

Town of Littleton Design Charrette

Littleton, NH

September 13-14, 2019



Town of Littleton Design Charrette Acknowledgments

Thank you to the individuals who donated their time, energy, and expertise for this charrette. And to all the community members who shared their insights about Littleton.

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The Littleton Team

Without the support and participation of all of the following groups and individuals, this charrette would not have been possible:

Leaders:

Andrew Dorsett, Littleton Town Manager

Robin Heath, Executive Assistant

John Hennessey, River District Commission Chair

David Ernsberger, River District Commission

Sue Pilotte, Littleton Opera House

Hosted by:

N.C.I.C. Grant

Woodsville Guaranty Savings Bank

Sponsors & Contributors

Littleton Coin Company

Eames Realty

Renaissance Mills, LLC

Porfidios Market and Deli

Peabody & Smith Realty

Littleton Food Coop

Topic of the Town Restaurant

Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce



Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire, The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH), is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed in 1989. Plan NH has *a vision* of a New Hampshire that is vibrant and healthy for its people, its economies and the environment. To achieve that vision, Plan NH's mission is to “foster excellence in planning, design and development of New Hampshire’s built environment,” because we believe that *what* we build, *where* we build and *how* we build anything has a significant impact on that vibrancy and health.

Plan NH *champions principles and ideas* that balance building projects, including anything built in the public realm, such as buildings, roads, bridges, memorials, public sculpture, with:

- the needs of people, including where they live, how they get about, what services are necessary, what they value
- maintaining the “sense of place” of our towns, cities and villages that make them unique, including preserving historic assets, open spaces, agriculture and farming
- protecting our air, water, flora and fauna

Among our signature programs is *the design charrette*, an exercise that brings professionals from our membership together with New Hampshire communities to explore design ideas, usually around a town center or other significant neighborhood. Through recommendations made, Plan NH can demonstrate the role and importance of the principles and ideas noted above in concrete, real examples.



Why did Plan NH come back to Littleton?



The application from the Town of Littleton requested that the Plan NH charrette team provide design ideas for the south side of the Ammonoosuc River, directly across from the downtown and the opposite side of the River from the location of the 2012 Plan NH charrette. In March of 2019, the Town of Littleton submitted an application to the Plan NH Design Charrette Program, seeking further investigation of the following:

The Town has secured partial funding for the acquisition and development of property along the Ammonoosuc River, directly across from the downtown. It is a 7.21-acre parcel, 2.26 acres of which shall be retained for development. The Town is considering developing the remaining 4.95 acre piece into a Health/Wellness Park. This could include a pavilion, skate rink, gardens and more- all a part of a larger trail network.

Additional focus was on the extensive trail network going through and near downtown, especially the Riverwalk and the potential for the Rail Trail connection. During our time in Littleton, the team noticed that the existing trails were extremely well utilized and a point of pride for residents. The team proposed to better establish and connect this trail network in addition to the creation of new trails along the river that would benefit from the future Rail Trail. Some of the new trails that were proposed would require working with private landowners as well as dealing with at-grade crossings with the existing road network and potential elevation changes with the future Rail Trail.

During the design charrette additional study areas were added including potential redevelopment of the McIver property, the rail trail, a potential dog park, a parcel owned by the NHDOT, the former Hitchiner Manufacturing parcel, and information on opportunity zones.

Plan NH in Littleton, NH

September 13th and September 14th, 2019



The charrette team takes a tour of the primary subject parcel



The charrette team holds listening sessions with the general public on September 13th

What is a charrette?

Simply stated, a charrette is a brief, intense, brainstorming session in which ideas are brought together for the purpose of defining potential planning recommendations and possible design solutions for an identified need. For Plan NH, this is usually related to a town center or other significant neighborhood in a community.

Plan NH's community design charrettes take place over the course of two days: eight hours on a Friday for listening and then another eight hours the next day for brainstorming, crafting recommended solutions, and presenting thoughts to the community.

The process engages planning and design professionals in direct dialog and conversation with each other and with local residents to collect information needed in order to develop good and relevant recommendations about how to address a particular challenge. Plan

NH sees this part of the process as a period of discovery: discovering who the community is, what they value, what they really want. This community input is essential and critical to the value of the outcomes.

The results of a Plan NH charrette are general and overarching planning and design recommendations, rather than specific directions. Plan NH does not dictate but suggests. Most often, the outcome of a Plan NH charrette is described as a "vision": an expression of how things might be, based on what the team saw and heard and learned.

Charrettes blend the broad experience of planning and design professionals with local citizens' detailed knowledge of their own community to develop recommendations that address challenges and opportunities in the project at hand. These recommendations provide a framework within which more detailed solutions and plans of action can be developed.



The charrette team works collaboratively with key stakeholders to understand challenges and draft recommendations



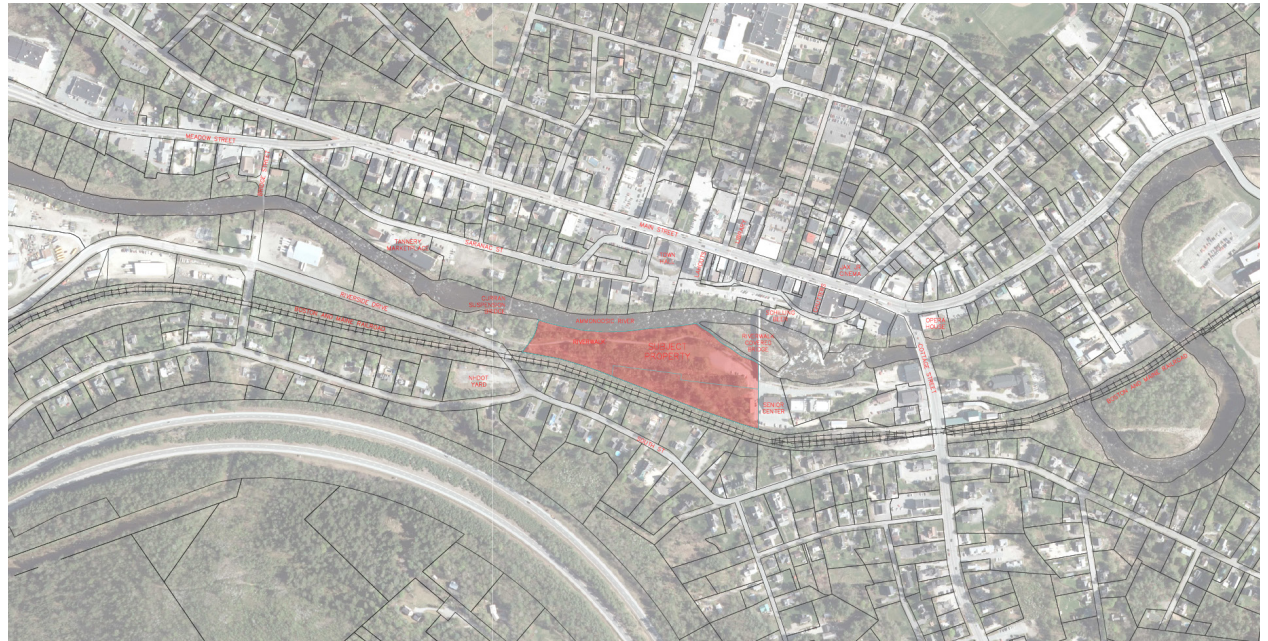
The general public are invited back for a presentation of the charrette team's recommendations

Primary Parcel – The Munro Parcel

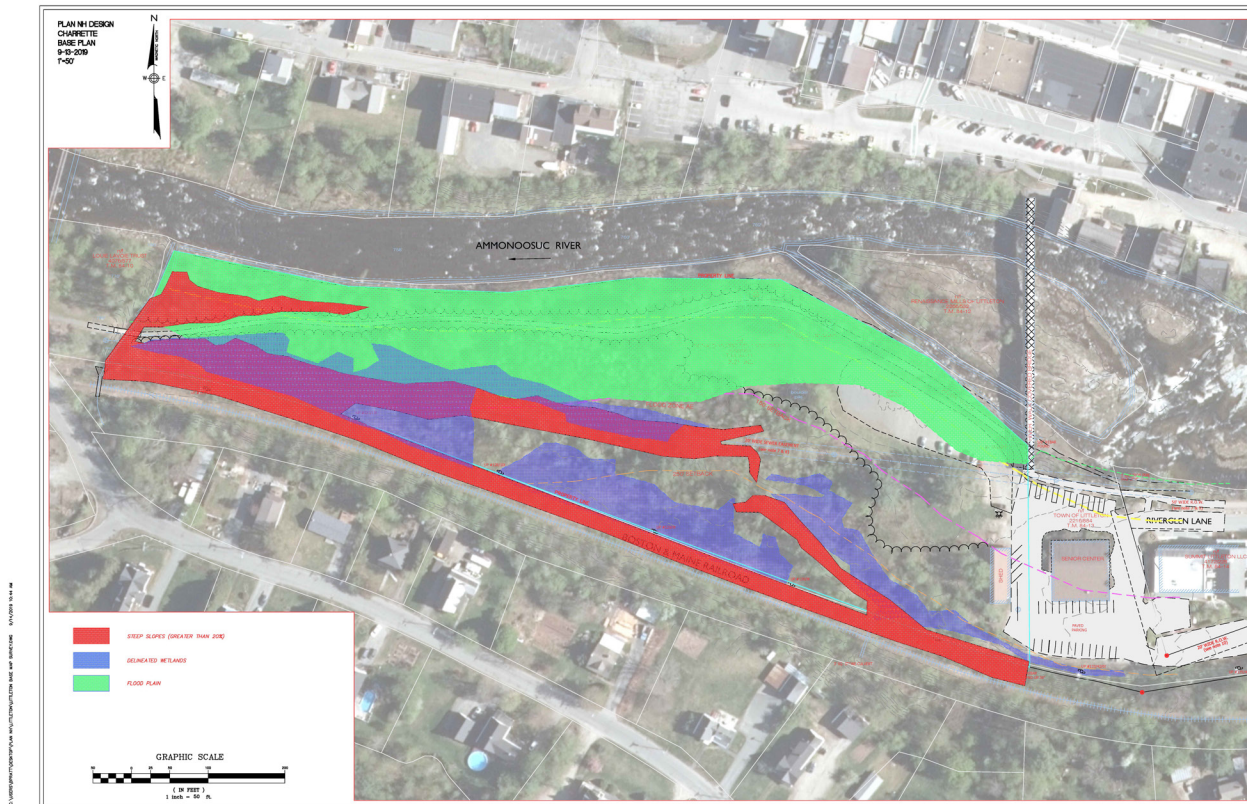
Details of the Primary Parcel

The primary subject parcel (Munro parcel) contains approximately 7.2 acres of land, bounded by the Ammonoosuc River on the north, the senior center parcel on the east, the Boston and Maine Railroad right of way on the south, and an intermittent stream to the west. Just to the east of the property is the existing Riverwalk covered pedestrian bridge, and to the west is another pedestrian bridge known as the Curran suspension bridge.

The land is a privately owned parcel which the landowner has graciously allowed the public to use. Currently the parcel contains a gravel Riverwalk which connects the Curran suspension bridge to the Riverwalk covered bridge with an additional pedestrian access to Riverside Drive. There is a gravel parking lot on the parcel as well used by the senior center, employees of local businesses and members of the public. Also located on the parcel is a grass area that is used for outdoor recreation including a farmers market, outdoor concerts, and other events.



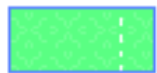
Primary Parcel – Lot Challenges



STEEL SLOPES (GREATER THAN 20%)



DELINEATED WETLANDS



FLOOD PLAIN

- **Wetlands** – The site has fairly significant wetlands on the southern side of the lot which are detailed on the base map plans highlighted in blue. A permit from NHDES would be needed to disturb wetlands. NHDES primarily intends to minimize and avoid wetland impacts unless absolutely necessary.
- **Floodplain** – The Ammonoosuc River has been determined by FEMA to be located within the 100-year floodplain. The floodplain extends a variable width into the parcel along the riverfront by over 100 feet in some locations. Development within floodplains can be performed, however any development in the floodplain must be completed in a responsible manner to avoid increases in flood depths to abutting properties, and any development within the floodplain must be completed by flood proofing or raising above the established flood plain elevations.
- **Steep Slopes** – The parcel also contains steep slopes. Steep slopes should be avoided when developing land to protect natural features and minimize erosion. These steep slopes are highlighted in red on the included maps.
- **Shoreland protection** – The parcel is located within the NHDES protected Shoreland. This is an area within 250 feet of a fourth order of higher stream. The protected Shoreland has different requirements depending on the setback from the protected Shoreland. Within 50 feet of the shoreline, the majority of the vegetation should be retained. Between 50 and 150 feet, at least 25 percent of the natural vegetation must be retained. Depending on the amount of impervious area, storm water management would be required. The Shoreland protection setbacks are shown on the attached plans.

Site Tour Observations



What the Plan NH team saw in Littleton

Murro Parcel

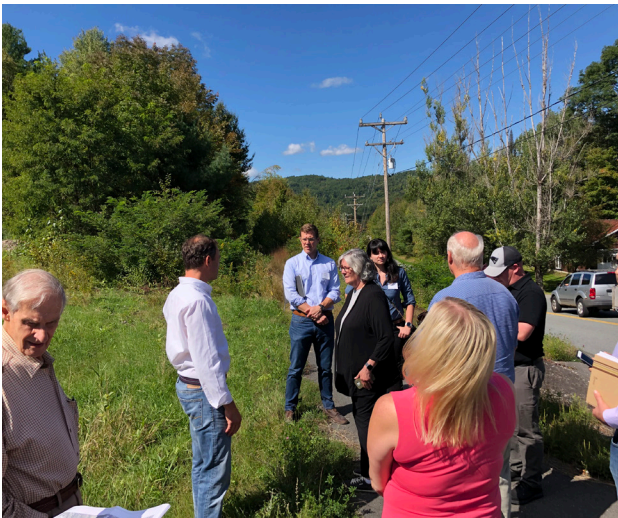
- Walked along the River
- Park
- Bridges
- Rail Trail
- Intersection



NHDOT Parcel

Littleton Water & Light Parcel

Former Hitchiner Manufacturing Parcel



The site tours helped our charrette team identify initial concerns and ideas about these parcels, setting up our collaborative sessions with community leaders, key stakeholders and the general public

Plan NH would like to thank Mr. Eames and Mr. Ernsberger for their historical and engaging tour of Littleton!

What Littleton Told Plan NH

What Plan NH Heard from Community Leaders and Key Stakeholders

Following our tour through Littleton, we held both key stakeholder and public sessions at the Littleton Opera House to make sure that our Charrette team had a comprehensive understanding of both the area in which we were going to address, in addition to the impacts that suggestions may have, taking into account the diverse needs and desires of the community. We held a major stakeholder session and two public sessions on Friday, September 13, 2019 and the overarching themes we heard during these sessions were:

- Recreational Access to the River
- Parking Challenges
- Safety and Lighting Considerations
- Community Event Space
- Maintain and Promote Natural Landscape
- Use of Area for Bikes, Pedestrians, and Snowmobiles Together
- Viewing Areas
- Connectivity between Rail Trail and Downtown

Key Takeaways from Public Sessions

- *Need to keep the space open and adaptable*
- *Increase and promote safety, maintenance and cleanliness (added lighting and public restrooms)*
- *Attract the 30-50 year old demographic to the area*
- *Work to develop solutions that manage the tension of structures and open space*
- *Enhance parking and downtown connection for the Rail Trail*
- *"Even New York City has Central Park"*



Key Factors for Recommendations

Stemming off these learned factors, our team also pressed stakeholders and the public to provide us with any other factors that we needed to know to make the best recommendations to the Town. They included:

- Keep the natural space, but still address the parking problem
- There is a current lack of parking and loading areas for snowmobiles
- There is potential for nature trails, but there needs to be more formal access to the river
- There is a current lack of power and utilities to this green space
- Greater need for safety (current lack of signage, no designated smoking areas)
- As the use grows, consider the potential changes in traffic
- Potentially reconfigure the parking to allow for more contiguous green space

Results from Information Gathering

Based on the results of the stakeholder and public meetings the overwhelming majority of residents and stakeholders preferred to keep the parcel to be used for open recreation space (farmer market, events, and concerts), preserve natural land, enhance lighting, add restrooms, and more.

The existing parking was discussed as well, and the overwhelming majority of residents preferred to keep parking on the parcel as parking is in short supply for downtown and the senior center. Based on the results, a plan was developed on how to best develop the parcel.



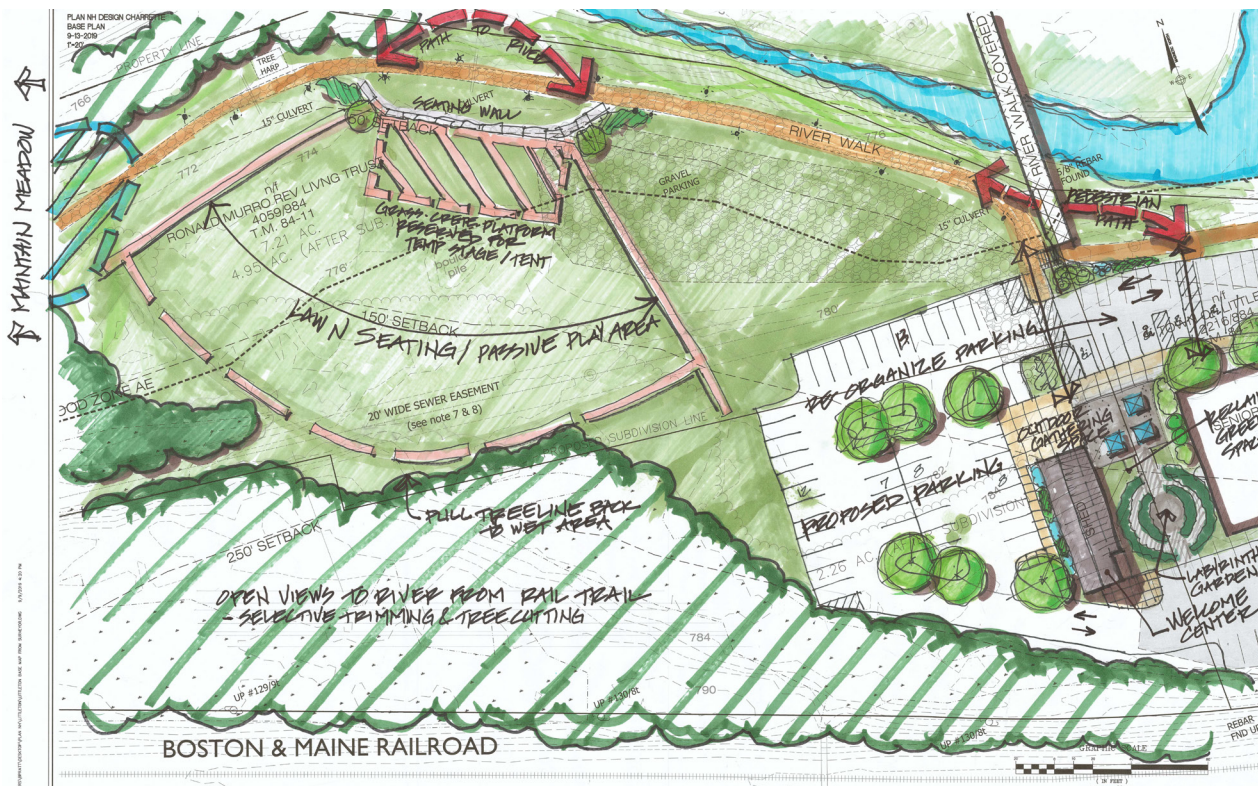
Context Map - An Overview



Park Redevelopment – Littleton Riverside Commons



For the reorientation of this space, the plan is to relocate the parking spaces to make them closer and more accessible to the senior center. This also allow us to regain some green space and greater access to the river and Riverwalk with the parking being more clearly delineated and moved away from the river. With clearer delineation of parking, we are able to define this space and not lose any spots from the current orientation. This also provides more access for emergency vehicles, which is an important factor considering the location of the Senior Center.



After doing a view study, there may be selective clearing to create more synergy with the Rail Trail, which is not currently visible to users of this green space area. The green space would continue to be utilized for the Farmer's Market, which has been a boon to the area, and is incredibly popular. Increased amenities, such as electrical hookups, improved landscaping and increased lighting will only enhance the user experience and increase connectivity to users of the area.

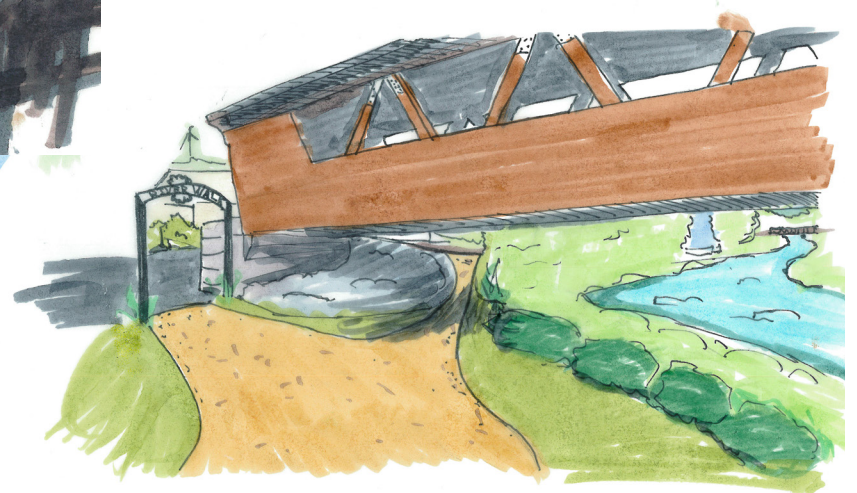
Park Redevelopment – Littleton Riverside Commons



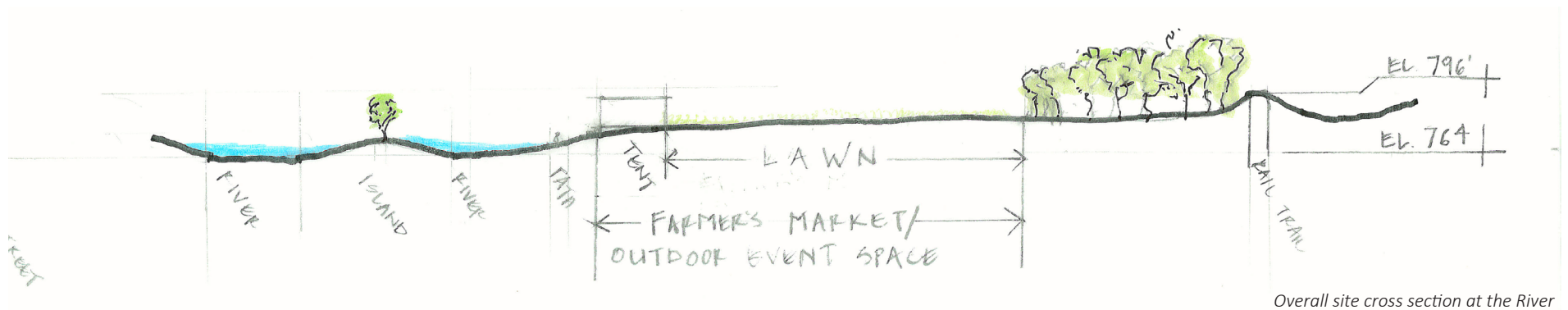
There is currently a shed that could be converted to a Welcome Center with public bathrooms and seasonal type amenities (warming/cooling station, possible garage for snowmobiles, potential retail kiosks) for visitors.

We also propose to incorporate an arch/gate structure, much like we see in other areas of town, to signify the entrance and beginning of the Riverwalk, to provide ease of wayfinding for visitors.

Installing a ramp and connecting it underneath the bridge, coupled with improved vegetation management, provides more connectivity to the space.



Park Redevelopment – Littleton Riverside Commons



In relocating the existing parking spaces currently abutting the Riverwalk, residents will have direct access to the water front for outdoor activities, including fly fishing, kayaking, and swimming. The relocated parking provides proximate parking for the senior center, and welcome center, concentrating activity vehicular activity adjacent to the existing and rehabilitated buildings.

The newly opened space along the waterfront would be regraded to create a large contiguous, open lawn. A 40-foot by 100-foot removable tensile structure (tent) is located adjacent to the existing trail, backed by a permanent seating wall that would allow for permanent water and power provisions. In combination of clearing a portion of the existing trees and brush, the Great Lawn allows for flexible outdoor town uses, including farmers market open area, and outdoor performances. With the modified grading, and natural site conditions, the Great Lawn provides for a gently sloping open amphitheater environment, with excellent sight lines to a stage set-up under the tensile structure. The expanded lawn allows for a broader sight line through the new parcel of land for improved public visibility and safety.

The existing elevated Rail Trail, and managed foliage create a natural acoustic buffer, will limit sound from disrupting the residential neighborhood directly to the south of the Rail Trail. The portion of the Riverwalk north of the tensile structure would be modified to allow for continued use of the Riverwalk by the public during performances, without disrupting the show. The newly created gathering space opens up to the water and creates a 'Pocket Park' within the greater park context, for smaller group gatherings.

The Riverwalk path itself would have illuminated bollards that light the path and further improve public safety, while limiting light pollution to the sky, maintaining night sky observations and reducing the disruption to the indigenous wildlife. Selective clearing of the existing foliage should include a sightline study to determine the best possible views from the Rail Trail to the Town, and, or other natural site features furthering the intimacy and interconnection of the trail network to the Town Center.

Redevelopment of MacIver Property

With this property being in such a unique location to the park, and with the development and increased use of the Rail Trail, this property provides an interesting opportunity for both growth and development. Between hikers, dog walkers, cyclists, and operators of snowmobiles and ATVs, this is already an area that sees some activity. The building that exists there has some unique features and with a little work, it could be a great spot for a coffee/ice cream shop, maybe a bicycle/ATV/snowmobile repair shop, and bringing this light retail element could attract more users.

There also happens to be a right-of-way leading to the park which gives another opportunity for connectivity to the greenspace and ultimately downtown. With the existing Depot restaurant there, more traffic could result to their business and other attractions – hopefully energized by private development.



Rail Trail Pedestrian Separation



During the design charrette it was discovered that the Rail Trail had recently moved into design stage to begin to remove the tracks and convert the corridor to a rail trail to provide connectivity between the already constructed portions of the rail trail on either end. The future Rail Trail, combined with the existing and new trails, will strengthen the connection of downtown to the surrounding areas. It will make these areas that once seemed only accessible by car feel much closer and more connected to the vibrancy of downtown. While ATX/UTVs and snowmobiles will be allowed on the future Rail Trail, this expanded network will benefit commuters on foot or by bike as well as dog walkers and runners. As a result, the team foresees an increase in traffic from Cottage Street on the east to Bridge Street on the west and proposes design solutions to manage this increased traffic.

The future rail trail will be a great connector for the southern side of the river. With the three pedestrian bridges through the town this segment of the Rail Trail needs special attention as it is anticipated that there could be higher pedestrian traffic.

Littleton and the North Country are unique with their rail trails when compared to many other parts of the country. The use of Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) on rail trails are normally banned, but they will be allowed through Littleton. We heard through the community that OHV are an asset, as they are a growing economy here which generates income through tourism and provides recreation. It is important therefore to accommodate these vehicles but also to make their use safe for non-motorized uses close to the downtown.

We recommend proper signage to warn users that they are entering a downtown neighborhood. Slower speed limits and other speed reduction techniques should be explored to keep the downtown neighborhood safe and to reduce noise.

Rail Trail Safety and Best Practices

The ideal situation is what this plan and section shows; dividing the path so that there is a separated pedestrian way from the OHV. A guard rail and elevation change is illustrated here for the separation. Intermittent pull-offs can be included to accommodate the passing of larger vehicles, if the grades don't allow a larger path.



A divided path helps separate pedestrians from OHVs.



Apply proper signage and consider speed reduction techniques



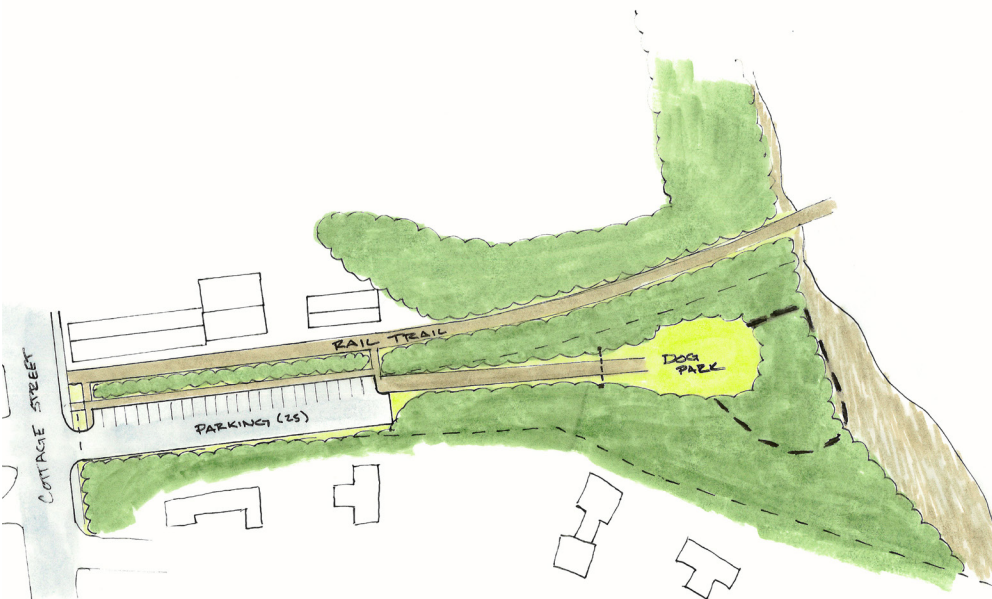
Intermittent pull-offs can be included to accommodate the passing of larger vehicles

Community Dog Park



Members of the community have expressed an interest in creating a dog park in the downtown area. After analyzing the subject parcel on the river and other vacant parcels in the area, we selected the parcel of land across from The Little Grille for potential use as a dog park. The land currently belongs to the owners of the Little Grille and has a lot of potential not only as a dog park, but also public parking.

This site is in close proximity to the downtown & the Murro parcel where many events are held and could serve as parking not only for the dog park, but also as additional parking for events. The current concept shows 25 parking spaces, but could potentially be expanded to more depending on the need. To allow for safe passage through the parking lot as well as provide a connection to the rail trail, a walkway would be placed along the row of parking. With the rail trail running next to this site, it would be a prime location for snow machine parking in the winter months.



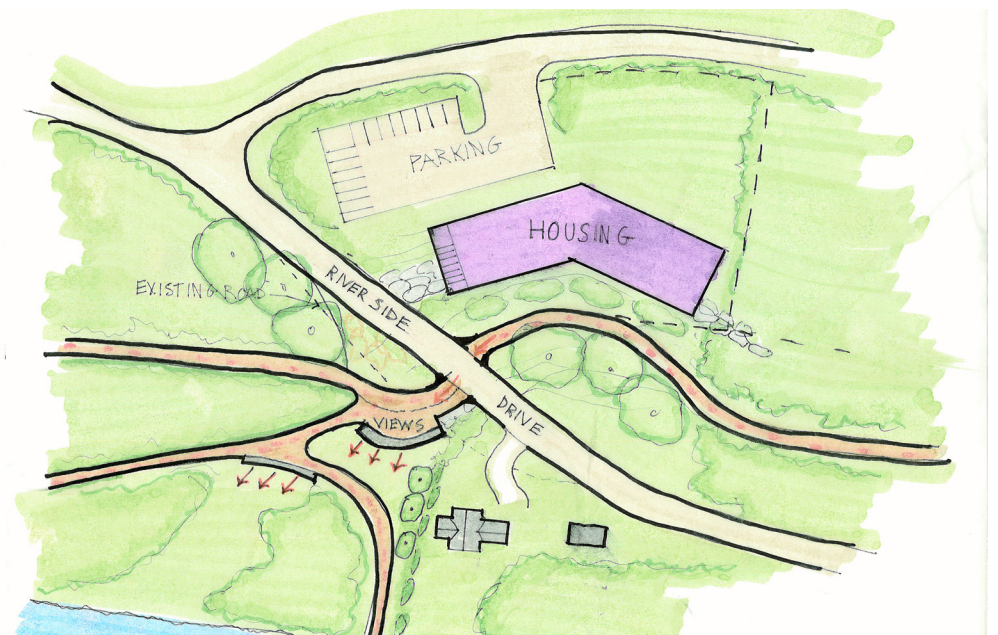
As you continue past the proposed parking area, the slopes transition into a level, open grassy area that would be used for the proposed dog park. The space that is currently cleared would be sufficient space for the park. Some clearing of scrub growth and trimming of trees would be done to clean the space up and possibly create some views of the river. For access to the river, a short walking trail could be created from the open space through the wooded area to the river and loop back around to the open space. Benches placed around the edge of the space would provide seating for pet owners and shade from the surrounding trees. Fencing for the dog park will also need to be installed. The fence could enclose the entire perimeter of the open space or it could just be one section of fencing at the road coming into the space extending from the tree line on one side to the tree line on the other side. In this case, the tree line encompassing the open space would act as the fencing for the rest of the area. Much of this space falls within the flood zone so any fencing placed within the flood zone would need to comply with the flood zone regulations for fencing.

NHDOT Lot Redevelopment

The town has expressed interest in obtaining surplus land from the NHDOT on Riverside Drive and South Street, near the Curren Suspension Bridge. The team agrees that the Town should continue to work with the NH DOT to have the land deemed surplus and put on the tax roll. As part of a redevelopment, the Team propose the creation of residential units with some potential retail to serve the future Rail Trail. Moreover, we also propose the realignment of the future Rail Trail and Riverside Drive to create a safer intersection.

During talks with local stakeholders, we had heard that a dog park has been highly sought after for some time. While the team understands that the NH DOT surplus land has been most recently considered as the location for the dog park, we feel that this could be better located on a triangular parcel of land accessible from the future Rail Trail As noted in other sections of this report

This existing lot would encompass the realignment of Riverside Drive to enhance safety and sight lines, as it appears to be a unsafe in its current orientation. There are opportunities to provide safety enhancements like crosswalks and traffic calming effects, as well as installing areas for enhanced river views from this breathtaking area. This could also be an area with minimal parking areas for ATVs, as it is a good spot for them to leave those vehicles and cross over the bridge and into downtown. There is an opportunity here to possibly build a small collection of housing, such as townhomes, to go along with some adjacent parking for residents.



Littleton Water & Light Parcel

The Littleton Water & Light Company property located to the east of downtown is on a peninsula only accessed through the Littleton Water & Light facility. This parcel will become more accessible with the creation of the future Rail Trail. The team understands that the location of a well on that site will preclude the development of permanent structure and a formal recreational area, but the team proposes extending the Riverwalk along the Ammonoosuc River as well as encouraging an internal trail network.



Former Hitchiner Manufacturing Parcel

While it was outside of the scope of the charrette, we understand that the Hitchiner manufacturing parcel is potential available to be developed. With the upcoming rail trail connectivity, this parcel will now have a pedestrian friendly connection directly to the downtown area, which could open up multiple opportunities for a campus type setting, or a mixed use development to expand the downtown. The town should continue to work with the private landowner and developers to explore development and connectivity options for this and other adjacent parcels.

The Marvin property will also be more accessible due to its proximity to the future Rail Trail. The combination of adjacent 16-acre and 12-acre sites, respectively, along the Ammonoosuc River and so close to downtown presents a huge opportunity. While the team understand that educational and other uses have been proposed for this area, we strongly encourage the Town get a better understanding of the highest and best use for these sites by evaluating potential large land user that would be a benefit to being close to downtown and the increased traffic, which may be a large mixed use re-development.



Opportunity Zones – Potential Funding Options



Littleton is an Opportunity Zone, designated by Governor Sununu in May 2018. The implementation of Opportunity Zones is a Federal program that encourages economic development and investment in underserved areas, and it is overseen by the IRS. There are no specific reporting requirements, state oversight, or investment mandates at this time.

Under the Opportunity Zone program, there are four types of investment types:

1. Construction and Development of Commercial Real Estate
2. Development and Renovation of Existing Property
3. Creation of a New Business
4. Expansion of an Existing Business

Anyone can create a fund, and there is no cap on the amount of capital gains invested. These funds are equity investments only, no debt, and the IRS has a collection of Frequently Asked Questions that can help guide as to which funding mechanism makes the most sense. There are also incentives, including the deferral of capital gains tax liability, step-up in basis of the sale of the original asset, and a permanent exclusion, where no tax on the gain earned if the property is held for 10 years.



Building on Charrette Findings

The charrette in Littleton serves as a starting point, and the vision and ideas outlined in this report are merely a guide for the Town to use as a tool. In our short time here, we have learned that Littleton is a tight-knit community and the power of people coming together to implement recommendations and these ideas cannot be understated. The results of the 2012 Littleton charrette can be seen throughout the Town, and we hope this can serve as the next step in continuing to connect Littleton's downtown with the vast natural resources and opportunities the Town has at its disposal.

Our findings are merely recommendations, and it's up to you – collectively as a Town – to decide what you want to follow, and then determine how to approach development. We recommend not just “input” but a true dialogue throughout this process. This is the future of your Town, and we know you will put in the energy and care that it deserves.

In the meantime, there are some measures that the Town of Littleton can take to prepare to continue the exciting opportunities of development:

- Formalize Pathways to the River
- Traffic Control Measures at Riverside Drive Intersection
- Lighting for Aesthetics and Safety
- Vegetation Control and Management for Visibility



PLAN NEW HAMPSHIRE

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