

# Manchester Community Design Charrette

Families in Transition-New Horizons

*June 28th and 29th, 2019*



# Manchester Community Design Charrette Team

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# 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.



# A Note From the Director

Before you dive into this charrette report, which contains a summary of the recommendations made by the Plan NH team members, I want to preface this by talking about people who don't have a place to live – the population being served by Families in Transition-New Horizons (FIT-NH). This is a very important issue and, as you probably know, there are myriad reasons why someone may end in this situation.

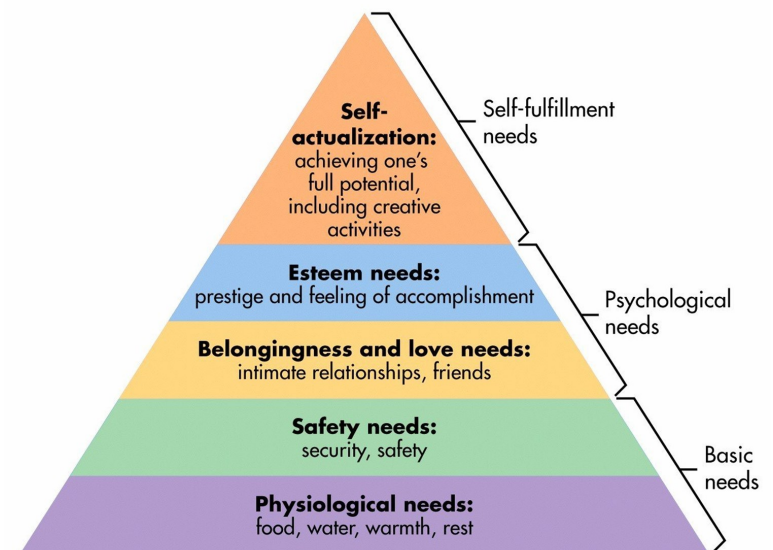
While this didn't come up during the charrette, it isn't uncommon to hear "homeless" attributed to individual choices and poor self-discipline. This narrative is one of the reasons why this issue is so challenging to address. Often, there is a punishment – for example, a fine for sleeping in the park – but this doesn't address the behavior because it does not address the underlying causes. Even when individuals donate sleeping bags, while this is a wonderful thing, it doesn't address the root of the problem.

This narrative is perpetuated by the media, as well as our own stories and perceptions: the middle-aged man who has lost his job, the woman and her children who left an abusive household, or the child who ran away from home. These images are stereotypes, and while they may be based in reality, there is a lot more than that to the issue of homelessness. The more we focus on individuals and their individual struggles, the more we stigmatize the issue and "other" those who don't have a place to live. This prevents us from seeing the *systemic* causes of how folks might end up without a place to live and that there is a spectrum of homelessness, including those who are couch surfing and those who are living in an abusive environment, or an overcrowded shelter, and anyone whose housing is unsafe or tentative. Being in the shelter or on the street is just one part of the spectrum.

In New Hampshire, this issue is exacerbated by a low inventory of available homes, especially at price points that lower income people can afford. Despite our low unemployment, there are still many people working at jobs with very low wages that can't support a place to live. There is also mental illness and drug dependency, which can lead to homelessness (and, in turn, homelessness can lead to drug and alcohol misuse).

In spite of the systemic issues, FIT-NH is doing an outstanding job addressing the basic needs of the people they serve and they're doing it very well. Our recommendations focus on the *built* environment that supports their programs, and are meant to be the foundation of the next conversations the organization has in creating a new future for itself and the people it serves.

Robin LeBlanc  
Executive Director  
Plan NH



# Why Did Plan NH Come to Manchester?

Families in Transition-New Horizons (FIT-NH) requested assistance from Plan NH to redevelop the existing New Horizons facility and reimagine the surrounding neighborhood to better serve the shelter guests and the shelter's neighbors. The mission of FIT-NH is to provide hunger relief, emergency shelter, safe affordable housing, and supportive services to individuals and families who are homeless or in need, enabling them to gain self-sufficiency and respect.

The existing New Horizons facility, which serves as an emergency shelter in downtown Manchester, is a 30,000 square foot building on a 0.57-acre lot at 199 Manchester Street. The goal is to develop the facility into a community center that better meets the needs of the individuals FIT-NH serves and create a centralized facility that acts as a catalyst for positive change in the surrounding neighborhood.

At the time of the charrette, the facility contained a small commercial kitchen and large dining area, which provides more than 200 meals per day; a food pantry, which provides groceries to more than 900 families

per month; beds, which can accommodate 72 shelter guests per night; and some staff offices. The facility's basement is occupied by Catholic Medical Center, which provides limited medical services to underserved populations. On the lot is a greenhouse, which the FIT-NH has considered relocating to the Hollows, a half-acre parcel donated by the City of Manchester that is being developed by FIT-NH into a community garden and learning center.

In their application, the FIT-NH team imagined specialized shelter areas, an enhanced food pantry, permanently-affordable housing units for chronically homeless individuals, increased capacity for shelter guests, community room with daytime access for guests, administrative offices for FIT-NH staff, increased security and safety measures, larger commercial kitchen, and increased walkability and beautification in the neighborhood directly surrounding the shelter.





# The Charrette Process


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 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.

## char·rette

/SHə'ret/ 

**noun** NORTH AMERICAN

a meeting in which all stakeholders in a project attempt to resolve conflicts and map solutions.



# What the Community Told Plan NH

On Friday, June 28th, Plan NH invited stakeholders and members of the community to share their thoughts with the team about the future of 199 Manchester Street.

## What do you see?

People congregating in the area because there is a lack of designated gathering space and shelter guests may not have anywhere to go during the day  
Very little beautification or greenspace  
Shelter guests lack access to a safe and comfortable bathroom facility  
Perception that area is not safe  
Dark (no streetlights)  
The area is dirty and depressed  
Inadequate parking for staff and volunteers  
The demand is very high and FIT-NH is providing services 24/7/365, but the demand is greater than the physical space can handle  
The area is uncomfortable for shelter guests and for the greater community because it isn't a *place*  
Dedicated volunteers and staff  
No bus route nearby and bus doesn't run routes that are compatible with 3<sup>rd</sup> shift jobs and the shelter's current curfew  
Shelter guests have nowhere to store their belongings during the day, meaning they must take everything they own with them  
Facility is not ADA accessible  
The New Horizons building itself needs a face lift and some interior updates

## What do you want to see?

Campus – a better connected and coordinated neighborhood  
Somewhere to store belongings safely and charge devices  
More variety for food  
Somewhere to lock your bicycle up  
Air conditioning during the summer  
More activity and services, such as a training center, for improved upward mobility and holistic help  
Make it a place by making it safer, more comfortable, and more inviting: parks, greenspace, designated outdoor and indoor gathering spaces, art, color, beautification, pedestrian infrastructure, benches, accessibility, streetlights  
Improved flow for entry and wet vs. dry support programs/sleeping quarters  
Permanent, affordable places to live for guests transitioning out of the shelter  
Education for the greater community about the work being done at the shelter  
More flexible shelter schedule/expanded hours  
Parking for staff, guests, and volunteers  
Space for technology use/job searching  
Bathrooms for guests to use 24/7  
ADA compliance

## What else do we need to know?

Swing big – the staff is open to big moves  
Education is needed for the public to combat perceptions  
There are opportunity properties nearby that can be acquired  
FIT-NH has 220 units of supportive housing  
The pantry and greenhouse are not accessed directly by the shelter guests, so they don't need to be on site  
Hannaford has more food available if the shelter can pick it up and store it  
There is funding available specifically because it is a "wet" shelter, but separate space is needed for those in need of a "dry" shelter.  
There are concerns about increased population and the public perception that rules have been loosened  
Expansion over the block is possible  
Most people walk, but occasionally case managers give them a ride. The bus is not well suited to those using the shelter.  
Participants don't want to stay in the same building all day – they want something to do, they want to be outside

# What Local Leaders Told Plan NH

On Friday, June 28th, Plan NH also met with local leaders to gather their input on the future of the Families in Transition-New Horizons shelter at 199 Manchester Street. In the room were representatives from the business community, Manchester Housing Authority, the office of the Mayor, the police and fire departments, and Board of School committee, in addition to abutters, municipal staff, and FIT-NH staff.

## Local leaders shared their insight with the Plan NH team:

The shelter has guests from outside of Manchester, including individuals put on a bus to Manchester from Florida and other parts of the country.

The location is very good, the facility and the staff and volunteers are working hard to meet demand the best they can.

The merger between Families in Transition and New Horizons increased the number of people and there has been an uptick in minor crimes at the site.

There is a lack of outdoor space for participants, and no green space or benches.

There is no good place for guests to wait between meals.

Not everyone wants to go to the shelter and others have been banned from the shelter for various reason. Since the merger, FIT-NH has been shortening the suspension list.

Some participants feel the atmosphere at FIT-NH is too rigid, while others think it isn't rigid enough.

There are opportunities to collaborate with other organizations (e.g. 1269 Café) and acquire additional properties.

There are limited sidewalks, crosswalks, streetlights, and other pedestrian infrastructure in the neighborhood surrounding the facility.

The housing shortage is city-wide, especially for low-income households.

## Local leaders expressed a desire to see:

Designated, desirable outdoor and indoor gathering spaces for shelter guests to occupy during the day.

Better connectivity between various FIT-NH buildings ("campus")

Somewhere for guests to store their belongings during the day so shelter guests can travel to work without their things.

Shelter guests could volunteer in the community or get involved with the community garden, greenhouse, food pantry, and in the kitchen.

Pedestrian infrastructure is needed in the area, including streetlights and sidewalks.





# Recommendations Overview



- The Plan NH team recommends razing the exiting food pantry/former pool building and move to either one of the adjacent properties in the block or to an available property across the street. Currently, the food pantry serves a different clientele than that of FIT-NH, so the team saw no reason in keeping it within the building where it now is. (See page 13 for more discussion.)
- Renovate the existing New Horizons structure and construct a new structure on Pine Street between Manchester Street and Monadnock Lane with an updated entry system and courtyard between the two sections of the shelter.
- The team proposed a new addition to the building on the east side where the dumpster is currently located for an elevator and lockers or storage units for shelter guests to use.
- Construct a new 5-story building for multiple uses/programs on the greenhouse property on Pine Street.
- Create a courtyard between the existing and new building, which will provide a safe, comfortable, outdoor landscaped area on property for participants to utilize.
- The Plan NH team was in support of FIT-NH's current plan for the St. Casmir school, which they would like to use for permanent affordable housing in the future. The second floor of the proposed food pantry may be another ideal location for additional units of permanent affordable housing.
- The Plan NH team's proposed plan, overall, yields a brand new 5-story facility and a renovated facility with adequate space for all the services required at the property, and increases the number of total beds to 200, which includes 140 male beds (21 dry and 119 wet) and 60 female beds (9 dry and 51 wet).

# New Building



Monadnock Lane Side of New Building



Pine Street Side of New Building

The Plan NH team imagined a new building at the current site of the greenhouse. The new building would provide space for a “wet” shelter, separating the “dry” and “wet” shelter guests.

Upon entering the building from the proposed courtyard (see page 14) on Manchester Street, shelter guests would be met with a greeter. In this area of the building, there would also be access to administrative offices and an elevator. Behind the greeter, on Monadnock Lane, there is a floral greenhouse. To the right of the greeter is the new building. The first floor might contain a café, flexible space for education and other uses, and commercial space for a barbershop and a salon. A smaller, indoor greenhouse can be found in the corner of the building

on Monadnock Lane and Pine Street. There is a secondary greeter on this floor, greeting those entering from Pine Street.

The second floor is home to the clinic and contains exam rooms, dental services, and two classrooms. The greenhouse and floral greenhouse can also be viewed on the second floor. Finally, the third, fourth, and fifth floors provide “wet” shelter. Two of the three floors are served for male guests, while the remaining floor is reserved for women. Each floor houses 60 beds, for a total of 180 beds. The sleeping floors also have showers and toilets available to the guests.



# New Building

## Program Allocation: New Construction

### First (Ground) Floor

- A. Reception/welcome center/wayfinding
- B. Solarium/indoor park
- C. Greenhouse (working/food producing)
- D. Personal care center (4x flex space)
- E. Barber, hair dresser, salon, etc.
- F. Café (indoor and outdoor)
- G. Café support
- H. Offices
- I. Clinic street access

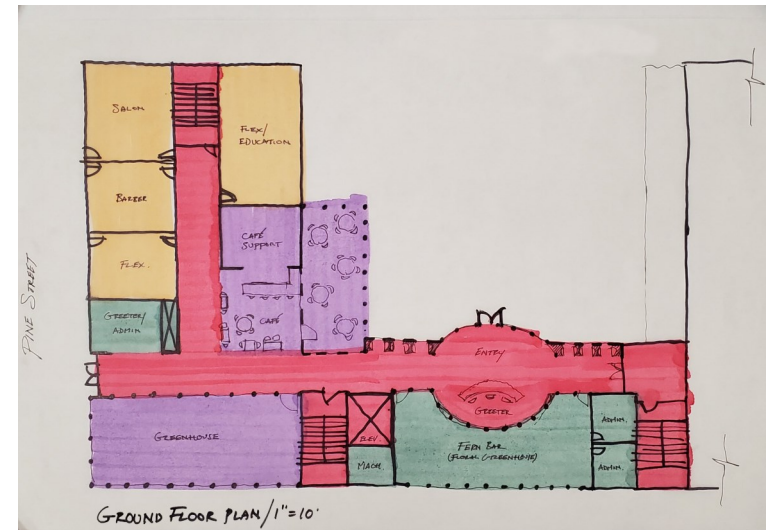
### Second Level (Clinic)

- A. General clinic (exam room x8-10)
- B. Doctor
- C. Dentist
- D. Nurse care
- E. Mental health counseling
- F. Mental health center
- G. Clinical staff offices (x2)

- H. Clinic check in/nurse station
- I. Toilet rooms (~x2)
- J. Greenhouse mezzanine
- K. Solarium/indoor park mezzanine

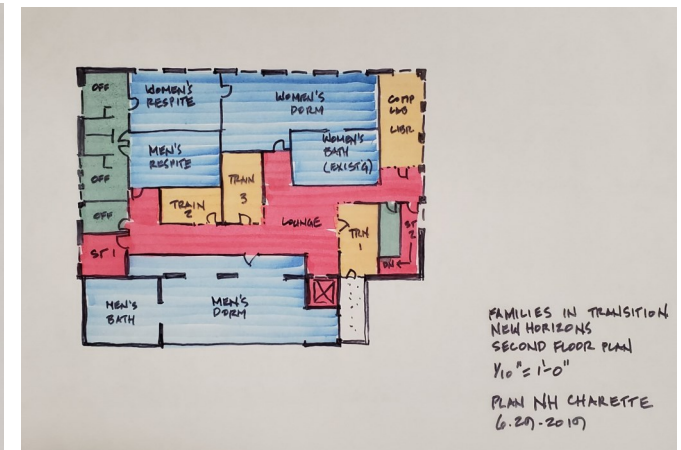
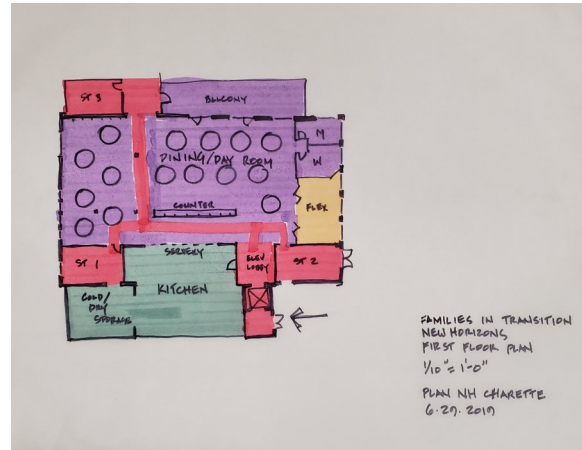
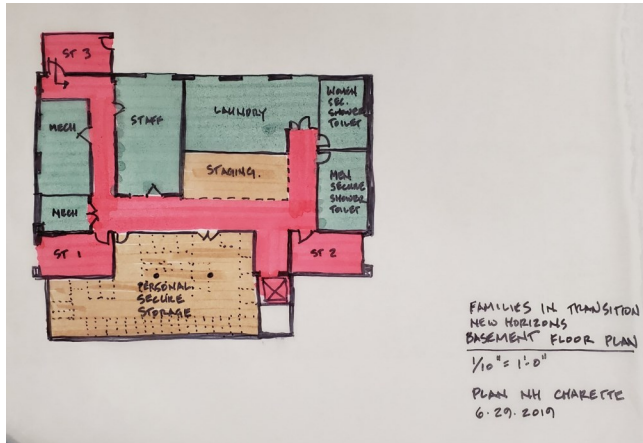
### Third through Fifth Levels

- A. Wet beds (2 levels men, 1 level women)
- B. Offices (x2 ea. floor)
- C. Restrooms (ea. floor)





# Existing Building



Shelter guests who enter via the proposed ourtyard and then proceed to the left will find themselves in the existing facility, which is now “dry” shelter. The basement of the existing building may be used for laundry, showers, and staff and administrative offices, but a large addition provides secure, personal storage for guests to use.

The first floor of the existing facility continues to be used as the dining area,

but with a much larger, upgraded kitchen with easier access to food storage. The dining area also has a balcony, accessible from inside the building, jutting out into the courtyard. The first floor also contains some flexible space, upgraded bathrooms, and elevator and stair access.

Finally, the second floor contains a computer lab and library , a lounge, and a women’s and men’s dorm with 30 total beds. The space is designed to minimize changes from the layout currently under construction.

## Lower Level

- A. Public restrooms
- B. Cleanliness center (showers)
- C. Day-use storage lockers
- D. Overnight-use storage lockers
- E. Mail room
- F. Staff
- G. Staff direction/wayfinding services
- H. Laundry (2x current size)
- I. Laundry staging

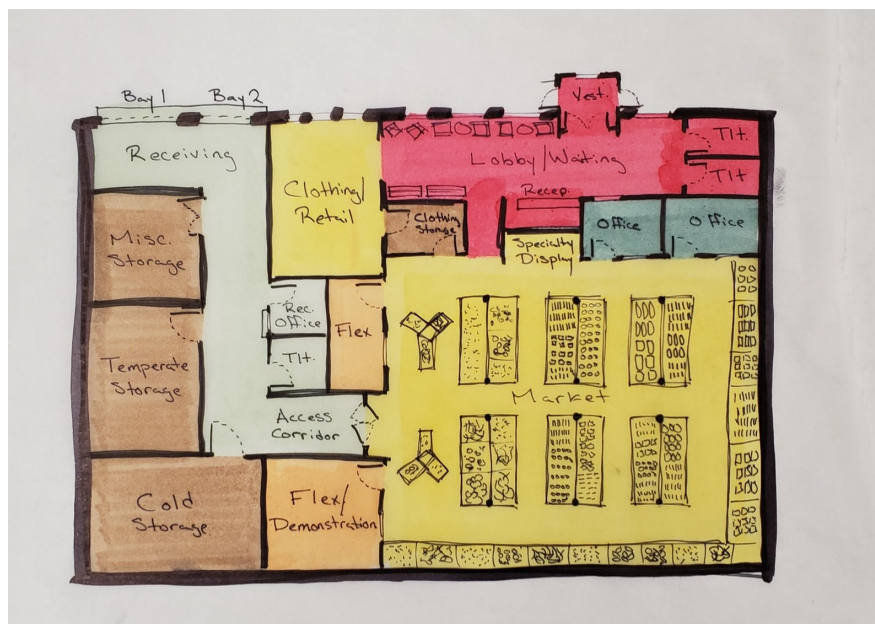
## First Floor

- A. Dining hall
- B. Serving area
- C. Commercial kitchen (2x current size +~800 SQ FT)
- D. Warm/cold food storagea
- E. Phone charging stations
- F. Public toilets
- G. Participant hand washing station
- H. Porch/deck space (Opt.)

## Second Floor

- A. Dry beds, men and women separate
- B. Flex space
- C. Computer area/library
- D. Staff offices (~3)
- E. Balcony (Opt.)

# The Market



During the community listening session, the charrette team learned that since the food pantry does not serve shelter guests, the pantry does not need to be located with the New Horizons building. The charrette team also heard from community members that there are opportunities to acquire additional properties in the neighborhood. The charrette team is proposing that FIT-NH take advantage of this and relocate the food pantry—recreated as The Market—to a new, nearby location.

The design of The Market is modeled after a grocery store and the floor plan includes space for storage, receiving, and plenty of flex space for nutrition education, culinary demonstrations, and more. There is some space for administrative office space, with an upgraded waiting area and check in process. There is also additional space available for commercial/retail space and a clothing closet.

The Plan NH team did not render additional floors, but there is opportunity to add additional units of permanently affordable housing above The Market., if desired.



## Program Allocation: The Market

- A. Receiving/handling
- B. Loading dock
- C. Receiving offices
- D. Cold storage
- E. Temperate storage
- F. Miscellaneous storage
- G. Indoor waiting area/lobby
- H. Market-style goods floor
- I. Demonstration/flex space
- J. Clothing store

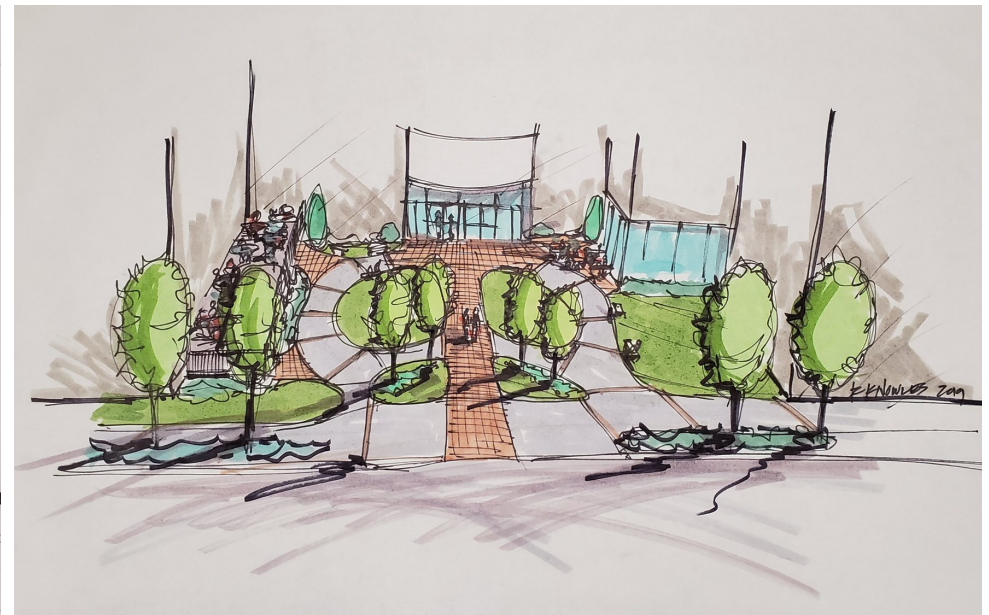
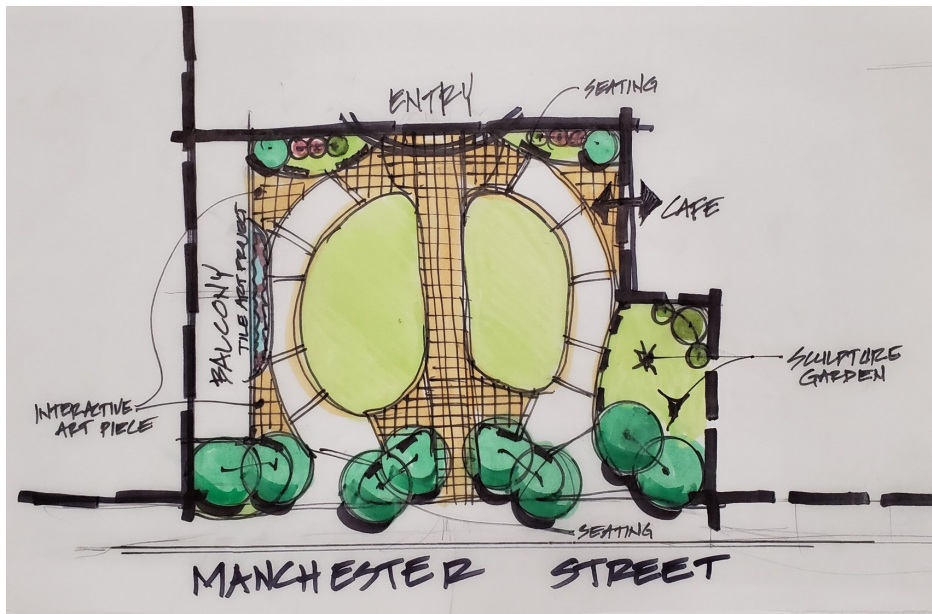


# The Courtyard



The goal of the courtyard is to create a welcoming and beautiful entrance into the facility and provide outdoor gathering space for shelter guests and others to visit. The courtyard is located on Manchester Street with improved and extended sidewalks and street trees providing shade. The courtyard might include AstroTurf (in lieu of grass); benches and other seating; opportunities for outdoor recreation and light fitness; a sculpture garden; public, interactive art; and other opportunities for gathering. The Plan NH team suggested including a public announcement system in faux rocks outside for announcements and ambient music.

In addition to creating a welcoming entry way, the courtyard can also cultivate a sense of place and belonging among shelter guests, providing them an outlet to express themselves and enhancing self-worth. The plan is to create a place of healing, where guests can foster social integration with the greater community. Creating a calming space can help to ease depression and feelings of social isolation. Exposure to a healthy environment with a high degree of social interaction, rather than the current, very urban setting.





# Placemaking

Not mentioned in the Letter from the Director earlier in this report is the notion of the “us vs them” that is created through labelling of “others.” “He is homeless/an addict/has mental health issues” are examples of labelling, and this does nothing to assist in changing their circumstances.

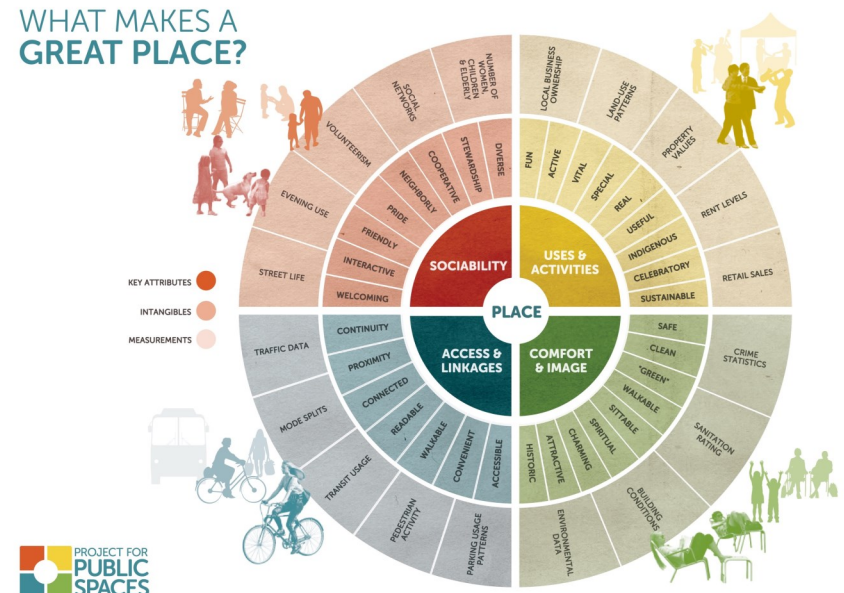
Instead, what if we (as a society) see people by their gifts – everyone has a gift to contribute to the larger whole of a community. In the courtyard and the new building, we recommend giving space for shelter guests to share music, drawing and other arts. Working together, showing/performing – interactions through the arts can slowly build strong bonds that are fundamental to personal growth, stress-relief, increased self-esteem and self-awareness, and insight. Interactive and experimental art nodes will support mental health and provide shelter guests with a sense of calm.



Incorporating art into the overall design aids in the stabilization of individuals that are particularly vulnerable to displacement. Incorporating music into the outdoor space is also helpful in decreasing loneliness and isolation. The faux rocks containing speakers are important for the FIT-NH staff to communicate with those using the courtyard, but also have benefits for the guests. Music is effective in fostering a sense of well-being and allowing the participants to join together in a meaningful activity.

Beyond the courtyard, the building can be decorated with (changeable) murals to create a “destination” within the neighborhood and encourage foot traffic from all members of the community. Murals also contrast the negative mental health effects of concrete and asphalt and can have therapeutic benefits for mentally ill and homeless populations.

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?



# Feasibility



## Permitting

Based on initial review, the plan appears to be feasible from a site planning and construction perspective. The majority of the properties in the area are zoned Central Business District (CBD) which has very relaxed dimensional requirements. The project will however require variances from the city of Manchester zoning board for uses. Changes to the buildings and uses will require a site plan approval and conditional use from the Manchester Planning board, and the development will require approval from the Board of Mayor and Alderman for offsite signage and parking changes. The development will likely disturb less than 100,000 s.f. of land, so permits from NHDES are likely not anticipated to be required, with the exception of a NHDES Sewer connection permit for sewer flows.



## Parking

The proposed plan eliminates the existing 18+/- space parking lot on the property in favor of a building addition, however if the automotive properties are obtained, a 14 space parking lot could be constructed off the alley. The plan also eliminates approximately 8 parking spaces on Manchester Street to provide a green strip along the frontage to incorporate street trees and a separation between the building and travel wall. One suggestion for replacing lost parking is to coordinate with the city to obtain parking passes in the Victory Garage, which is located 0.25 miles away. The city may offer reduced rates for FIT employees. An alternative option would be to leasing or purchase parking elsewhere in the city, such as the St Casimir School. Parking is not required in the CBD, so parking changes and calculations do not require planning board approval.

## Utilities

**Drainage:** An existing old stone drain line runs under the greenhouse and will need to be relocated as part of this development. This drain line is unknown and will be a fairly significant task to relocate. We have reached out to city DPW for information but have not received a response.

**Sewer and Water:** Adequate sewer and water appear to exist in the neighborhood for the expansion

**Electric:** Electric was not considered, however it is assumed that overhead utilities in the alley could accommodate the planned expansions.





# Concluding Thoughts

## *A Starting Point, Not an Ending Point*

Like the Families in Transition-New Horizons shelter, this charrette is a starting point, not an ending point. The vision outlined in this report is merely a guide for Families in Transition-New Horizons and the City of Manchester to use as a tool.

The recommendations that the Plan NH team created are lofty, but, as we heard during the charrette, FIT-NH is not afraid of swinging big. When FIT-NH applied for the charrette, they expressed a desire not just to reimagine the shelter, but the surrounding neighborhood too because the shelter is part of the greater community. Plan NH hopes the future brings a cohesive and connected neighborhood.



## For More Information...

The Plan NH Reveal Presentation, which took place on June 29, 2019, can be viewed on Manchester Public TV On Demand: [manchestertv.org/od](http://manchestertv.org/od) under “Misc./Other Government Meetings”.

The charrette was featured in NH Business Review on June 12, 2019: *“Charrette planned to upgrade Manchester homeless shelter”* and in the Union Leader on June 29, 2019: *“City residents offer solutions to city’s homeless challenges.”*



