

Project Overview



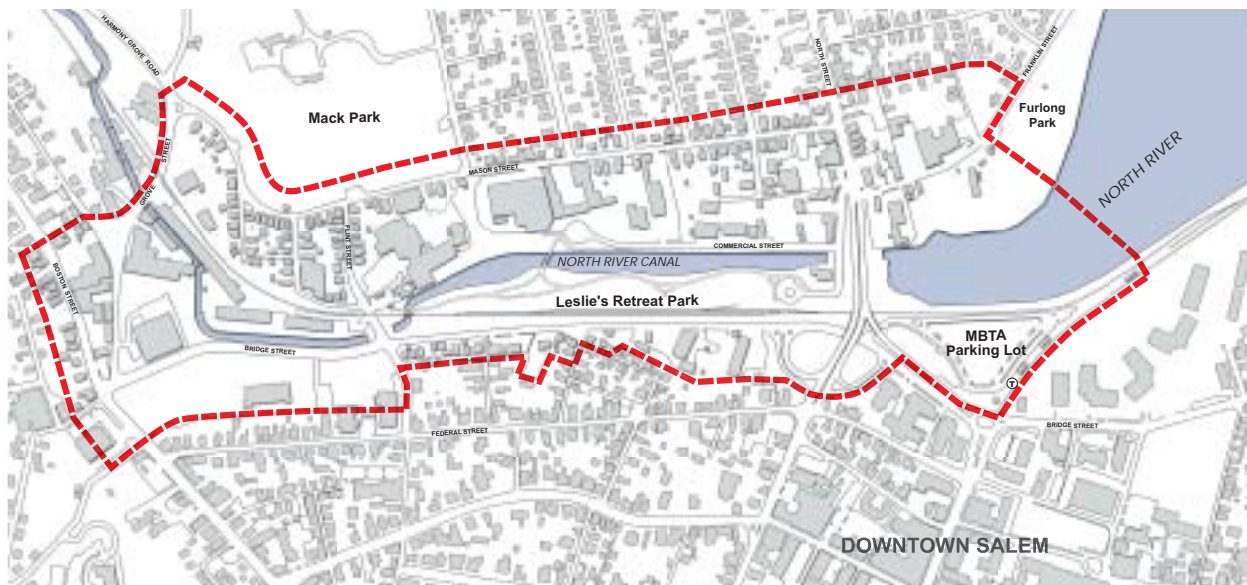
Project Overview

In initiating the North River Canal Corridor Neighborhood Master Planning process, the City of Salem has recognized the true potential of this area to contribute directly to the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods and the community as a whole. They have also recognized that capturing the area's full potential will require an active partnership with the neighborhood residents, business people and the wider community to create a visionary plan that is market responsive, encompasses a real understanding of roadway capacity, and responds to development issues and opportunities.

Despite the inherent challenges that are posed in undertaking a planning study that includes such diverse urban characteristics, many of the historic and physical qualities of the North River Canal Corridor's environment – if pooled together – offer the opportunity to reconnect various pieces of new and old urban fabric. To achieve this, the Master Plan has capitalized on the existing area resources such as Leslie's Retreat Park, the nearby historic neighborhoods, canal



Leslie's Retreat Park.



The study area.



North River Canal is bound by the canal, a railroad corridor, and a mix of industrial, residential, and commercial sites.



Large older buildings on Goodhue Street offer potential for redevelopment.



Bridge Street is currently characterized by a mix of auto-related uses and historic residential homes.

and riverfront and has endeavored to forge new connections and build in opportunities for new development that will transform and strengthen the identity of this area.

This plan is the product of those efforts. It describes the shared Vision Plan produced by the larger community and City, and the process leading to the creation of the vision and the subsequent implementation steps needed to achieve the short and long-term goals of this plan.

The Planning Area

The planning area for this study is comprised of approximately 57 acres, generally bound by Bridge Street, Mason Street, North Street and Boston Street, including parts of Wards 2, 4 and 6. On the northern banks of the river, it also includes land that extends along Franklin Street to Furlong Park, and on the southern bank includes the MBTA Station and its parking lot. The area has a wide range and mix of uses that create a unique character. It includes historic residential areas, and a river of regional ecological significance, as well as large pieces of parkland. The area also includes several vacant or underutilized parcels that have been identified by the City and Working Group as potentially having a major role in the

future of revitalizing this area. They include: the old Sylvania site, the Flynntan site, and the waterfront parcels along Franklin Street.

Significant historic resources are located in and nearby the study area. Within the study area is the McIntire National Register Historic District, and several neighborhoods and streetscapes on the north side of the North River and North River Canal that have been recommended for potential National Register listing. It is also the historic site of Leslie's Retreat, currently identified by the plaque that is adjacent to North Street. Nearby to study area are the Courthouse District, the First Universalist Church, the Old Salem Jail and Jailer's House, the Howard Street Burying Ground, the Salem Common Historic District, and the North River Historic District, all National Register districts or sites.

History of the North River, Canal, and study area

Salem was settled by English colonists 375 years ago along the banks of the North River. In the 19th century, engineers filled in parts of the river, creating a canal and new land along the banks of the waterway in order to hasten disposal of wastes from the various tanneries and mills (formerly known as the Blubber Hollow area) that had developed along the river corridor. By the middle of the 20th century, industrial uses along the canal had declined, leaving many industrial sites abandoned. Although there are still some active industrial uses in the corridor, there are also vacant and large pieces of underutilized land. As a result of inadequate regulations, The North River's important role in the industrial development of the cities of Salem and Peabody came at a high cost to the River's environmental health. Today, with stricter regulations and sound planning, the North River is being restored and once again recognized as a natural resource.



The historic homes of Federal Street line portions of Bridge Street.



Rail cars are stored adjacent to the park, which are an eyesore, and visual barrier.



Today, the North River Canal Corridor area is a diverse district with a mix of uses adjacent to vibrant residential neighborhoods. Bridge Street now a major east-west vehicular connection between North Street and Boston Street—currently has a diverse character and set of uses on the south side of the street—these include the Webb building—a historic brick warehouse building—a variety of auto-related industries, large vacant parcels and portions of the historic residential fabric of the adjacent Federal Street Neighborhood.

The North River Canal is at the heart of the study area. Leslie's Retreat Park, centered on the North River Canal, was created as a replication area and to mitigate adverse effects to wetlands that are associated with all Phases of the Salem-Beverly Transportation project or otherwise known as the Bi-Pass Road or North River Parkway. The park has inadequate access from the surrounding neighborhoods, and poor drainage. Residents and neighbors have advocated for safety measures to further protect people at the waters edge. While this new urban park offers the opportunity to enhance the area and provide dedicated public space that enhances the quality of life in the neighborhood, the lack of connectivity to the surrounding residential areas, physical barriers- such as the rail lines and industrial areas – have isolated this park and left it disconnected from its context.



Salem in its region.

The North River Basin is located on the east side of North Street and is connected to the North River Canal via a conduit under North Street. This portion of the riverfront is very different in scale and character from the adjacent portions of the canal. The MBTA's Salem Station is located on the southern banks of the river and currently has a large surface parking lot that is not well

connected to the downtown, northern neighborhoods and its adjacent waterfront. During the time of this planning study, the MBTA was engaged in developing a proposal for a 700 car parking structure to replace the existing surface parking lot.

The northern banks of the North River are, yet again, quite different in character from the southern banks. The area is home to many industrial uses, including an auto-salvage yard, as well as vacant waterfront sites, a car wash facility and other commercial uses. The North Salem residential community, consisting of many two-to-two 1/2 and some three story homes is located just north of Franklin Street.

Residential neighborhoods are located to the north and south of the study area. The Federal Street neighborhood includes some of the oldest homes in Salem and has maintained a fine historic character. Mason Street currently is the transition point from commercial and light industrial uses to the south, to predominantly residential uses with fine urban streets to the north.

Significance to Salem and Region

The North River Canal Corridor area is an important northern gateway to downtown Salem. It is bordered by two primary entrance roadways from Route 128, which include Boston Street and North Street (Rt. 114). In addition, the MBTA commuter rail station, which provides daily service for commuters to Boston, is located along the riverfront adjacent to North Street. As part of the North Shore Major Investment Study (MIS), the MBTA is exploring several options to improve rail service to Salem. One of the options being studied would use the rail line that runs along the canal to expand service to Peabody and Danvers. The expanded service would be accommodated through redeveloping the existing rail line that spurs to the west of the existing rail station and

runs adjacent to Bridge Street and Leslie's Retreat Park.

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the proposed rail extension to Beverly would occur. It should be noted, however, that the issue of one track vs. two track extension was not discussed by the working group. The rail extension should continue to be coordinated with the efforts of this plan as it progresses into the design phase to ensure that the recommendations of this plan are fully acknowledged.

As part of reconstruction of Bridge Street, Phase IV of the Salem-Beverly Transportation Project, it is anticipated that the current storage of rail cars that occurs next to Leslie's Retreat Park would be removed, as would the current spur line that connects the Salem line and the westbound line to Danvers – thus freeing up a significant portion of the waterfront adjacent to the MBTA parking lot.

The Planning Process Overview

The planning process was undertaken in two phases. During phase one, the City and Working Group developed a vision statement and identified preliminary issues and opportunities. For phase two—The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) initiated the master planning process with their planning consultant team to transform the vision statement into a master plan.

Phase One

Mayor Stanley Usovicz appointed a 20 member Working Group for the North River Corridor Planning Project, representing business owners, members of the community, residents and volunteers who attended monthly meetings. Through their participation, they were charged to “help create a true communi-

North River Canal Corridor Vision Statement

(February 2003)

Salem was settled by English colonists 375 years ago along the banks of the North River. Today, the North River Canal Corridor area is a diverse district with a mix of commercial, residential, and industrial uses adjacent to vibrant residential neighborhoods. This important area is also the main entrance corridor into the city and commuter gateway to the downtown. However, the river, the railroad, and industrial development have created a barrier to the downtown. Future development should reconnect this area creating a mixture of compatible uses that expand upon the urban character of the city. Its strategic location offers the opportunity to reconnect the diverse neighborhoods that surround it and take advantage of the available building stock, vacant parcels, unique open space system, and waterfront access. This important area deserves thoughtful development worthy of the rich neighborhood tradition of Salem.

The North River Canal planning process was initiated in June 2002, and planners, residents, businesses, and political leaders developed this Vision Statement for the future.

Create appropriate development while preserving our historic neighborhood character

Create new housing opportunities that encourage a range of housing types and affordability. Take advantage of the unique architectural character of the existing underutilized industrial buildings by embracing uses such as artist exhibit, work, and live/work space.

Encourage development projects that preserve the unique historic character and scale of the adjacent neighborhoods and which take advantage of its waterfront location. Use zoning to encourage desired quality development that respects the quality of life provided by the existing neighborhoods.

Support development that contributes to the quality of life for all Salem residents by providing housing options, livable-wage employment prospects, and cultural and recreational opportunities.

Address transportation issues for existing and new developments

Encourage public and private developments in the area that provide connections and links to the adjacent train station to promote transit use; reduce and manage

existing traffic congestion; address parking demand; and provide a more pedestrian-friendly area.

Improve and enhance traffic patterns to facilitate access to and through the area by channeling traffic to appropriate roadways while providing better connections to open space through integration of pedestrian and bike paths.

Enhance the public realm in keeping with our unique neighborhood character

Upgrade the public realm by creating an accessible network of safe, clean, and well-landscaped areas and open spaces where people can sit, walk, run, or bike.

Coordinate the development and implementation of guidelines for landscape and streetscape improvements that are historically sensitive and encourage the use of appropriate materials.

Development of the NRCC area in accordance with this vision offers an opportunity to link neighborhoods to create an area in which people can live, work, shop, and play in a diverse urban area.

ty-driven planning process... and assist the Department of Planning and Community Development and a planning consultant develop a vision for the area to guide future projects in the neighborhood.”

DPCD worked closely with the established Working Group during the first phase of the planning process to develop a clear understanding of the site, its related issues and opportunities and ultimately a vision statement (see previous page) that set the framework for developing the master plan in phase two of the planning process.

Walking Tour

At its second meeting, held in September 2002, the Working Group went outside on a walking tour of the North River Canal area. With cameras in hand, group members took photos and notes to illustrate and document the issues and opportunities important to them.

Issues & Opportunities

In October 2002, the Working Group met again to exchange ideas and to discuss the findings of the walking tour. The group identified issues and opportunities regarding;

- Transportation
- Housing
- Environment
- Economic development
- Public realm

These ideas and concerns were compiled into a prioritized list. For a full list of prioritized issues and opportunities, refer to Appendix A

Vision Statement

The DPCD and the Working Group met again in December 2002 to translate the prioritized issues and opportunities into goals and objec-

tives and a Vision Statement for the future of the area. The Vision Statement served as a guide for subsequent planning to the consulting team in this planning effort. The Vision Statement, developed in February 2003, is based on the following three principles:

- Create appropriate development while preserving our historic neighborhood character.
- Address transportation issues for existing and new developments.
- Enhance the public realm in keeping with our unique neighborhood character.

Phase Two

Team Members

Goody, Clancy & Associates was selected by the City to serve as the primary consultant for the North River Canal planning effort. Goody Clancy was joined in this effort by two firms that brought complementary expertise in transportation and economic development. Earth Tech, Inc. provided transportation planning and traffic engineering services for the project. FXM Associates, an economics research firm, provided an overall assessment of the market potential for alternative uses in the Canal corridor.

Goals

The consulting team worked closely with the DCPD and Working Group to develop a highly interactive process to engage the public and to produce a master plan that builds on the work accomplished in phase one and specifically address the issues and opportunities that were identified by the Working Group. The team analyzed existing conditions and the vision statement that was prepared by the Working group, and developed three concept alternatives for development in the study area. A market analyses was conducted, which provided an overview of development potential.

Analyses were also done for future planned developments on key parcels on Franklin, Goodhue, and Bridge Streets. Finally, the alternatives were refined into a preferred plan based on input from the community and working group.

Concurrent Planning Efforts

During the process of this study there were several concurrent planning studies that were being undertaken. They include:

- The North Street (Route 114) Improvements
- The Salem Trial Court Expansion
- MBTA Parking garage
- North Shore major investment study
- Bridge Street Reconstruction

It should be emphasized that these concurrent planning studies were still in the preliminary stages of development and that some of the initial considerations from these plans have been considered as part of this plan as general assumptions for the planning purposes of this study. This does not mean, however, that this planning study endorses the other concurrent planning studies that are noted above and referred to in this document. As noted in chapter 4 – Implementation, it is important as this plan moves forward to continue to coordinate the efforts of this plan with other surrounding planning studies so that others will be aware of the design considerations that are included in this Vision Plan.

Schedule

The consulting team met with the working group over a 7-month period and engaged the community members in variety of topic specific meetings to understand and explore issues and opportunities and to refine the vision statement and develop a vision plan. These meetings

include informal, individual stakeholder interviews with local residents, business owners, and community members as well as formal meetings with the DPCD and the Working Group and workshops with the public.

A summary of the project schedule and meetings follows:

- **Analysis of Existing Conditions and Review of Vision Statement**
DPCD and Working Group Meeting #1—Kickoff
DPCD and Working Group Meeting #2
—Report Back on Existing Conditions and Vision Statement
- **Identification and Preparation of Conceptual Alternatives for Future Development**
Public Meeting #1—Two Day—Alternatives Workshop
- **Preparation of a Draft Neighborhood Master Plan**
DPCD and Working Group Meeting #3 and 4 /
Public Meeting #2—Presentation of Draft Plan
- **Preparation of a Final Neighborhood Master Plan**
DPCD and Working Group Meeting #5 / Public Meeting—Presentation of Final Plan