible West Street bypass could improve traffic circulation and accommodate increases in traffic. These improvements also have the potential of creating a loss of more downtown parking spaces and, if not carefully designed, harm the fabric of downtown. Other future traffic improvements could, potentially, harm the pedestrian scale of downtown by creating wide street crossings and other unsafe areas that are difficult and undesirable for pedestrians to cross.

Alleys and back entrances, many in parking lots, allow deliveries to many businesses with minimal impacts on vehicular and pedestrian circulation.

Public and Quasi-Public Spaces

Outdoor spaces range from formal city parks to informal quasi-public spaces. These include:

1. Pulaski Park, with its new tot lot
2. Nagle Downtown Walkway and the Pleasant Street Park by Depot Parking Lot
3. Veterans Field Recreation Area (approximately 1/4 mile from downtown).
4. Front of Memorial Hall
5. Front of City Hall
6. Front of Hampshire County Courthouse and Yard
7. Park and Fountain at 64 Gothic Street (privately owned with a public easement).
8. Agnes Fox Field
9. Fountain at Hampton Court (privately owned)
10. Front of 135 Main Street (probably privately owned, but possibly city owned)
11. Terraced Area by Parking Garage
12. Land in front of Fleet Bank and the First Churches and the City Art Kiosk

The most formal of these areas, Pulaski Park, is the most heavily used of these facilities, with all types of uses and users represented. The least formal of these areas, however, the front steps at 135 Main Street and the front lawn at the First Churches, are among the most heavily used public and quasi-public spaces in downtown. People seeking a place to sit downtown use these areas.

Other public areas, including the terrace by the parking garage and the small, unfinished park in the Nagle Walkway by Pleasant Street, are infrequently used.

Heavily used parks are those in or near the flow of foot traffic with the simple facilities needed to serve resident needs. Other less used public spaces, however, often serve critical neighborhood needs. The privately owned park at 64 Gothic Street, for example, receives moderate use from the immediate neighborhood, especially Sunday mornings, but infrequent use during the weekdays.

Other Public Infrastructure

Over the years, the city has committed significant funds to public infrastructure. It is unlikely that downtown could have become so successful without these improvements, although the improvements are only some of many factors in the success of downtown. Improvements have been funded by a combination of grant funding, user fees and general revenue.

Important public infrastructure improvements have included maintenance of cast iron street lights, sidewalk and pavement reconstruction, street trees, the parking garage and surface parking lots, public buildings and public spaces. The maintenance of several public spaces and removal of trash and debris by the Northampton Honor Court has allowed many of these facilities to remain clean and attractive at a low cost to the city.

Street signs are also an important part of public infrastructure. The city has improved parking signage in recent years and is continuing efforts to reduce confusing signage. Besides a sign for the parking garage and commercial billboards, there are not welcoming signs at the entryways to downtown or signs that would draw a visitor downtown.

History of Northampton and of the Central Business District

The City of Northampton is a dominant economic and cultural force in among its immediate neighbors in Hampshire County: Easthampton, Westhampton, Williamsburg, Hatfield and Hadley

with a strong draw on the community at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The city covers 35.7 square miles (22,880 acres). Northampton has a very stable population of approximately 30,000 people.

Northampton was founded in 1654. The rich Connecticut River and associated floodplain and agricultural resources that attracted the earliest Native American seasonal encampments also attracted its founders. As Northampton developed, industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors eventually eclipsed agriculture as the most important sectors of the economy.

Since the end of World War II, Northampton's economy has changed significantly. The commercial and service sectors of the economy have grown steadily, while the industrial sector has contracted. The role of the Northampton State Hospital and Veterans Affairs Hospital have been shrinking for almost a generation, while the roles of other institutions, especially Smith College, have remained stable or grown.

Historically, Northampton's downtown has been the leading retail center for Hampshire County. It served as a regional center and it had the largest market share of retail spending. Strip shopping malls, starting in the late 1950's, and later indoor malls, greatly threatened the dominance of the Central Business District. This same threat to the Central Business District in Northampton threatened and decimated many towns and small cities around the country.

Today, through the development of a successful market niche, Northampton's downtown serves as a magnetic gastronomical and shopping Mecca to Hampshire County. Downtown Northampton is still the most defined urban retail center in the county, although it has a smaller market share of total county retail spending now than in the past and a smaller market share of retail (non-restaurant) spending than the Hampshire Mall. Per capita retail and restaurants sales for Northampton are significantly above those sales for Hampshire County and for the Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Today, the entire City of Northampton, not just the downtown, has extremely vibrant service, commercial, and institutional sectors and a strong, albeit significantly smaller, industrial sector. The industrial sector has significantly declined in the last few decades and professional uses have declined significantly during the 2001-2002 recession. Although the Northampton State Hospital has closed, the institutional sector is stable with Smith College, the Veterans Affairs Center and the City of Northampton. In addition, Northampton provides housing for the majority of its work force and for many residents who work outside of Northampton.

In downtown Northampton itself, commercial activity has continued to spread out from its Main Street core. Over the past decade, because of the increasing scarcity of affordable downtown first floor retail space and the shortage of high quality office space with available parking, a new wave of redevelopment and revitalization has come to Pleasant Street while King Street has become an automobile-oriented strip-style development with lower land rents than Main Street.

Central Business and King Street Highway Business Economic Activity

Area	Property Value	Property Value*	Acreage	Value per Acre
Central Business District	\$165,921,794	\$117,428,960	79.9 Acres	\$2,076,618/acre
King St. Highway Business	\$ 70,097,700	\$ 64,951,300	173.4 Acres	\$ 404,254/acre
Downtown has greater land value and correspondingly more economic and job activity than King Street.				

Data source: 2001 Assessors Data. Based on parcels at least 75% in given zoning district.

*Property value excludes tax-exempt properties.

Downtown Land Use

The mix of uses in downtown and surrounding neighborhoods helps create the vibrancy that characterizes Northampton. Institutional, office, retail, restaurants and other commercial uses all complement each other and keep Northampton vibrant at different hours of the day. While many other downtowns, including those much larger than Northampton, have enough offices and institutional uses to appear vibrant during the working day, it takes a much broader mix of uses to remain vibrant in the evenings and weekends.

As discussed earlier, housing downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods is one of the most important elements of keeping downtown vital and is critical to supporting downtown businesses. Housing in the study area includes housing above commercial buildings, apartment buildings in and near the downtown, multi-family housing of every size, and many single-family homes. Housing downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods spans many price ranges.

There are several other business or industrial zones in the downtown study area, besides the Central Business District. These can complement downtown and provide room for a small downtown expansion for mutual benefit. Unfortunately, they also have the potential to weaken the downtown corridor with conflicting uses or competition.

The King Street Neighborhood Business District North of the Hotel Northampton: Although Neighborhood Business (NB) districts are designed for areas that serve local needs, the King Street NB district contains businesses that draw people from greater distances.

The King Street Highway Business District North of Summer Street and North Street: This is the beginning of the automobile-oriented strip-style section of King Street. This area has provided the greatest local competition to downtown in years past, though downtown has partially adapted by developing its competitive market niche accordingly.

The Bridge Street, Market Street and Hawley Street Neighborhood Business District: This area contains some businesses that draw people from greater distances as well as other more traditional commercial uses serving the local area.

Green Street Neighborhood Business District: This area has been in transition for several years. It has gone from a highly successful shopping area to a declining area. Smith College dominates this area, and owns most of the buildings in this district.

West Street Special Industrial District: The former National Felt factory provides an enormous opportunity to this area and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Hawley Street and Service Center Special Industrial Districts: Special Industrial is the catchall zone for mixed industrial, commercial and non-conforming uses.

Previous Studies

Previous studies provide a wealth of information related to downtown. The Planning Board reviewed and drew from the previous studies on the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods for this plan.

Parking Survey and Program, Central Business District, Northampton, Massachusetts, February 1953: This report by Ramp Building Associated surveyed parking facilities and demand and made recommendations for addressing the demand. They identified 838 public and 477 private parking spaces (1,315 total) in the Central Business District in 1953.

The Master Plan for The City of Northampton, August 1963: The Northampton Planning Board and Technical Planning Associates wrote the 1963 Master Plan with federal funding from the Urban Renewal Administration. The plan identified Northampton's role as a regional center and found that "if Northampton takes necessary steps to improve its central business area to maintain its regional leadership in business, growth of the area towns will be reflected in increased economic activity and consequent attraction to new residents." The plan overestimated this trend and projected a much higher rate of population growth than has occurred.

The 1963 Master Plan underscored importance of the retail and service sectors in the Northampton economy, especially in the downtown. The report stressed, however, the threat to central business from suburban shopping malls and strips. "Either the central area must be drastically modernized, or it will be outpaced by competition from outside . . ."

It recommended that the city increase the availability of off-street parking, which the city did, and that the city undertake a large urban renewal program in which the city would tear down many old buildings and private investors would replace those buildings with single use structures. Fortunately, the city never followed through on this last recommendation.

Comprehensive Plan for Northampton, Massachusetts, June 1972: This comprehensive plan was written by Metcalf & Eddy and federally funded by the Urban Renewal Administration. The plan was adopted by the Northampton Planning Board. Because of this planning effort, the city rewrote its zoning ordinance in 1975 and created 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 the downtown as "the civic and economic heart of the community." It also stressed that civic and "cultural activities attract people to the area, which in turn assist in the overall business and economic activity."

The 1972 Comprehensive Plan identified the growing economic threat to the downtown by competing strip shopping malls and it acknowledged that the "future role of the CBD may be defined as that of a civic, cultural, and specialty merchandising center . . ." The plan also identified problems with vehicular and pedestrian circulation and with inadequate parking. It contains a good historic inventory of circulation and parking resources.

The 1972 Comprehensive Plan maintained, "the various mixed land uses usually tend to produce conflicts of various types. The conflicts in the Northampton CBD are primarily between residential and commercial uses, especially where the apartments have been developed on the upper floors of the same building housing Main Street commercial activity." The plan identified some areas of blight and inferred that the solution to this blight might be demolishing several older buildings. Fortunately, the city never followed through on recommendations to reduce these mixed uses or to do large-scale demolition.

A June 1971 draft memo from Metcalf & Eddy to the Northampton Planning Board goes into greater detail about issues relating to the Central Business District.

The Pleasant/River Redevelopment Project, May 1975: The Northampton Redevelopment Authority prepared this report and supporting documentation as an outgrowth of the 1972 Comprehensive Plan. The city designed this state-funded urban renewal project to make the Central Business District a better place to live and to revitalize the downtown. Unlike many urban renewal projects, this project did not recommend demolition of most of the Main Street buildings. In fact, the 5.5 million dollar project (1975 dollars) envisioned massive property acquisition and rehabilitation.

City of Northampton, Mass., Downtown Business Area, Commercial Revitalization District (CARD), February 1980: The Northampton Office of Planning and Development wrote this proposal to create a Downtown CARD, which was approved. "The intent of the CARD program is to encourage the revitalization of established commercial districts by making available reduced-interest industrial revenue bond financing . . . to eligible commercial development projects."

The report included a list of opportunities and problems that might shape continued revitalization of downtown. It stressed "the historic ambience of downtown as a major advantage that is held over new commercial areas . . ."

1981 Parking Study, City of Northampton: This study, by John Martin and John Mullin, inventoried parking problems and made recommendations on how to reduce these problems. While identifying a need for more parking, the report cautioned against allowing parking to reduce the pedestrian scale of downtown. Since 1981, more detailed parking studies have been done and many improvements, including construction of the John Gare Parking Garage, have been completed.

Resource Team Report for Northampton, Massachusetts, October 1981: The National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation provided this assessment of downtown. The report stressed that while downtown Northampton is very successful, an ongoing comprehensive examination is critical to ensure continued success.

The report focuses on three areas: urban design, traffic circulation and improving management and marketing for the downtown commercial sector. It includes a 1981 inventory of occupancy rates.

The city has implemented many of the report's recommendations since 1981. Among the significant recommendations:

1. Improve Urban Gateways on Pleasant Street and on Conz Street and Old South Street.
2. Improve the back of the buildings on the south side of Main Street.
3. Improve sidewalk and traffic safety, improve downtown public signage and use care with downtown banners and promote appropriate colors for downtown buildings.
4. Market downtown and encourage small business development.

Commercial Space Inventory, Northampton, MA Card Districts, June 1985: The Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts conducted an inventory of gross square footage by use in Northampton. Downtown they identified 1,166,954 square feet of gross commercial space, with 33.4% of the space offices (including banks), 50.5% retail, 1.2% industrial, 7.4% services, and 7.5% vacant.

Central Business District Parking Study, Northampton, Massachusetts & Related Financial Summaries, August 1985: This parking study by Ramp Engineering Associates provided a detailed inventory of parking, identified parking deficiencies and recommended alternatives. This report was critical in documenting the need for the city to build a parking garage. The report identified 1,222 public and 1,209 private parking spaces in the central business district (2,431 total).

Mayor's Task Force on Land Use and Development, Final Report, February 1986: Then 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.

The 1986 Mayors Task Force report recommended that Northampton "preserve and maintain the city's unique architectural and historical resources, such as the Downtown Historic District . . . Integrate public and private improvements into the downtown area so as to complement the unique character and appearance of the area . . . Strengthen and improve commercial development in clearly defined and established commercial centers . . . so as to maintain the traditional structure and character of the community . . ." The report made no other recommendations that directly affect the downtown.

Strategic Plan for Resource Conservation, March 1987: The strategic plan was prepared for the city by Lozano, White and Associates, Inc. with a state Strategic Planning Grant. The strategic planning process focused primarily on residential development and preserving sensitive ecological resources. It suggested, however, maintaining the integrity of downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, including:

1. "Encourage the development of traditional Northampton housing types, that is, two- and three-family dwellings" by zoning changes. (The zoning partially implemented this recommendation.)
2. "Establish a Design Review process to be applied to the Downtown Area." The proposed design review would regulate new construction and substantial renovations that could have a visual impact on downtown. The purpose of design review would be to insure that regulated projects respect and preserve the best of downtown architecture and urban design.

Northampton Parking Garage, Market and Economic Analysis & Residual Land Development Potential, 1987: RKG Associates, Inc. prepared the report as part of the planning for the parking garage. The report provided a useful discussion of retail, professional and residential uses, rents and vacancy rates in the downtown. It identified that, in 1987, demand for quality housing and office space was rising amid shrinking supply. The report concluded that as downtown success continues, "development may force some retailers out of their locations into less expensive and less desirable space, as prime spaces are leased or sold to larger more financially secure retailers (often national or regional franchises). If alternative space is not available, these smaller retailers may be forced out of the Northampton market altogether."

Northampton Cultural Plan, January 1989: The plan identified steps the city and the arts community could take to make art and cultural activities an even greater part of life in Northampton. The Public Art Plan, 1994, identifies ways to help public art in Northampton and contains an inventory of public art on public and private property.

Economic Development Component Strategic Plan, City of Northampton, April 1991: The Economic Development Strategic Plan focused on needed citywide actions. It does identify the need to "strengthen and improve commercial development in clearly defined and established centers: Downtown, Florence Center, Pleasant Street, King Street" and suggests looking for appropriate locations for the expansion of commercial zoning.

City of Northampton Local Historic Districts, Final Report, June 1991: The report, by a local historic district study committee created by City Council, discusses four proposed local historic districts, including a Downtown Northampton District. "The rich mixture of commercial, institutional and religious buildings is enhanced by prestigious residential areas that developed along major entry corridors . . . The architectural fabric and the history of Northampton are inseparable . . . A wide range of architectural styles compose the fabric of the streetscape . . . It is this eclectic mix of buildings of distinction that justifies the architectural importance of the district."

Streamlining the Zoning Process: How We Can Simplify Your Life Without Threatening Your Quality of Life!, June 1994: The Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, 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 downtown redevelopment.

Downtown Northampton: Today, Tomorrow and the Future, September 1995: A comprehensive plan for downtown and its entryways has been updated to serve as the core for this plan.

1994 Charette: Downtown Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Strengths

As part of their attempt to encourage public participation in the planning process, the Northampton Planning Board sponsored a downtown interactive workshop, or a charette, in November 1994. 150 residents, business and building owners and citizens participated in the Downtown Charette. They identified downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Downtown Strengths

- Arts Community & Cultural Opportunities
- Clean Streets and the Honor Court
- Thorne's Market & Parking Garage
- Street Safety through Street Life
- Commercial and Civic Vitality
- Human-Scale Development
- Open-Minded Population
- Mixed-Use Development
- Architectural Integrity
- Intellectually Vibrant
- Vibrant Street Life
- Mass Transit

Downtown Weaknesses

- Too many Chain Businesses versus too few Local Independent Business
- Parking Conflict of Mixed-Use Development (Business & Residential)
- Limited Affordable Housing and Gentrification
- Main Street Traffic Congestion
- Few Opportunities for Elderly
- Few Opportunities for Youth
- Shortage of Public Facilities
- Shortage of Public Spaces
- Poor Historic Preservation
- Poor Delivery Access

Downtown Opportunities

- Increased Transportation Choices: Transit, Bicycle, and Pedestrian
- More Opportunities for Youth and Elderly
- Infill Development and Building Reuse
- More Downtown Affordable Housing
- Expanded Local Farmers Market
- New Structure Parking Facility
- Reuse of State Hospital Land
- Historic Preservation District
- Improved Urban Gateways
- Public Information on City
- Improved Public Spaces
- Downtown Expansion
- Celebrating Diversity
- Creative Labor Force
- Diversify Economy

Downtown Threats

Alienation of Youth, Elderly and Minorities
National Chain Stores and Franchises
Institutions Leaving Downtown
Lack of Design Guidelines
Loss of Parking Spaces
Big Box Stores
Gentrification
Pavement

1994 Charette: Actions

In the 1994 Downtown Charette, workshop participants identified the following actions to be taken by the city. The participants listed short-term (0-2 years), medium-term (2-5 years) and long-term (5 years or more) items. The items with the broadest support among charette participants appear here, though all items are need also pass scrutiny in public meetings and planning board discussions.

- Expand downtown parking to allow for downtown development. (medium-term to long-term)
- Create second structured parking facility off of either King Street or Pleasant Street. (long-term)
- Create transportation plan that both respects the pedestrian scale and encourages automobile alternatives. (long-term)
- Improve pedestrian safety by improving crosswalk visibility and areas hostile to pedestrian safety. (short-term to long-term)
- Encourage bicycling by improving bike routes and providing more bike racks. (short-term to long-term)
- Encourage walking by improving walking routes and providing more benches. (short-term to medium-term)
- Improve streetscape amenities to facilitate street life and improve the role of the street as a public meeting place. (medium-term)
- Expand and improve public cultural and recreational facilities (medium-term)
- Expand farmers market to enhance weekend street life and to support local agriculture. (short-term)
- Create Greenbelt around downtown based on the Old Mill River and Pleasant Street and Conz Street areas. (long-term)
- Create environmental plan that includes easy access from downtown to preserved open and green spaces. (medium-term)
- Preserve historic, architectural, design and aesthetic character of downtown. (short-term to long-term)
- Improve King Street and Pleasant Street by pedestrian-scale mixed-use development and maximum setbacks. (long-term)

-Encourage backdoor parking lots entrances to and through buildings along both sides of Main Street. (long-term)

-Encourage affordable and mixed-use residential developments and to discourage national chains with zoning. (medium-term)

-Encourage infill development of underused urban areas like buildings with frontage on alleys and parking lots. (long-term)

-Improve visual gateways to downtown on King Street, Pleasant Street and Bridge Street. (medium-term to long-term)

-Encourage public participation in the planning process through media, charettes and information campaigns (long-term)

Inventory of Existing Public Art

Municipal Properties:

City Hall – Interior: permanent art collection of the city

First Churches – Exterior: public art kiosk

Memorial Hall - Interior: assorted bronze plaques of war dead in main lobby

Memorial Hall - Exterior: two bronze sculptures (Civil War soldier and sailor)

Remembers Memorial (granite sculpture)

Forbes Library - Interior: numerous pieces of art

Forbes Library - Exterior: memorial bench

Pulaski Park: granite sculpture to honor Casimir Pulaski and Northampton Artifacts (Time Capsule, ca. 1976)

Private and County Properties:

Hampshire County Courthouse - Exterior: bust of Calvin Coolidge with bronze plaque, 1902 stone fountain with names of towns, bronze and stone marker to honor those who served during the Persian Gulf War, and 1912 bronze and stone marker to honor First Meeting House.

NYNEX, 61 Masonic Street: "The History of Women in Northampton from 1600 to 1980" mural.

Midway Electric, 135 King Street: light bulbs and fixtures mural.

Hampton Court Plaza, 20 Hampton Avenue: stone fountain.

Boston & Maine Railroad Trestle Bridge: Leland Johnston's "Dream" mural on the bridge's east side and Lucy Baird Menousek's metal train sculpture on the bridge's west side.

Crackerbarrel Alley: Jonathan Kohrman's "Skateboarders" mural.

64 Gothic Street: marble fountain