

Lower Highlands Neighborhood Plan Meeting



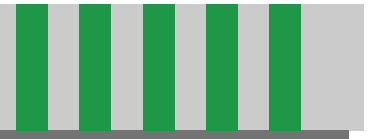
December 1, 2009

Sponsored by:

The City of Lowell's Division of Planning and Development



What We Will Cover



Introduction and Context



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Cupples Square



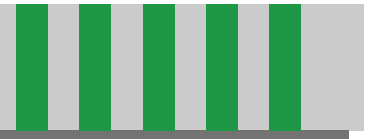
Nottingham St. Mills



Gallagher Terminal



Lower Highlands: Cross Cutting



Key Stakeholders consulted:

- Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association
- Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer Asamblea de Dios
- Pailin City Market and Restaurant
- Revolving Museum
- 119 Gallery
- Lower Highlands Neighborhood Association
- Cultural Organization of Lowell (COOL)
- UMass Lowell Community Relations Office
- Coalition for a Better Acre
- Community Gardens Greenhouse
- Keep Lowell Beautiful
- Lowell Development Finance Corporation
- Lowell Department of Parks and Recreation
- Lowell Wastewater Utility
- Lowell Planning Department
- Lowell Police Department
- Business owners and employees throughout neighborhood
- Diverse Lower Highlands residents and business patrons
- Owners of businesses located elsewhere in Lowell

Context of Lower Highlands



Lowell Neighborhoods

MIT/Lower Highlands Public Meeting 12/01/2009

Statistics

Demographics

Total housing units: 39,468
Homeownership rate: 43%
Median household income: \$39,192
Persons below poverty: 16.8%

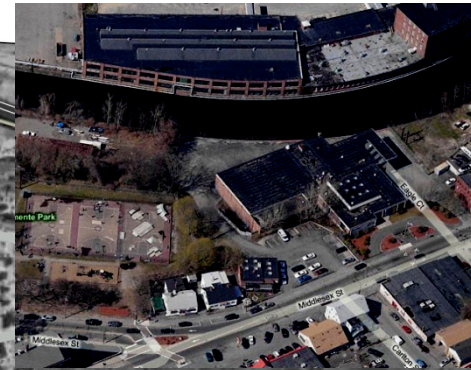
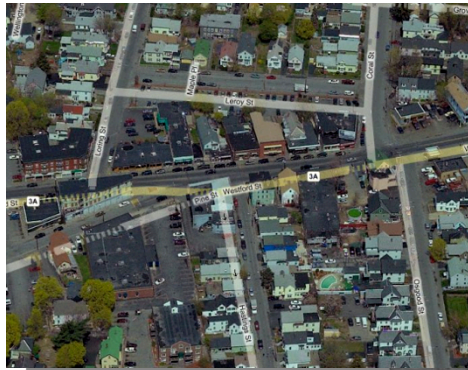


Business/Commercial

Total retail sales: 517,804
Total number of firms: 5,310
Minority owned firms: 21.3%
Women owned firms: 27.3%



Assets of Lower Highlands



Canal, Gallagher Terminal

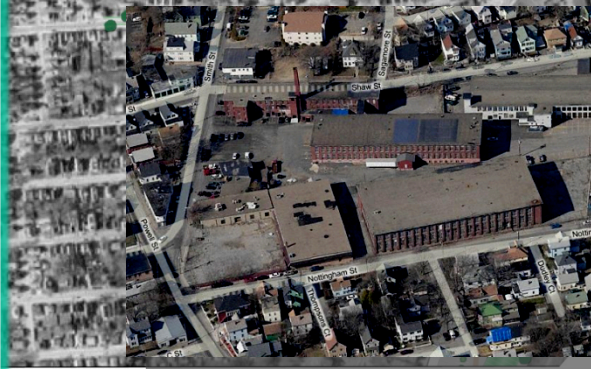
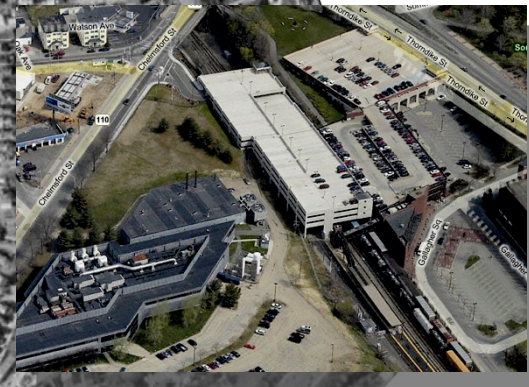
**Proximity to Downtown/
Hamilton Canal District**

**Gateway to Lowell via
Chelmsford**

**Immigrant gateway
community**

Affordable

Historical legacy



Challenges

- Old infrastructure
- Worn-out public spaces
- Neglected houses
- Lack of pedestrian support in streetscape
- Isolated from the rest of the city
- Lack of community gathering spaces
- Mostly vacant mill
- Conflicting land uses
- Localized flooding and drainage problems
- Weak economic development



MIT's Favorite Things about the Lower Highlands



- Talking with people in the community
- Potential to be a TOD neighborhood
- The architecture of the old homes
- Exploring inside the mill buildings
- Taking the train in from Boston– an easy day trip!
- Great vegetable markets
- All the kids on skateboards
- Eating at the Red Rose
- Eating fried dough
- Flower gardens



The Lower Highlands can build its identity as a gateway to Lowell and destination neighborhood by capitalizing on its:

- rich cultural diversity,
- outward connectivity via the Gallagher terminal,
- central location, and proximity to Hamilton Canal District and downtown, and
- traditional neighborhood fabric.

To achieve these objectives, this plan aims to:

- enhance public spaces and neighborhood identity,
- improve walkability,
- strengthen local business presence,
- ensure continued affordability, and
- incorporate cutting-edge green design principles.



Aerial Neighborhood Plan



Aerial Neighborhood Plan

Areas of Interest:

Pailin Plaza



Aerial Neighborhood Plan

Areas of Interest:

Pailin Plaza

Cupples Square



Aerial Neighborhood Plan

Areas of Interest:

Pailin Plaza

Cupples Square

The Mill Site



Aerial Neighborhood Plan

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The Mill Site

Gallagher Terminal



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Nottingham St. Mills



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Lower Highlands: Cross Cutting

Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Pailin Plaza and Clemente Park



Design Guidelines

- Do you want this area branded?
- Identity and Sign Control
- Streetscape Improvements



Pailin Plaza: Site Plan



Pailin Plaza: Illustrative Plan



Pailin Plaza: Streetscape Improvements



Pailin Plaza: Streetscape Improvements



Pailin Plaza: Streetscape Improvements



Pailin Plaza: Streetscape Improvements



Clemente Park: Improvements



Clemente Park: Improvements



Canal Frontage



Canal Walk



Canal Walk



Autobody Shops and Park Expansion

- Economically beneficial
- More consistent use
- Is there a better site?



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Nottingham St. Mills



Gallagher Terminal



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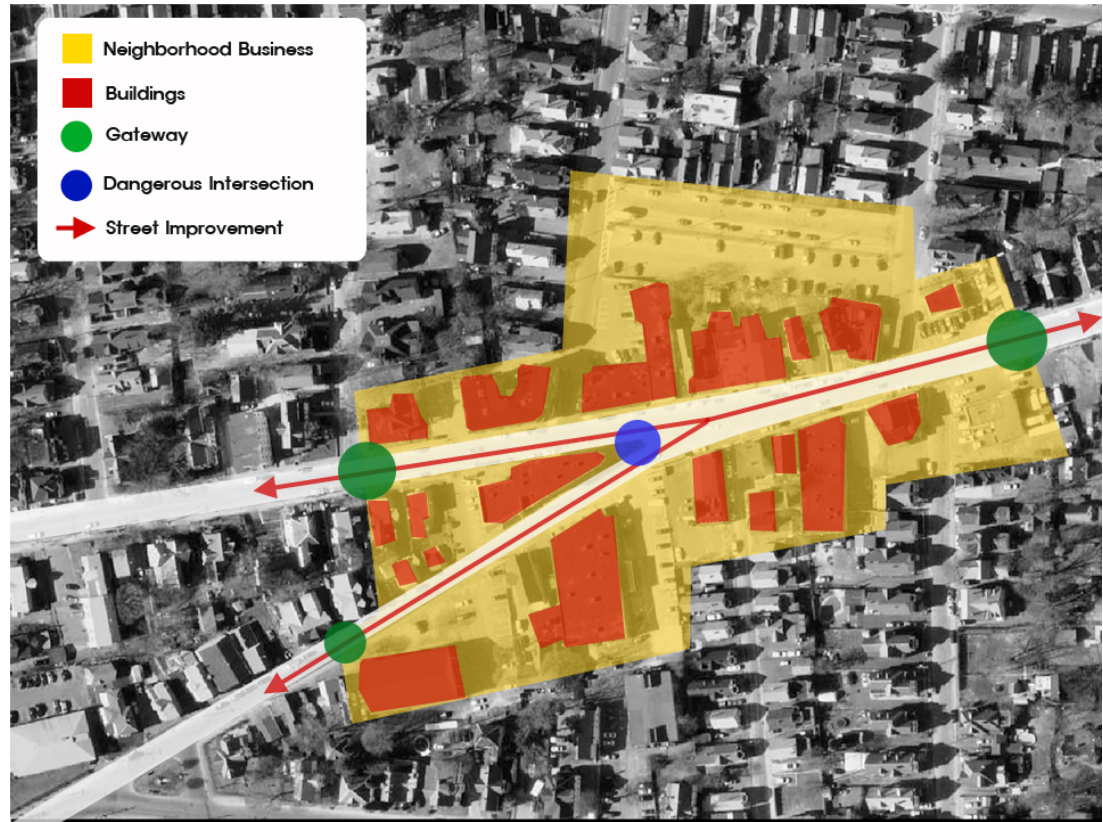
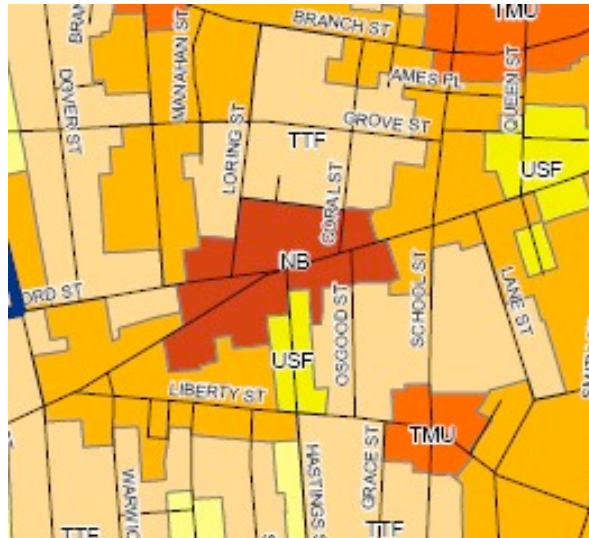
Cupples Square



Cupples Square



Cupples Square



Key Interventions

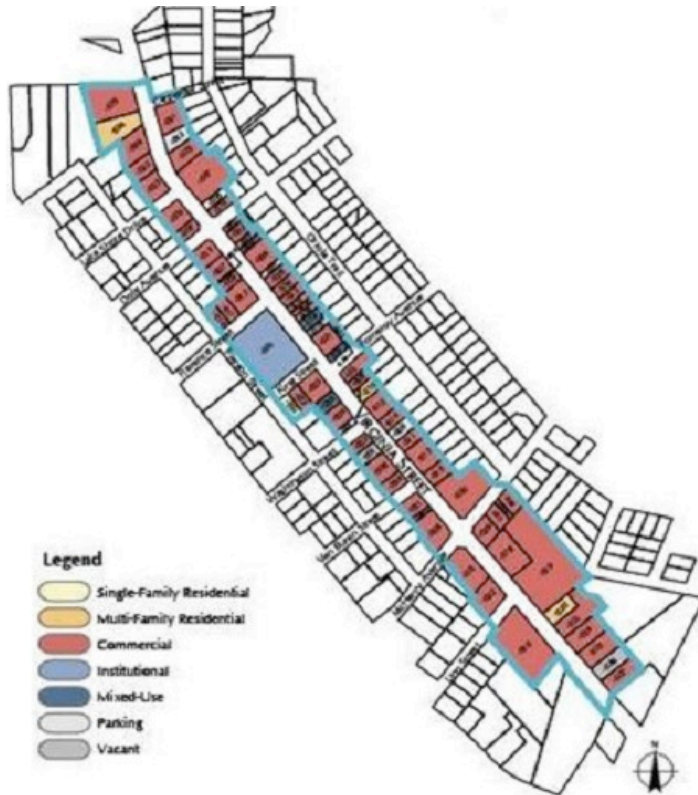
1. Creation of zoning overlay district
2. Streetscape improvements
3. Traffic mitigation
4. Small business development



Cupples Square

Cupples Square Overlay District

- Allows for unique place-making
- More specifically tailored uses than what is allowed in
- Neighborhood Business zoning



Cupples Square Overlay District

- Design guidelines for business facades
- Incorporates zoning incentives for green development
- Merge lots → “Lot next door” program
- Preserve historic landmark building



Streetscape Improvements

- Wider sidewalks allow for street trees and street furniture
- Human-scale, attractive streetlamps
- Cupples Square landmark signage
- Informational historic placards on buildings



Streetscape Improvements





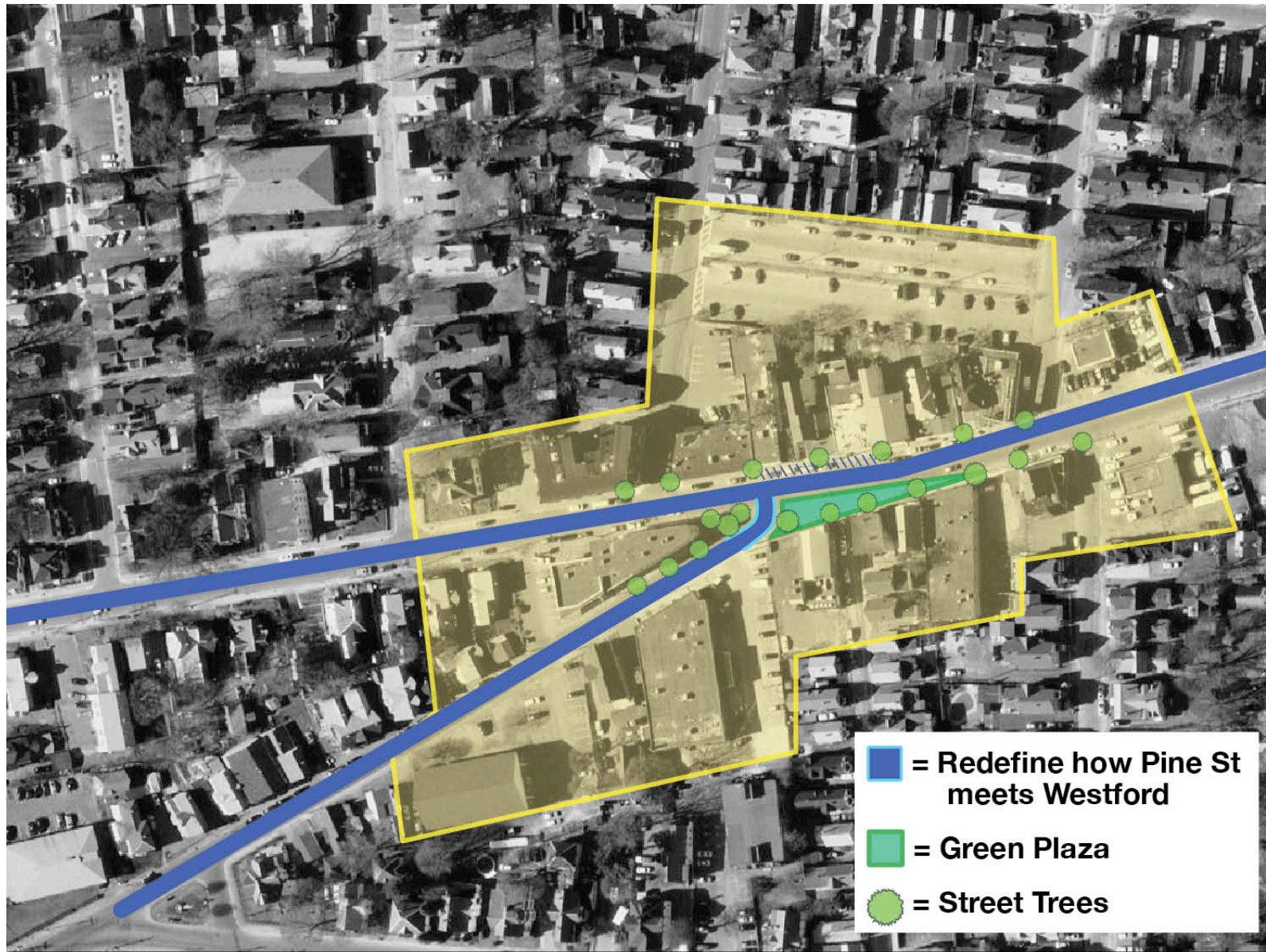


Traffic mitigation

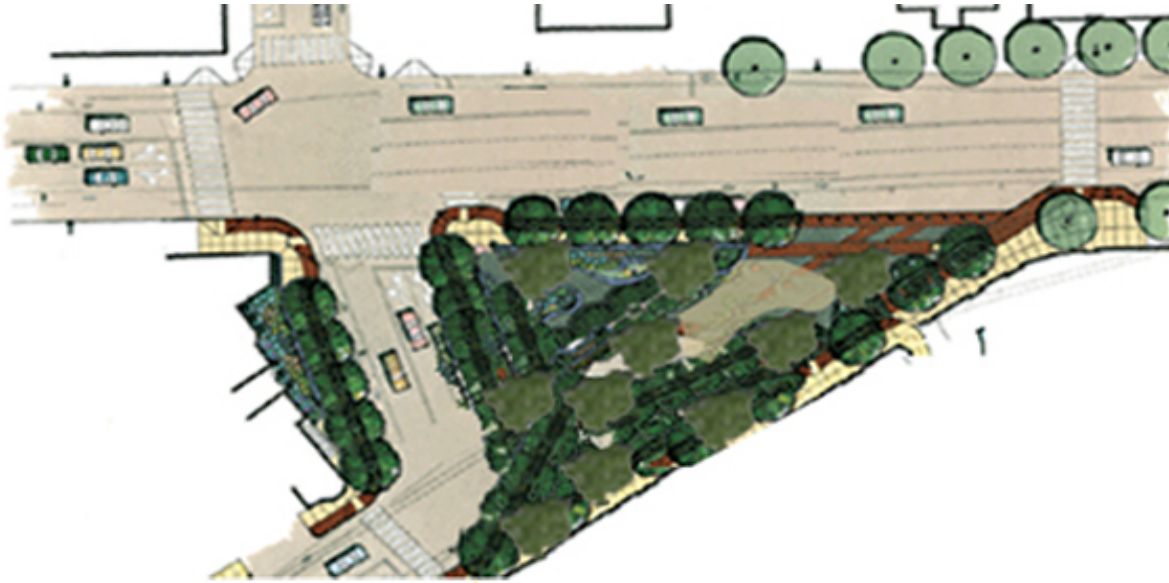
- Create right angle intersection between Pine St. and Westford St.
- Widen sidewalk at intervals
- Add pedestrian crosswalk and signage



Cupples Square



Site Detail





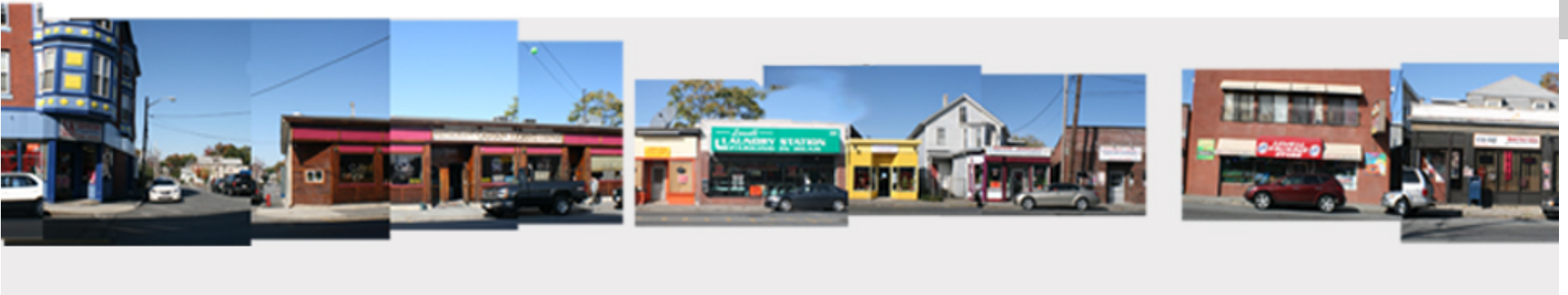


Small business program

- Develop Main Streets program
- Bring Lowell's Retail Best Practices program to the area
- Green retrofit loan program



1st Phase



2nd Phase



3rd Phase



Revitalizing Small Businesses

Gateway Business District Restoration Grant Program; Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn NY
New York City Department of Small Business Services



Revitalizing Small Businesses

Downtown Redevelopment Strategy; Bel Air, Maryland (2003)



Example organizations:

The Jamaica Plain's Small Business Development Program

Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation

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Cupples Square



Nottingham St. Mills



Gallagher Terminal



Lower Highlands: Cross Cutting

Nottingham St. Mills Area: Sites We Looked At



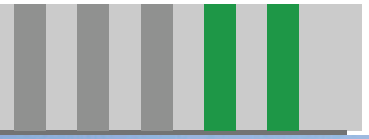
Nottingham St. Mills: Existing Conditions



Nottingham St. Mills: Existing Conditions



Nottingham St. Mills Existing Conditions



Nottingham St. Mills Existing Conditions





Designate site as **Priority Development District (PDD)** to:

- Access state resources to clean up site
- Create new site guidelines to attract investment and new uses
- Get expedited permitting for developers if they follow guidelines

Create new design principles that:

- Promote preservation of the site's historic buildings and reflect the historic scale of buildings
- Support the site's unique low-elevation topography by integrating natural systems into the site's design
- Encourage the development of a contemporary millyard that serves the surrounding neighborhood and attracts visitors from within and outside of the city through service provision, cultural activities, and job creation

Redeveloping the Mills: A Vision



Nottingham St. Mills: Option 1



Nottingham St. Mills: before



Nottingham St. Mills: after



Nottingham St. Mills: Before



Nottingham St. Mills: After



Nottingham St. Mills: Option 1

Possible implementation partners and funding sources:

The Angkor Dance Troupe



Coalition for a Better Acre

*Building and Strengthening
Our Communities*

State sources through PPD designation:

- Community development action grants
- Public works economic development grants
- Brownfields remediation assistance
- \$150,000 in technical assistance

Additional sources:

- Lowell HOME funds
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Housing Tax Credits

Nottingham St. Mills: Option 2



Possible implementation partners and additional \$\$ sources:



State sources through PPD designation:

- Community development action grants
- Public works economic development grants
- Brownfields remediation assistance
- \$150,000 in technical assistance

Additional sources:

- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- New Market Tax Credits

Registry of Motor Vehicles Site

**CURRENT ZONING:
REGIONAL RETAIL**

Site Advantages:

- Accessible and partially visible from Lowell Connector
- Proximity to Target and Nottingham Mills Sites
- Proximity to Gallagher Terminal
- Large lot
- Situated on only Regional Retail zone within Lowell's urban core
- Neighboring lots underutilized - potential for larger redevelopment?

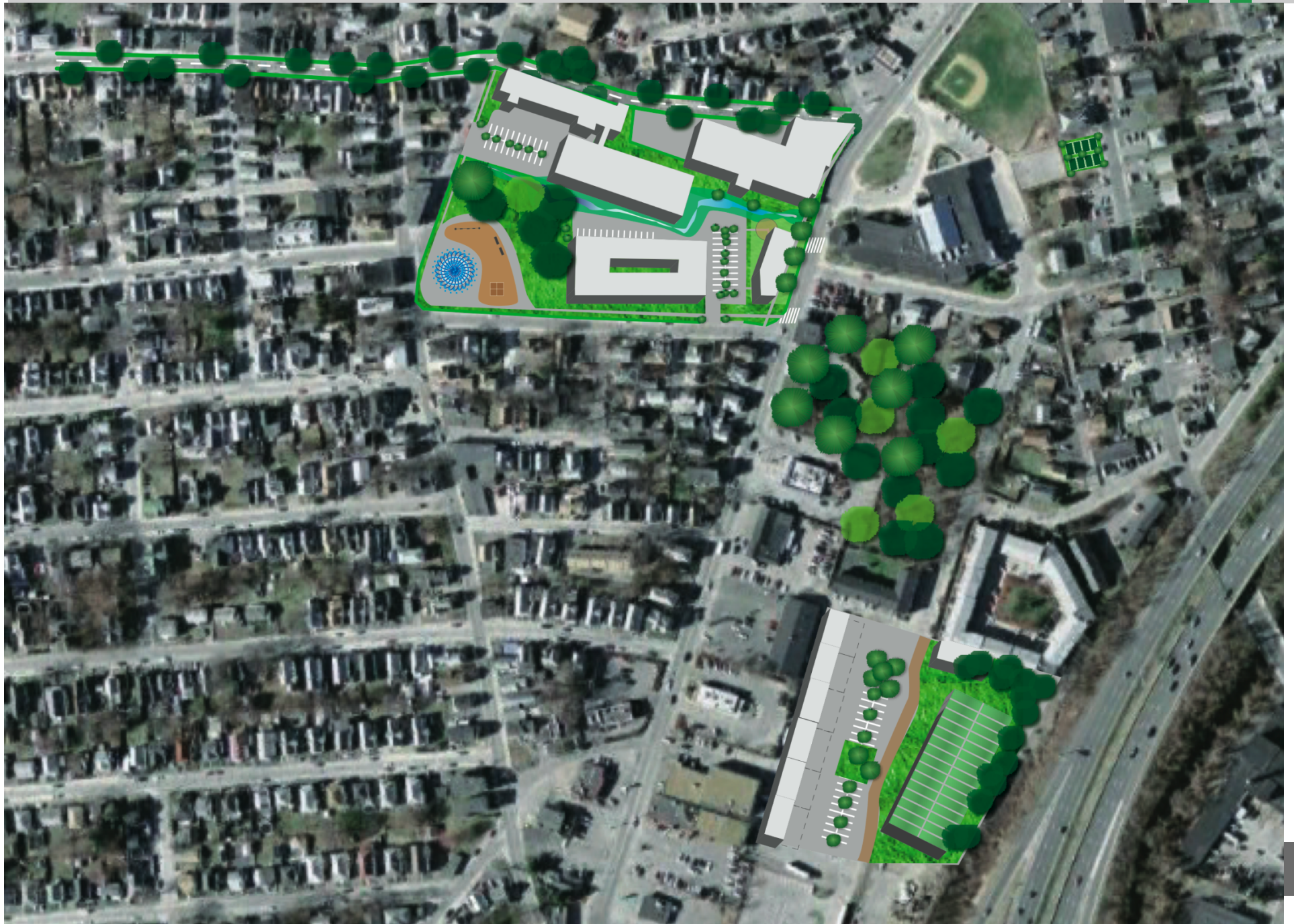
Registry of Motor Vehicles Site

Challenges:

Strategies:

No Chelmsford St. frontage	Amend zoning to allow businesses that don't require prominent street frontage (autobody shops)
Concern that autobody shops incompatible with nearby residential, and ugly as seen from Lowell Connector	Develop design and quality criteria ensure autobody "eco friendliness"; screen uses from Connector with trees
Multiple parcels, all privately held	Incentivize merging of parcels through density bonuses
Desire for community amenities	Advocate city purchase of RMV land to set aside part for sports fields / community garden / etc.
Lack of city funds for public amenities	Solicit big box or other large retail to "anchor" redevelopment
Chelmsford St. businesses not physically integrated with neighborhood	Develop Chelmsford St. Corridor design guidelines to guide future redevelopment

A New South Gate into the Lower Highlands



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Nottingham St. Mills



Gallagher Terminal



Lower Highlands: Cross Cutting

Gallagher Terminal

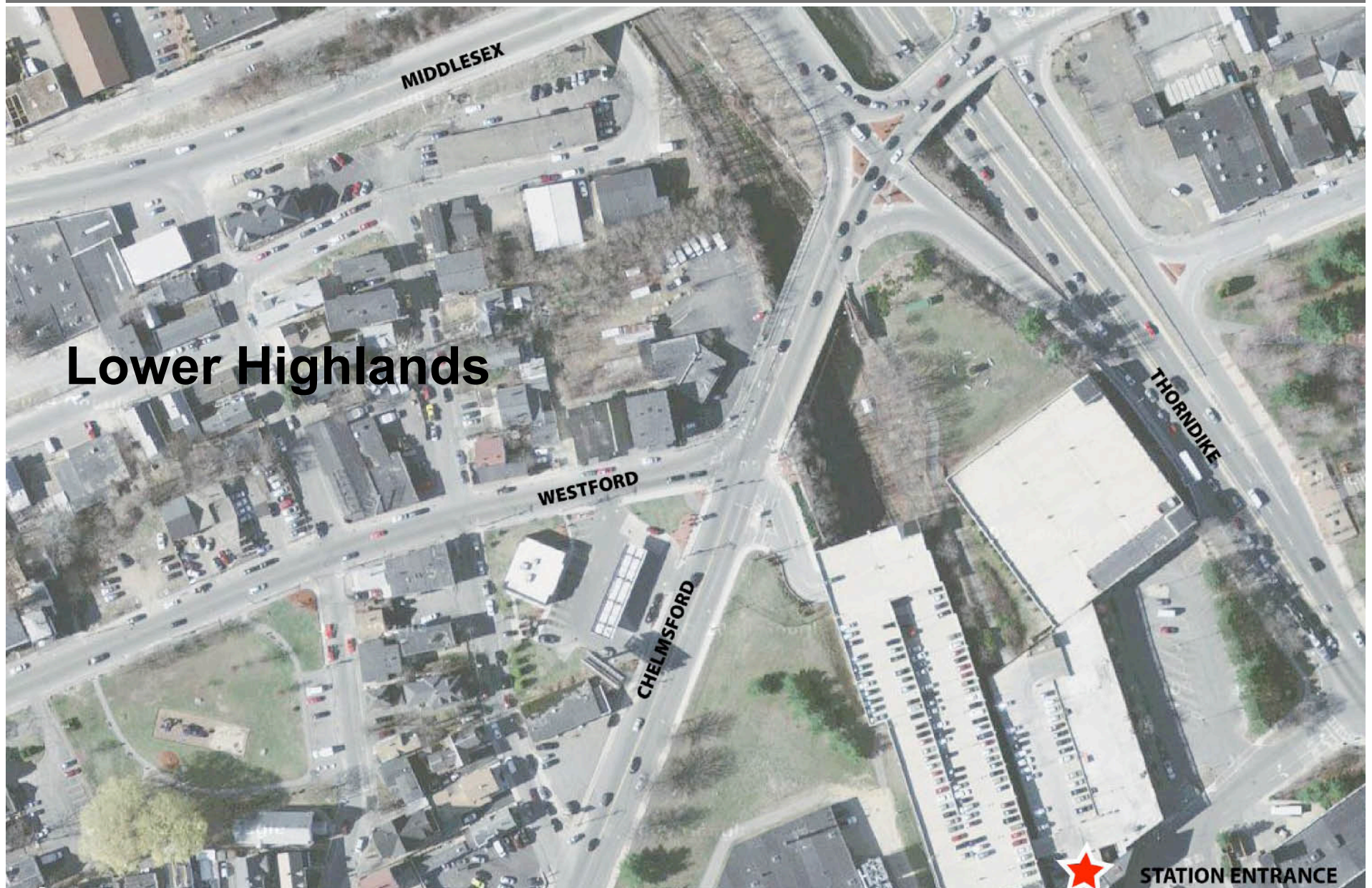


Gallagher Terminal

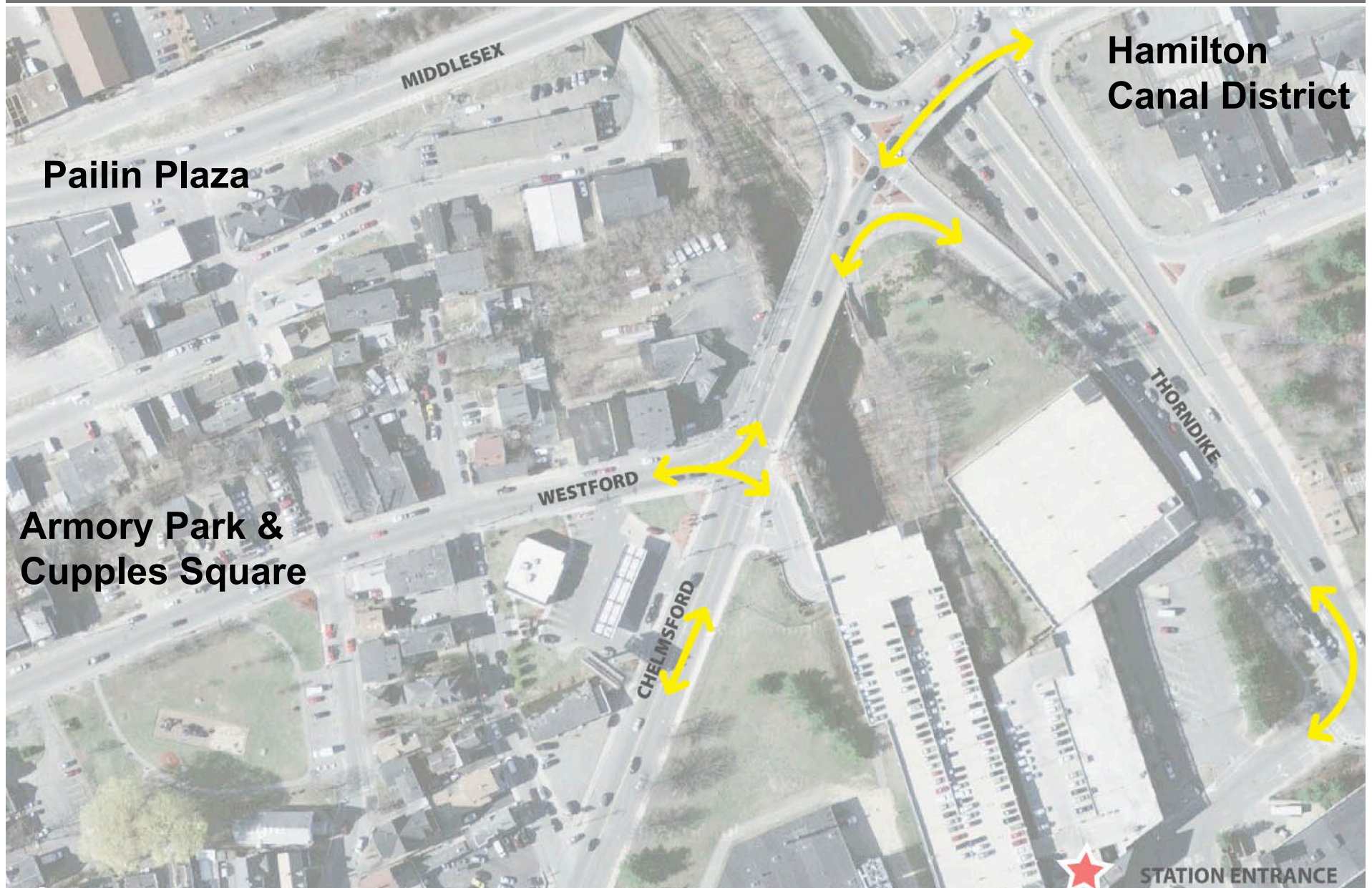
- 5th busiest MBTA commuter rail station (weekday inbound)
- 1,600 daily train boardings
- Stimulates local economy
- Connects Lowell, Lower Highlands and neighbors
- Ties together neighboring land uses



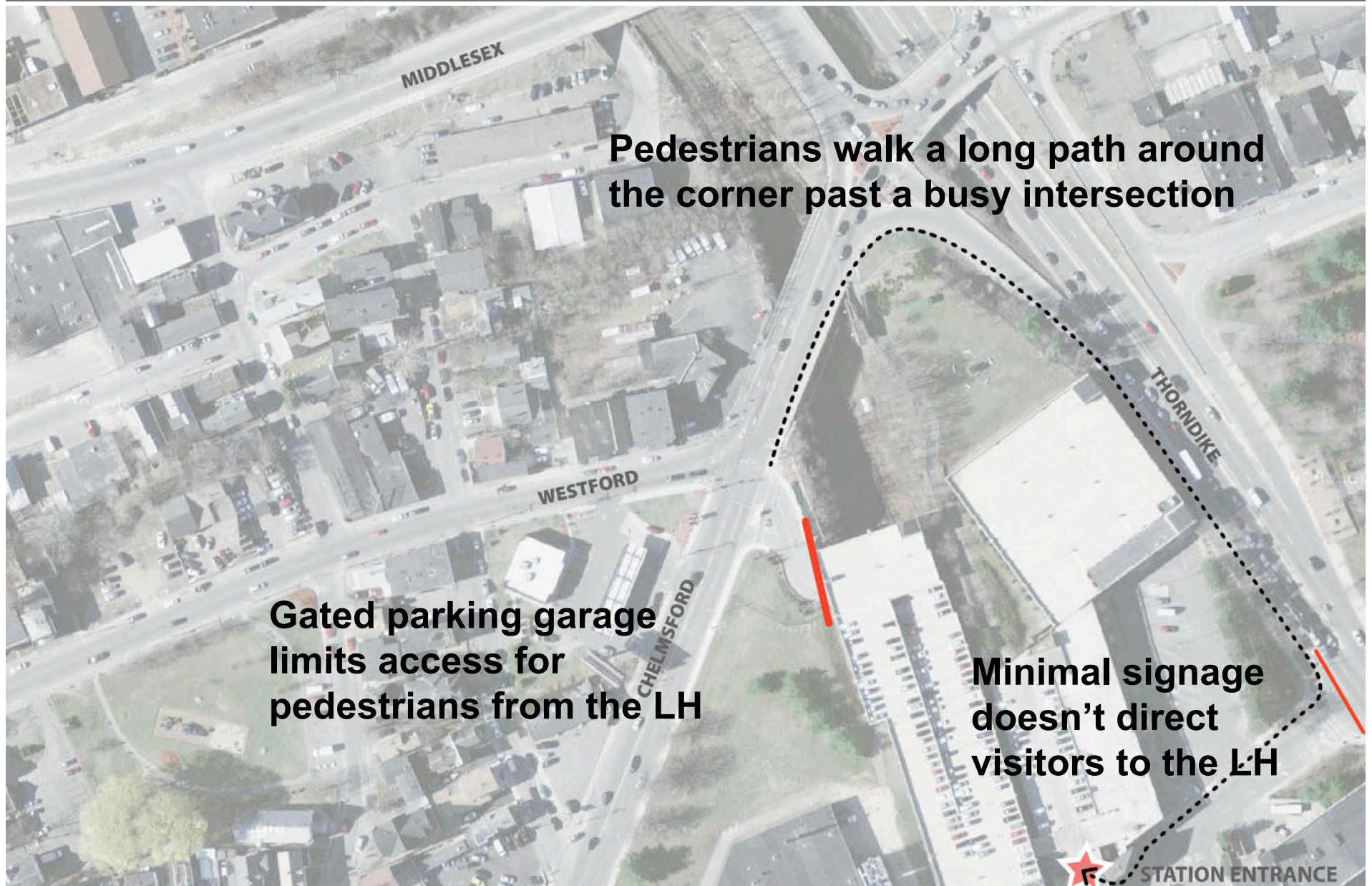
Gallagher Terminal



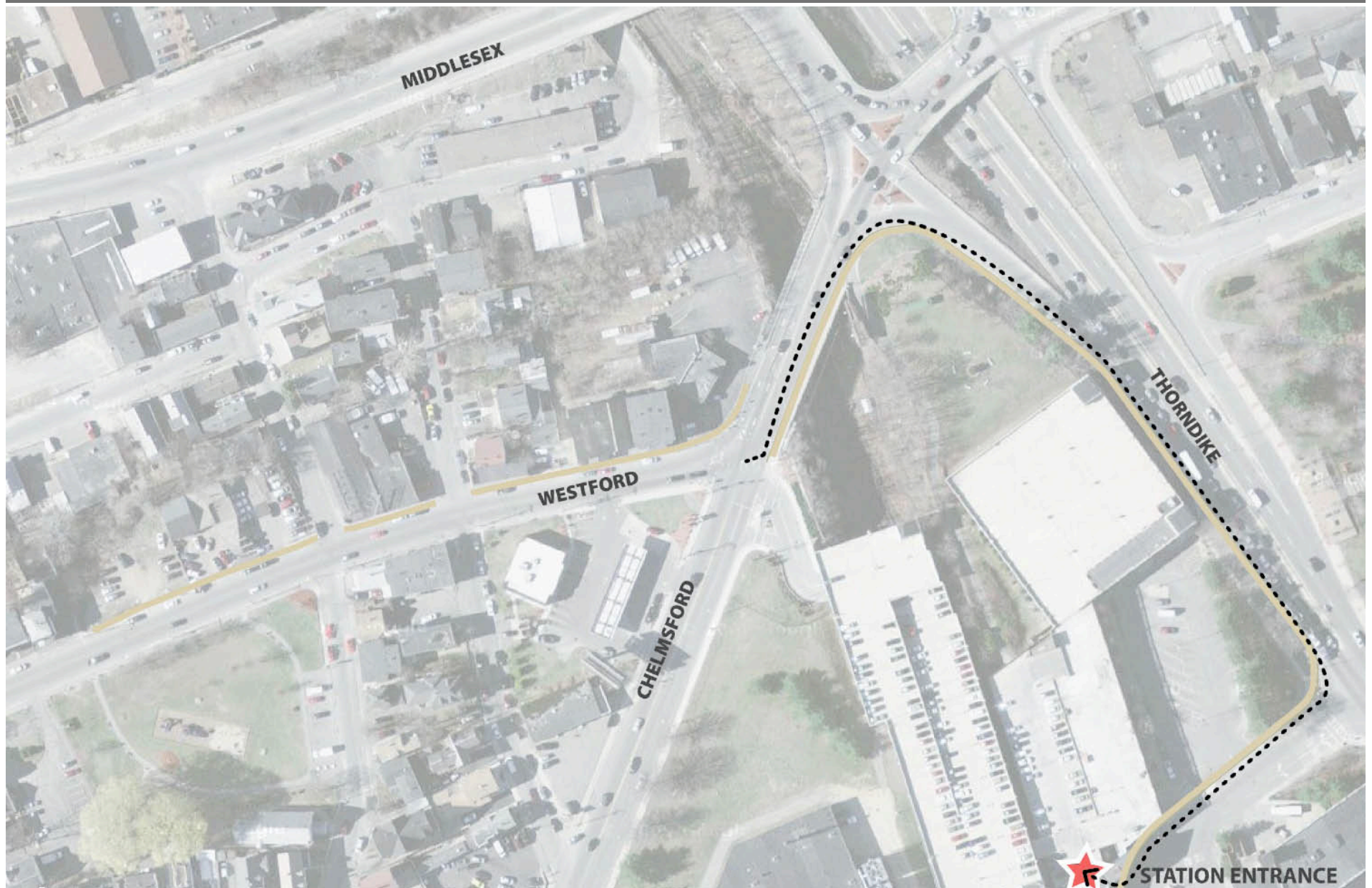
Gallagher Terminal: Neighborhood Connections



Gallagher Terminal: Barriers



Option #1: Streetscape improvements



Option #1: Streetscape improvements



Option #1: Streetscape improvements



Bright street markings, improved lighting, and landscaping improve safety at the Westford intersection and to the front of Gallagher

Option #2: Safer route through the garage

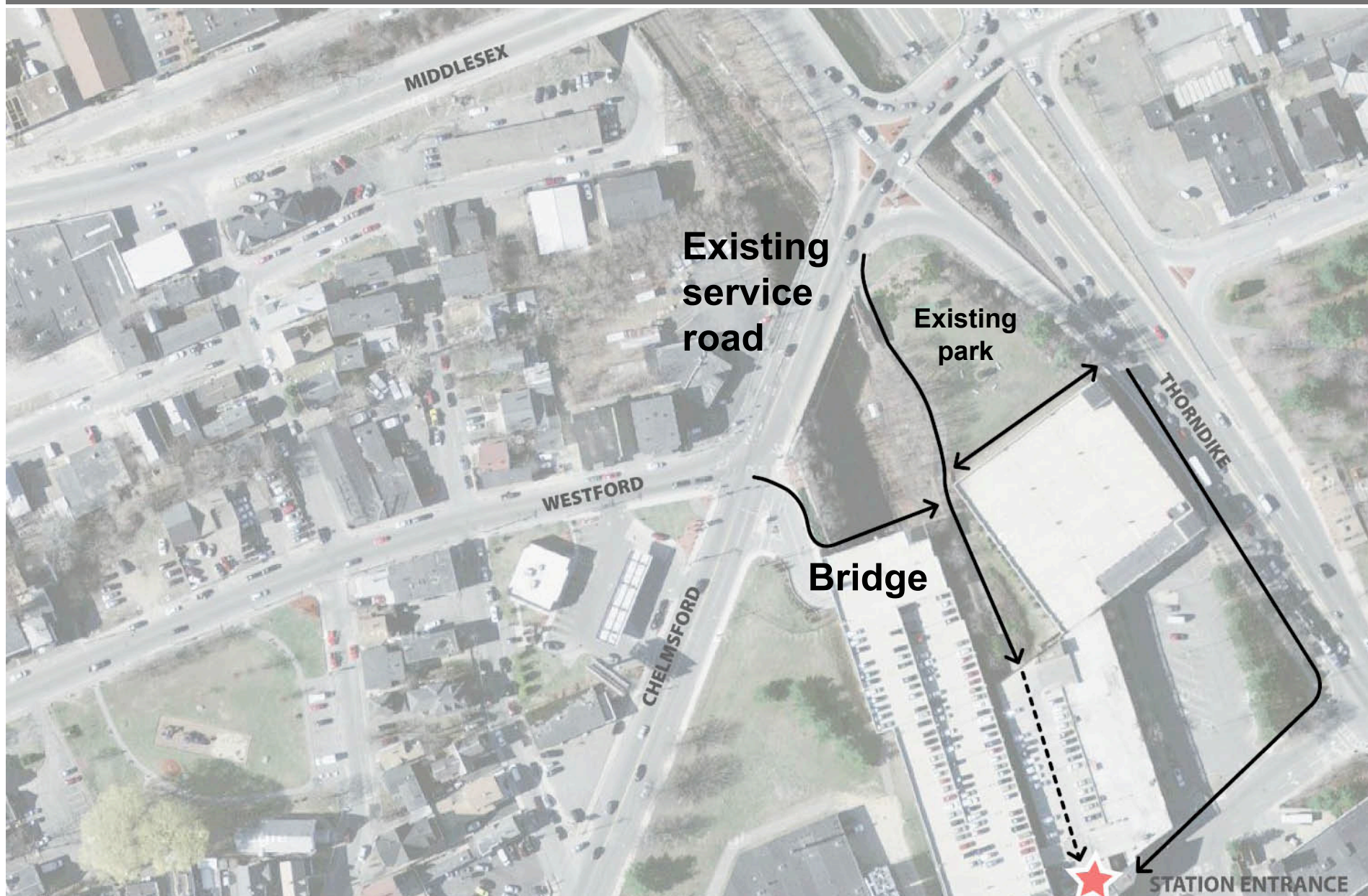


Option #2: Safer route through the garage



Parking garage creates access problems

Option #3: New path and bridge



Option #3: New path and bridge



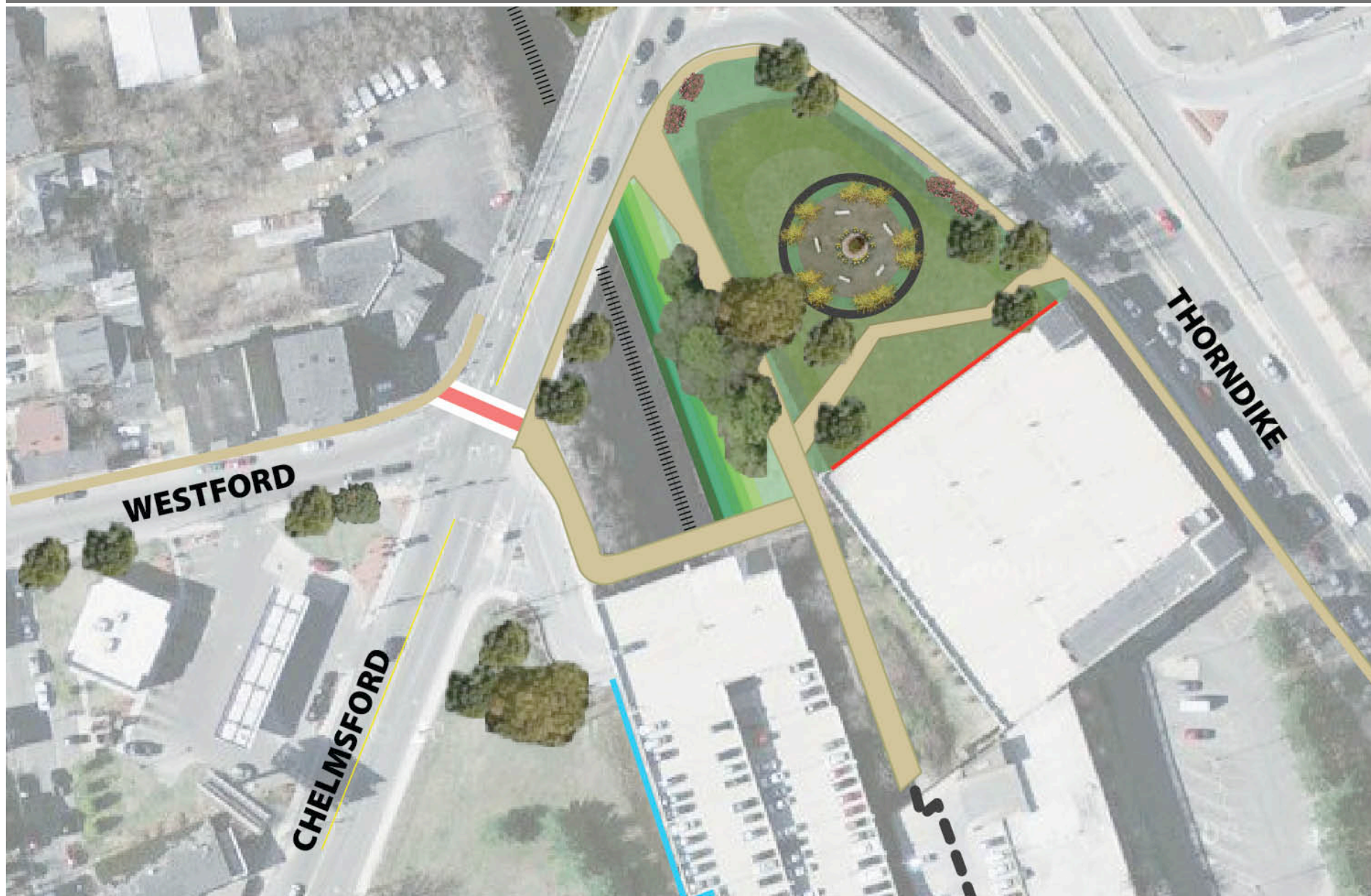
Option #3: New path and bridge

PROPOSALS:

1. Pedestrian pathway along the existing service pathway. Revitalize the park.
2. Passage through the garage.



Option #3: New path and bridge



Option #3: New path and bridge



View of the north side of Gallagher Station from Thorndike

Option #3: New path and bridge



View of the north side of Gallagher Station from Thorndike

Option #3: New path and bridge



EXISTING



View from the parking garage roof, facing north

Option #3: New path and bridge

PATHWAY & PARK



View from the parking garage roof, facing north

Option #3: New path and bridge



Option #3: New path and bridge



Option #4: Elevated path along parking garage



Option #4: Elevated path along parking garage



View of the parking garage and Terminal, facing North

Option #4: Elevated path along parking garage

New exterior elevated pathway



**Solar photovoltaics on the exterior
can convert sunshine into electricity**



- Install more wayfinding signage near Gallagher Terminal
 - Overpass and adjacent streets
 - Directions to Cupples Sq. via Westford
 - Directions to Pailin Plaza area
- Extend downtown directional signage
 - Example: signs near School St. and Western Ave. Studios
- Post standalone map signage to orient pedestrians at and around Gallagher
 - Include directions to proposed garage bypass (pedestrian path)

Wayfinding in the Lower Highlands



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Cupples Square



Nottingham St. Mills

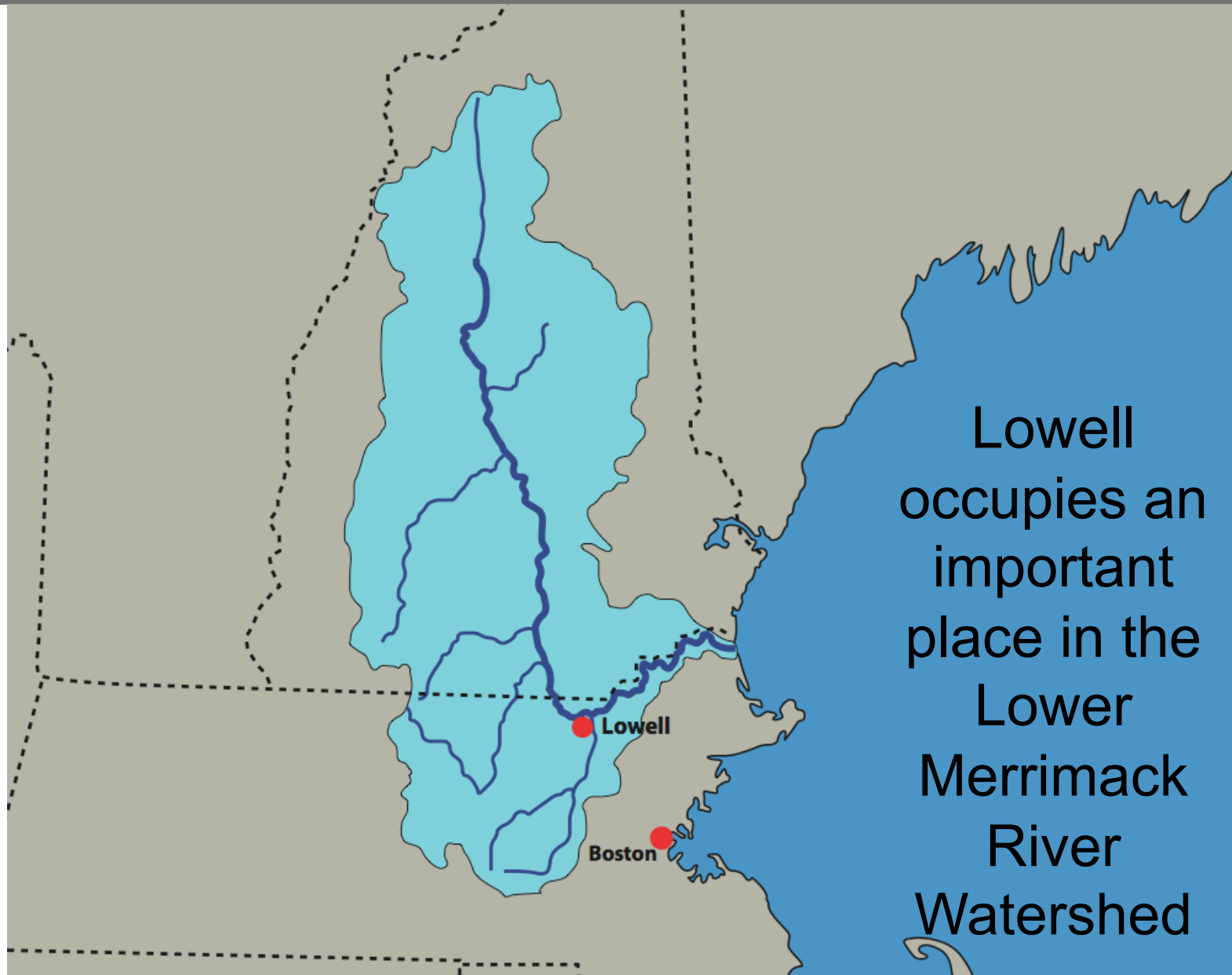


Gallagher Terminal

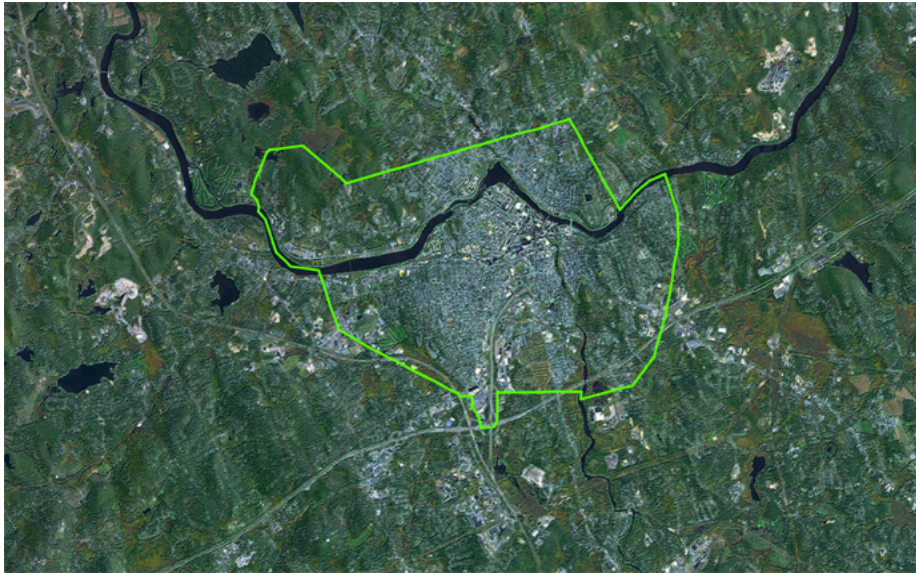


Lower Highlands: Cross Cutting

Natural Systems and Lowell



Natural Systems and the Lower Highlands

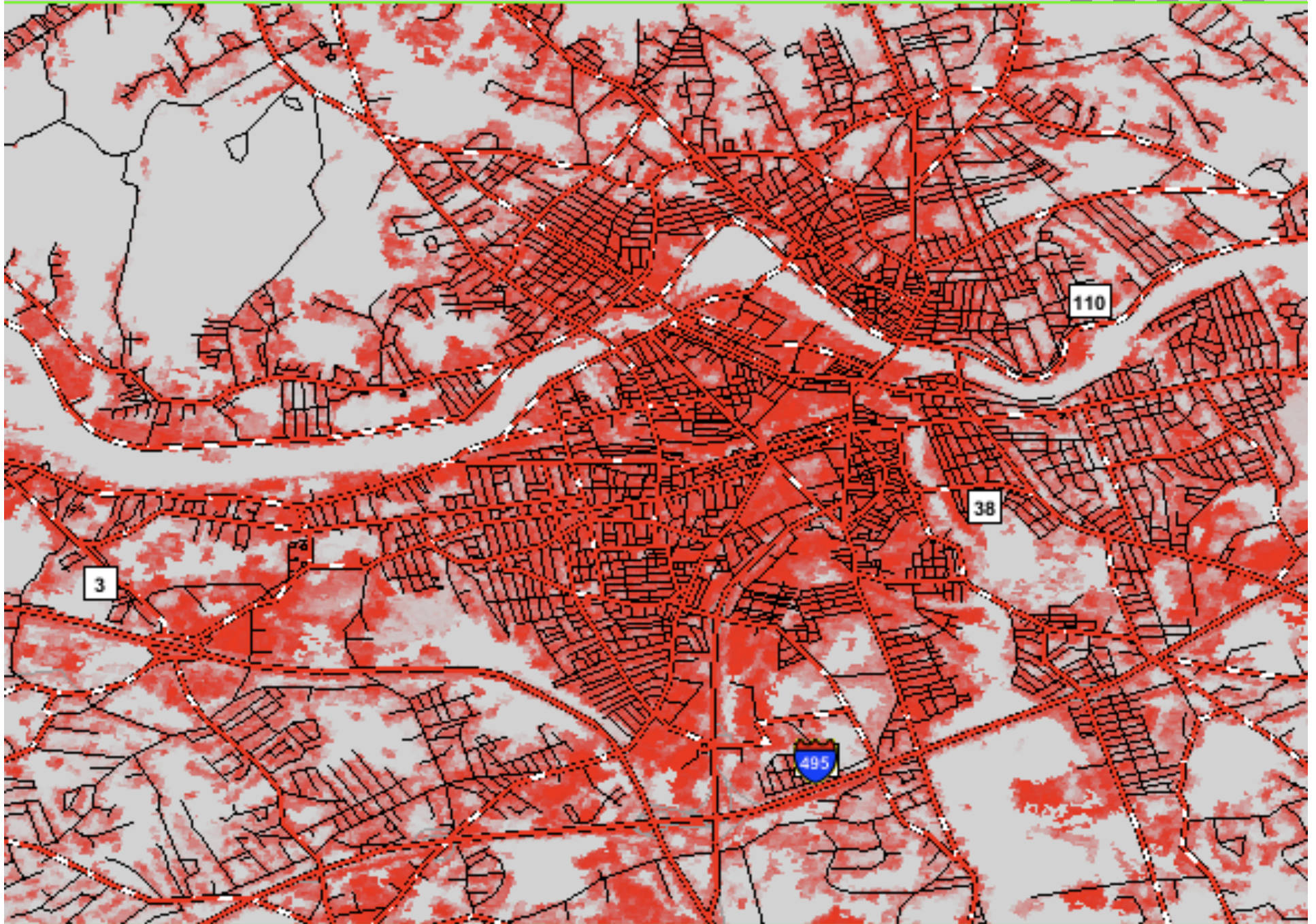


Natural landscaping and green space:

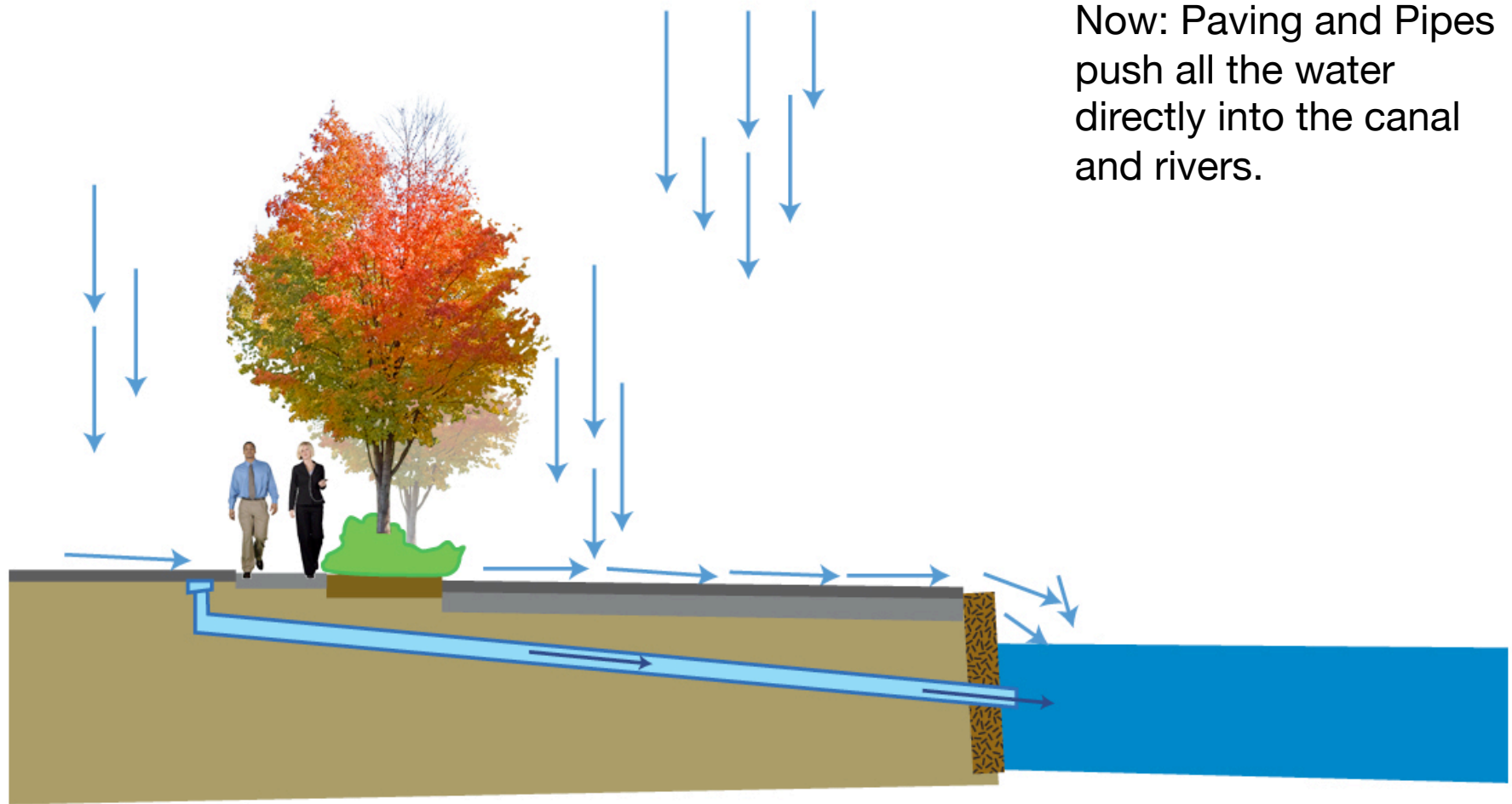
- Clean air and water
- Control flooding by improved runoff absorption
- Aid in soil retention
- Beautify neighborhoods
- Create new community spaces
- Activate the streets



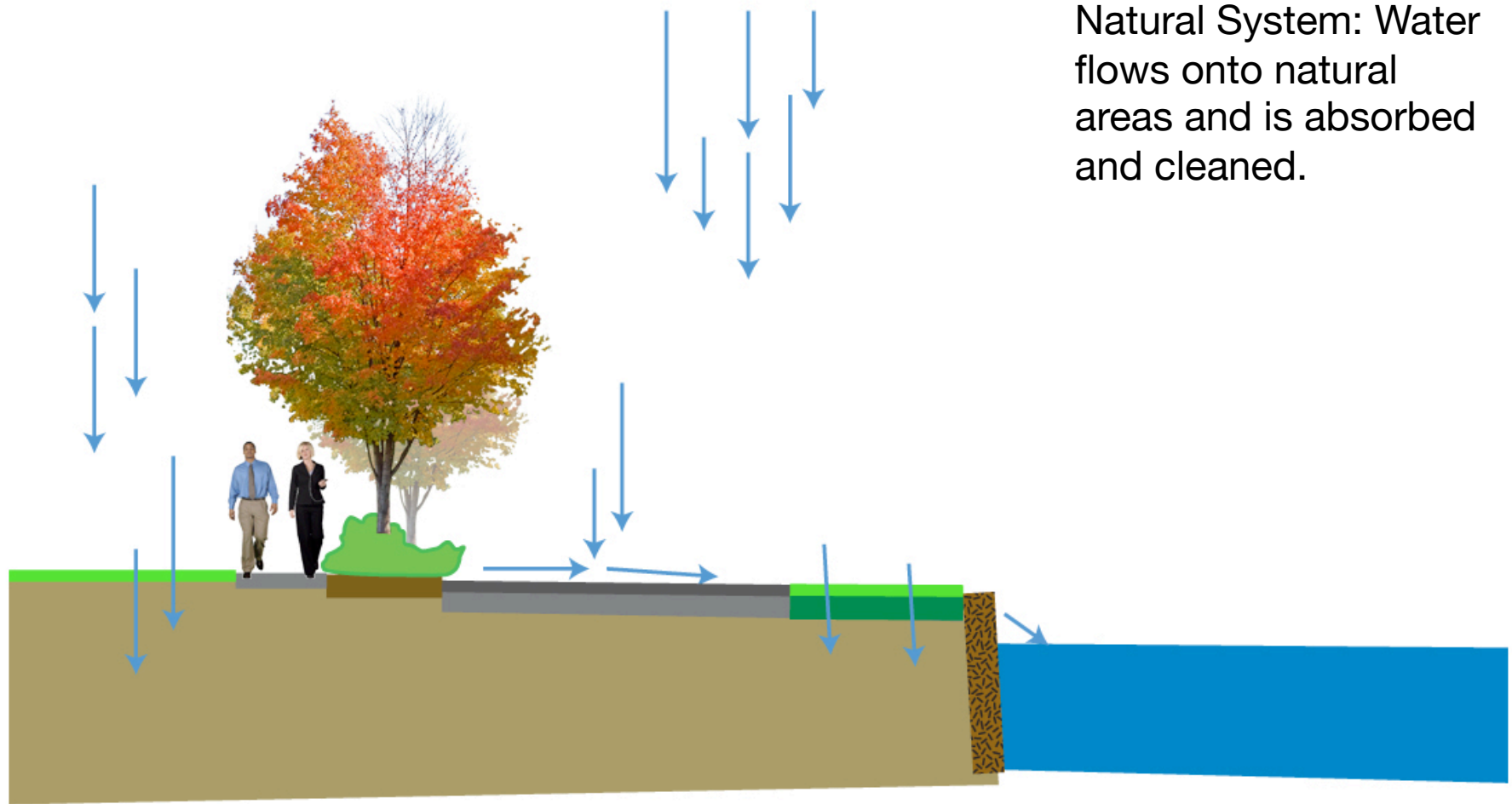
Existing paved surfaces in Lowell



Rainwater in the Lower Highlands

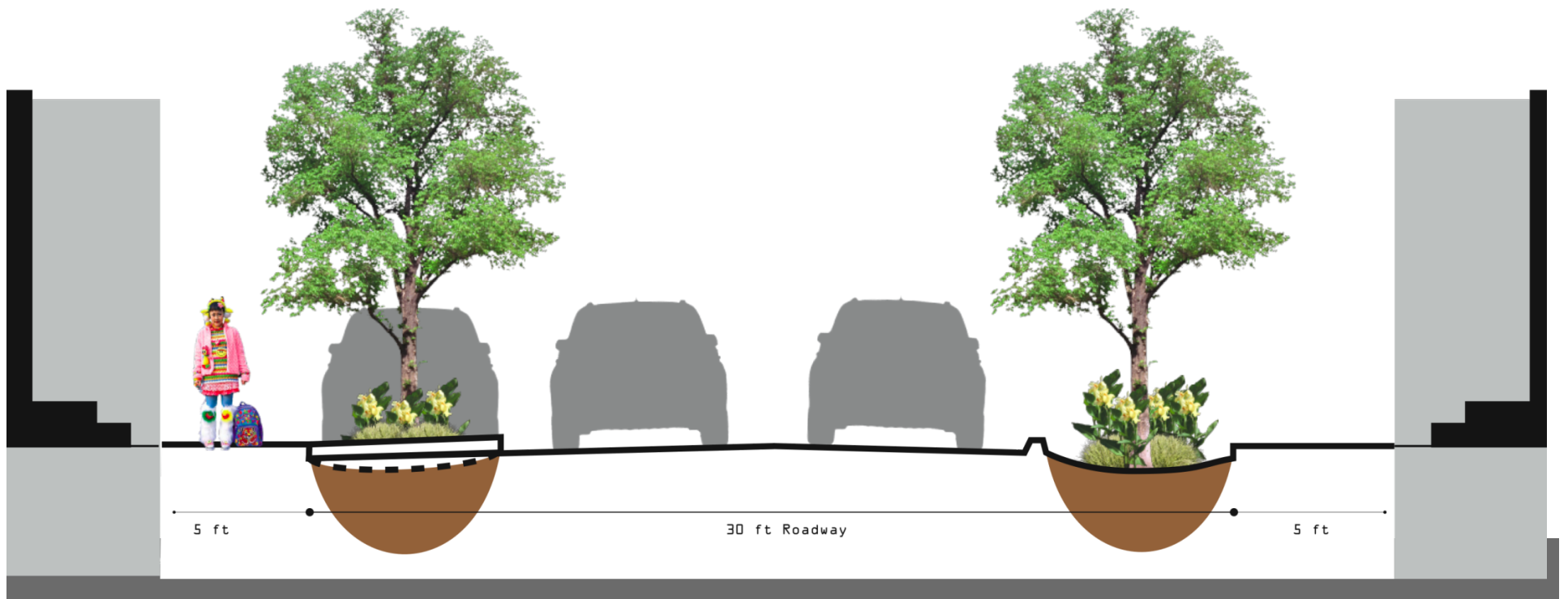
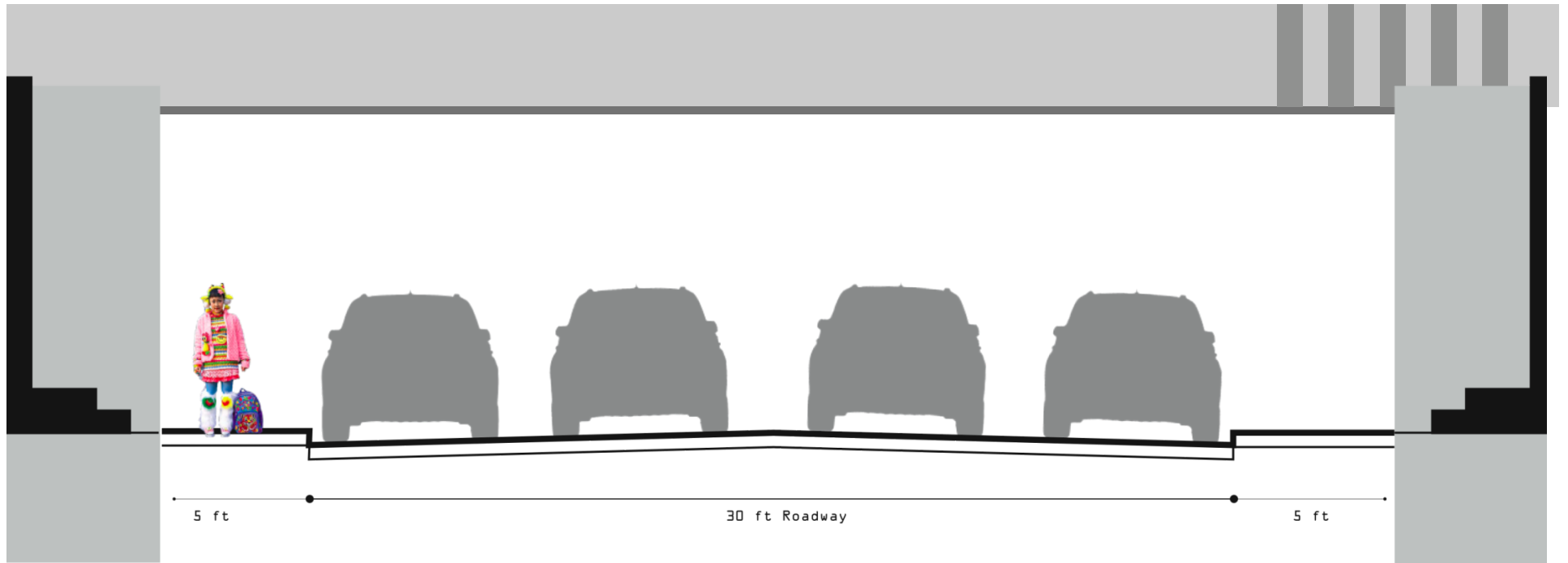


Improved Natural Water Flows

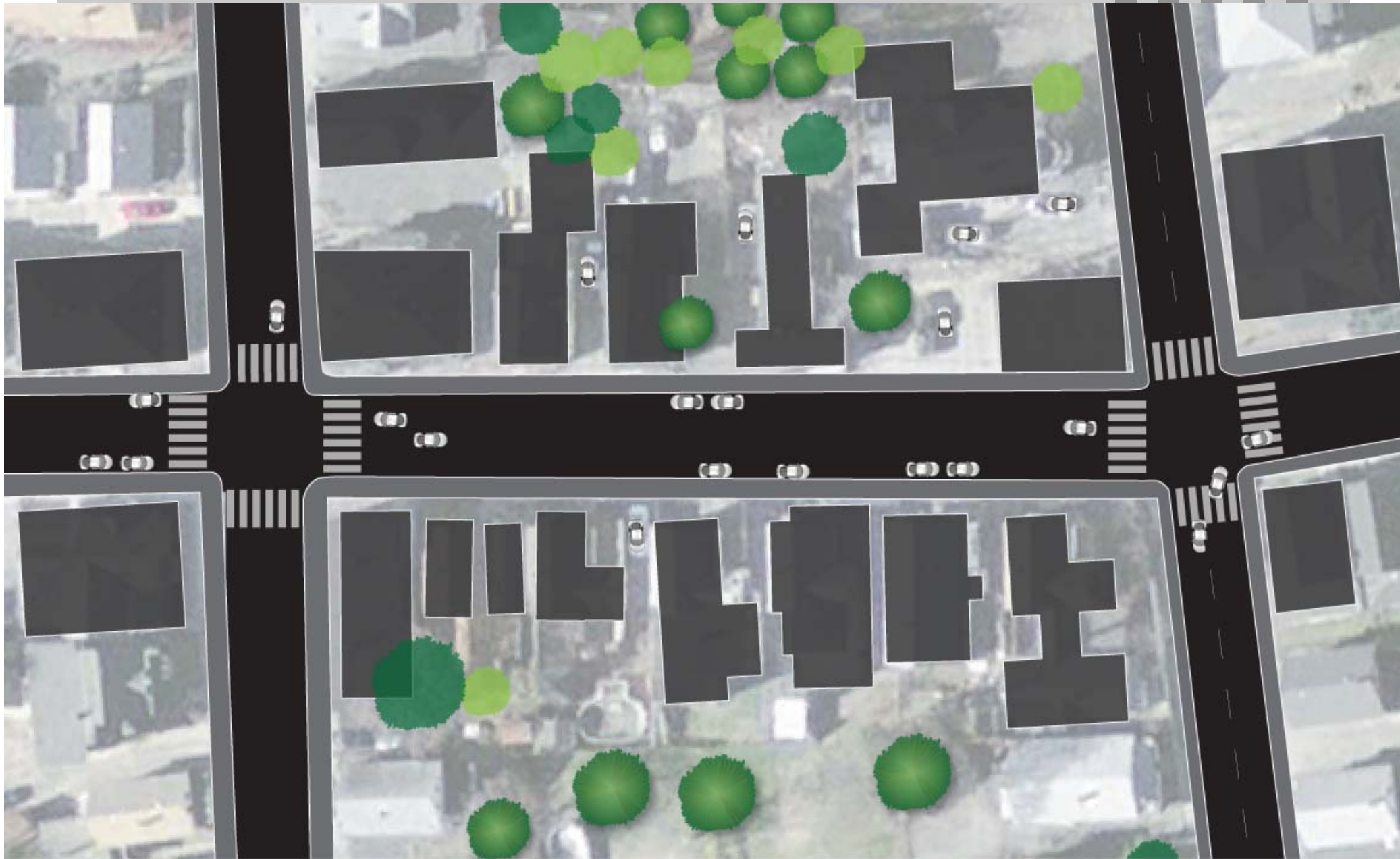


Improving drainage and natural systems: “green streets”





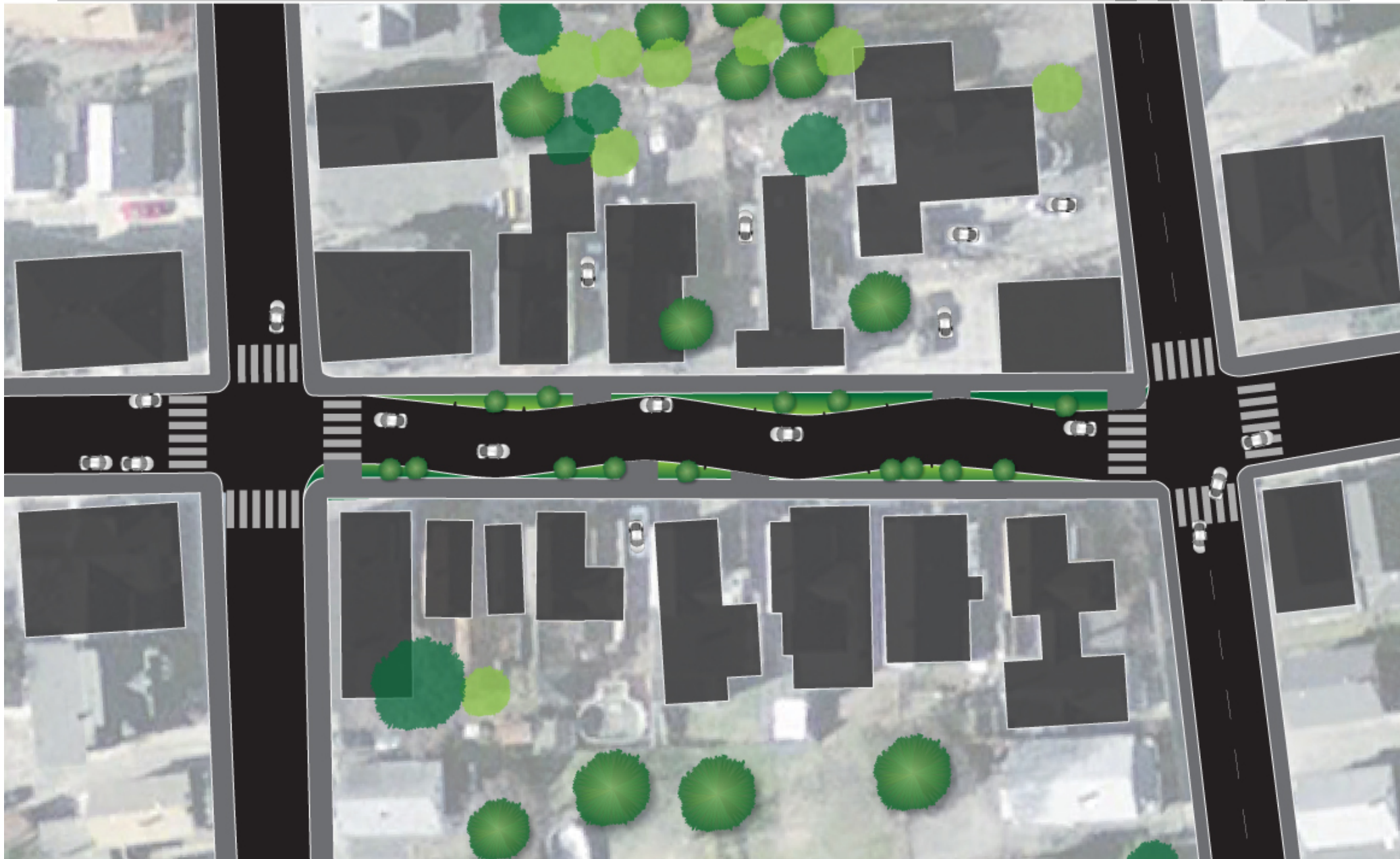
A regular street



A green street (model 1)



Another green street (model 2)



Green Street: how?

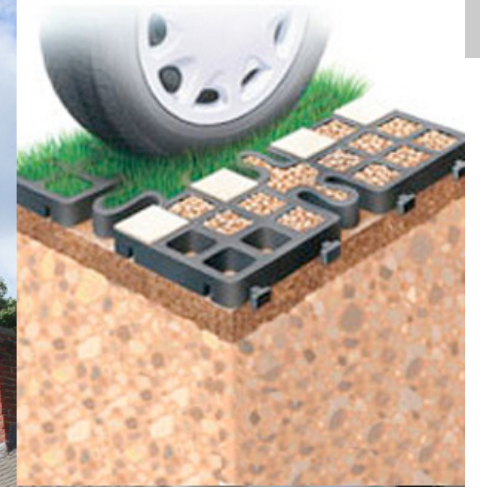
- Integrate into ongoing city-wide Combined Sewer Separation Project
- Link up with city-wide Climate Change Action Plan as “green infrastructure” showcase
- Revise Traditional Neighborhood design guidelines
 - Create specifications for pervious pavement, swales, and other drainage innovations
 - Provide for street narrowing to allow for additional trees and greenery
- We want your ideas on the best candidate pilot streets in Lower Highlands

Improving drainage on private lots

- Amend zoning code section on off-street parking:
 - Revise purpose not only to provide adequate parking, but also to promote multi-modal transport and ensure ecological integrity
 - Reduce off-street parking requirements for properties close to Gallagher Terminal; trolley line and other public transit; affordable housing (example: NYC and other cities)
 - Require new off-street parking to utilize pervious pavement (develop new guidelines; apply through paving permit process)
- Incentive schemes to encourage residents to replace existing pavement with natural or pervious surfaces
 - Stormwater utility payment scheme
 - Educational materials, technical assistance from the City







Increase Community Green Space

Proposal: Turn vacant lots into community gardens & pocket parks



Partner with Keep Lowell Beautiful & Neighborhood groups

Implementation

Planning Recommendation	Specific Action/s	Cost	Time (yrs)
Cupples Square streetscape improvements	Widen sidewalks and add amenities such as streetlamps, informational placards and trees	Moderate	Can Start within a few months
Creation of Cupples Square Zoning Overlay District		Low	1
Traffic Mitigation in Cupples Square	Construction of right angle in road, pedestrian crosswalks, sidewalk widening and signage	High	
Small business development	Create Main Streets Program, bring in Best Retail Practices program; revolving loan fund for green retrofits	Moderate	1-2 years
Pailin-Clemente area: enhance unique identity and regional draw	Institute new design guidelines including a removal of sign ordinance; create branding and gateways; Extend Acre Urban Renewal Boundary to include current autobody shop area	Low	1-2
Upgrade Clemente Park	Improvements to park, surrounding streetscape, and crosswalk	Medium	1-2
Create Community Center in Clemente Park	Acquire taxicab barn and convert to community center	High	5
Create Canal Walk	Interface with National Park Service plan for upgrading canal walk	High	Reliant on NPS
Redevelop Nottingham Mills	Designate site as Priority Development District	Low	immediate
Redevelop Nottingham Mills	Develop according to pre-specified uses: (Option 1) Mixed use with residential; or (Option 2) Mixed use with business incubator	High, but offset by grants and tax credits	3+

Implementation

Planning Recommendation	Specific Action/s	Cost	Time (yrs)
Utilize RMV site	Amend site zoning to allow eco-friendly autobody shops	Low	< 1 year
Plan for RMV site future redevelopment	Amend zoning to encourage lot consolidation for larger-scale future redevelopment; develop Chelmsford St. design guidelines	Low	<1 year
Improved (dedicated?) pedestrian access to train platform from Chelmsford St.	Identify and construct new pedestrian pathway around and through terminal	Moderate	2+
Improved outdoor park space at corner adjacent to Lord Overpass	Conduct site analysis and develop design concept	Low-High	<1-10
Enhanced wayfinding signage at and around Terminal property	(i) Develop a signage master plan and/or coordinate with existing City sign program (ii) Design and produce signs directing pedestrians around Terminal vicinity	Low/ Medium	Immediate / <1 year
Public arts program at Terminal using facades as canvases	Solicit RFPs from various arts groups and community artists	Low/Medium	1-2
Community marketing campaign to promote use of train / Terminal	Advertise and promote use of commuter rail in LH neighborhood to better highlight the Terminal asset in the community	Low/Medium	Immediate/ <1 year
Create demonstration "green street"	revise traditional neighborhood design guidelines select and design pilot street in collaboration with residents	Moderate	1-2
Reduce pavement on private lots	Amend zoning code section on off-street parking to require and encourage pervious pavement reduce parking requirements near transit	Low	<1

Thank You!

Send us comments and questions at
11.360@mit.edu

