

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**U.S. EPA Smart Growth Implementation Assistance
For Laconia, New Hampshire**

Laconia, New Hampshire

*three neighborhoods,
ne vision*

The Weirs:
*recreation on the water
for all seasons*

Lakeport:
*the heart of a
special community*

Downtown Laconia:
*rediscovering
Main Street*

Laconia: connecting a rich history with a dynamic future



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Laconia is in an enviable position, having a strong economic base and a beautiful location. Principally composed of three neighborhood centers (Downtown Laconia, Weirs Beach, and Lakeport), Laconia has a rural, small-town character. Residents and visitors alike adore the scenic beauty and slower pace. By building on these assets, Laconia can continue to be a thriving vibrant community.

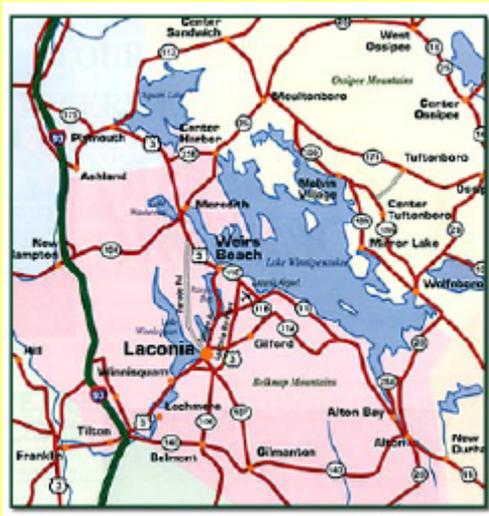
In August 2005, Laconia, New Hampshire, successfully applied for technical assistance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program to encourage investment and development in its neighborhoods centers, while maintaining its small-town charm. Laconia needed help to implement its publicly supported 2007 Master Plan, including neighborhood-specific technical tools and policies.

A team of consultants with relevant expertise (the “Consultant Team”) studied development patterns, codes and regulations, and market conditions in Laconia. From December 10-13, 2006, the Consultant Team visited Laconia to:

- Listen to what Laconia’s residents want for their city; and
- Help find options the city could use to
 - Maintain its small-town charm, while encouraging investment in the three neighborhood centers; and
 - Keep new growth consistent with the goals of its master plan.

LACONIA AT A GLANCE

In the Lakes region of New Hampshire, Laconia is a small, steadily growing city of 17,500. Located 90 minutes north of Boston, Laconia is adjacent to three lakes. It has a median household income of \$41,000, and a strong service-based industry. Residents are proud of the quality of life and living in the “City on the Lakes.”



Map of Laconia

Source: www.villageprofile.com/newhampshire/laconia/laconia1.html



The City of Laconia logo promotes its water-based lifestyle.

During the site visit, Laconia residents said they wanted to:

- Protect the lakes that flank the city;
- Preserve and enhance the town’s natural characteristics; and
- Enhance and capitalize on the three different neighborhoods.

Stakeholders emphasized that Laconia offers three distinct neighborhood experiences:

- A quiet lake experience in Lakeport;
- A funky and fun family spot in Weirs Beach; and
- A more urban area Downtown.

Residents embrace these different neighborhood characters and believe they can combine into a full-destination experience. While Laconia needs general, citywide strategies to maintain cohesion among these different areas, each neighborhood is different and thus requires different strategies. Accordingly, the Consultant Team concluded that Laconia would benefit most if the Team worked with stakeholders from each neighborhood to create Illustrative Development Plans for each area. These three Illustrative Development Plans and the city’s overarching goals will help Laconia become a city with “three neighborhoods, one vision.”

1 INTRODUCTION

Located about 90 minutes north of Boston, Laconia is a small, steadily growing city of approximately 17,500 residents. Principally composed of three neighborhood centers—Downtown Laconia, Weirs Beach, and Lakeport—Laconia has a rural, small-town charm. Residents are proud of the quality of life that is part of living in the “City on the Lakes.”

As is the case for many communities with assets like these, Laconia has been experiencing significant change and development pressure. A booming tourism industry and strong market for vacation and retirement homes are great economic drivers that provide employment and development opportunities to Laconia’s residents. Nevertheless, long-time residents and newcomers alike do not want this growth to detract from the city’s fundamental charm or harm their quality of life.

The City of Laconia over the last few years has had a community-wide dialogue among residents, business owners, board members, and City Council members on better growth strategies. As part of the Master Plan process, a series of forums was held in 2002.

Participants identified strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, and used this information to form the vision statement of the Master Plan.

From 2005 through 2007, Laconia engaged its citizens in an extensive public participation process and updated its land use Master Plan. The plan includes smart growth principles (see adjacent text box) and articulates a vision of development in Laconia that creates walkable communities, protects water resources, and strengthens the Downtown:

SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Source: www.smartgrowth.org/about/principles/default.asp

“Compact, mixed-use and pedestrian friendly development is encouraged for the efficient use of land, resources, and infrastructure. Traditional neighborhood development is conducive to strong community life. Growth is directed to make maximum use of resources without over-development.”¹

¹ The City of Laconia, *Master Plan: Vision Statement*. Available at: <http://www.cityonthelakes.org/Vision%20Statement.rtf>.

In the summer and fall of 2005, Laconia held a series of meetings to educate the community on issues related to growth, to help the community explore and understand options for how to grow, and to set in motion several action groups. These forums were coordinated by a local business group and involved representatives from the City Council, and all City boards and departments (e.g., fire, police, schools, planning department, etc.).

As an outgrowth of this series of meetings, and as a next step in plan implementation, the City applied to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) Program. Laconia sought technical assistance to help answer the question: "What kinds of codes does Laconia need to support development and investment in keeping with the vision described in the master plan and smart growth principles?" The City also requested technical assistance to help develop a "Village Design Overlay" code, customized for each neighborhood center. Laconia's goal is to encourage investment in its core neighborhoods while preserving the City's small-town charm, maintaining individual neighborhood identities, and encouraging vibrant business districts.

After receiving this charge from the city, EPA worked with its contractor, ICF International, to assemble a team of national smart growth experts to assist the City. The multi-disciplinary team (the Consultant Team) consisted of:

- Dena Belzer, economist, Strategic Economics.
- Chester "Rick" Chellman, P.E., engineer, TND Engineering.
- Rick Williams, urban planner, Van Meter Williams Pollack.

William Schroeer, vice president, ICF International, directed the team. Tim Torma, Geoff Anderson, and Rosemary Monahan of EPA provided additional support.

The team studied development patterns, codes and regulations, and market conditions in Laconia and the surrounding area. From December 10-13, 2006, the team visited Laconia to:

- Listen to what Laconia's residents want for their city;
- Help find options the City can use to
 - Maintain its small-town charm, while encouraging investment in the three neighborhoods centers; and
 - Keep new growth consistent with the goals of its master plan.

During the visit, the City and the Consultant Team held three public meetings to engage the community. Ninety-six residents attended, and thirty-two were interviewed individually. A wide range of stakeholders, including selectmen, local landowners, members of various town boards and commissions, interested residents, City staff, and local citizen groups participated in the public meetings and/or the interview sessions.

During the site visit, Laconia residents identified several major goals, including:

- Protect the lakes that flank the city.
- Preserve and enhance the town’s natural characteristics and charm.
- Enhance and capitalize on the three different neighborhoods.

All stakeholders emphasized the identity of its three distinct neighborhood centers and the need to customize recommendations for these areas. Although the Future Land Use Map identifies each neighborhood as an area planned for “nodal development,” a clear, coherent vision for site-specific implementation was missing. Thus, the Consultant Team concluded Laconia needed an interim product between Master Plan and Village Design Overlay code.

The nearby town of Meredith came up frequently in discussions with a wide range of Laconia officials and other stakeholders. It was clear to the Team that Laconia did not want to be just like Meredith, but there was general agreement that Meredith had accomplished an admirable redevelopment and reinvention of itself. Laconia needs to emulate one critical element of the Meredith story: each neighborhood needs to establish a clear vision for its development. The presence of a clear vision was essential in Meredith and is a critical next step for Laconia.

A clear vision and a development plan are prerequisites for appropriate supportive codes and policies. A development plan is needed because it provides a tool to evaluate the success of the codes and policies. Accordingly, the Consultant Team created individualized Illustrative Development Plans, based on what the market will support and what the stakeholders in each neighborhood said they wanted.

This report:

- Describes the current and future market conditions for Laconia.
- Presents Laconians’ overall vision for their city.
- Presents development options for each core neighborhood.
- Identifies strategies for implementation.

2 MARKET ANALYSIS

Plans for Laconia’s future should capitalize on market opportunities. This market analysis provides an overview of current market conditions and future trends to leverage Laconia’s assets. It also identifies where plans will be difficult to implement without proactive public policy changes or strategic public investment.

Strategic Economics, a member of the consulting team, conducted an off-site market analysis for the City of Laconia and the larger competitive trade area, including Gilford (the adjoining community) and Belknap County. The City’s demographic, population, employment, and real estate market trends and conditions were analyzed. Additional research investigated new tourism-related development in Meredith, a nearby city that represents both competition and a case study for Laconia. Meredith has newer hotels and a more “tourist friendly” downtown. Laconia wants the same level of success, without copying the Meredith experience.

The market analysis drew on published economic, demographic, and real estate data, and on interviews with local real estate brokers and other key informants. The analysis reached five major conclusions:

1. Housing prices in the Laconia area have increased far more rapidly than incomes, making housing affordability an issue of concern for some segments of Laconia’s population.
2. The City suffers from retail leakage, and does not capture the full buying power of its residents.²
3. There are not enough people living in either Lakeport or Weirs Beach to support a significant year-round concentration of retail activity.
4. The conversion of weekly rental properties into second homes has led to declining use of seasonal tourist attractions and has changed the nature of visitor-serving businesses in the City.
5. Bike Week creates competing forces. It provides a highly profitable retail period for some businesses in Weirs Beach, but this freezes key properties in their current uses.

These five trends characterize the opportunities and challenges for Laconia’s continued prosperity.

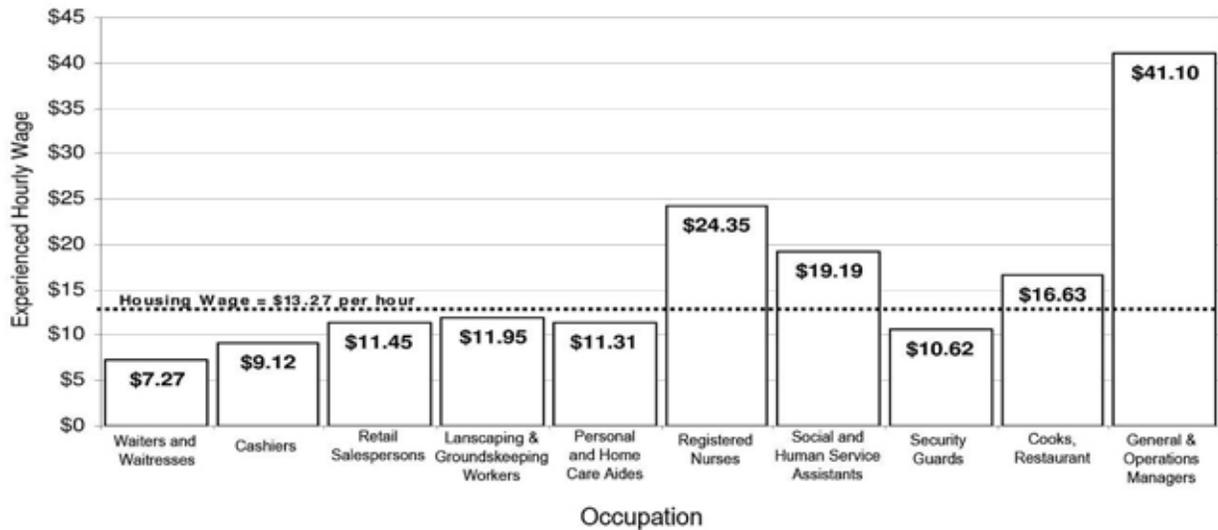
Laconia and Belknap County have grown at a moderate but steady pace for the past thirty years, although the County has experienced much more growth than Laconia. The County added some 30,000 residents since 1970, while Laconia grew by only 2,500 residents to 17,280 people during the same period.

² Retail leakage occurs when members of a community spend money outside that community or when money spent inside that community is transferred outside the community. For example, when goods are purchased across a border, the money spent to make that purchase is lost to the community.

Fifty-seven percent of Laconia’s housing units are owner occupied while 43 percent are rental. Seventeen percent of units are occupied seasonally. Twenty-eight percent of the households in Laconia include children. As the county seat, Laconia has a higher percentage of government jobs than the rest of the County, but the employment base also includes a substantial number of manufacturing and service jobs. As in other parts of the country, jobs in the service industry are the fastest growing. Household incomes in Laconia have increased some \$4,000 since 2000, but lag behind other communities in the area. Laconia’s median household income was approximately \$41,000 in 2006, compared to more than \$50,000 in Belknap County.

Most recent housing projects are the new construction of single family homes, the conversion of old mill buildings into condominiums, and the conversion of transient occupancy “cottages” into ownership units. Most of the single-family homes and mill conversions are primary residences, while the converted cottages are second homes.

Housing prices in the Laconia area have increased far more rapidly than incomes. Between 2000 and 2006, both condominiums and houses prices doubled. In 2006, the median price for a condominium was \$207,000 and the median price for a single family home was \$274,000. Recent price increases are an issue of concern for some of Laconia’s population. The current 57 percent rate of home ownership in Laconia is well short of the county’s rate of 74 percent. As the housing affordability exhibit below indicates, even rental housing may become untenable for many workers in Laconia and Belknap County.



Housing Affordability in Laconia and Belknap County

Retail development within Laconia’s boundaries has been tepid. Most recent retail development has been big-box stores outside of the city limits. In keeping with this, analysis of retail spending in Laconia reveals retail sales leakage out of the city. Clearly, Laconia is not capturing the full buying power of its own residents and could support more general merchandise stores. However, Downtown stores have struggled in recent history. In Lakeport, the recent Elm Street Bridge renovations, which eliminated customer parking, hurt its retail. Furthermore, the high volume of

traffic in the Lakeport commercial district does not translate into significant sales for local businesses. Retail activity in Weirs Beach depends almost entirely upon seasonal visitors to the area, most notably during Bike Week. The conversion of weekly rental units to second homes affects spending patterns in Weirs Beach as well. People staying in second homes are not supporting the traditional Weirs Beach attractions, such as mini-golf, go-carts, or the boardwalk. Instead, second-home residents are more likely to support restaurants, and food and lifestyle merchandise stores.

Laconia will accomplish more, be more successful, and be more competitive if the neighborhoods can successfully leverage each other. Currently, Downtown and Lakeport derive little benefit from the seasonal visitors in Weirs Beach. Similarly, Downtown and Lakeport provide little draw for seasonal visitors. Creating great places for local residents is appealing to visitors. People will travel further to visit a place if there are more options and experiences. A diversity of experience, opportunity, and amenity is greater than any one neighborhood can provide by itself, and improvements help all neighborhoods.

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3 OVERALL GOALS FOR LACONIA

While Laconia can build on its three wonderful neighborhood centers, certain common themes unite the city as a whole. The residents of Laconia have several goals for the city, including:



Aerial view of Laconia
Source: www.city.laconia.nh.us/

- Keep the lakes clean, and take better advantage of waterfront areas.
- Create better physical and psychological linkages to unify the three neighborhood centers as one Laconia.
- Preserve small-town charm and historic character.
- Create more year-round employment and economic opportunities.
- Solve parking issues in each area.
- Increase walking and biking atmosphere/opportunities.
- Build a variety of different housing types (town homes, apartments, lofts, and live-work units) to complement single-family detached housing.
- Address general concern about new subdivisions.

At the public meetings, participants expressed the desire to build on the unique qualities of each neighborhood to develop a strategy for a unified vision. They want each community to have its own concept plan, fostering three neighborhoods and one vision. For example, they envision a city where a family might make a weekend of Downtown while spending the week in Weirs Beach; alternatively, the family might break up the hectic times of holiday hustle and bustle on the beach by taking an easy train ride to spa and lunch in Lakeport.

Lakeport could be a small-town local spot with day-destination attractions. Its connection to the lakes, its small intimate character, and its strategic location between the other two communities will draw people's attention. Improvements to its small business area and lakefront activity could make Lakeport a destination for the locals, while attracting a good number of outside visitors to its restaurants, hotels and spas, and specialty shops and businesses. Its authenticity would be crucial for this concept plan.

Weirs Beach could leverage its status as a summertime destination, providing an increased breadth of attractions for the lake-oriented destination. Future improvements could center on the core of the community and add a greater variety of attractions for a wider but still family-oriented audience. Potential infill sites could include a variety of special uses and attractions for this family-friendly, soon-to-be-year-round destination.

Downtown Laconia could be a more vibrant riverfront community by building on its heritage and maintaining its identity as the local urban hub of commerce. As the riverfront development expands, circulation improves, and appropriate businesses develop, Downtown could become a travel destination for small-town shopping, historic educational activities, everyday business, and pleasure.

During the public meetings, a powerful idea evolved: hosting a Festival Week with music, food, wine, and interesting activities that capitalize on local attractions. Arranging festival venues in each community—from shows in the Weirs Dance Hall, to plays in Lakeport’s Masonic Hall, to events in the Colonial Theater—would connect the three communities. If the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railway service could expand from Weirs Beach to Downtown Laconia and Lakeport, it would be a tremendous asset and draw for both visitors and residents. Riding the train could also be a multi-seasonal experience for weekend outings. The train expansion and the Festival Week could help create a unified vision and leverage the different neighborhoods attributes. Laconia could be both an urban place that offers quieter local interest and a place with regional draw as a family entertainment center.



Weirs Beach Iconic Sign

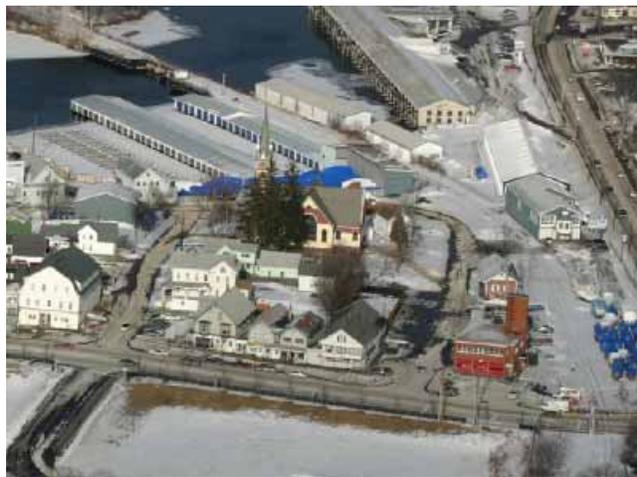


This farmer’s market in Cohasset, Massachusetts, shows how programmed events can enliven public spaces. Public spaces in Downtown, Lakeport, and Weirs Beach could be activated similarly with events of a Festival Week.

4 LAKEPORT: THE HEART OF A SPECIAL COMMUNITY

Lakeport, located between Downtown and Weirs Beach, has evolved from its roots as a neighborhood with industrial character. It is now poised to develop as a niche for water sports and boating for residents and visitors.

Lakeport stakeholders expressed a strong desire to improve local access to the water and attract some additional business activity, transforming the neighborhood from a place people drive by to a place people want to visit.



Aerial view of Lakeport in winter

4.1 Existing Conditions

The community does not capture its appropriate share of business activity from the local economy. Poorly designed sidewalk and parking arrangements, unattractive boat storage around the train station, and deteriorating historic buildings exacerbate this problem. Stakeholders shared the following observations:

- People pass through but do not stop in Lakeport.
- Some of the sidewalks and parking area arrangements need to improve.
- Boat storage around the train station is unattractive and does not add value.
- Historic buildings are slowly deteriorating and need investment.



Old Lakeport

Old photographs of Lakeport support these concerns. At one time, Lakeport presented the fine-grained structure of a small town with a main street at its center. Several civic and religious

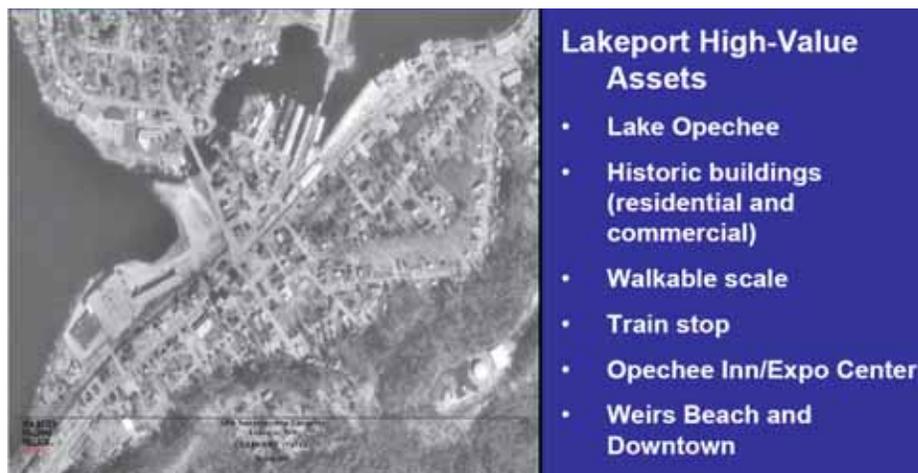
buildings defined its identity. The Elm Street of today has lost its identity as a main street, in part because the firehouse site is a dead zone at the gateway of Elm and Union. Further, the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa does not connect well to the community and so does not assist the Elm Street commercial business frontage. Finally, the waterfront property below the dam and the industrial properties across from Lake Opechee Inn and Spa are underutilized. Development of these critical sites would allow Lakeport to achieve its goal of being a small identifiable community.

Many of the streetscapes do not encourage vibrant energy. For example, Union Street, the main thoroughfare and connection from Downtown and Weirs Beach to Lakeport, is characterized by drive-thru and other strip commercial activity. Encouraging different kinds of businesses would make the neighborhood more vibrant.

4.2 Lakeport Illustrative Development Plan

Lakeport residents envision maintaining its “great residential neighborhood” character, while recapturing the once-bustling energy of their neighborhood. They picture their neighborhood as a walkable, vibrant hub of activity, serving both residents and visitors. They also envision their neighborhood providing public access to the lake, especially for small boats, in an aesthetic setting. The Lakeport community can reinforce the image of Lake Opechee as “the quiet lake,” by embracing its limited boat access from Lake Winnepesaukee and Lake Winnisquam. Having passengers from the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railway disembark in Lakeport more frequently could be part of the long-term vision. An economic development strategy for Lakeport (and for the Railway) might coordinate Railway arrivals with events in the area around the station. See Section 7.4.1 and Appendix E on the Railway Extension for more detailed information.

In response, the Lakeport Illustrative Development Plan builds on this great residential character, the quiet lake, and the local charm through two strategies, large site redevelopment, and streetscape and waterfront improvements.



Aerial of Lakeport and its community assets



Lakeport's Illustrative Development Plan

4.3 Large Site Redevelopment

Lakeport has a considerable number of revitalization opportunities that, if taken advantage of, could help Lakeport overcome its weakened sense of place. Its location between Paugus Bay and Lake Opechee makes it a perfect destination for residents and tourists. Lakeport could also benefit from the redevelopment of larger, strategically located sites, which would allow it to meet the recreation-oriented needs of a broader set of tourists. The underutilized sites offer great potential for a small-town renaissance, including Pasch Landing, the Lakeport marina area, and the intersection of Elm and Union as the “Gateway” to Lakeport.

4.3.1 Pasch Landing

Pasch Landing is an underutilized site, containing low-intensity industrial/office space. The site has untapped ambience and economic potential, as it sits on a bluff overlooking the lake and City. Three design elements are integral to this site’s redevelopment as shown in the Illustrative Development Plan:

- Maximizing the waterfront location of new uses.
- Reducing the prominence of parking by relocating it to internal areas.
- Minimizing runoff to protect the lake.



Pasch Landing lies directly across the lake from the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa.

Other ideas include local canoe/kayak rental, bike trail expansion, and bridge improvement. A kiosk or shop for canoe and kayak rental could support smaller watercraft use on Lake Opechee, diversifying visitor activities in Lakeport, and a spur from the W.O.W. Bike Trail would allow bikers access to the waterfront. (See Appendix D for a map of the W.O.W. Trail.) Finally, improving the bridge would provide better pedestrian linkages to the train station and other parts of Lakeport.



The Gold Street footbridge in Lakeport will be used by the W.O.W. bike trail to cross the Winnepesaukee River just to the east of Elm Street Bridge.

4.3.2 Lakeport Landing Marina Area

The citizens and businesses of Lakeport desire to capture business from the many visitors who store boats at the Lakeport Landing Marina and elsewhere in the area. A combination boating dock and small retail/café spot would be ideal on this site. It could also draw some boaters from Lake Winnepesaukee to Lakeport. A nearby residential area could complement a possible hospitality/commercial development with an increased residential capacity. Later, this point could evolve into another gateway for visitors to the area.



Changes around the Lakeport Landing Marina could help capture more business from area boaters.

4.3.3 Gateway of Elm and Union Streets



The corner of Elm Street and Union Avenue

The redevelopment of this intersection is crucial to Lakeport's success. It could be inviting and aesthetically pleasing, making people want to stop in Lakeport. A focus on the pedestrian experience and the redevelopment of key underutilized sites could encourage a small town character and make Lakeport an identifiable community. A coordinated development effort focusing on the historic train building and the adjacent parcel could transform the Union-Elm Street intersection into a special stop on the trip between the other two larger communities of Downtown Laconia and Weirs Beach.

Currently, an old firehouse dominates this gateway to the Lakeport's core. City-owned, the firehouse is a great opportunity to create an anchor for a new Lakeport identity. One option is conversion to a pocket park or a small public garden, providing much needed public space. Another possibility would be to create a restaurant with seasonal outdoor seating on a rooftop patio. Fire stations can be ideal for distinctive restaurants. For example, the firehouse could



Examples of adaptive firehouse reuse

become Laconia's first brewpub. These possibilities would invite residents and visitors to enjoy Lakeport.

Union Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare. Lakeport is not unique in having a busy thoroughfare in its village center. The traffic that comes with having a highway as a main street is an opportunity, but both transportation and buildings must be designed specifically to convert traffic from a nuisance into a source of energy and customers. Best practices from other communities help illustrate how attractive and well-designed infrastructure can move traffic more efficiently, make the village center highway meet community goals, and make walking safer and more pleasant.³ The combined impact of turning the firehouse site into an anchor site and reactivating Elm Street would highlight Lakeport's new identity.

Several synergistic supplemental projects could enhance the success of this new gateway project. These possibilities include:

- *Small parcel of city-owned land (#367-189-24) behind the fire station:* If the fire station is adaptively reused, it may become landscaped parking or an additional public park space.
- *Long, narrow parcel of land (#367-71-26) between the railroad tracks and Union Avenue:* Near the firehouse, the City owns a long, narrow parcel of land between the railroad tracks and Union Avenue. The City rents this space for boat storage in the winter. If the railroad becomes more active, it may be desirable to use this parcel to provide amenities for people who travel on the train (e.g., a building with restrooms, snack bar, a shaded sitting area, and kiosk with information about local attractions).
- *Large underutilized site by the current train station on Union Avenue:* The convenient location of this site adjacent to the regional railroad, which connects Lakeport to Weirs Beach and Downtown, would make this site a desirable place to live. It could become a residential community (potentially master-planned).
- *Site on the opposite side of Elm Street, southwest of the two existing residential neighborhoods:* A new mixed-use, hotel, hospitality, and commercial development would balance and interface the residential nature of the neighborhoods. Because of its prominent location on the lake, the new development could feature new boat docks for residents and visitors.



The area between Railroad Avenue and Union Avenue

³ State Highway Administration, *When Main Street is a Highway*, State of Maryland, at www.sha.state.md.us/businessWithSHA/projects/ohd/Mainstreet/MainStreet.pdf. 8/28/07.

- *Parcel on the southwest corner of Union and Elm:* The site size, topography, and proximity of the railroad tracks limit options for this corner, which is currently occupied by a small park. However, the new retail envisioned across the tracks on Elm Street could address this site with a mural or windows, activating the corner to some degree and drawing passers-by down Elm Street toward the retail and the lake.

4.4 Streetscape and Waterfront Improvements

Comprehensive streetscape improvements and extended waterfront trails would create strong connections among the new destinations, strengthen pedestrian circulation throughout town, and bring more people to the water. The City could commission a streetscape design plan for the core of Lakeport. This plan could balance pedestrian needs and create lively public spaces while maintaining appropriate vehicular function.

Lakeport stakeholders identified a broad range of street- and streetscape-related concerns as impeding Lakeport in achieving its goals. The following options would help Lakeport make progress in this area:

- Framing a street with buildings of similar mass and continuous frontage are two key factors in enhancing the pedestrian friendliness of a downtown street. Small shops/restaurants, on-street parking, interesting activities, well-placed seating, and trees all help frame the street and generate human activity and vitality. This is reflected on the plan—part of the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa parking is turned into street level retail/restaurant uses on Elm Street. Combined with the existing uses on the other side of Elm Street, this will frame and activate the street.
- Adding a pedestrian walkway with stairs between the new structures on the south side of Elm Street will give guests at the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa a walkway to the rest of Lakeport. The Inn, located along Union Avenue, could connect to the newly renovated Main Street by creating a strong pedestrian path and sharing its large parking lot to support the existing and new retail along Elm Street.



Enhancing Elm Street will connect Lakeport to Lake Opechee, and improve the waterfront experience.

- Capitalizing on the point of land jutting into Lake Opechee from Doris Ray Court, which has excellent waterfront activity potential. A waterfront trail starting on Elm Street or Doris Ray Court could begin at this site and extend beyond the convention center, giving conventioners and Inn and Spa guests the option to stroll along the waterfront. The site also would be ideal for a simple seasonal use, such as a restaurant with outdoor seating or seasonal canoe and kayak rental site.
- Enhancing the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa as a destination for visitors and tourists through increased proximity and access to these local amenities would support the long-term vision for Lakeport.

See Appendix B on Smart Development for more details on streetscape and street design.



Possible lakeside trail or a casual lakeside café site.



The Lake Opechee Inn and Spa

A concern related to streetscape design is the placement of parking. Inadequate parking for some existing businesses is a problem in Lakeport. To accommodate the increased retail traffic that it seeks, while minimizing the impact of parking of the desired urban feel, Lakeport should consider:

- Creating new diagonal parking on Elm Street and on a widened Railroad Avenue. This would serve the new retail and other uses shown on the Illustrative Development plan.
- Sharing underutilized parking.
- Installing new on-street parking and sidewalk buffers to provide convenient, visible access for customers.
- Converting waterfront parking into other uses and using parking capacity at other mixed development sites.

In the longer term, creating a parking district would help the City provide and manage parking as demand increases, without having to meet that demand on each individual parcel. See Appendix F Parking for more details on how Lakeport might implement a district-wide parking plan.

4.5 Priorities for Lakeport

To help Lakeport achieve its goals, the City could prioritize the following:

- Large site development, such as the development of the fire station site.
- Streetscape and waterfront improvement, such as the redesign of Elm Street as a main street, and the waterfront development near Lake Opechee Hotel and Spa.

5 WEIRS BEACH: FUN ON THE WATER FOR ALL SEASONS

With its small beach and long boardwalk, Weirs Beach has a wonderful physical relationship to Lake Winnepesaukee. As a result, Weirs Beach has been a family-friendly lakefront resort for over 50 years. Nonetheless, stakeholders would like their neighborhood to become a multi-seasonal destination. Transitioning Weirs Beach from a summertime vacation spot to a year-round destination will require changes in the uses of many sites and businesses. Successfully making these changes could allow Weirs Beach to accommodate a larger population, with more diverse clientele, over an extended season.



Aerial View of Weirs Beach
Source: www.weirsbeach.com/

5.1 Existing Conditions

Weirs Beach is not capitalizing on its full range of destination opportunities. One major challenge will be developing new types of businesses and lodgings to attract a new group of visitors, while maintaining the energy and economic success of existing events such as Fourth of July week and Bike Week. Some sites are very useful during Bike Week, but less so the rest of the year. An example is the old drive-in site, which is an essential parking and concessions area during Bike Week but is underused the rest of the year. Building on event successes without damaging them is a challenge for Weirs Beach.



Bike Week at Weirs Beach
Source: www.laconiamcweek.com

Currently, Weirs Beach is at risk of having its character change very quickly in ways that are at odds with the community vision. Residents of Weirs Beach want to limit beach erosion and protect the lake's water quality and viewsheds. They also want better pedestrian movement from the beach area to the businesses and attractions across the Aquadoctan Bridge and more peak-season parking options. Current development does not support these goals. A thriving second-home real estate market has spurred new subdivisions. New hotel and retail development already approved beyond the Methodist Circle neighborhood will enlarge the commercial area,

expanding seasonal activity for visitors, but not in a pedestrian-supportive way. Further, several large, prominent parcels are candidates for redevelopment. Accordingly, the people of Weirs Beach are concerned about the potential negative consequences of rapid development, declining vacation rentals, decreasing market share of visitors to the Lakes Region, and the seasonal nature of their neighborhood. Conversely, Weirs Beach has a number of properties in key locations that are unlikely to change in the near future. One example is the Veteran’s property along Lakeside Avenue, which does not add significantly to the activity along the boardwalk. These concerns challenge the community’s ability to change and meet the goals of the Illustrative Development Plan.

5.2 Weirs Beach Illustrative Development Plan

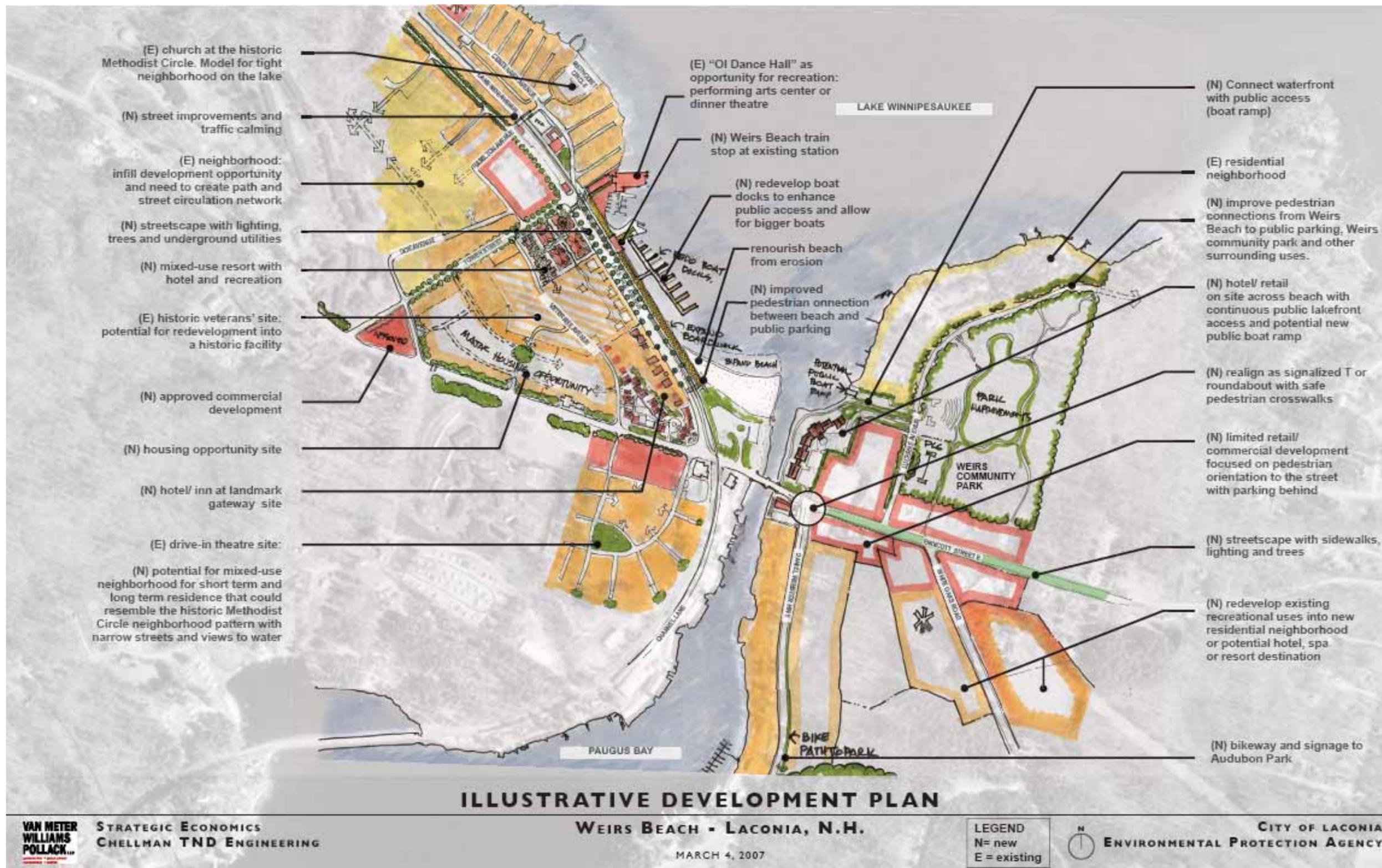
Weirs Beach residents share a vision of their neighborhood as remaining a fun, family-oriented, “three season” resort destination that is the epicenter of Bike Week, a local cultural fixture and economic boon. They envision:

- Improved visitor facilities (e.g., expanded beach and docks, and a fully developed Weirs Beach Community Park).
- Enhanced venues for live performances.
- Increased public park space.
- Expanded tourist season (building on increased local and regional offerings).
- Improved mobility, including more walkable streets and better connectivity between the east and west sides of the Weirs Channel.

A new vision for Weirs Beach can transform its identity from a solely summertime destination into a multi-season destination for a larger year-round community. Elements of the vision include circulation improvements, waterfront enhancements, refined zoning, and gateway development.



Aerial of Weirs Beach and its community assets



Weirs Beach Illustrative Development Plan

5.3 Circulation Improvements

Relatively small road and pedestrian changes would help Weirs Beach realize its vision of improved pedestrian connections and automobile circulation.

The intersection of Route 3 and Route 11 (Endicott Street and Daniel Webster Highway) is a traffic congestion trouble spot, known locally as “malfunction junction.” Its current configuration impedes walking in the area and confuses drivers.⁴ This intersection is a bottleneck during peak season and a safety hazard when low traffic levels allow for fast moving traffic. Existing traffic studies suggest introducing a simple “T” intersection with turn lanes and appropriate signal timing to make the intersection function better and increase safety at pedestrian crossings. Another option for improving the intersection would be a roundabout design with safe pedestrian crosswalks (see adjacent sketch). Redevelopment of the intersection could potentially shift the intersection easterly away from the bridge and enhance pedestrian crossings.



Weirs Beach Road Network



An initial concept sketch of “malfunction junction” redesigned with a roundabout.

The existing bridge presents a safety issue as well. A wider or separate pedestrian and bike facility would enhance the connectivity between areas on either side of the bridge and enhance pedestrian access as well as vehicle circulation. To retain the existing character of the bridge, a new pedestrian and bike bridge might be the right strategy.

⁴ Route 3 runs north/south through the local area, but at this intersection, it is a sweeping left turn (as one travels northerly) over the railroad bridge. Route 11 runs east/west, and the two highways form an approximate “T” intersection. Normally, there would be a stop or yield at the northbound approach on Route 3, but it is absent. However, most drivers slow to a near stop and thereby further congest the intersection. Similarly, the westerly approach has no control for the west-to-south right turn, while the west-to-east straight movement is yield-controlled. The easterly Route 11 approach is stop-controlled.

Currently the pedestrian overall experience is generally unpleasant and potentially risky. To alleviate these problems, 5-10 foot wide sidewalks on both sides of the street could extend in all directions from the intersection of Route 3 and Route 11B. A sidewalk on the eastern side of Route 3 exists, but is not sufficient for such a heavily pedestrian- and car-traveled area.⁵ Sidewalks on both sides of Route 3, street trees, and lighting would greatly improve the walking conditions. Over time, a sidewalk could extend 1 mile northward to Funspot and, eventually, all the way to the junction of Route 3 and Scenic/Watson Road; and the sidewalks along the West side of Weirs Boulevard could be extended to link all the sidewalks.

To make walking easier, large blocks could be broken up with clear pedestrian throughways. Furthermore, the Veterans' Association site could include well-marked pedestrian thoroughfares to give visitors direct access to the beach and Lakeside Avenue. See Appendix B on Smart Development for more details.



Breaking up long blocks with footpath access to Weirs Beach could enhance pedestrian activity. This example is from a beach community in Florida.

⁵ This sidewalk begins at Endicott Rock Park, traverses the Aquadoctan stone bridge, and continues on to the Alpenrose plaza.

5.4 Waterfront Improvements

The Illustrative Development Plan depicts the waterfront area from the east side of the Weirs Channel to the “Ol Dance Hall” undergoing a variety of investments. One idea was a public boat ramp on the east side of Weirs Channel. Given the probable development adjacent to the Aquadoctan Bridge, the boat ramp could be a public/private venture, combining affordable public access with private uses. Another suggestion is to improve the size/configuration of the boat docks. The current configuration does not make efficient use of the dock spaces, resulting in a smaller number of docked watercraft. Maximizing these spaces would help draw more Lakes Region visitors who travel by water.

The people of Weirs Beach are also concerned with the shrinking of the beach. Stormwater runoff and nature have shifted sands toward the jetty on Weirs Channel. Environmental concerns complicate replenishing the beach with additional sand. Nevertheless, the City of Laconia could immediately fix the storm drain near the bathrooms, which clearly contributes to erosion in the area. The drain overflows above the beach during rain events and increases erosion. More details on additional strategies for achieving stormwater runoff reductions at the neighborhood level are in Appendix A Stormwater Strategies.

5.5 Refined Zoning

Zoning in Weirs Beach does not support the nuanced vision of the neighborhood stakeholders described. Approximately 85 percent of the Weirs Beach area is zoned for commercial uses and only 15 percent for residential uses. This means that nearly all of the Weirs Beach area could be developed for tourist-oriented uses. Therefore, refining zoning is a key to the successful implementation of many individual elements in the Illustrative Development Plan. For instance, on the drive-in theater site, the Illustrative Development Plan shows a small-scale, compact mixed-use development with a mix of residential types, narrow streets, and views of the water. If the community agrees with this aspect of the vision, then the zoning could be changed to reflect this preference, increasing the likelihood of its occurrence. See Section 7.2 on Private Incentives and Appendix C Planning Tools for more information on refining the zoning in general.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) POSSIBILITIES

Many of the changes Weirs Beach might undertake will benefit the entire neighborhood and would be good candidates for use of TIF funds. Example projects might include:

- Boat dock expansion.
- Boardwalk enlargement.
- District-wide stormwater control measures implementation.
- Streetscape improvements.
- Signage enhancement.
- Marketing efforts.

Creation of a Weirs Beach TIF district was one of the “quick hit” ideas that came out of the workshop. More information on TIF funding is in Appendix G on Financing Tools.

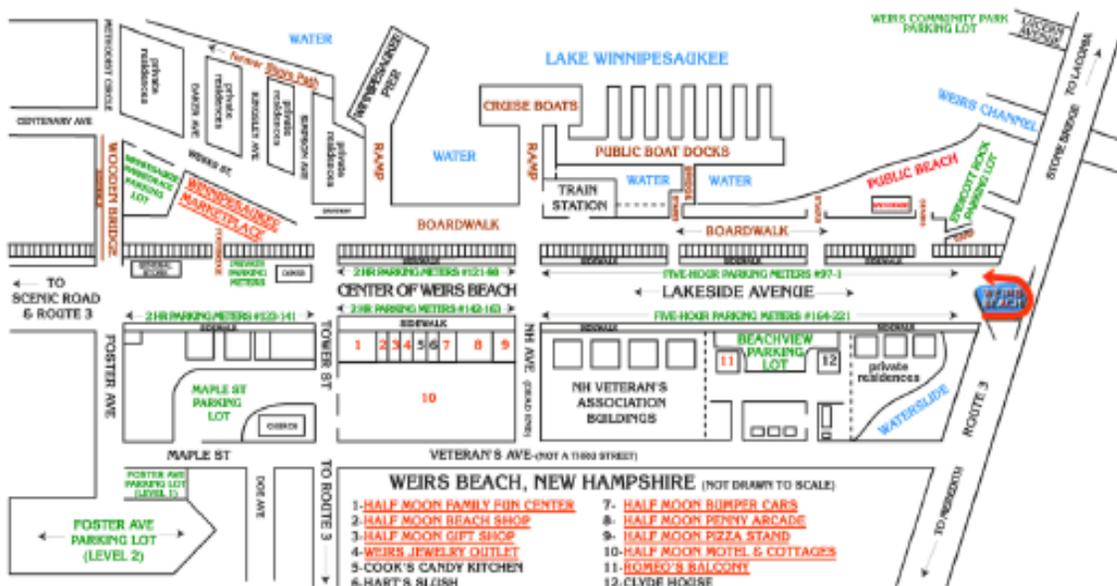
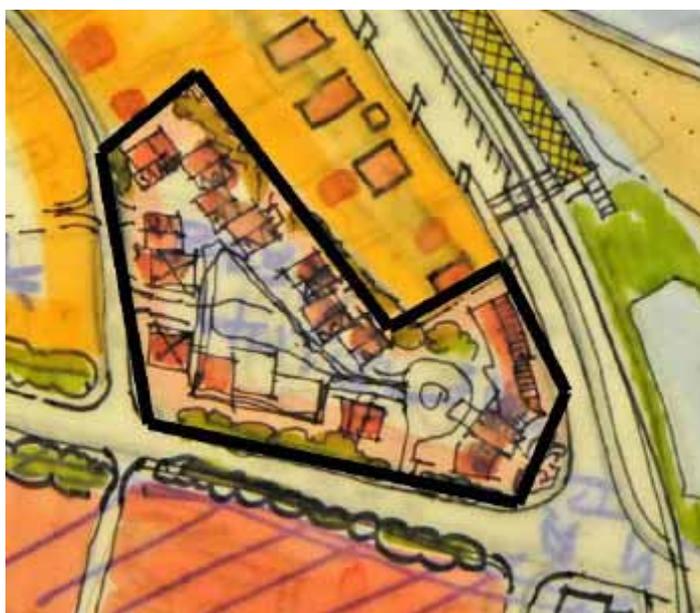


Diagram of Weirs Beach Central Streets
 Source: www.weirsbeach.com

5.6 Gateway and Major Site Development

A gateway site is an entrance or access point to a community, usually signifying a change in the landscape. A gateway can be emphasized in many different ways, such as an impressive boulevard, an arch, artwork, a distinctive building, or an impressive welcome sign. The key gateway site in Weirs Beach presently is the “volcano water slide.” Redevelopment of this gateway would help Weirs Beach become a multi-seasonal location.

The primary spine of Weirs Beach parallels the boardwalk along Lakeside Avenue, which is a unique street that offers development potential. Lakeside Avenue—anchored on one end by the Methodist Circle neighborhood and the Dance Hall and on the other by the volcano water slide—is wide enough for diagonal parking. Its width, lighting, and landscaping allows it to transform into a long public plaza during major events. The interesting character of this street and its great potential could spur new development along the lake.



The site currently occupied by the volcano waterslide (outlined in black here) is perhaps the most prominent in Weirs Beach and serves as a gateway to the neighborhood. Any redevelopment on this site will play a major role in determining the evolving image and feel of Weirs Beach.

Cumulatively, the streetscape, a new anchor hotel, a redefined arcade/dance hall, and the existing beer garden at the entry of the Methodist Circle neighborhood can create a synergy of uses that will attract visitors of all ages.



*Weirs Beach Waterfront – As this image illustrates, parking challenges are not new to the area.
Source: www.weirsbeach.com*

5.6.1 Weirs Dance Hall

The former Weirs Dance Hall could be devoted to more flexible, year-round uses. A great performance venue would help reinvigorate Weirs Beach as a top performing arts locale. Residents mentioned reviving the Ol Dance Hall as a logical place for top acts with its additional waterfront advantage.

5.6.2 Hotel Development

Residents' opinions differ on the desirability, impacts, and likelihood of future hotel development. A market for more hotel space exists, and hotel development is likely in Weirs Beach. A new, higher-end hotel would anchor the community as a year-round destination. For example, a hillside hotel cascading down to retail frontage on Lakeside is an appropriate development strategy for this area. Several large sites could make fine locations for hotels and are likely candidates to change ownership or undergo redevelopment in the near future. Some possible locations for hotels include:

- Two large parcels on either side of White Oak Road, just south of East Endicott Street.
- The site between Interlaken and Weirs Channel.
- The site at the corner of Endicott and Lakeside (the mini golf site with volcano water ride).
- The Veterans Association site.

- The current site of Half Moon Hotel, cottages, and other businesses. Importantly, the last site would provide Weirs Beach with a revived community waterfront.

The Veterans site is in a key location. The City and other property owners will need to work closely to turn the site into a cultural resource and educational opportunity and to integrate it into the larger strategy of economic revitalization. The City and the community should assist the veteran’s organization in master planning new activities on their site.



The image of Weirs Beach waterfront from 1906 shows the coexistence of a landmark hotel with the structures on the NH Veterans Association site.

Source: www.weirsbeach.com



The “New Hotel Weirs” circa 1906 provided a strong anchor for Lakeside Avenue.

Source: www.weirsbeach.com

5.6.3 Drive-In Theater

Across Route 3 from the neighborhood's gateway is a large property, currently used as a drive-in theater. As mentioned earlier, this site is a major resource for parking and a concession area for the events surrounding Bike Week. However, the site is large enough to accommodate a major commercial or residential development. By developing a new mixed-use neighborhood with convenience retail along Channel Lane, this strategic property could become a community modeled after the Methodist Circle neighborhood. This type of fine-grained cottage community could attract second home or full-time residents. Furthermore, it could address the shortage of vacation rental properties and provide an attractive alternative to the more common subdivision. Such a residential development could help Weirs Beach transition from being a summer-only destination into a year-round neighborhood.



The entrance to Methodist Circle as it appears today.

Source: www.winnipesaukee.com

This historic image shows examples of cottages in the Methodist Circle neighborhood.

Source: www.winnipesaukee.com

5.7 Priorities for Weirs Beach

To help Weirs Beach achieve its goals, the City could prioritize the following:

- Circulation improvements, such as enhancing the transportation flow of Weirs Beach to the rest of Laconia, via Main Street and key intersections.
- Waterfront improvements, such as fixing the storm drain and reconfiguring the boat docks.
- Refined zoning, such as creating multiple zoning designations.
- Encourage high quality gateway development that can attract a year-round tourist clientele.
- Use Stormwater Strategies (described in Appendix A) to help protect its assets and qualities residents and visitors value about Weirs Beach.

6 DOWNTOWN LACONIA: REDISCOVERING MAIN STREET

Downtown Laconia has many features of a classic New England downtown district. It has distinctive architecture and several nicely restored historic buildings. Property owners and organizations are interested in working with each other and the City to improve the area. Much of Laconia's historic downtown core remains intact, with a genuine Main Street and a critical mass of civic and renovated mill buildings. Laconia is well-positioned to take advantage of these aspects of downtown and help spur further reinvestment and improvements to the downtown.



The public library in downtown Laconia.

6.1 Existing Conditions

Over the course of the three-day workshop, the Consultant Team worked with Downtown business owners and other stakeholders to elicit further details on goals, visions, and concerns for future development. A desire to enhance the business environment while preserving the small town character and charm of the downtown area was a focal point of discussion.

Downtown has many community assets with which to pursue the stakeholders' goals. Nevertheless, problems with street circulation and the lack of the river's prominence in the Downtown experience are challenges. Some existing conditions include:

- Deteriorating historic buildings, such as the Colonial Theater.
- Downtown not currently perceived as a visible destination spot.
- Insufficient office and housing options.
- Safety concerns.
- Reduced access to the riverfront and evening uses.
- Uninviting streetscapes.

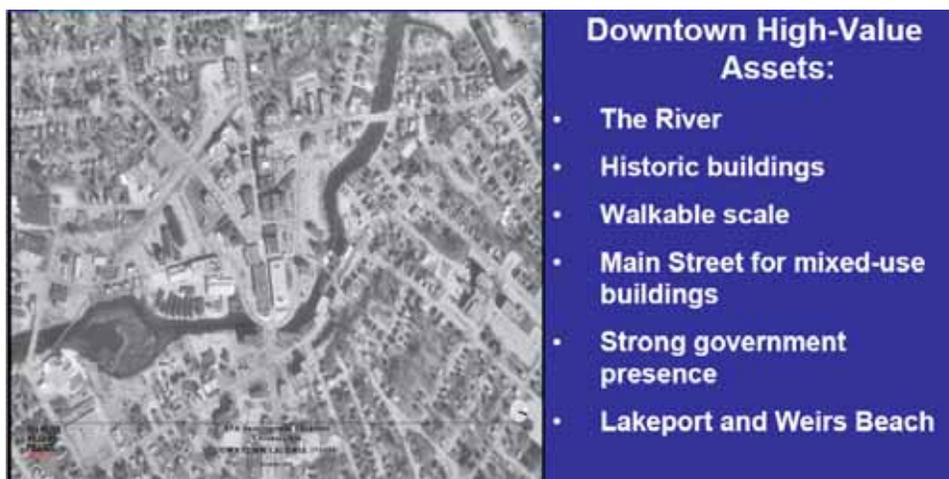
Traffic circulation issues are a major character-defining feature of Downtown. The use of one-way streets minimizes smooth traffic flow, making both the automobile and the pedestrian experiences more difficult. Furthermore, fast moving routes with wide-radius turns and complex intersections encourage high travel speeds, create barriers to pedestrians and bicycles, and disconnect the surrounding residential neighborhoods from Downtown. Many buildings in Downtown are oriented to the parking lots rather than to the pedestrian paths. This combination

creates a downtown environment that is not conducive to easy access by cars or mixed-use, pedestrian, and commercial activity.

6.2 Laconia Downtown Illustrative Development Plan

The residents of Downtown envision their neighborhood as a high quality, walkable, urban neighborhood with increased riverfront orientation. This vision includes greater diversity of residential and commercial spaces and shared amenities, such as parking and open space. Downtown residents want more market-rate housing for small households, restaurants with outdoor dining, professional office space, lifestyle retail, and the revival of arts and entertainment

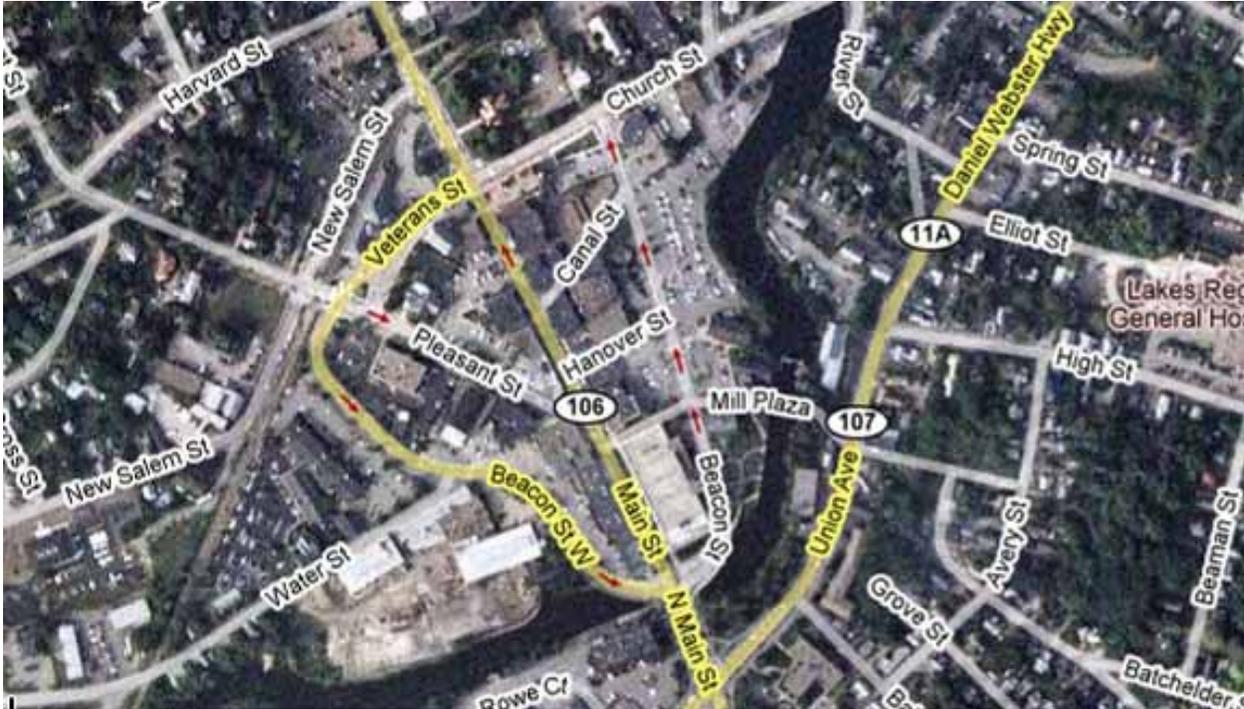
venues. Residents also envision renovating a greater number of historic buildings, thereby increasing heritage tourism. Finally, the people of Downtown envision a strong government presence, and increased institutional and medical uses.



Aerial of Downtown Laconia and its community assets

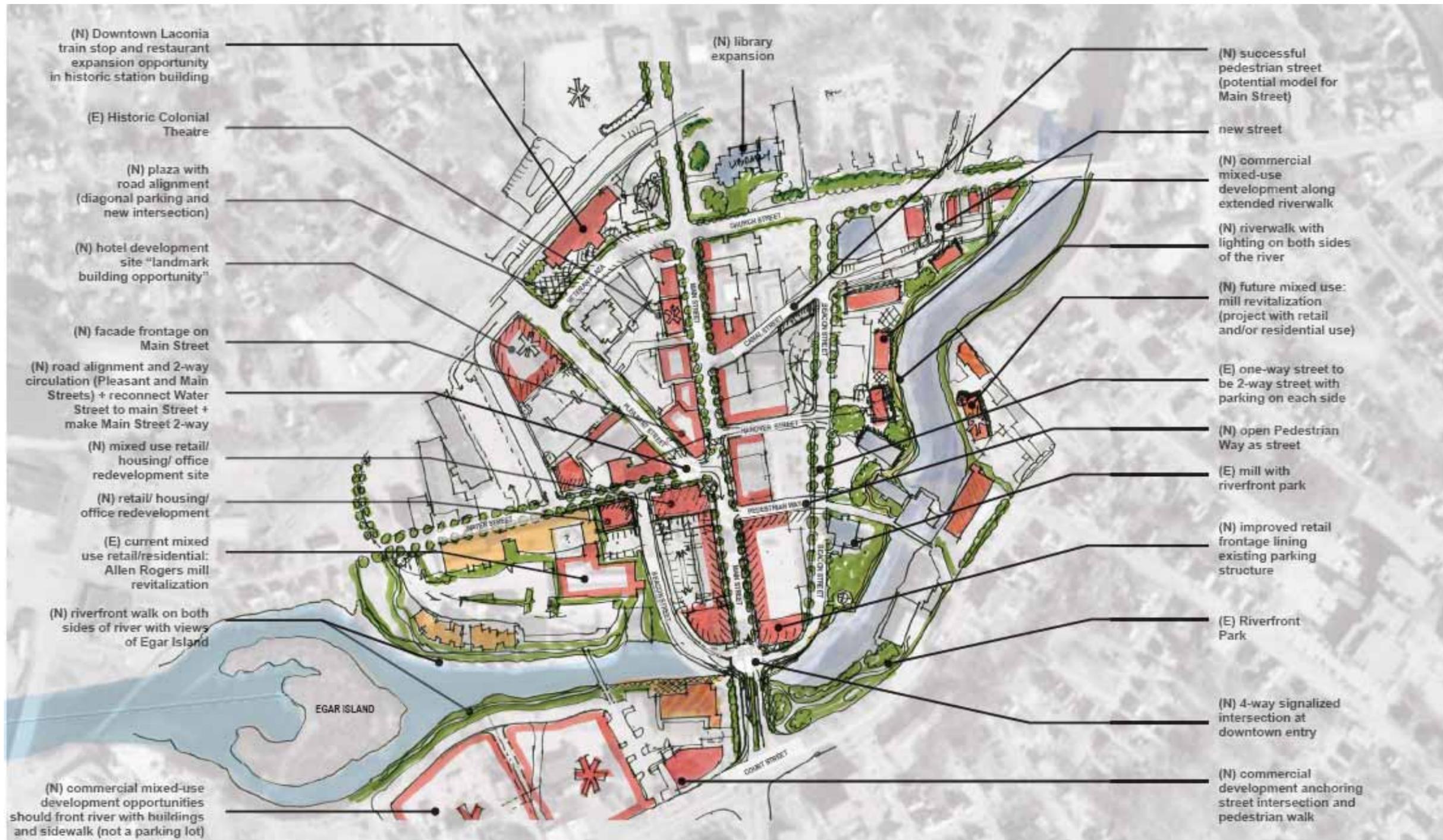
As the heart and spine of Downtown, Main Street can anchor a new gateway development, which could take better advantage of the existing parking structure near the southern end of Main Street. This would provide a stronger, more appealing entrance to Downtown and connect the new gateway to the historic train depot and the public library, which anchor the northern end of Main Street.

To maintain Downtown as the focus of business in the City, the entire area will need to solicit additional office, cultural, and small business opportunities. It will also be important to extend the pattern of Downtown beyond the riverbanks. As new mixed-use and residential developments come to fruition, new businesses, such as restaurants and special entertainment venues will likely locate in Downtown.



Existing Downtown streets and circulation

Private development or redevelopment of key gateway sites will draw mixed-use and residential projects into Downtown and will build an added constituency for the new character and quality of life. The City can undertake a variety of physical changes to reinforce and encourage future private development. Specifically, circulation and streetscape improvements, a Riverwalk emphasis, parking enhancements, city-owned redevelopment, and historic buildings restoration are useful priority areas for Downtown Laconia to consider.



ILLUSTRATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN



STRATEGIC ECONOMICS
CHELLMAN TND ENGINEERING

DOWNTOWN LACONIA - LACONIA, N.H.
MARCH 4, 2007

LEGEND
N= new
E = existing



CITY OF LACONIA
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

6.3 Circulation and Streetscape Improvements

Downtown stakeholders agreed that improving traffic flow was their priority issue. They wanted to transform the Downtown circulation from major, one-way thoroughfares into a network of two-way streets. These changes would focus Downtown and allow for a better pedestrian environment as well as safer streets for walking, biking, and driving. Two primary circulation changes can occur Downtown.

- *At the intersection of Main Street and the river bridge:* A new 4-stop intersection would create a gateway as the primary entry into Downtown. The redevelopment of the southern end of Main Street would allow for two-way circulation and a four-way stop signal.
- *At the northern end of Main Street at the Rail Depot:* The realignment of streets and intersections could make Veteran Plaza a new public space that fronts the depot. The plaza will be an anchor for Main Street and will allow for added development and expansion of outdoor entertainment at the depot. Main Street will have the opportunity to hone its niche in entertainment and specialty retail as well as its traditional services for the surrounding neighborhoods. Creating some distance between the intersection and the railroad tracks enhances safety. New on-street diagonal parking would increase the number of easy-to-find, convenient spaces. This new parking and the street alignment would simplify the geometry of the intersection, making it safer for pedestrians and motorists, and create a wider sidewalk space suitable for outdoor café seating and other uses in front of the old depot building.



This rendering shows a potential redesign near the intersection of Veterans St. and Pleasant St. In this scenario, angled on-street parking and new public space is created along Veterans Street

Some other suggestions for street circulation include:

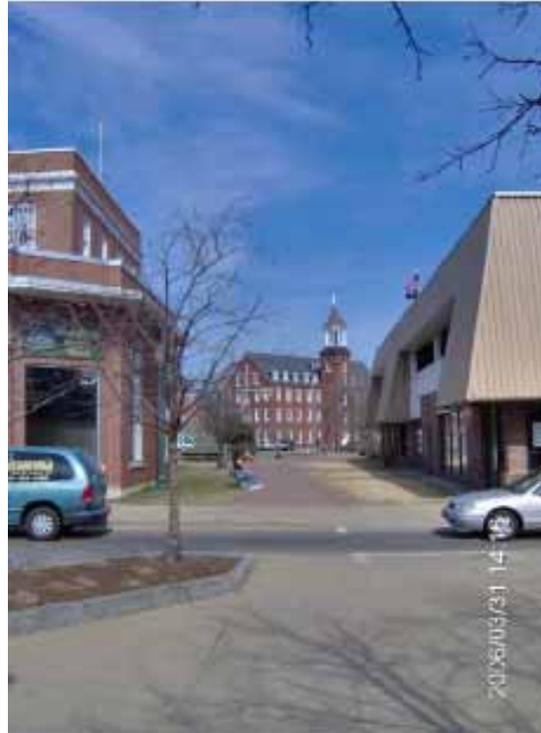
- *New extension of Canal Street aligning with Messer Street:* A new extension of Canal Street would improve traffic flow and pedestrian access to Main Street. It would also create opportunities for productive street uses on both Church Street and the new Canal Street. Further engineering studies would confirm the possibility of this suggestion.



Suggested new extension of Canal Street



This rendering depicts a potential realignment of streets at the intersection of Beacon Street, West and Water Street. This approach reconnects Water Street with Main Street.



This pedestrian-only passage to Mill Plaza is opened to auto traffic in the Illustrative Development Plan for Downtown Laconia.

- *New connection for Beacon Street, West and Water Street:* Presently, Water Street does not connect to Main Street, and walking can be unsafe. The Illustrative Development Plan reconnects Water Street with Main Street and creates two new “T” intersections. These changes improve traffic flow and remove the high-speed, suburban geometry on Beacon Street, West.
- *Between Main Street and Beacon Street, East, allow automobile access on Mill Plaza:* Opening this street to car traffic will help alleviate some of the existing circulation problems in the Downtown. A well-designed street will accommodate pedestrians and cars comfortably. Restoring connectivity is important to the overall circulation of the district. Further study would be needed to determine if there is adequate space between buildings to implement this suggestion.

Downtown could benefit from an overall plan to improve streetscapes in the district. A comprehensive plan with standards for streetscapes and prioritizing actions would be beneficial. As new development occurs, part of the approval process could include conditions stipulating the proper streetscape elements. Some basic features of a good streetscape include street trees, good crosswalks, attractive street furniture, and ample sidewalks. See Section 7 for Development Strategies in Laconia, Appendix B Smart Development, and Appendix C Planning Tools.



In the Illustrative Development Plan, buildings rather than surface parking enjoy river views.

6.4 Riverwalk Emphasis

Although the riverfront is currently transforming, to support continued transformation the City could formally address the desire for a continuous riverfront walk and bike route along each side of the river. The river would be a more visible part of Downtown if a separate Riverwalk Plan were used to maximize public access to the river and Downtown. The extension and development of a wide, well-lit, multi-use path should be a part of any riverfront development. As critical as the path, the development along it should line the path with activities serving residents and businesses alike.

A master plan including the route, design, materials, lighting, and seating and other furnishings will provide direction for the City and future private developers to build this important amenity in keeping with what Downtown stakeholders want. A higher-end restaurant with river views would offer a new dining option Downtown (e.g., an attractive restaurant on top of the parking garage). Over time, new mixed-use development could begin to fill some key areas across and adjacent to the river. A new pedestrian bridge on the west side of Main Street, near the Allen-Rogers Mill condominiums, would give Downtown better connectivity. Union Street, and the commercial activity on the other side of the river, could either enhance or detract from Downtown's waterfront image. It is critically important that development on that side of the river use the same principles, including a continuous riverfront trail, a grid network of streets and mixed-use buildings, preservation of historic structures, and development oriented toward streets and pedestrian walks. The Riverwalk should be an amenity and a pleasure in the Downtown area.



An increasing number of towns are reclaiming land adjacent to the water to create great places for people to spend time. Several examples are shown here.

6.5 Parking Enhancements

Parking is crucial to the success of redevelopment efforts. Communities and developers recognize that compact, mixed-use, walkable places need parking to thrive. Retail activity in particular requires some convenient parking spaces that can handle high turnover. The need for parking may shift throughout the day as people come to shop, employees head to work, and residents go out for the evening. Retail and commercial success of the area requires adequate and convenient parking. However, too much parking, or parking that dominates the landscape, can destroy community character, and detract from the identity and strengths of Downtown. Surface parking lots also create unpleasant areas to spend time and generate significant polluted runoff.

In a successful downtown, surface parking occurs primarily on the streets. Reaching that state would require the City to phase out surface parking lots and institute a moratorium on new surface lot construction in Downtown.

The parking garage is the most prominent structure on Main Street from the south and does not convey the image Laconia envisions for the future of Downtown. The faces of the structure on Beacon Street, East and Main Street could better mimic the scale and look of other retail in the Downtown area. Many communities have benefited from wrapping such structures with other uses or other measures that lessen the visual impact of massive parking structures. Similarly, improving the retail frontage in the base of the parking garage or adding high-end dining with river views to the top floor of the garage would help revitalize Main Street.

Using riverfront and visible Downtown property for parking wastes a natural and economic asset. Some strategies provide needed parking without prioritizing it, including allowing parking needs to be met off-site and sharing that off-site parking. To get the urban form that Downtown wants, parking Downtown will need to be shared as much as possible. Forcing property owners to provide



A variety of techniques can be used to improve the aesthetics of parking structures. Surprisingly, all of these images are parking garages.

parking on each parcel makes it very difficult to create a strong pedestrian atmosphere for Downtown. Seeking uses that need the most parking in the evenings would help maximize sharing parking spaces since there is currently excess unused parking at night. There is currently some excess parking even at peak daytime hours, as demonstrated by the empty top floor of the parking garage. Laconia should consider conducting a thorough professional parking study, which will examine the best means and methods to share parking in the Downtown. See Appendix F for a broader discussion of parking strategies to consider.⁶

6.6 City-owned Redevelopment Opportunities

Presently, the City owns three sizeable surface parking lots. The largest of these (parcel #432-15-34) is adjacent to City Hall and consists of nearly two acres of land that includes frontage on the river. As shown on the Illustrative Development Plan, the City could consider redeveloping the riverfront portion of this parcel as a mixed-use development with a riverwalk that extends from Belknap Mill to Church Street.



A view of the restored Belknap Mill building.

Another City-owned surface parking lot comprises much of the center portion of the block between Main and Pleasant Street. At nearly an acre in size, this parcel (parcel #432-186-5) takes up prime street frontage on Main Street and a significant length of the frontage on Pleasant Street. The Main Street portion of the site should become a mixed-use development. New buildings should mirror other buildings along the street in scale and design. Such buildings would restore a continuous building frontage along the street, which is important for pedestrians. Framing a street with buildings of similar mass and continuous frontage are two key factors in enhancing the pedestrian friendliness of a downtown street.

The third large City-owned surface parking lot is located at the bottom of Beacon Street (parcel #442-15-3), across from the Allen-Rogers Mill and behind the stores at the foot of Main Street. At $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre, this parking lot is underutilized. In its current condition, it presents a pedestrian-unfriendly face to the Beacon Street West development. Reconfiguration of Beacon Street, West, as shown on the Illustrative Development Plan, would use some of this parking lot. Additionally, the City should consider streetscape changes on Beacon Street to make this parking area more pedestrian friendly, such as a sidewalk addition on the east side of Beacon Street and limiting the access to one entrance and exit; this will reduce the number of pedestrian-vehicle conflicts, which is increasingly important as use of the mill grows.

⁶ For more information, see also EPA's *Parking Spaces/Community Places: Finding the Balance Through Smart Growth Solutions*, available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/EPAParkingSpaces06.pdf. The report provides information on a wide range of parking strategies and communities that have implemented those strategies.

6.7 Historic Building Restoration

Laconia has done a great job restoring and adaptively reusing a number of distinctive historic buildings. Downtown could use more residents, market-rate housing, and preservation of historic buildings. Combine all three of those and there is an excellent environment for successful and beautiful restorations. Compare the look and feel of the mill buildings and other historic structures to the buildings that were constructed in the last several decades. The older structures fit into the future vision of Downtown better than the more recent structures and should be used to full advantage. In order to make reuse of the mills financially feasible, the City should consider all options available including reducing parking requirements, helping prospective developers secure brownfield funding, and streamlining the development approval process.

6.8 Priorities for Downtown

To help Downtown achieve its goals, the City could prioritize the following:

- Circulation and streetscape improvements, such as the installation of recommended road configurations and calming features (e.g. wide sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and street trees); and the implementation of regulations and/or guidelines that require the front exterior wall of buildings on designated streets to coincide in a line that eliminates large parking areas lining the streets and promotes buildings oriented to the street.
- Riverwalk emphasis, such as the codification of a master plan illustrating particular building locations to develop a street wall or emphasize a vista.
- Parking enhancements, such as the completion of an overall parking plan that minimizes the need for on-site parking within the Downtown core area by providing aggregated parking and parking on city streets. This plan should include a strategy for future parking financing.
- City-owned redevelopment opportunities, such as surface lot conversion.
- Historic building restoration, such as the Belknap Mill, Allen Rogers, and Library renovation projects.

7 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN LACONIA

Using the overall goals for Laconia and the neighborhood Illustrative Development Plans, the Consultant Team identified several strategies Laconia could use to implement these goals. The four main prioritized strategies are public realm improvements, private incentives, implementation of Illustrative Development Plans, and transportation enhancements.

7.1 Public Realm Improvements

This strategy focuses on changes to public space, including streetscape improvement, traffic changes, sidewalk installation, city-property development, and parking. Generally, implementing these changes will require either city or state actions, and can catalyze private investment.

Examples include the Downtown street realignment, the fire station property development in Lakeport, and boat docking changes in Weirs Beach. Each Illustrative Development Plan details these ideas for the different neighborhoods.

Laconia could better connect its street network. For example, Laconia could require streets in new subdivisions to connect to existing subdivisions by revising the subdivision ordinance. Laconia could also make a clear policy statement against incremental closing of residential streets. Many jurisdictions have adopted the policy that they will not close any street except under truly exceptional circumstances (see adjacent text box about Arlington, VA).

As noted in the other sections, many current streets and streetscapes make it difficult to achieve Laconia's vision. Some of these difficulties include:

HOW ARLINGTON, VA ADDRESSED STREET CONCERNS

Arlington's master transportation plan includes policies for maintaining and increasing street network connectivity, including:

- Encourage the development of new streets as part of redevelopment of large blocks (greater than 600 feet in length) and wherever else a new street could reduce congestion or make traffic circulation and building access more efficient.
- Require new streets, whenever possible, to connect on both ends to other streets or public alleys.
- Discourage closure of existing routes (including street closure, conversion to one-way travel, turn restrictions, or other connectivity degradations), unless suitable replacements provided will not adversely affect adjacent streets.
- Reopen previously closed streets where it can be determined that such reconnections can enhance travel flow without adversely affecting the safety or livability of adjacent streets.

Traffic calming and street redesign can also insulate some neighborhoods from commercial traffic.

Source:

www.arlingtonva.us/departments/EnvironmentalServices/dot/planning/mplan/mtp/images/2nd%20Draft/Streets%20Plan%20November%20version.pdf

- Traffic speeds are often too high for the setting.
- Some streets are much wider than needed.
- Parking is inadequate in some places and overabundant in others.
- Sidewalk networks are incomplete or inadequate.
- Streets do not accommodate easy, safe bicycling.
- Streets lack landscaping, planters, street furniture, planting strips, or tree wells to create ambiance and shade for pedestrians.
- Neighborhood destinations are not well connected (e.g., it is extremely difficult to walk from the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa to other parts of Lakeport).
- Street width, lack of crosswalks, and street geometry cause difficulty crossing the street, even at key intersections.
- Inadequate lighting raises nighttime safety concerns.

Streets are public spaces that influence neighborhood character. Street design can support pedestrians, bicycles, local retailers, and residents while accommodating automobile traffic. Changes to the streetscape in Laconia could include the following:

- Requiring sidewalks at least four feet wide in all new developments, wider in retail areas.
- Setting standards for pedestrian-



Here is a pleasant pedestrian environment. The benches provide people with a place to rest and the planters provide some shade and an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. Bicycle parking is available. All of these facilities separate the sidewalk from the roadway.

Source: www.pedbikeimages.org/ Reed Huegerich



Two people take a rest on a bench. Street furniture can make the walking experience more enjoyable in a downtown area.

Source: www.pedbikeimages.org/ Annie Lux

friendly design for each street type in the area.

- Coordinating and prioritizing planned transportation improvements and/or new development projects.
- Encouraging walking with shade trees, lighting, and street furniture in pedestrian areas.
- Determining and designating streets that require on-street parking and sidewalk-planting strips next to the street and/or a short or zero setback/build-to line up to the building.
- Identifying intersections that need special treatment for pedestrian crossings (e.g., all four directions at the intersection of Union and Elm in Lakeport).
- Connecting neighborhood destinations with sidewalks.
- Creating flexibility in design for possible increased population densities.

See also the street and streetscape sections in Appendix B on Smart Design.

7.2 Private Incentives

Providing more predictability and a level of certainty attracts private sector investment. Accordingly, Laconia can signal the private sector by creating a prioritized list for planned public investment in its three core neighborhoods. The Illustrative Development Plans for Weirs Beach, Downtown, and Lakeport will help translate principles expressed in the Master Plan and abstractions in the zoning code into a clear picture of the community's desired development. Incentives for business and property owners to develop should be consistent with each community's Illustrative Development Plan, aligning development proposals with each neighborhood's specific vision and goals.

Some possible projects that encourage the use of incentives include development of a hotel in Weirs Beach and the redevelopment of Lakeport gateway sites combined with the conversion of Main Street into a two-way street in Downtown. Private incentive tools include financial incentives, Business Improvement District (BID) creation, and other financial assistance from the City or other governmental organizations. The City's leaders should work in close collaboration with private property owners to support specific actions, and the City should expedite approvals for quality developments. The City should also work with landowners to promote and advertise quality infill development opportunities within its communities to attract quality developers who wish to be part of this type of project.

7.3 Implementation of Illustrative Development Plans

Laconia can use three primary regulatory tools to implement the Illustrative Development Plans: the codification of the Illustrative Development Plans, the subdivision ordinance, and zoning regulations.

7.3.1 Codification of the Illustrative Development Plans

A logical next step for Laconia is to decide if the Illustrative Development Plans presented in this report capture the City’s goals for its core neighborhoods. If they do, legal codification of the Illustrative Development Plans would demonstrate a strong civic and legal commitment to the Plans. A legal development plan is important to a successful vision because through it, the community’s wishes become legal requirements. It is important that the goals and intentions of the community, as captured in the Illustrative Development Plans, be codified in each regulatory area. The Illustrative Development Plans in this report are examples of necessary starting points for this process. If the City believes that they represent potential solutions to the challenges facing the city, then the City could codify them. The important point here is that in order to get a city that looks like its vision, the vision must be put on paper, adopted, illustrated, and codified.

7.3.2 The Subdivision Ordinance

To implement the Illustrative Development Plans, several regulations in the subdivision ordinance will need to be modified. The regulations currently allow relatively large-lot, single-family home subdivisions (examples exist on the periphery of Weirs Beach). The ordinance could provide an alternative set of development standards so subdivisions within the Weirs Beach core area (shown on the Illustrative Development Plan) can be developed in small cottage clusters or a neighborhood akin to the Methodist Circle community. These would be of higher density and a different character than the current Subdivision Standards allow. The subdivision regulations could also require, among other things, new street standards to allow for smaller streets with different materials, which help create neighborhood and community character.

Potential subdivision ordinance revisions, discussed elsewhere in the report, include:

- Require better-connected street networks.
- Refine street designs (e.g., allow narrower lanes).
- Promote sidewalks on both sides of streets.
- Endorse lots sized for cottages in some areas.
- Allow Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Clarify stormwater strategies.
- Adopt a “viewshed protection” ordinance.

A subdivision is different from a neighborhood. A neighborhood contains mixed-uses, activity centers for civic and commercial uses, outdoor public spaces such as squares or greens, and a range of residential densities that provide more choice in housing types than typical subdivisions composed entirely of single-family homes. The residents of Laconia overwhelmingly prefer neighborhoods. Changes to the subdivision ordinance would help align development rules with this preference. See Appendix C Planning Tools for more information.

7.3.3 Zoning Regulations

The zoning regulations should match the community's review style and enable the community to maintain consistency with its vision. For example, much of the Weirs Beach community consists of large, unique parcels, which are difficult to categorize in a form-based code matrix. As the development programs for these sites become better defined, the zoning regulations will need flexibility to allow for the use of unique design principles for this area. A Planned Unit Development (PUD) or master plan development process might provide greater flexibility for development of large, important parcels. Additional development regulations, which are aligned with the Illustrative Development Plan's goals for these particular sites, could be included under a new PUD zoning designation. Flexibility with greater explicit direction within a PUD process is common among a wide variety of jurisdictions. The regulations needed to get each neighborhood the development it wants are not one-size-fits-all.

Implementation of the tools to promote change is a process in itself. It helps to have community education with the development process. The more direct and explicit the vision can be, the more the regulations can direct development toward a specific outcome.

Lakeport

Due to its size and limited number of parcels, Lakeport has a unique opportunity to use a master plan as a key part of its implementation strategy. A set of regulations would be less effective than a strong development and master plan to guide the City landowners and development community. It should articulate primary design principles and goals, which include relationship to the existing neighborhood, public access to the lake, and a variety of smaller buildings that fit the character of the area.

Weirs Beach

Weirs Beach is not well suited for a single regulatory strategy. Instead, the area needs a variety of zoning designations that are consistent with the Weirs Beach Illustrative Development Plan. Currently, nearly all of Weirs Beach is designated for "Tourist-based Commercial" uses, including questionable designations in areas such as the Methodist Circle. The zoning regulations need to be of a finer grain and distinguish between commercial and residential properties, hotel and mixed-use designations, and tourist-oriented operations. Furthermore, different areas of larger parcels might be designated for different uses. To promote change, regulations could allow temporarily non-conforming uses, which are likely to arise due to changed designations.

Downtown

Downtown has a strong traditional street and building pattern. Downtown needs most to guard against deterioration caused by new developments by enforcing the following principles: minimizing surface parking, and having buildings that relate to the street and are of the appropriate use and design character.

7.4 Transportation

Currently, cars are the only realistic mode of travel between the three neighborhood centers. Laconia should consider enhancing street, bike, and Railway connections between the neighborhoods.

7.4.1 Rail Connection

The Consultant Team felt that the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railway represented a major opportunity for Laconia. Extension of the Railway to Downtown would move the city toward many of the goals expressed during the workshop. A train connection linking the three neighborhood centers could help define the Laconia experience for many visitors. While some barriers to implementing the idea exist, they are surmountable. Therefore, Laconia should consider discussions with the Railway owners about this possibility.⁷



The Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad train pulls into Weirs Beach station.

Source: www.hoborr.com/winni.html

Weirs Beach and Lakeport both have operating train stations, but the status of Lakeport's station was less clear during the workshop. The Consultant Team has since learned that the train currently only travels into Lakeport during Bike Week. The drawbridge between Lakeport and Weirs Beach is functional, but the Railway operators felt it causes delays. Having passengers from the Railway disembark in Lakeport more frequently is part of the long-term vision expressed in this plan. The Railway operators might be open to stopping in Lakeport more frequently if such stops could be coordinated with an activity or event in Lakeport, which would boost ridership and income for the Railway. An economic development strategy for Lakeport (and for the Railway) might consider coordinating Railway arrivals with events in the area around the station. See Appendix E on Railway Extension for more details.

7.4.2 Better Bike/Pedestrian Connections

The Lakes Region Planning Commission approved the Lakes Region Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2006. As part of the plan, the Commission is working with communities to construct a region-wide connector of multi-use trails to be completed in 2017. This regional trail system will connect Meredith to Lebanon by way of Laconia. Many stakeholders in Laconia were unaware of this effort. The Laconia section, known as the "W.O.W." trail



Footbridge in Weirs Beach over the railroad tracks

⁷ The Railway is owned by Ben and Brenda Clark of Fast Track Railroad Consultants L.L.C.

(because it will link Lakes Winnisquam, Opechee, and Winnepesaukee), will be a paved, 9-mile long, multi-use trail. It will also link Lakeport, Weirs Beach, and Downtown.

Prioritizing and accelerating completion of the Laconia portions of the trail would support multiple aspects of the three neighborhoods' visions. Maintaining and increasing the bike and pedestrian network would also reap economic dividends. The W.O.W. Trail (and the larger regional connector trail system) will be a year-round amenity to stimulate tourist and economic activity during the non-summer season. Furthermore, the W.O.W. Trail will be a tourist amenity, appeal to residents of all ages, and attract more professionals to live and work in Laconia. See Appendix D Bike/Pedestrian Pathways Improvement for details about the barriers, potential roles for Laconia, and resources for moving forward.



Completion of the W.O.W. trail in Laconia would benefit residents and visitors alike.

APPENDIX A: STORMWATER STRATEGIES

Many Laconia residents expressed concerns about the possibility of stormwater runoff from development contaminating the City's vitally important lakes, rivers, and streams. This need is particularly acute in Laconia, given that the City's "sense of community and economic backbone is derived from its waterfront areas and natural landscapes."⁸ Laconia could implement numerous stormwater management strategies protecting the lakes while meeting its economic development goals.

Water protection strategies cover three scales: (1) the region or larger watershed area, (2) the community or neighborhood, and (3) the site or block. The watershed scale usually affects the location and character of development. Community level measures, such as road width requirements, often transcend specific development sites and apply throughout a neighborhood. Finally, site-specific stormwater strategies, such as rain gardens and infiltration areas, are localized.⁹ Some strategies apply at several scales. For instance, maximizing infiltration opportunities can occur at the neighborhood and site levels. A comprehensive stormwater management approach for the city and its region will help protect all water bodies in the region at all levels.



Runoff from impervious surfaces is one large source of stormwater contamination.

Regional Stormwater Approaches

Land development directly affects lakes and rivers.¹⁰ Residential and commercial developments create impervious surfaces and compacted soils that filter less water and increase surface runoff. These changes can increase the volume and velocity of runoff, and the frequency and severity of flooding and peak storm flows. Typical stormwater contaminants can include sediment from improperly managed construction sites; oil, gasoline, road salt, and sand from streets and parking lots; and pesticides, fertilizers, pet waste, and litter from residential and commercial areas. These contaminants can clog streams and degrade the quality of waters for recreation and drinking water and the habitat for fish and wildlife.¹¹ Limiting or minimizing the amount of disturbed land

⁸ Laconia Master Plan, 2006.

⁹ Infiltration means allowing stormwater to soak into the ground.

¹⁰ EPA, 2006, *Protecting Water Resources with Higher Density Development*, EPA 231-R-06-001, available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/publications.htm. 8/27/07. See also Arnold, C., and C. J. Gibbons, 1996, *Impervious Surface Coverage: The Emergence of a Key Environmental Indicator*. Journal of the American Planning Association, 62.2: 243-258.

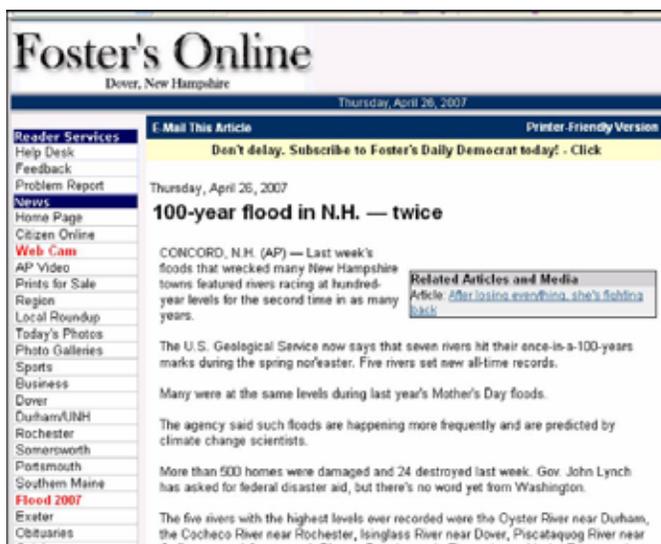
¹¹ Schueler, Tom, 2000, *Compaction of Urban Soil*, available at http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/management/files/sq_utn_2.pdf. 8/27/07.

and impervious cover can help protect water quality.

Three primary land use strategies Laconia could use to protect water resources include:

- Preserve large, continuous areas of absorbent open space and natural lands.
- Protect critical ecological areas, such as wetlands, floodplains, groundwater recharge areas, and riparian corridors.
- Minimize overall land disturbance and impervious surface associated with development.

For guidance on how to protect water resources while allowing development, see EPA's *Protecting Water Resources with Higher-Density Development*, which helps communities understand the impacts of high- and low-density development on water resources.¹² The report notes that two key factors not generally taken into account are: (1) the land-consumptive nature of low-density development and (2) the other infrastructure necessary to support dispersed, low density uses. It concludes that increasing densities in some areas can better protect regional water resources by absorbing development pressure from other areas. For example, on a 10-acre development site, it is easier and less expensive to manage the stormwater associated with 10 houses compared to 1000 houses. However, on a per capita/house measure, less runoff and pollutants are generated if the site plan has more houses.



As this headline from April 2007 shows, New Hampshire (like many areas) experienced increased flooding in recent years. Better management of stormwater runoff can help minimize the extent and impacts of floods.

TACOMA AND INNOVATIVE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

A development in Tacoma, Washington demonstrated that increasing densities and addressing stormwater at the site level could work effectively. The Salishan Housing District increased densities from 855 housing units to over 1,200 homes and added multiple other uses (local retail, senior housing, a health clinic, an Education/Technology Center, and an expanded community center). The redevelopment of this property reduced impervious surface area, treated runoff on site, and provided areas for run-off infiltration. Planners estimate that 91 percent of the runoff will be treated and infiltrated.

¹² See EPA, supra n. 10.

Using Land Efficiently

Although each neighborhood center in Laconia needs additional development to become a more attractive, walkable destination, Laconia can better manage its stormwater through efficient land use practices, such as locating development on appropriate sites and protecting large areas of natural land. In keeping with this principle, the Illustrative Development Plans for Downtown, Lakeport, and Weirs Beach show relatively dense development on developed sites that are underused. For example, the fire station in Lakeport and the police station Downtown are sites where development would not increase stormwater runoff. Furthermore, the redevelopment of parking lots generally does not increase runoff and, depending on the on-site infiltration practices, it can even decrease it.

Clustering new development in neighborhood centers reduces the need for development in other, undisturbed areas. The total runoff associated with each person or each house in the high growth districts will be considerably less than total runoff volumes associated with lower density, single use development. Development of underutilized sites in centers would allow Laconia to enjoy the economic benefits of growth without sacrificing its undeveloped pristine land. Most important, reducing total runoff volumes will ultimately help protect Laconia's lake heritage.

Finally, the City or local land trusts may wish to identify and preserve critical pieces of undeveloped land near or adjacent to town areas that provide residents with recreation opportunities.

Implementing a Model Stormwater Ordinance

Section 235-44 of the City's Zoning Code addresses erosion and sedimentation pre- and post-construction and requires all construction and development to comply with the state's Stormwater Management, Erosion, and Sedimentation Control Handbook for

STORMWATER AT WEIRS BEACH

While the City considers adopting a stormwater management ordinance, some shorter-term actions could address existing problems. For example, flow from a pipe that discharges stormwater onto Weirs Beach causes part of the erosion on the beach. A variety of possible solutions—ranging from catch basin retrofits to diverting the flow to grass swales—can help address existing stormwater problems on Weirs Beach as well as elsewhere in the City. The pollutant removal efficiency of different stormwater practices varies dramatically, and some are more compact and better suited for areas where space is at a premium. Accordingly, it is important that the solution fit the water quality problem and the site.

Funding to address problems such as the erosion on Weirs Beach may be available from NH Department of Environmental Services through its 319/Nonpoint Source Program. To qualify for this funding, the City would need to:

- Address stormwater and water quality at the watershed scale, not just at the scale of a single discharge pipe;
- Focus on achieving a specific water quality goal or measurable improvement;
- Provide matching funds, and
- Demonstrate local support for the project.

Urban and Developing Areas in New Hampshire. It is important to control stormwater at the source to the maximum extent possible. Most effective is the minimization of site disturbance and the maximization of infiltration, because end-of-pipe solutions tend to be more expensive and challenging to design and construct. An example of this issue is the stormwater pipe at Weirs Beach, which overflows and erodes the beach on a regular basis. If runoff were controlled at the site and neighborhood levels, this overflow problem might not exist. In contrast, it is likely that it will be expensive to upgrade the storm sewer system or to construct a variety of smaller measures uphill to reduce the amount of water flowing into the pipe.

Many cities and towns have adopted comprehensive stormwater regulations. Given the City's reliance on Paugus Bay for drinking water and the importance of lake-based tourism to the local economy, Laconia could consider such an ordinance. Presently, the State of New Hampshire plans to release a model ordinance cities can adopt. The model ordinance will encourage the use of "nonstructural" stormwater management measures, rather than "structural" measures. Examples of nonstructural measures include minimizing the use of impervious surfaces (pavement), implementing development designs that reduces the rate and volume of runoff, and using "rain gardens" or other vegetated areas designed to absorb stormwater. Stormwater controls should be site-appropriate where, for example, solutions for new subdivisions are different from those for Downtown.

If Laconia adopts a Stormwater Management Ordinance, desirable site design characteristics should be included. Some options include the development or redevelopment of sites, such as:

- Brownfield sites, abandoned or underutilized parking lots, vacant buildings, or other under-used retail areas.
- Sites with significant integration of multiple land uses, such as apartments and condominiums above stores or offices (the type of development envisioned for all three neighborhood centers).
- Locations that accommodate greater densities, including multiple building stories, density bonuses, streamlined permitting, or infrastructure upgrades

Redevelopment can have significant stormwater benefits. It can also help cities protect their previous infrastructure investments and can serve as a catalyst for neighborhood-wide investment. Additionally, specific stormwater targets for redevelopment projects will create more predictability in the development process. Factors to consider when developing targets include the existing conditions of sites and their location relative to water bodies, and the enhanced environmental performance gained from redeveloping sites.

Finally, the City should consider adopting more comprehensive stormwater controls to minimize potential regulatory hurdles.¹³ It is possible that EPA will require stormwater control programs, in accordance with the Clean Water Act (Storm Water Phase II Final Rule for urbanized areas).

¹³ EPA's Smart Growth program is currently developing model Phase II permit provisions that seek to recognize the environmental performance of different types of development. If Laconia is required to develop a Phase II permit in the future, they could contact EPA's Smart Growth program for more ideas and information. The model permit will complement Laconia's vision for the three neighborhood centers.

As Laconia develops, this possibility increases. Information about Storm Water Phase II rules is available on EPA's web site, www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater.

Neighborhood Stormwater Management Strategies

The New Hampshire stormwater management manual and model ordinance emphasizes stormwater management strategies that infiltrate, reuse, or evaporate water. Traditional engineered approaches, such as detention ponds on developed land, generally do not meeting multiple community objectives. Neighborhood-level stormwater management incorporates natural landscape features or natural functions into development projects, streets and roads, and individual buildings. These approaches can dramatically reduce pollution, decrease runoff volume, reduce runoff temperature, protect aquatic habitat, and create better local scenery. When used in combination with regional strategies, these approaches can prevent, treat, and store runoff and associated pollutants.



Open space and stormwater management

Linking stormwater management and open space

New England communities have long recognized the value of open space, as illustrated by the significance of town commons. In recent decades, Americans have demonstrated their preference for living near or adjacent to parks or other open space areas by their willingness to pay a premium for these locations.¹⁴ Easy access to parks and open space has become a new measure of community wealth and an important way to promote both quality of life and economic health. Davidson, North Carolina, a small town and recipient of a National Award for Smart Growth, requires a park within a five-minute walk of all new housing. In Laconia, new development, including redevelopment of existing areas, could incorporate open space, parks, or green places. Such opportunities exist in the areas shown as parks or trails around the lakefronts in the Illustrative Development Plans. If implemented, the waterfronts parks could also slow, treat, and store stormwater.

Linking stormwater management and streets

The residents of Laconia prioritized several inter-related goals, including preserving the lakes, increasing biking and pedestrian areas, making these activities safer, respecting Laconia's natural heritage, improving traffic flow, and helping to create three distinctive neighborhood centers to define Laconia. A neighborhood stormwater approach can connect these priorities through a

¹⁴ Trust for Public Land. 1999, *Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space: How Land Conservation Helps Communities Grow Smart and Protect the Bottom Line*, TPL: San Francisco, CA, available at http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cdl.cfm?content_item_id=1145&folder_id=727. 8/17/07.

range of transportation strategies. These methods can also offer greater environmental benefits, are more visually attractive, and can be less expensive than more engineered methods of stormwater control.¹⁵

Natural infiltration approaches to address runoff from streets can apply to larger roads with on-street parking and additional lanes. The adjacent photo demonstrates how street-edge infiltration practices could be used on wider streets, including those with on-street parking. This runoff does not enter any stormwater system or water body. Laconia could consider adopting a policy that incorporates these natural elements into new roads or during maintenance/redesign efforts to existing roads. Green streetscapes that use vegetation to facilitate natural infiltration of stormwater also contribute to a community's sense of place by creating attractive, distinctive design.



On this street, curb extensions capture stormwater.

Narrower streets also play an important role in stormwater management, because wider streets create more impervious surfaces. Laconia could consider narrowing some existing streets to reduce impervious cover. Neighborhood development standards recently developed by the U.S. Green Building Council set the objective of reducing impervious area and street runoff by 25 percent.¹⁶ This goal can be accomplished by reducing lane widths, and using natural infiltration techniques in medians, parking spaces, and lane edges to reduce runoff from streets. Parking areas and roads can use landscape elements that are usually part of the streetscape, such as planter gardens, trees, and pavement, and can augment these features with soils that absorb more water. Strategically placed, these design solutions can serve as a stormwater management system for the area. Finally, any paved surface can include a type of infiltration practice called “curb extensions.” The extensions have the



Street features such as this planting strip can add aesthetic appeal while absorbing stormwater runoff.

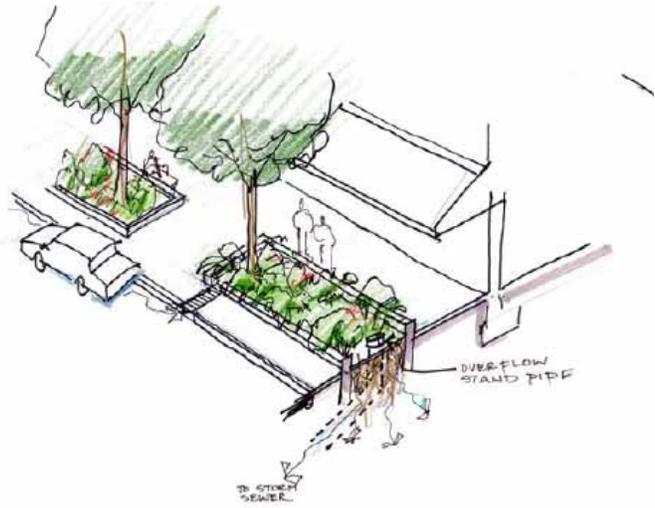
¹⁵ Kloss, Christopher and Crystal Calarusse, 2006, *Rooftops to Rivers: Green Strategies for Controlling Stormwater and Combined Sewer Overflows*, Washington, D.C.: NRDC, available at <http://www.nrdc.org/water/pollution/rooftops/contents.asp>. 8/27/07.

¹⁶ See generally U.S. Green Building Council, LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—Neighborhood Development) at www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=148.

capacity to manage runoff from a 25-year storm event. They also calm traffic, create a more interesting pedestrian environment, and reduce pedestrian crossing distances.

Site-Specific Stormwater Management Strategies

The design of any development, including streets, parking, and open spaces can incorporate site-specific solutions that can promote stormwater evaporation and infiltration as well as retention and reuse. Within Laconia, numerous opportunities exist to install stormwater management approaches such as garden planters, permeable pavers, or other infiltration techniques that can address on-site runoff.



A sidewalk planter garden

Maximizing areas for absorbing rainwater

As discussed in the state’s stormwater management plan and the model ordinance, the overall objective is to manage as much stormwater as possible on-site, which means increasing infiltration. This approach allows runoff to be a resource. The design of new developments, including the projects described in the Illustrative Development Plans, can incorporate site-specific design solutions into streets, parking, sidewalks, and open spaces that will allow stormwater to infiltrate.

New development and streetscape improvements offer numerous opportunities to install features that maximize infiltration, such as rainwater gardens or sidewalk planter gardens. The stored water in the planter area slowly infiltrates over a period of days into the storm sewer system or, if site conditions are favorable, into the underlying soils. The image above demonstrates what a sidewalk planter garden could look like in the pedestrian district. Planter gardens can also include street trees, which can help increase the amount of stormwater absorbed on site. On average, a single tree can intercept and absorb from 800 gallons to 2,400 gallons per year. Additionally, their root systems treat runoff and create spaces in the soil that allow the soil to hold more water.¹⁷

Another bio-retention solution Laconia could use is permeable pavers or porous pavements. These pavers can take many different forms, but the term refers to pavement surfaces that allow water to pass through them. Areas with permeable pavers built over a reservoir further detain stormwater and slowly release it to the surrounding soil. These two systems can also filter out pollutants associated with stormwater runoff. Laconia could look for places in town to add bio-retention planters, sidewalk planters, or other infiltration devices. For new development or

¹⁷ Belan, Gary and Betsy Otto. 2004, *Catching the Rain: A Great Lakes Resource Guide for Natural Stormwater Management*, Washington, D.C.: American Rivers.

redevelopment projects, the City could consider requiring a certain percentage of runoff (25 or 50 percent) to be captured on site via infiltration.

Reducing hard surfaces

Large amounts of runoff can adversely effect Laconia’s lakes and other water bodies. Streets, roads, and parking for cars can create large swathes of impervious cover, which can create significant runoff. Many communities have found that one successful strategy for reducing hard surfaces is to assess street and road design guidelines and parking lot design. By reducing the size of roads and parking lots and changing how these surfaces function, communities can reduce the environmental impact of parking.

Narrowing roads can support Laconia’s goals. The City could assess their street and road width requirements and design guidelines to determine if it can utilize strategies to reduce impervious surfaces, such as narrowing travel lanes, creating planted medians, or installing stormwater curb extensions. These parking strategies need not be limited to the neighborhood centers. Laconia could consider revising parking requirements throughout the city to encourage more shared parking between complementary uses. Reducing parking supply would free up land that could become new open space. Redeveloping existing degraded surfaces, such as parking lots, is an excellent stormwater management strategy as it allows the community to reap the economic benefits of growth while not increasing net stormwater runoff. In addition to incorporating design strategies into new development or redevelopment, Laconia could also consider retrofitting existing parking lots to add infiltration elements to store runoff on site. The image below on the right demonstrates how infiltration basins could be incorporated into existing parking lots to reduce runoff. These basins generally require little space and add more greenery to the streetscape. A retrofit strategy may help improve and protect Laconia’s water resources more quickly than waiting for new development to happen.



Large impervious surfaces



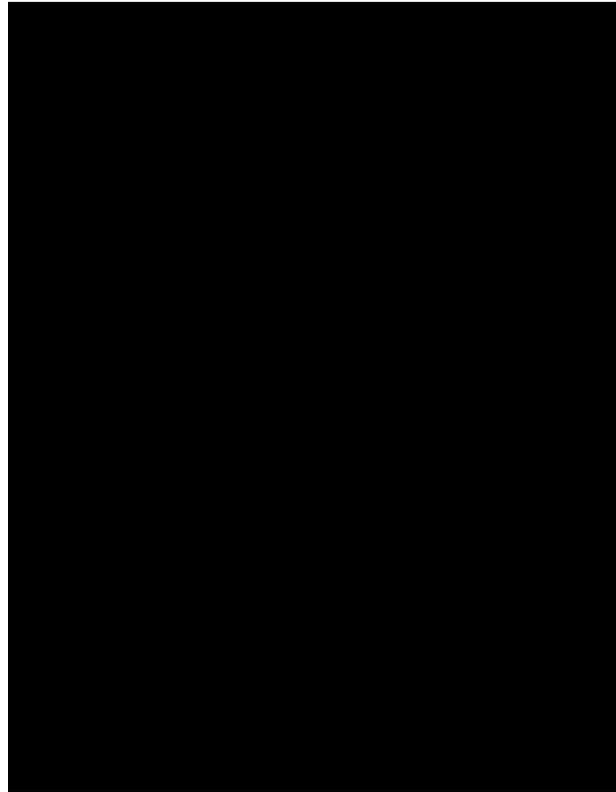
These parking lot basins capture stormwater runoff. Note the gap between spaces that allows water to flow into the basin.

APPENDIX B: SMART DEVELOPMENT

For areas not within the three neighborhood centers, Laconia could consider revising its subdivision ordinance in favor of Smart Neighborhood Development.¹⁸ Successful neighborhoods have streets and roads that are developed and maintained in a well-designed, interconnected system that serves all transportation modes (driving, walking, and biking). Well-designed streets and roads are critical to meeting a number of the goals articulated in Laconia's Master Plan, such as increasing walkability, maintaining small-town charm, and creating great neighborhoods. Because essentially every parcel of land abuts one or more streets, streets are the most prevalent public spaces. Together with the infrastructure located within their rights-of-way, streets are also commonly the most costly element of subdivisions and other developments. Clearly, the appropriate design of streets is an integral component of how Laconia will grow and evolve over time.

Smart Development includes street designs that create an environment where drivers will realize that to drive too fast or too aggressively is inappropriate, anti-social, and uncomfortable. "Traffic calming" is the term for measures used to counter fast, aggressive driving. In this sample diagram, there are many "T" intersections, deflections, and other alignment techniques to create built-in traffic calming and, in so doing, make a more memorable place. With appropriate design techniques, drivers will more automatically choose lower speeds and less aggressive behaviors. In this desired "self-enforcing" environment, both motorists and non-motorists will feel like more equivalent occupants of each Smart Development street. This sense of equivalency should be a design goal, as it will enhance the livability of the street and neighborhood.

Any environment that is motorist-dominated needlessly affects children and other non-drivers. When a non-motorist cannot travel safely or conveniently to a day's events without a vehicle, even simple matters such as the schedule of children's recreation outside of the home become more rigid due to travel



Sample traffic-calming street design.

¹⁸ Chellman, C.E. et al. 1999, *Traditional Neighborhood Development Street Design Guidelines*, Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), Washington, D.C. #RP-027. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) published a Recommended Practice for Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) streets, principally authored by C.E. Chellman (the author of this section). Because of the similarities of topic and authorship, some of the text from the ITE document has been adapted for this text. The ITE document is recommended for additional details and technical information about these topics.

coordination needs. The societal impacts of such requirements are difficult to measure, but they are significant. Smart Development allows the possibility of non-motorist travel and the replacement of some vehicular trips with non-vehicular trips. Laconia should focus on several elements of Smart Development for its communities, including street connectivity, shared spaces, and streetscape design.

Street Connectivity

Smart Development streets are interconnected. This principle is central to Smart Development design. Cul-de-sacs and other dead-end streets are not a part of a Smart Development. For vehicles, Smart Development streets function in an interdependent manner. Connected streets provide continuous and generally more comprehensible routes, which serve to enhance the beneficial purpose of non-vehicular travel.



The image of the left depicts a poorly connected street network consisting of cul-de-sacs and pods of development. The image on the right shows a well-connected street network. Note the trip distance shown by the yellow lines. Longer trip distances discourage pedestrian activity and force people into cars for every errand.

A typical street network in most new residential development (and in the new developments the Consultant Team visited in Laconia) offers few ways in and out, wide streets, poor connectivity, few direct routes, and limited ability to walk to stores, schools, or restaurants. Often, the result is an automobile oriented landscape that increases traffic congestion, which makes it unrealistic to bicycle or walk. In contrast, Laconia could alter its subdivision ordinance to require a more connected street network with short blocks and frequent intersections to give pedestrians, bikers, and drivers more options. This street design minimizes congestion by dispersing traffic. On occasion, the desire to insulate adjacent neighborhoods from traffic can lead to construction of barricades or other measures that close streets and degrade the connectivity of the overall street network. While always popular on the closed streets, the unfortunate consequences of rerouting and concentrating traffic on other streets create congestion and choke points. Measures other than

street closings, such as traffic calming and street redesign, can address cut-through traffic concerns.

Where it is difficult to provide full through streets, there are alternatives to cul-de-sacs. One option is the “close” (pronounced “cloze”). The close is a simple U-shaped street with a natural or landscaped interior of the “U.” Keys to making an appropriate close are to have a one-way loop and to have the middle area generally be between fifty and one hundred fifty feet in width.

By reducing unnecessary parking spaces, creating narrower roads, and eliminating the use of cul-de-sacs, development can minimize the amount of paved surfaces, saving construction costs and minimizing off-site stormwater runoff. As the text box below indicates, narrower streets help keep traffic at reasonable speeds and save taxpayer money by reducing the cost of building and maintaining roads. Furthermore, it can create built-in traffic calming.¹⁹ Nevertheless, among other things, Laconia’s subdivision regulations require minimum street widths of fifty feet.²⁰ Although

single-family housing layouts are difficult to regulate in New Hampshire, the City should consider incentives to promote new projects with connected streets. Aligning buildings along streets, pushing garages behind the front façade of homes, adding planting strips between the street and the sidewalk, and encouraging porches and fences, can create a very different neighborhood with a different sense of place. These same techniques also enhance the pedestrian and vehicular experience.

Concept of “Lanes” and Shared Street Space

Smart Development street design seeks to minimize lane widths and limit the addition of separate “lanes” of traffic or parking. A relatively narrow residential street, where there are low densities or rear alley access, is an example of successful street design. On narrow streets with

DID YOU KNOW?

A study of over 20,000 accidents in Longmont, Colorado, found that more accidents occurred on wider streets than on narrow streets. This study found that the safest streets were narrow 24-foot wide streets.

The cost of paving a road averages \$15 per square yard. Reducing street width by four feet can save more than \$35,000 per mile of residential street. In addition, since narrower streets produce less impervious cover and runoff, additional savings can be realized in the reduced size and cost of downstream stormwater management facilities.

Abstract at www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/articles/narrow.asp.

¹⁹ Portland Metro. 2002, *Green Streets: Innovative Solutions for Stormwater and Stream Crossings*, available at www.metro-region.org/article.cfm?articleid=262. 8/17/07.

²⁰ Laconia’s existing subdivision regulations contain the following requirements:
Street right-of-way widths shall be a minimum of fifty (50) feet in width. Additional right-of-way width may be required where street, sidewalk, and drainage design warrant. Dead-end streets shall be no longer than one-thousand (1,000) feet, measured from the edge of the access street right-of-way to the center of the turn-around. The end of the street shall accommodate adequate access for normal traffic, street maintenance, and public safety access. In the case of cul-de-sac designs, the outside right-of-way shall have a minimum radius of sixty (60) feet and an outside paved radius of at least fifty (50) feet.

intermittent on-street parking, the street's width may occasionally require one driver to slow down or pull over to let an oncoming vehicle pass before proceeding, particularly if one of the vehicles is a truck or other large vehicle. The keys here are "occasionally" requiring drivers to pull over or stop and "intermittent" on street parking that provide space to pull over. Where volumes are low and large vehicles few, only one lane may be needed.

Street Space

The Smart Development street begins at the front of a vertical element such as a building (or fence) on one side of a street and runs to the front of a building on the other side of the street.

Some planners call this building-to-building space the "streetscape." Where the land is not yet developed, a Smart Development street designer must know the scale of the buildings; existing and projected vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian volumes; and the general form(s) of development to occur on the undeveloped land. Where the scale and general types of development are known, it is more practical to accurately predict and design for the needs of the vehicular and non-vehicular users of each Smart Development street.



This cross-section of a yield street showing how a narrower street can accommodate two-way traffic and parking on one side. Since the traffic demand is lower, cars yield to one another when passing the parked vehicle, inducing traffic calming, and smaller, cozier neighborhoods.



Note some of the key features of the inviting streetscape, such as ample sidewalk, wide planting strips, regularly spaced street trees, and minimal setback lines.

Other Resources

- New Jersey Department of Transportation published *Flexible Design of New Jersey's Main Streets*. This document provides policy and practice changes that add flexibility and context sensitivity to the department's design process for main streets. It is available at www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/reading/flexible-design-new-jersey/resources/flexible-design-new-jersey/.
- The Oregon Departments of Transportation and Growth Management and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development published *Main Street... When a Highway Runs Through It: A Handbook for Oregon Communities*. This document provides strategies to make state highways more context sensitive as they travel through towns as the main street. It is available at www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/reading/main-street/resources/main-street-when-a-highway/.
- The Project for Public Spaces wrote *Balancing Street Space for Pedestrians and Vehicles*. This article discusses how to balance pedestrian needs and create lively public spaces while maintaining appropriate space for vehicles. It is available at www.pps.org/civic_centers/info/how_to/transit_tool/balancing_peds_and_vehicles.
- The Context Sensitive Solutions organization has a web site that includes hundreds of resources about designing transportation projects in a way that fits the physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. Its web site can be viewed at www.contextsensitivesolutions.org.
- The Walkable Communities organization offers a variety of publications and photos on its web site, <http://walkable.org/>.

APPENDIX C: PLANNING TOOLS

Many different planning tools, which are based on other communities' experiences, are available to Laconia. Below are some of the most relevant resources.

Inventory of Ordinances

The Consultant Team recommends the following resources:

- The American Planning Association has model smart growth codes available at www.planning.org/smartgrowthcodes. These codes encourage mixing land uses, preserving open space, and environmentally sensitive areas, providing choices in housing and transportation, and making the development process more predictable.
- The Local Government Commission's *Smart Growth Zoning Codes: a Resource Guide* studies codes in communities around the country. Its main areas include: "traditional neighborhood design," which encourages walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods; mixed-use and live/work codes, which help diversify land uses; street and block design that makes it easy and comfortable for people to walk, bike, or drive; parking guidelines that use land more efficiently; and design regulations that help maintain or create attractive, distinctive, and safe places. The resource guide is available on the LGC web site, www.lgc.org.
- Form-based codes emphasize the appearance and qualities of buildings and blocks rather than their uses. They encourage great public participation because they are more visually appealing than traditional zoning codes, making it easier to understand what type of buildings they will allow. They encourage a mix of uses and housing types. A good introduction to form-based codes is available at www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_sheets/form_based_codes.pdf.
- The planning firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk, developed a sample form-based code called the Smart Code. It combines zoning, subdivision regulations, urban design, and basic architectural standards, which can be customized to local needs. It is available at www.dpz.com/pdf/SmartCodeV7.0-6-06-05.pdf.
- The state of Colorado has a model code for small communities, which is available at www.dola.state.co.us/smartgrowth/resources.htm.
- Envision Utah offers guidance on zoning, at www.envisionutah.org/plans.phtml?type=ordinances.
- Nashville, Tennessee, recently revamped its subdivision regulations, which are available at www.nashville.gov/mpc/expanded_subdiv_regs_doc.htm.
- The Unified Development Ordinance for Durham, North Carolina is available at www.durhamnc.gov/departments/planning/udo/.

Examples of Mixed-Use Codes

The following links provide good examples of mixed-use codes:

- The Oregon Commercial and Mixed-Use Development Code Handbook is available at www.oregon.gov/LCD/docs/publications/commmixedusecode.pdf.
- Nashville's Urban Design Overlay includes example overlay codes, which are available at www.nashville.org/mpc/urban.htm.
- The City of Austin has a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) code, implemented in 1997, and a parallel Transit Oriented Design (TOD) code. See the City's web site at www.ci.austin.tx.us/tnd/.
- A model TND ordinance prepared for Wisconsin is available at www.wisc.edu/urpl/people/ohm/projects/tndord.pdf.
- Nashville, Tennessee, just passed new codes, which utilize an urban design overlay. See www.nashville.gov/mpc/expanded_subdiv_regs_doc.htm.
- The Colorado Office of Smart Growth has a model land use code for small communities. See www.dola.state.co.us/smartgrowth/resources.htm.
- Envision Utah has some useful information, which is available at www.envisionutah.org/plans.phtml?type=ordinances.

Other Online Resources

- Annapolis Comprehensive Plan, at www.annapolis.gov/info.asp?page=2950.
- California Safe Routes to School, at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoute2.htm.
- Chowan County Subdivision Ordinance (Landscaping and Open Space), at www.chowancounty-nc.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B10E82D50-AAE0-43D7-A98A-42E82683885E%7D/uploads/%7BE79DE079-CB52-47F1-A94B-10FE07113779%7D.PDF.
- Kendall County Scenic Route Guidelines, at www.co.kendall.il.us/zoning/pdf/new%20Appendix.pdf.
- Richland County Rural Growth and Preservation Strategies, at www.richlandonline.com/information/vision/rural_growth.html.
- New York State Coastal Resources Online (The Public Waterfront), at http://nyswaterfronts.com/waterfront_public.asp.

- The Town of Edenton Subdivision Ordinance (Screening, Landscaping, and Trees), at www.townofedenton.com/index.asp?Type=B_LIST&SEC={7F25AFED-F9E6-44CB-8D8C-3AE5C676E4AD}#{FD36F27B-6984-4907-A474-12199544E6B1}.
- The Town of Davidson Planning Ordinance (Streets and Gateways Section), at www.ci.davidson.nc.us/units/planning/ordinance/pdfs/11-StreetsGreenways-hd.pdf.
- Vermont Agency on Transportation, *Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Planning and Design Manual*, at: www.aot.state.vt.us/progdev/Documents/LTF/FinalPedestrianAndBicycleFacility/Chap3.pdf.
- Wake County Consolidated Open Space Plan, at: www.wakegov.com/parks/openspace/consolidatedplan.htm.

Smart Growth Network Tools and Resources

- *Creating Great Neighborhoods: Density in Your Community*, available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/density.htm.
- *Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation*, available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/getting_to_sg2.htm.
- *Getting to Smart Growth II: 100 More Policies for Implementation*, available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/getting_to_sg2.htm.
- *Making Land Development Regulations Work for Smart Growth*, available at www.smartgrowth.org/library/articles.asp?art=1340.
- *The Second Coming of the American Town Center*, available at www.co.dane.wi.us/plandev/community/build/pdf/20031024_bohl_presentation.pdf.

Publications/Reports

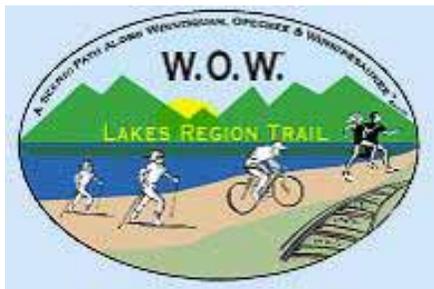
- *Creating Walkable Communities: A Guide for Local Communities*, available at www.bikewalk.org/pdfs/ncbwpubwalkablecomm.pdf.
- *Main Street....When a Highway Runs Through it: A Handbook for Oregon Communities*, available at www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/BIKEPED/docs/mainstreethandbook.pdf.
- *PAS Report (418): Designing Urban Corridors*, available at www.planning.org/APAStore/Search/Default.aspx?p=2349.
- *PAS Report (399): Aesthetics & Land-Use Controls*, available at www.planning.org/APAStore/Search/Default.aspx?p=2332.
- *Pedestrian Facilities Users Guide: Providing Safety and Mobility*, available at www.walkinginfo.org/pdf/peduserguide/peduserguide.pdf.

- *Rural Healthy Communities*, available at www.ncsmartgrowth.org/pgm/hrci/r&aguide/index.html.
- *Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips*, available at www.accessmanagement.gov/pdf/ULI_Ten_Principles.pdf.
- *Ten Principles for Smart Growth on the Suburban Fringe*, available at www.accessmanagement.gov/pdf/ULI_Ten_Principles.pdf.
- *The Design of New Urbanist Streets*, available at www.tndesign.com/papers/ULI-4-2000.pdf.

Miscellaneous Resources

- NC DOT Strategic Highway Corridors. See www.ncdot.org/doh/PRECONSTRUCT/tpb/SHC/documents/.
- Project for Public Spaces (PPS)
 - *About the PPS Transportation Program*, available at www.pps.org/transportation/info/transportation_approach.
 - *Good Places*, available at www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/casesforplaces/goodplaces.
 - *How to Turn a Waterfront Around*, available at www.pps.org/info/newsletter/february2007/turn_waterfront_around.
 - *What is a Great Civic Space?*, available at www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/casesforplaces/benefits_public_spaces.
- *Scenic America*, available at www.scenic.org/.
- *Street Reclaiming Through Design*, available at www.lesstraffic.com/Articles/Traffic/SRdesign.htm.
- *Transect Applied to Regional Plans*, available at www.newurbannews.com/transect.html.
- *Urban Advantage*, available at www.urban-advantage.com/.
- *Your Town: The Citizens' Institute on Rural Design*, available at www.yourtowndesign.org/.

APPENDIX D: BIKE/PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS IMPROVEMENTS



W.O.W. Trail Logo

The Lakes Region Planning Commission approved the Lakes Region Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2006. As part of the plan, the commission is working with communities to construct a region-wide connector of alternative transportation trails by 2017. This regional trail system will connect Meredith to Lebanon by way of Laconia. The Laconia section, known as the “W.O.W.” trail, will be a paved, 9-mile long, multiuse trail that will link lakes Winnisquam, Opechee, and Winnepesaukee. It will also link Downtown, Lakeport, and Weirs Beach.

The Consultant Team felt Laconia should consider prioritizing and accelerating completion of its portions of the trail. There are synergies between completing this multi-use connection and Laconia’s goals. The W.O.W. Trail (and the larger regional connector trail system) will be a year-round amenity that can stimulate tourist and economic activity during the non-summer season. Homes close to rail trails have become increasingly desirable. One recent Massachusetts study found that homes near rail trails in seven towns sold at closer to the list price and much faster than other homes in the area. Homeowners in Massachusetts even put “for sale” signs on the bike path side of their homes to advertise proximity to the paths.²¹

According to some stakeholders, both children and adults often cross the river via the active railroad tracks, which is dangerous and illegal. The W.O.W. Trail will provide a safer route for pedestrians and bikes crossing the Winnepesaukee River at both Messer Street and Fair Street. Another benefit to completing the W.O.W. trail will be regular maintenance of vegetation and trash pick-up along the tracks, making the area more attractive and inviting.

The W.O.W. Trail is an amenity that appeals to all ages and can attract more professionals to live and work in Laconia. When completed, the W.O.W. Trail will serve the residents of three retirement communities between Downtown and Lakeport, and will provide an alternate route to Opechee Park, Memorial Middle School, and several

ECONOMIC VALUE OF NATURE TOURISM

Research has found that hiking and biking trails can stimulate tourism. Each year, more than 100,000 people come to ride the famous Slickrock Mountain Bike Trail near Moab, Utah. The trail generates more than \$1.3 million in annual receipts for Moab, part of the \$86 million spent by visitors on nearby attractions. Trails along former railroad corridors also pay dividends. For example, in Dunedin, Florida, store vacancy rates tumbled from 35 percent to zero after the Pinellas Trail was built through the town. In another example, research found that, in 2003, the Maryland Northern Central Rail Trail near Baltimore cost approximately \$200,000 to maintain and operate, yet returned over \$300,000 in state and local taxes.

Source: Craig Della Penna, The Murphys Realtors, Inc., January 2006, available at www.craigdp.com/myniche/interestingdataonhousesalesinmiddlesexcountyineasternmass.html.

²¹ See www.craigdp.com/myniche/houseshawkedonthebikeway.html.

neighborhoods. Furthermore, traveling through the neighborhoods along Paugus Bay and Lake Winnepesaukee (Phases 3 & 4) will provide a safe, quiet alternative to driving on Parade Road or Route 3 to reach the three town centers, schools, parks, city beaches, and other amenities.



W.O.W. Lakes Region Trail starting in Meredith, crossing through Laconia, and ending in Belmont, New Hampshire.

Phase I of the W.O.W. Trail will run from the railroad tracks by the Gale Memorial Library, down Messer Street to the former department of public works building, rejoin the railroad right-of-way along Lake Opechee, and continue to the Lake Opechee Inn and Spa. Construction of this Phase will begin in fall 2007. Phase II will connect Downtown to Belmont's BRATT bike/pedestrian trail (currently under construction). The Fair Street Bridge will include a bike lane for the W.O.W. Trail. According to Diane Hanley, President of the Laconia Rails-with-Trails Exploratory Committee, Phase III, which will link Lakeport to Weirs Beach, will probably be completed in 5 years.

Much of the route is located in state-owned rail right-of-way (ROW). This presents both benefits and barriers. On the positive side, the ROW does not have to be purchased from private landowners. However, in places where the railway is operating, the state considers the uses to be "in conflict" and is raising liability concerns. Working with the state Attorney General's office, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH-DOT), and the city's insurer to come to agreement on liability issues has been the greatest barrier to completing the trail and has delayed construction by one year. According to Ms. Hanley, the state is currently "willing to work with us to design the trail, but status of indemnification issue is critical."

Another related barrier is the NH-DOT position that a 5-foot high fence between bike path and the Railway is necessary. Such a fence would detract from the water views and water access of residents along Paugus Bay and Lake Winnepesaukee. Strong opposition to unattractive fencing has been voiced. Given the low operating speed of the Railway, an alternate approach to fencing

may exist. Nearby states have implemented other solutions to this issue. The Vermont DOT allows separation through various fence types, or by vegetation, grading, or drainage ditches depending upon site conditions. In downtown Montpelier, fencing is not required between trail users and the active railroad line. Laconia has an opportunity to take an active role in facilitating solutions by working with the state Attorney General, the Rails-With-Trails Committee, and the NH-DOT. About 65 “rails-with-trails” encompassing 239 miles in 30 states exist today. These trails are located adjacent to active rail lines ranging from a few slow moving, short-haul freight trains weekly, to high-frequency Amtrak trains traveling as fast as 225 km/h (140 mi/h). Clearly, workable solutions exist.²²

Other Resources

- The Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse, a project of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, provides free technical assistance, information resources, and referrals to trail and greenway advocates and developers across the nation. The web site provides an abundance of online manuals; reports; and case studies covering advocacy, acquisition, legal issues, funding, design and more for individuals, government agencies, communities, grassroots organizations, and anyone else who is seeking to create or manage trails and greenways. See www.trailsandgreenways.org/.

²² FHWA, *Rails with Trails: Lessons Learned, Literature Review, Current Practices, Conclusions*, available at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/retrails/rwt/toc.htm, 8/27/07.

APPENDIX E: RAILWAY EXTENSION

The Consultant Team felt that the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railway (Railway) represents a major opportunity for Laconia. Extension of the Railway to Downtown Laconia would move the City toward many of the goals expressed during the workshop. Railway staff indicated there is no functional problem with the tracks between Lakeport and Downtown. The state owns the tracks and leases them to the Railway. According to the Railway staff, logistical and financial issues are the impediments to the Railway reconnecting to Downtown. On the logistics side, the drawbridge functionally creates delay and scheduling challenges; on the financial side, the Railway will need to be convinced that the extension would be profitable. The Consultant Team feels that both of these objections are surmountable and that Laconia should consider discussions with the Railway owners about this possibility.²³

With that as background, the Railway expansion is a good idea because it would:

- Link all three centers of Laconia, especially for tourists.
- Provide a viable, pleasant, and convenient travel choice. Currently, the Railway is a vehicle for sightseeing/tourists.²⁴ If train service expands from Meredith to Downtown Laconia, although predominately intended to serve visitors, it also can provide a true transportation option. Rather than the current one- or two-hour tour, the train could run on a continuous loop. During peak season, this could take cars off the congested road system.
- Increase the number of visitors to all three Laconia centers. As Lakeport redevelops and as Downtown becomes a destination in its own right, the Railway connection brings visitors from both Meredith and Weirs Beach. By opening new possibilities for activity and travel in the region without having to use a car during the congested summer period, it will also make Weirs Beach a more attractive destination.



Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad Promotion

²³ The Railway is owned by Ben and Brenda Clark of Fast Track Railroad Consultants L.L.C. (603) 398-8720.

²⁴ See www.hoborr.com/winni.html.

APPENDIX F: PARKING

Motor vehicle parking is a challenging issue in urban environments. Parking is expensive to build, consumes valuable land, and can force significant design compromises. At the same time, the need to provide parking cannot be ignored if urban places are to thrive. The key is to provide “the right amount” of parking. Too little parking affects the viability of retail and too much parking wastes space and money, and discourages walking.

Since the cost of parking can be disproportionate to its benefits, a good parking strategy requires an integrated approach. A good strategy must address four important parking elements:

- 1) on-street parking supply,
- 2) off-street parking,
- 3) enforcement, and
- 4) pricing/funding/finance.



As this image in 1910 shows, parking has been challenge in Weirs Beach for a long time.

Source: www.weirsbeach.com

Ignoring any of these elements of a parking strategy will put

increased pressure on the other elements, so a comprehensive strategy should address all parking issues. The following strategies could help address the challenges associated with creating the appropriate amount of parking to enhance Downtown:

- Establish a policy to share public and private parking.
- Create a sunset for street-front, surface-parking areas.
- Manage the on-street parking supply.
- Enhance the existing city garage.

Establish a Policy to Share Public and Private Parking

Shared parking, where different users utilize the same space(s) at different times of day and/or on different days of the week, is a well-understood and quantified method of optimizing the use of parking areas. Uses, such as offices and restaurants, which have peak parking demand at different times, are good candidates for shared parking.

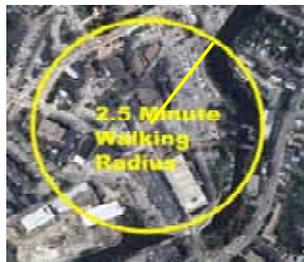
Resources

- The Urban Land Institute has a publication and CD on this topic, which is available at www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Bookstore&Template=Ecommerce/ProductDisplay.cfm&Productid=1495.
- The Victoria Transport Policy Institute has a good description, which is also available online at www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm89.htm.
- In addition, the City of Portland, Oregon, has a Model Ordinance, which is also available online at www.metro-region.org/library_docs/land_use/appendixa.pdf.

Establish a Sunset for Street-Front Surface Parking Areas

Off-street surface parking in Downtown should be limited, and no new such parking areas with more than one layer of parking stalls should be approved or constructed that front a street. Larger surface parking lots should be behind buildings. Existing lots that front streets should be redeveloped with buildings and the City should consider adopting a zoning amendment to make such existing lots non-conforming. Another short-term approach to this would be for the City to identify its “A” and “B” streets in the Downtown area and have the above prohibition only apply to the “A” streets.

One problem with surface parking lots is the disruptive impact they have on the pedestrian environment and the perception of how large the downtown area actually is. In the United States, the generally accepted size of a neighborhood for planning purposes (or “pedestrian shed”) is a five-minute walking radius, which equates to a quarter-mile (or 1,320 feet). However, a circle superimposed over Downtown Laconia results in a radius that is almost exactly 1/8 mile.



Actual and Possible/Desired Walking Radii in Downtown Laconia

The circle with the 2.5 minutes walking radius on the left has one quarter of the area of the 5-minute walking radius circle. The existing Downtown core, as depicted by the small circle, encompasses only about 31 acres, as opposed to the 124 acres that could be the walkable core.²⁵ Throughout the United States, the value of genuine walkable downtown real estate generally increases. Accordingly, the City could expand its tax base by considering the potential of this larger area, which should be inclusive of Downtown but need not be centered over it.

Manage the On-Street Parking Supply

As Downtown re-establishes itself, on-street parking will become increasingly desirable. Heightened parking desirability makes parking more valuable, which will create a new revenue source for the City. Some of these revenues should be reinvested in the pedestrian experience.

Parking supply and pricing is a well-understood issue. For example, generally, the most convenient parking spaces should have higher pricing and shorter stays. Furthermore, as the demand for parking increases, employers will need to manage employee (and their own) parking practices to ensure that spaces are available for customers.

Other Resources

- The EPA Smart Growth program parking document, available at www.epa.gov/piedpage/pdf/EPAParkingSpaces06.pdf.
- VTPI also has a good page on the specific topic of parking pricing, which is available at www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm26.htm.

Enhance the City's Garage

As previously mentioned in Section 6, the parking garage is in an ideal location to aid the redevelopment of Downtown. However, the City's garage suffers from poor aesthetics, which make it uninviting. As a city surrounded by primarily rural communities, the aesthetics of the garage are particularly important.



Downtown City Garage

The City should consider having a competition among local designers to develop ideas on how to wrap the garage more successfully. For example, simply wrapping the vertical support beams to make them appear more substantial, would increase the user-friendly aspect of the garage considerably.

²⁵ Enhancing the pedestrian environment so it is safe, comfortable, and interesting can significantly enlarge the walking radius. For example, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the radius is about 10 minutes, or twice the United States norm.

APPENDIX G: FINANCING TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing (TIF) provides for the temporary allocation of increased tax proceeds in a designated area generated by increases in assessed property values. It provides measurable specific benefits to select, well-defined groups of taxpayers. Although people think of TIFs as financing tools, they are also land development and improvement tools. A TIF plan, often referred to as a redevelopment plan, provides governments and community stakeholders with a forum and process to manage their redevelopment and growth for years to come. In the process, TIF provides a vehicle for local governments and the private sector to develop public-private partnerships to work on promoting economic development.

TIF captures the future tax benefits of real estate improvements in a designated area to pay the cost of making those improvements in the present. In a basic TIF, property assessments are made at a pre-development level in the specified area. Bonds are then issued to finance a portion of the redevelopment or remediation costs. As property values and assessments in the area increase, the municipality uses the added increment in tax revenues to meet the debt service on those bonds. The technique requires the creation of a special district and the maintenance of two separate sets of tax records. An excellent resource to consult when setting up a TIF is the 2002 primer prepared for the National Association of Realtors, which is available at <http://assist.neded.org/TIFreport.pdf>.

TIF bond proceeds commonly finance projects in non-blighted as well as blighted areas. They can be used for a variety of purposes associated with redevelopment; development; or related physical infrastructure improvements, such as elementary and secondary educational facilities, roads, bridges, parking facilities, recreational facilities, water and wastewater facilities, and electrical power plants. TIF has financed a wide variety of successful commercial and industrial projects.

Community Development Block Grant Funds

The Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program is a flexible program in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. The CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to local government and states. The City of Laconia has experience with this grant program. Laconia received \$500,000 in CDBG Housing funds in order to sub-grant \$479,551 to the Laconia Area Community Land Trust (LACLT) to develop the Mill View Family Housing Project.

Communities receiving CDBG funds from the State may use the funds for many kinds of community development activities. Some examples include:

- Acquisition of property for public purposes.
- Construction or reconstruction of streets, water and sewer facilities, neighborhood centers, recreation facilities, and other public works.

- Demolition.
- Rehabilitation of public and private buildings.
- Public services.
- Planning activities.
- Assistance to nonprofit entities for community development activities.
- Assistance to private, for profit entities to carry out economic development activities (including assistance to micro-enterprises).

To find out more about the CDBG program in New Hampshire, contact:

Paul Denton, CDBG Program Manager
State of New Hampshire
Community Development Finance Authority
14 Dixon Ave.
Suite 102
Concord, NH 03301
Phone: (603) 226-2170
Fax: (603) 226-2816

In-Lieu Fees

In-lieu fees are one way to finance centralized infrastructure (common examples include public parking garages and stormwater treatment facilities) and give developers flexibility in meeting infrastructure needs shared by a larger district. Developers are able to avoid constructing infrastructure on site by paying the city a fee, and the city in return provides off-site infrastructure that serves a defined district.

In the case of parking, a large facility would be available for use by a number of developments. The city determines the fees, generally based on the cost of providing parking. Cities set fees in one of two ways: (1) by calculating a flat fee for parking spaces not provided either by a developer on site or (2) by establishing development-specific fees on a case-by-case basis.

In-lieu fees in the United States range from \$2,000 to \$20,000 per parking space and may or may not reflect the true costs of providing parking. These fees can be imposed at the time of development permitting or as a property tax surcharge. In-lieu parking fees provide a mechanism for providing parking in balance with other community goals, such as spurring pedestrian-friendly redevelopment on Laconia's Main Street. Using in-lieu fees and centralized garages can:

- Reduce overall construction costs.
- Avoid construction of awkward, unattractive onsite parking that could compromise historic buildings.

- Increase public access to convenient parking.
- Ensure that parking facilities will be used more efficiently.
- Encourage better urban design with streetscapes uninterrupted by parking lots and driveways.

In establishing in-lieu parking fees, planners must be aware that developers are often concerned that the lack of on-site parking will make developments less attractive to tenants and visitors. This can be an issue if available public parking is insufficient, inconveniently located, or inefficiently operated. Accordingly, planners must carefully consider the parking demand for each participating property and provide enough parking to meet this demand and, thereby, avoid creating a perceived or real parking shortage. Planners must also work to ensure that public parking facilities are located and operated in ways that support development.

In addition to parking, some communities use in-lieu fee programs to support other programs, including:

- *Stormwater facilities:* For a description of how these systems allocate costs, see <http://stormwaterfinance.urbancenter.iupui.edu/PDFs/Nelson.pdf>.
- *Affordable housing:* A chart summarizing how such fees are structured in various locations is available at www.planning.org/zoningpractice/pdf/inlieuchart.pdf.

Impact Fees

An impact fee is a one-time charge intended to pass some costs for infrastructure to the developer and ultimately those who purchase the new homes. These fees can be imposed to cover costs of improvements to roads, schools, water, sewer, parks and recreational facilities, and other municipal services. New Hampshire law allows municipalities to impose impact fees on commercial and residential developments to cover capital improvements for new construction. Impact fees can provide funds required to expand infrastructure without increasing property taxes. According to a survey done in 2006 by the Governor's Office of Energy and Planning, of New Hampshire's 234 municipalities, 74 have some impact fee ordinance (IFO) in effect. The number and cost of the fees vary widely.²⁶ In New Hampshire, RSA 674:39 requires assessment of impact fees at the time of planning board approval and collection of the fee when the certificate of occupancy is issued.

Opponents argue that impact fees stifle economic growth and reduce the supply of affordable housing. However, an analysis prepared by the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy showed impact fees have either a neutral or positive effect upon economic growth, as measured by new jobs added. The Brookings Institution analysis examined economic development (job growth) in the 67 counties of Florida. The authors found that either impact fees

²⁶ Kenny, Jack. 2006, *Do development-related fees add to housing costs?*, New Hampshire Business Review, at www.nh.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060818/BUSINESSREVIEW04/60817003 8/27/07.

had no effect on job growth or the counties with impact fees added more jobs during the study period (1993-1999) when compared with areas lacking impact fees.²⁷

To create an IFO that serves the mutual interests of developers and taxpayers, consider the following:

- Make implementation of IFOs contingent on sound master and capital improvement planning.
- Select and identify data determining the fee calculation, and update regularly.
- Exempt affordable housing.
- Exempt 55-and-over developments from school-related impact fees.
- Regionalize fees so developers are not assessed fees by different municipalities for the same project.²⁸

RSA 79-E Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive

This legislative proposal encourages investment in downtowns and village centers with a new tax incentive modeled after an existing New Hampshire statute (the so-called Barn Bill). Its goals are to encourage the rehabilitation and active use of underutilized buildings and, in so doing, to:

- Promote strong local economies.
- Encourage smart, sustainable growth, as an alternative to sprawl, in accordance with the purpose and objectives of RSA Ch. 9-B (State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy).

In a town that has adopted the tool created by this legislation, a property owner who wants to rehabilitate substantially a building located in a downtown or in a village center may apply to the local governing body for a period of temporary tax relief. The temporary tax relief, if granted, would consist of a finite period of time during which the property tax on the structure would not increase because of its substantial rehabilitation. In exchange for the relief, the property owner grants a covenant ensuring there is a public benefit to the rehabilitation. Following expiration of the finite tax-relief period, the structure would be taxed at its full market value taking into account the rehabilitation. Any city or town may adopt this program with the majority vote of its legislative body. Applications by property owners are made to the governing body and are accompanied by a public notice and public hearing. The governing body may grant tax relief if the application meets the guidelines and public benefit test. The governing body may deny the application in its discretion and “such denial shall be deemed discretionary and shall not be set

²⁷ The Brookings Institution. 2003, *Paying for Prosperity: Impact Fees and Job Growth*, at www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/nelsonimpactfees.htm. 8/27/07.

²⁸ Erik Newman, 2005, *Impact Fees: A Blueprint for Frustration*, New Hampshire Business Review, at www.gcglaw.com/resources/realestate/impact_fees.html. 8/27/07.

aside by the board or tax and land appeals or the superior court except for bad faith or discrimination” (79-E:4 V).

A property owner can apply for the tax relief only if:

- The building is located in the community’s downtown district (or equivalent); and
- The rehabilitation costs at least 15 percent of the building’s pre-rehab assessed value, or \$75,000, whichever is less; and
- The rehabilitation is consistent with the municipality’s master plan or development regulations.

For more information, contact:

Jennifer Goodman, NH Preservation Alliance – (603) 224-2281, jg@nhpreservation.org.

Kathy La Plante, NH Main Street Center – (603) 223-9942, klaplante@nhmainstreet.org.

Transportation Enhancement Funds

Transportation Enhancements (TE) activities are federally funded community-based projects that expand travel choices and enhance the transportation experience by improving the cultural, historic, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of the transportation infrastructure. Projects can include creation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, streetscape improvements, refurbishment of historic transportation facilities, and other investments that enhance community access. The federal government provides funding for TE projects through surface transportation legislation. A listing of past projects funded by TE money in Belknap and elsewhere in New Hampshire is available at www.enhancements.org/projectlist.asp.

To submit an application for TE funds or to learn more about the TE program, contact the New Hampshire TE manager at NH-DOT. State TE contacts are responsible for the implementation of the TE program and the distribution of funds. U.S. DOT provides thorough guidance on the types of eligible projects, which is available at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/guidance.htm#eligible.

New Hampshire TE Contact:

Ram Maddali
Project Manager
Project Development Div.
Department of Transportation
JO Morton Building
1 Hazen Drive PO Box 438
Concord, NH 03302-0438
Tel: (603) 271-6581 Fax: (603) 271-7199
rmaddali@dot.state.nh.us

Belknap County Economic Development Council

The Belknap County Economic Development Council (BCEDC) is a non-profit regional development corporation serving the businesses and eleven municipalities in Belknap County, New Hampshire. Funded by public and private donations, the primary mission of the BCEDC is to promote the economic vitality of Belknap County by providing coordination and leadership in facilitating sustainable economic growth and the preservation and creation of quality jobs. The Council serves as the regional liaison with the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development.

Business development assistance is available without charge to established, new, or prospective businesses. Laconia's three core neighborhoods should be working with the BCEDC to, at a minimum, become familiar with their services. BCEDC offers a wide range of development services and business development assistance to municipalities and existing, new, and prospective businesses. BCEDC provides a wide range of services including technical assistance, loan programs, a Site Assistance, Business Information Center, and workshops. For more information on BCEDC programs, see www.bcedc.org/.

Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund

The Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF) is a widely available financing source used to fund municipal wastewater treatment projects as well as nonpoint-source pollution control projects. Since 1989, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services has provided millions of dollars in low interest loans to towns and cities for sewer and wastewater treatment projects through the New Hampshire State Revolving Loan Fund Program (NH SRF).

The NH Department of Environmental Services administers the NH SRF program. The Department obtains capitalization grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, solicits potential interested parties for loans, negotiates loan agreements with local communities, reviews and approves payment requests from loan recipients, and otherwise manages the program. Each fiscal year (normally in August), the State prepares a priority list to project where the available funds for that year will be allocated. The list is for planning purposes and is subject to change depending on which communities are ready to proceed. Consequently, the funds can become available on a "first come, first served" basis. The loan span ranges from five to twenty years, and all repayments, including interest and principal, must be credited to the Program.

Most New Hampshire communities with publicly owned wastewater systems or unlined landfills are eligible for a loan from the CWSRF to improve their wastewater system or close their landfill. Most, if not all, costs directly associated with these projects are eligible for funding through the loan program. Some of the costs not eligible for funding are:

- An acquisition that is not part of the wastewater treatment process or directly related to the project.
- The operation and maintenance costs.

- Most legal and administrative costs. For other information and application procedures, see www.des.state.nh.us/factsheets/wwt/web-6.htm.

Other Resources

Dollars and Sense of Saving Special Places, available at www.nh.gov/oep/resourcelibrary/referencelibrary/o/openspace/documents/dollarsandsensebrochure.pdf. This link leads to a brochure describing the availability of the new and improved Dollars and Sense of Saving Special Places, which is a presentation on the economic aspects of land use and land conservation. This is an update of a resource that has been effective for nearly 10 years. The new version contains new information and has changed enough that people who have seen the old one will still enjoy and learn from the new one. For questions, contact Dorothy Tripp Taylor, Director, Center for Land Conservation Assistance, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, 54 Portsmouth Street, Concord, NH 03301 (603) 717-7045 dtaylor@ForestSociety.org.