



A Vision for Upper Merrimack

Presented by MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning



A Vision for Upper Merrimack

Who we are:

- A group of graduate students at MIT.
- Planning consultants for the City of Lowell.
- Previous classes have created plans for communities throughout Massachusetts, including Centralville.



Our Process

Gather information

- A public meeting, 10.17
- Meetings with residents, community organizations, service agencies, parks service, and business owners
- Walking, observing, taking pictures

Propose interventions

- Attract growth that fits with the character of the neighborhood
- Provide a range of development alternatives
- Use your ideas and feedback to what we show today

Compose a neighborhood plan for the City of Lowell



A Vision for Upper Merrimack

Planning for growth while
preserving a diverse community.

- Affordable housing for all ages and backgrounds
- Safe and vibrant streets and public spaces
- Better connections to the river, canals and parks
- New retail development to serve community needs
- A regional center for public services
- Implementing change through zoning



Agenda

Open Spaces and Greenways

Neighborhood Streetscape

Transportation

Housing and Community Services

Catalyst Properties

Question and Answer





Open Space and Greenways



Open Spaces and Greenways



Open Space and Greenways



The city of Lowell has adopted the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. In part, Lowell has agreed to:

- ✓ **Adopt and enforce land-use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, and create compact, walkable urban communities**
- ✓ **Maintain healthy urban forests; promote tree planting to increase shading and to absorb CO₂**



Open Spaces and Greenways

Goals:

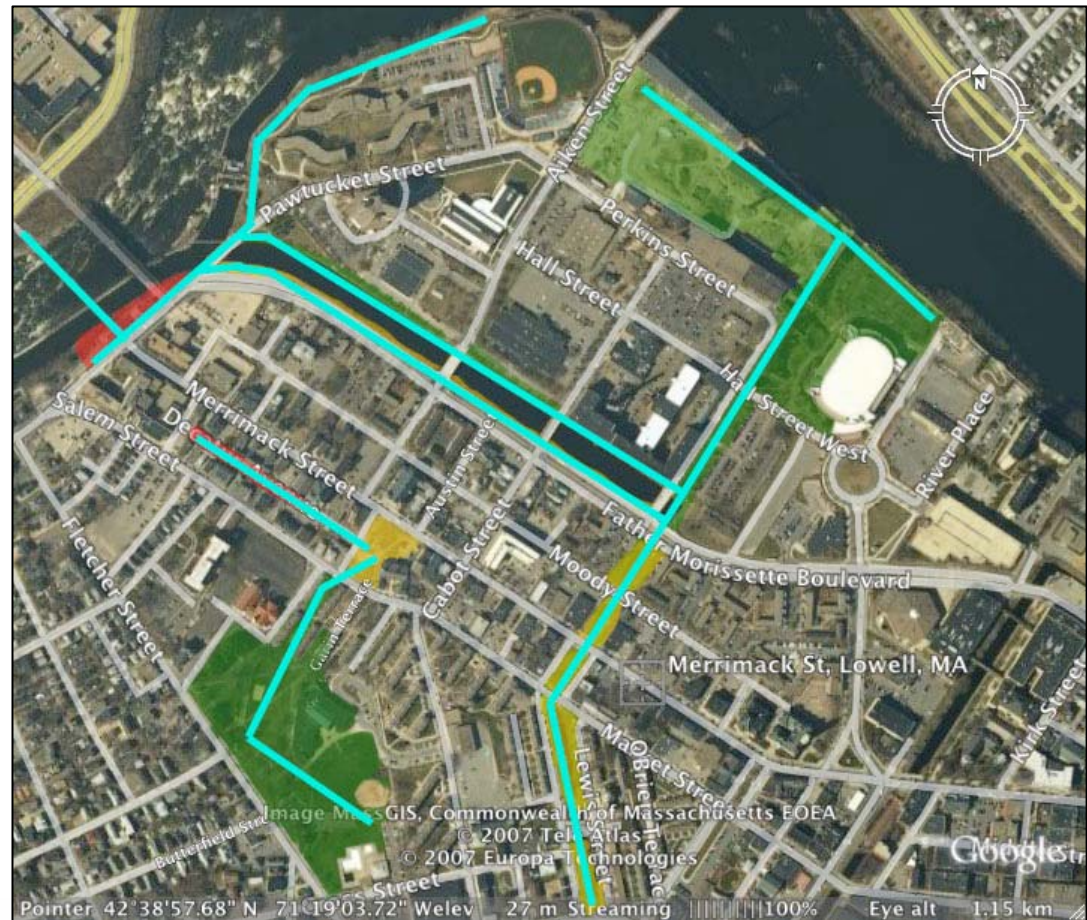
- Improve access to existing open space
- Enhance existing open spaces
- Develop new open spaces
- Encourage community art projects



Open Spaces and Greenways

Goal:

Improve access to existing open spaces in and around the neighborhood



Open Spaces and Greenways

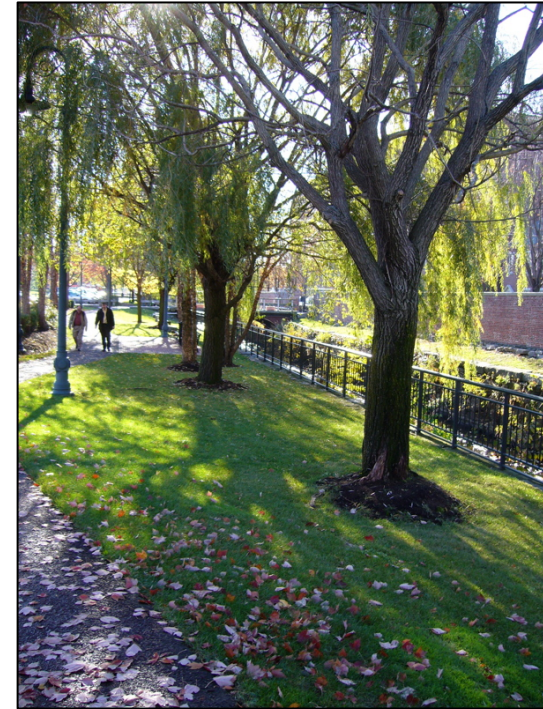
Access



Northern Canal



Riverwalk

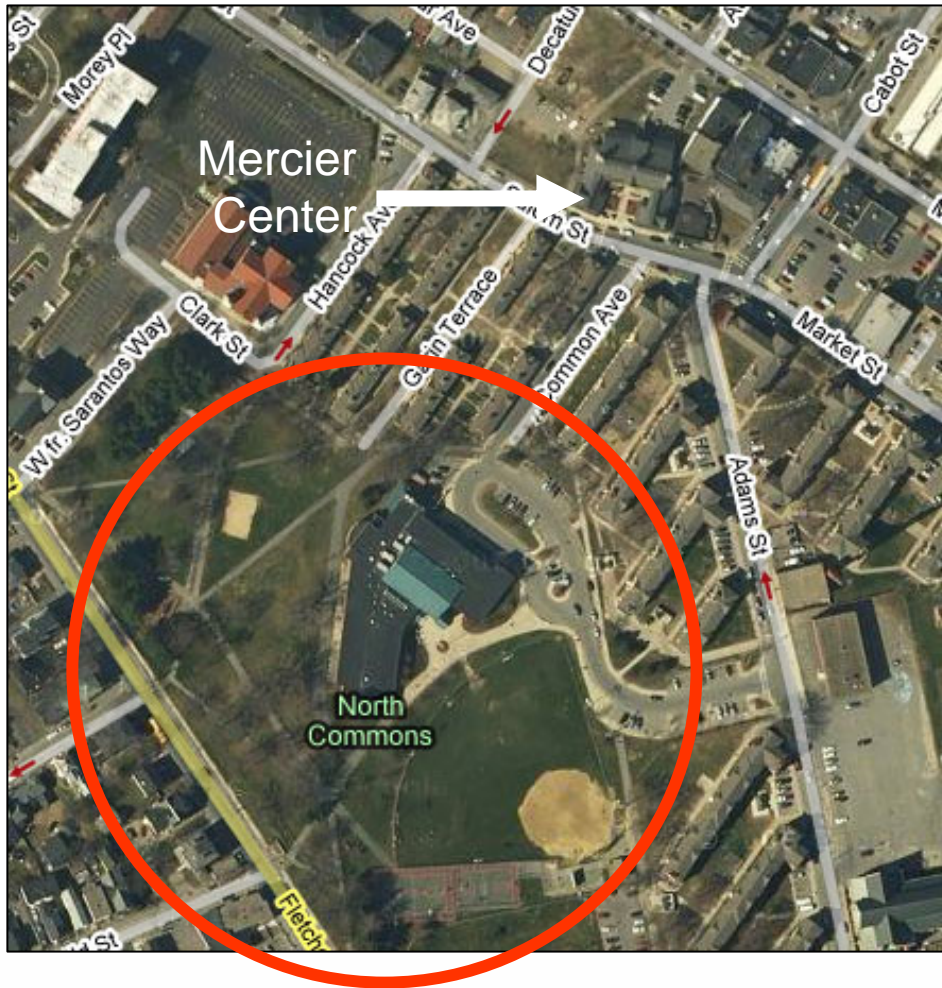


Western Canal



Open Spaces and Greenways

Access



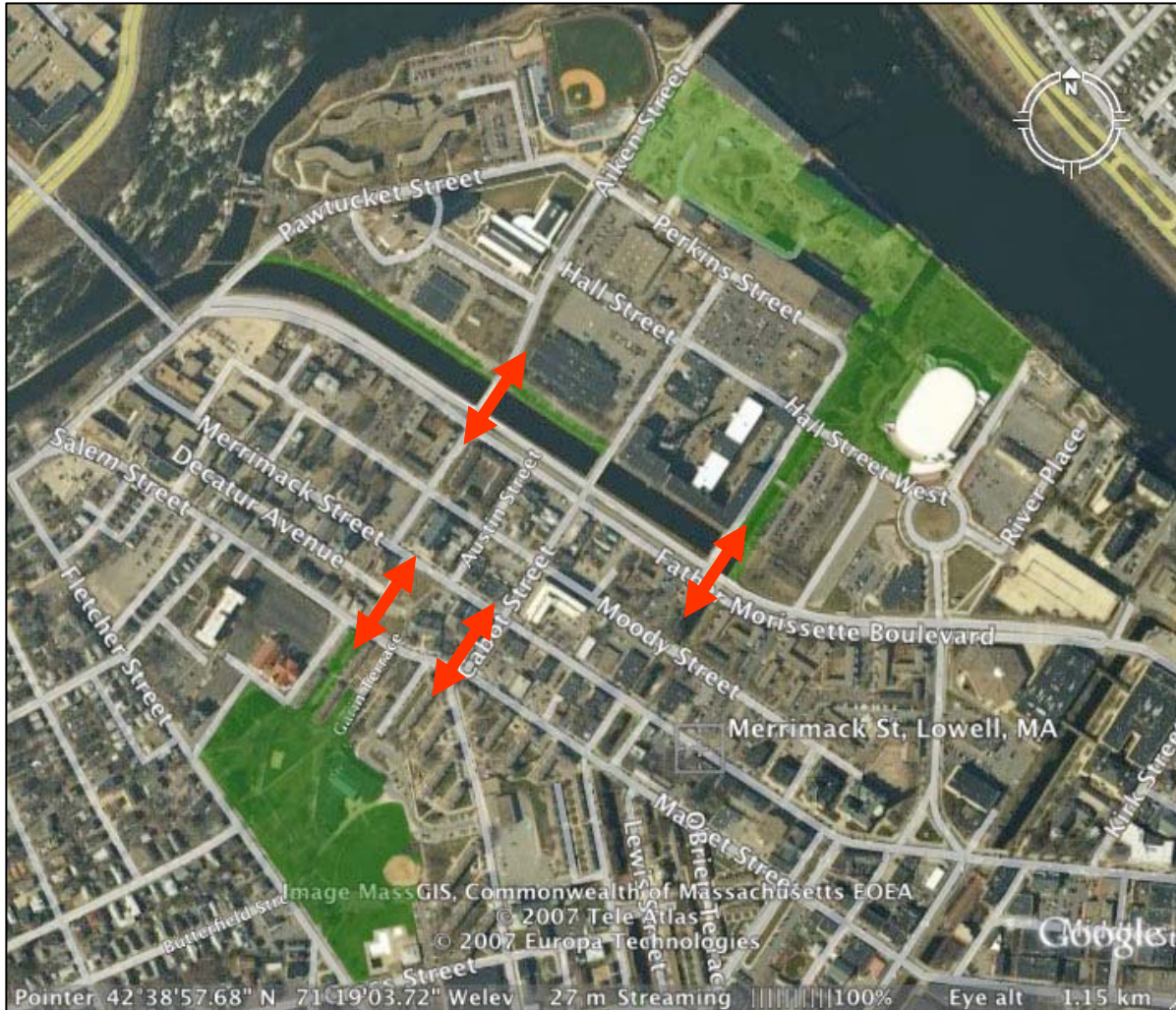
Park to the South

Open space
Ball field
Tennis courts



Open Spaces and Greenways

Access



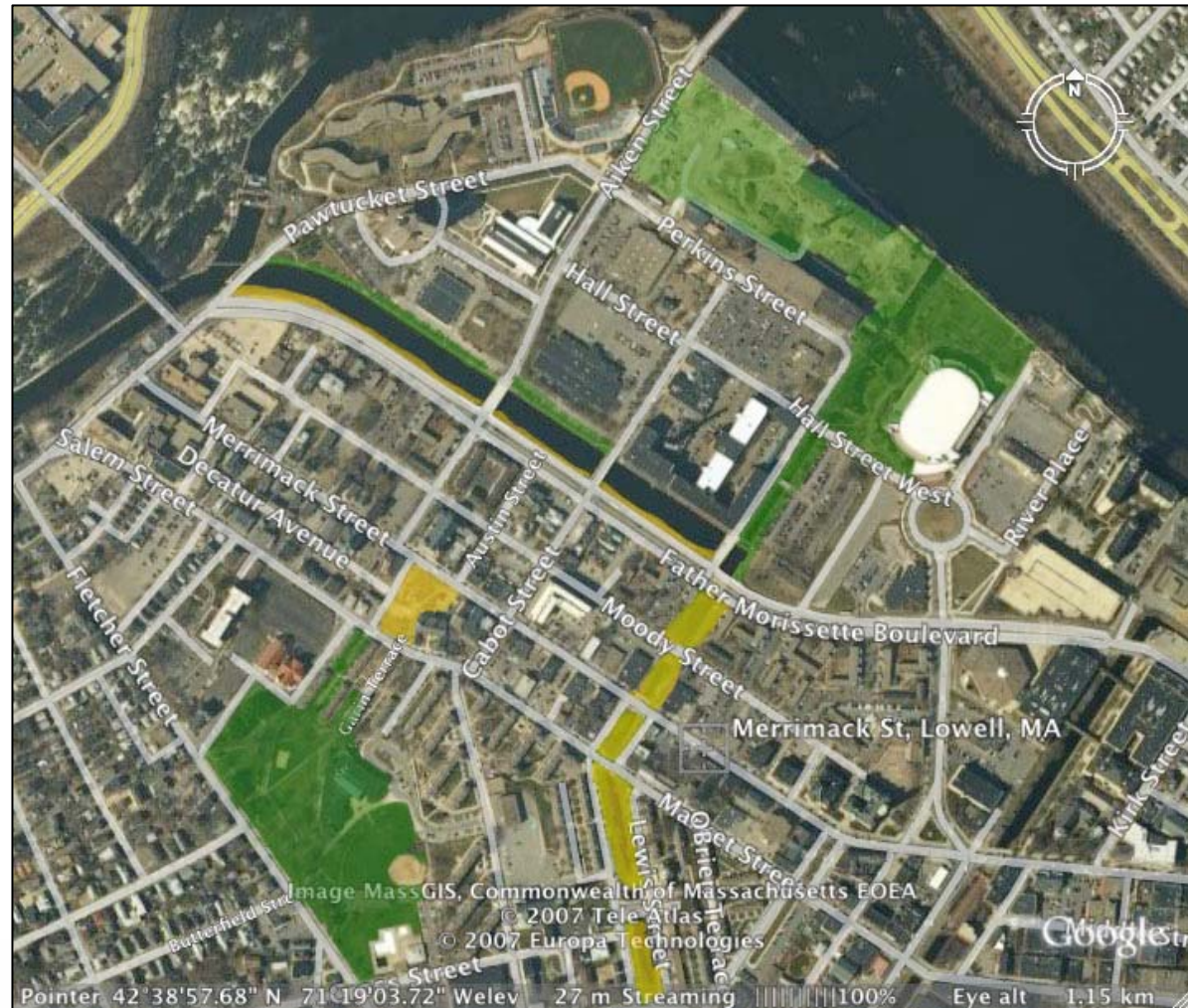
Improve pedestrian access to these surrounding open space areas



Open Spaces and Greenways

Goal:

To enhance
existing green
spaces



Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement



Along Fr. Morrisette & Northern Canal

- Improve landscaping
- Improve fence
- Move guardrail

Existing sidewalk



Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement



Recommendation

Use the North side of the Northern Canal as a model



Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement



Current lot and park next
to Mercier Center



Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement



**New Mercier Center Park
and Playground**



Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement

New Mercier Center Park and Playground



Recommendation

Include areas suitable for residents of all ages



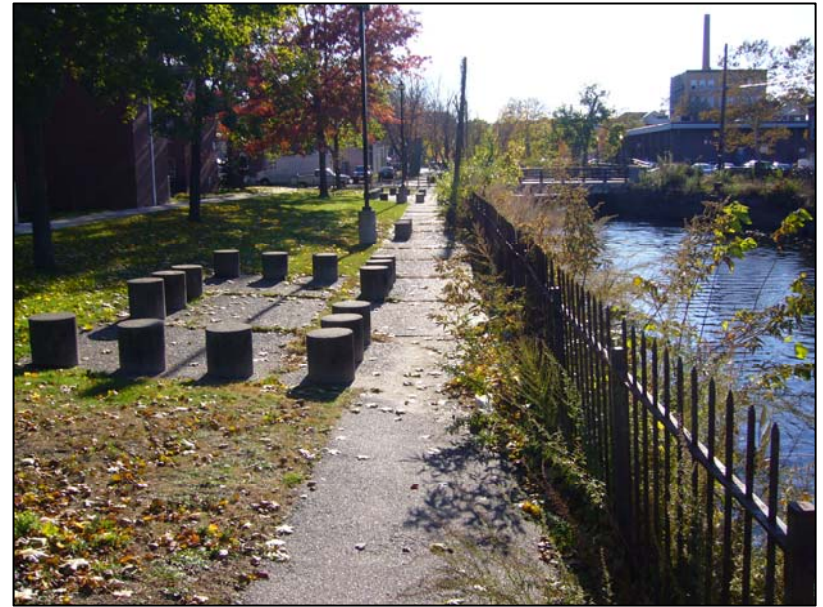
Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement

Planned Western Canal Improvements



Western Canal Beyond Northern Canal



Improvement Area 3



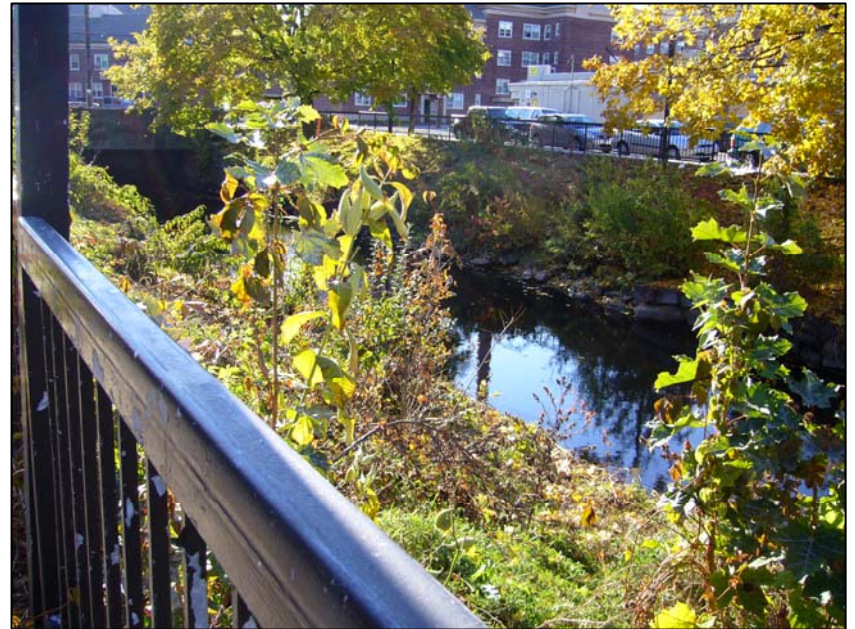
Open Spaces and Greenways

Enhancement

Planned Western Canal Improvements



Improvement Area 1



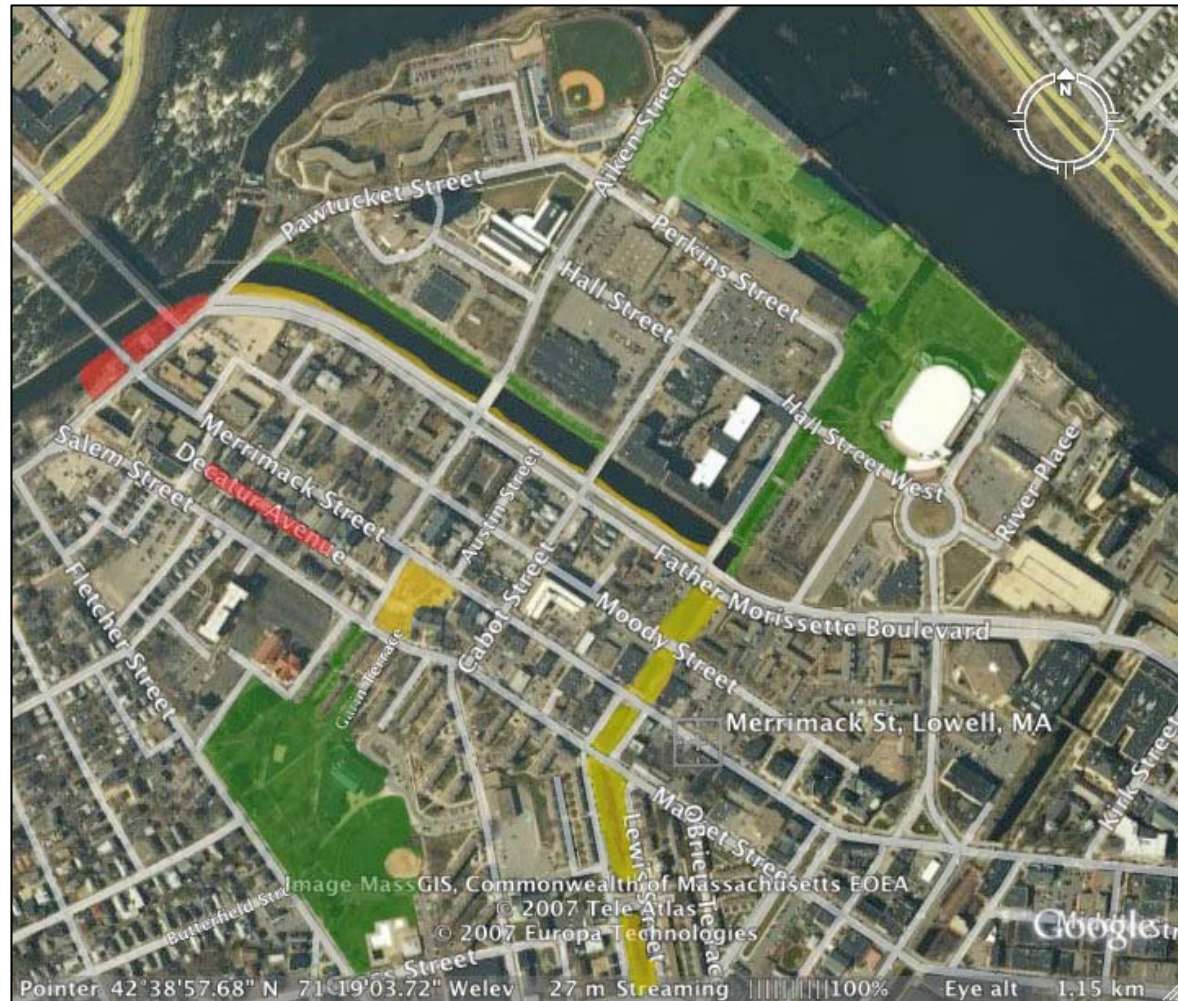
Improvement Area 2



Open Spaces and Greenways

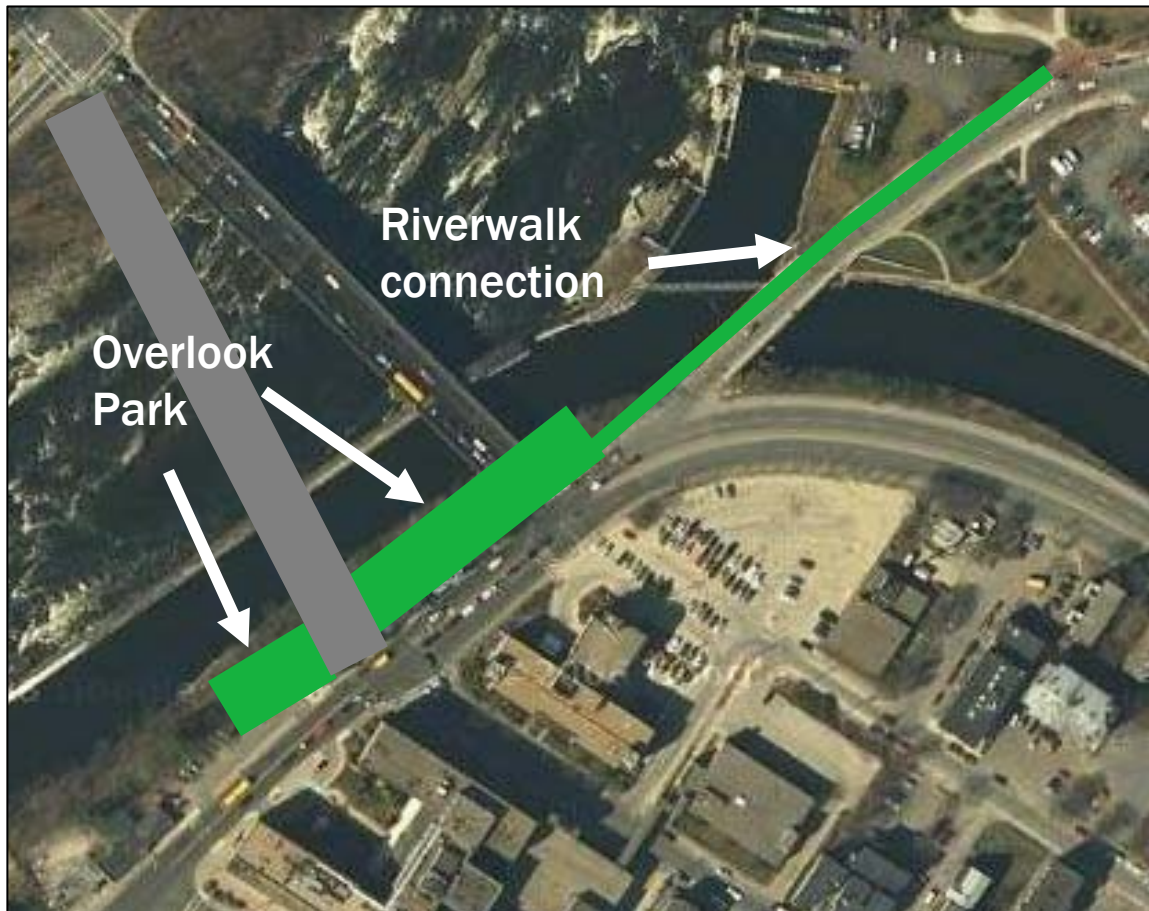
Goal:

Future development
of safe and pleasant
new open spaces



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Develop an overlook park and connect it with the existing NPS Riverwalk to the North



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Potential design for the overlook park as a gateway to the Upper Merrimack Neighborhood



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Recommendation

Build a gazebo near the previous Mission Church location using wood salvaged from the demolition



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



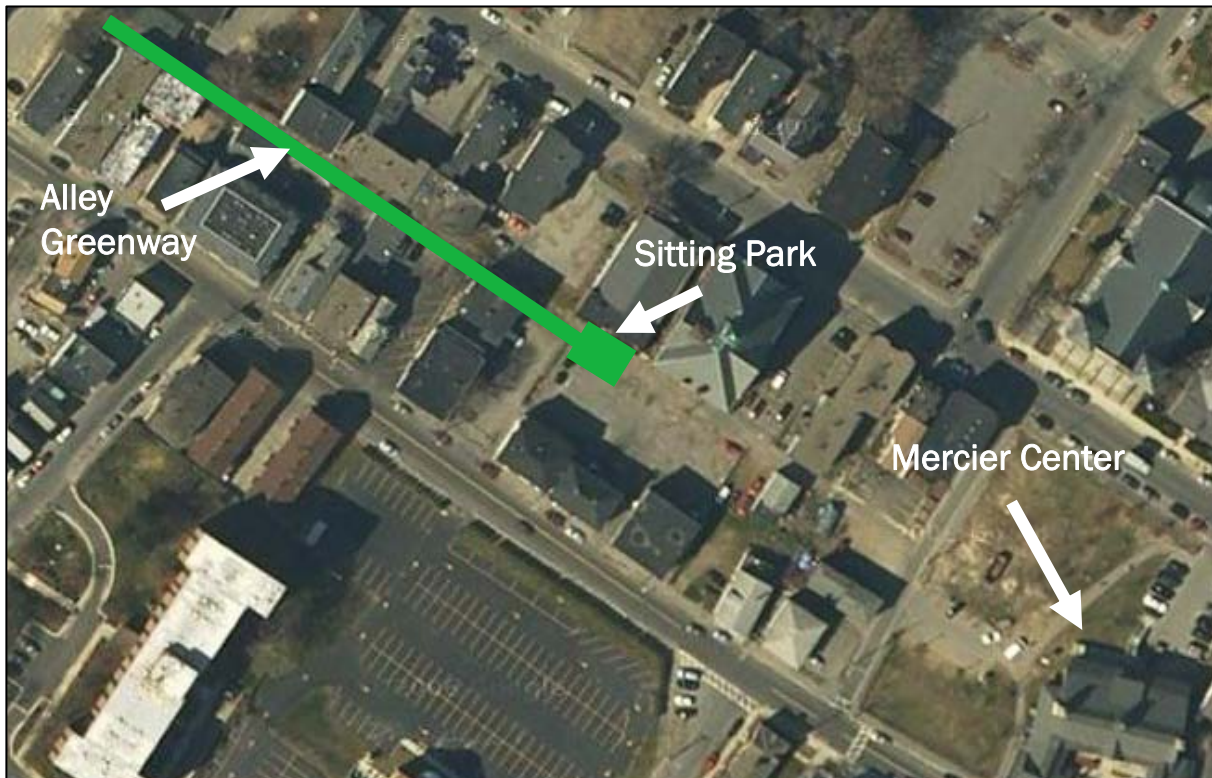
Recommendation

Create a historic marker for the old bridge linking this with other Kerouac destinations in Lowell



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Develop a greenway through Decatur Alley, with a small park at the entrance



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Existing Decatur
Alleyway



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Recommendation:

Construct a clear path with mulch strips on either side for native plants and/or resident garden boxes



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space

Existing entrance to the alley



Open Spaces and Greenways

New Open Space



Recommendation

Construct a park area with benches to encourage recreational use



Open Spaces and Greenways

Goal:

Encourage
community art
projects



Open Spaces and Greenways

Community Art

Recommendation

In all open space projects, actively seek the involvement of neighborhood residents and local artists to create unique community art



Open Spaces and Greenways

We envision these recommendations will improve opportunities for residents of the Upper Merrimack Neighborhood to enjoy safe and pleasant outdoor spaces







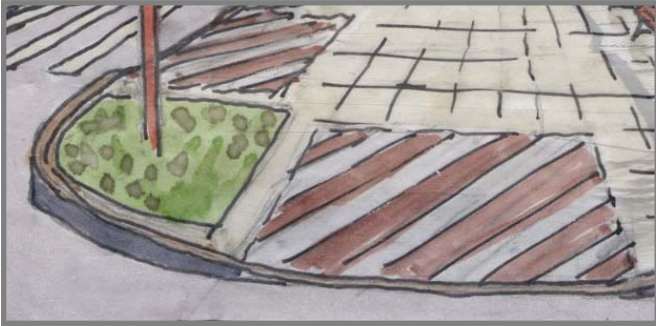

Neighborhood Streetscape



What is streetscaping and why is it important?

- Creates a safe and comfortable pedestrian environment
- Enlivens street life creating sense of place and encouraging business
- Unifies the neighborhood
- Improves the public space and experience



	Safety	Aesthetic/Comfort
Short Term	 <p>Sidewalks</p>	 <p>Street furniture</p>
Long Term	 <p>Traffic calming</p>	 <p>Design guidelines</p>





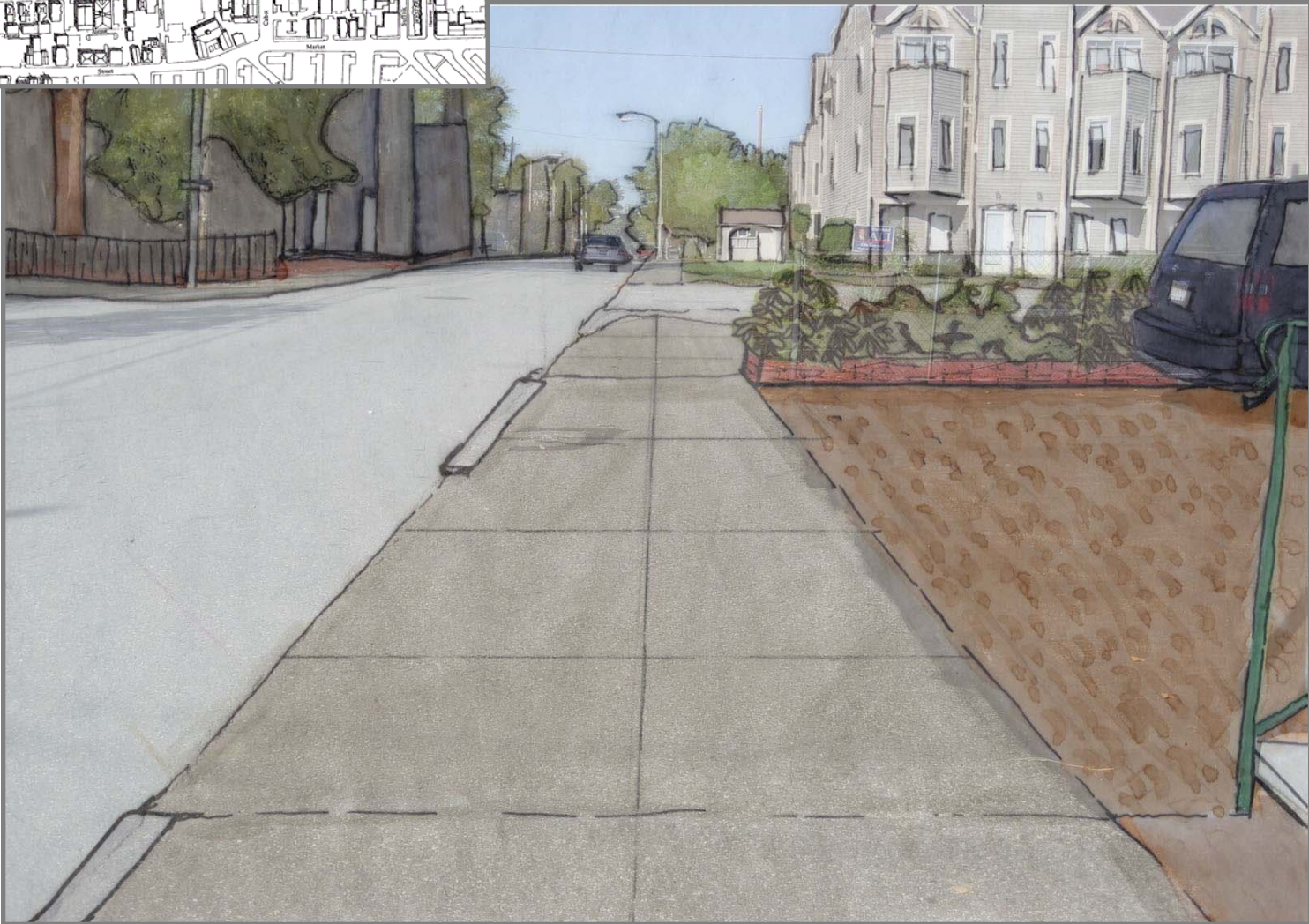
Existing Conditions

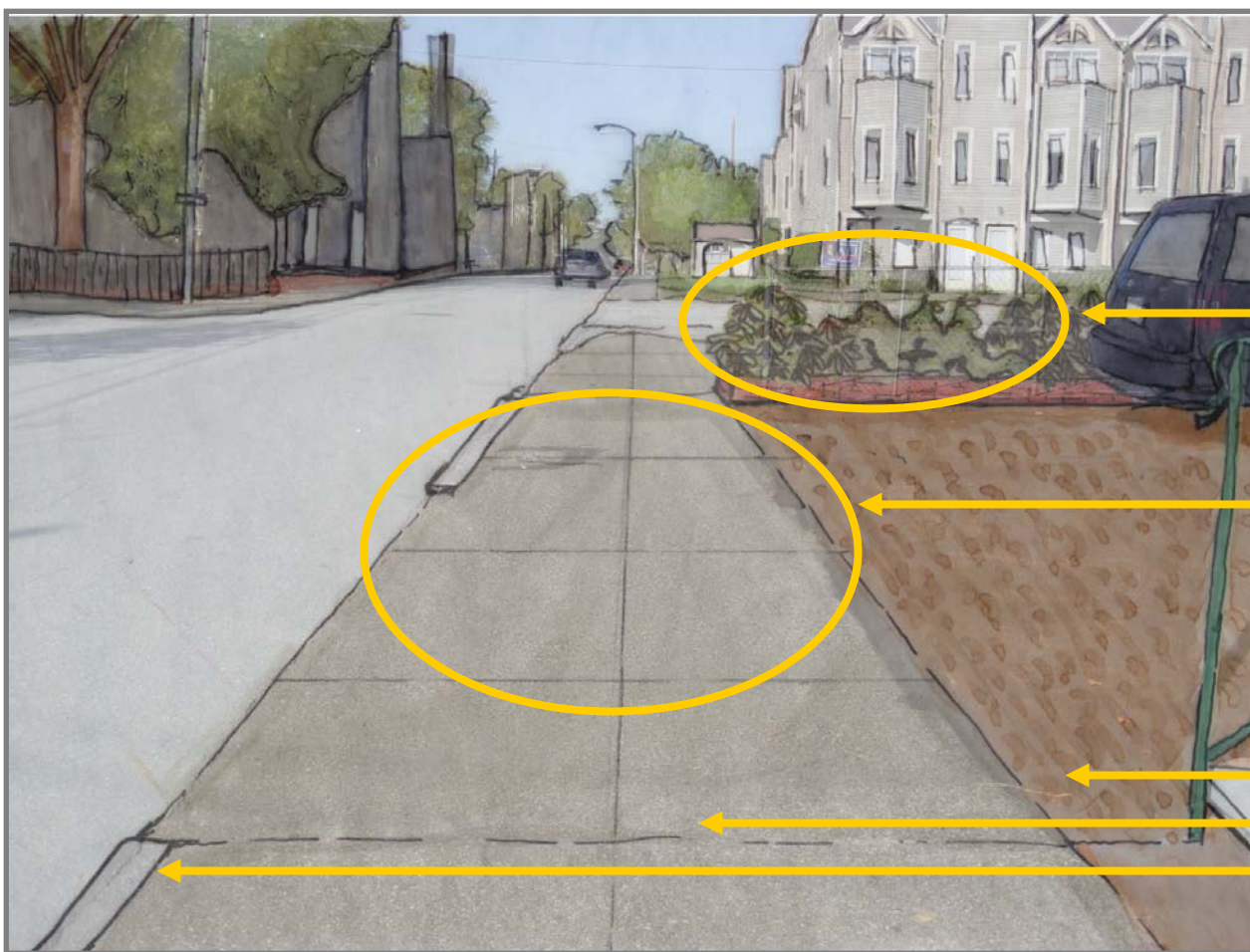


Moody Street **Before**



Moody Street **After**





Landscaping: plantings instead of fencing

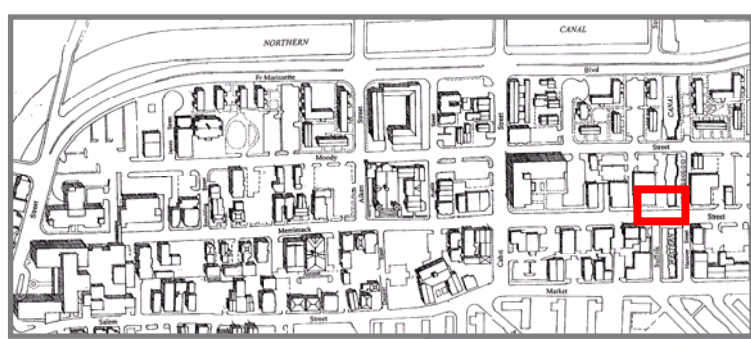
Sidewalks: better pavement materials

Pedestrian environment: curbs and varied street materials

Moody St. Streetscape Improvements



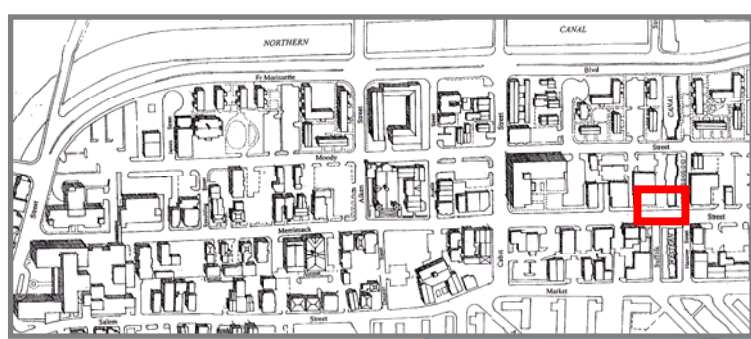
Canal Streetscape Before

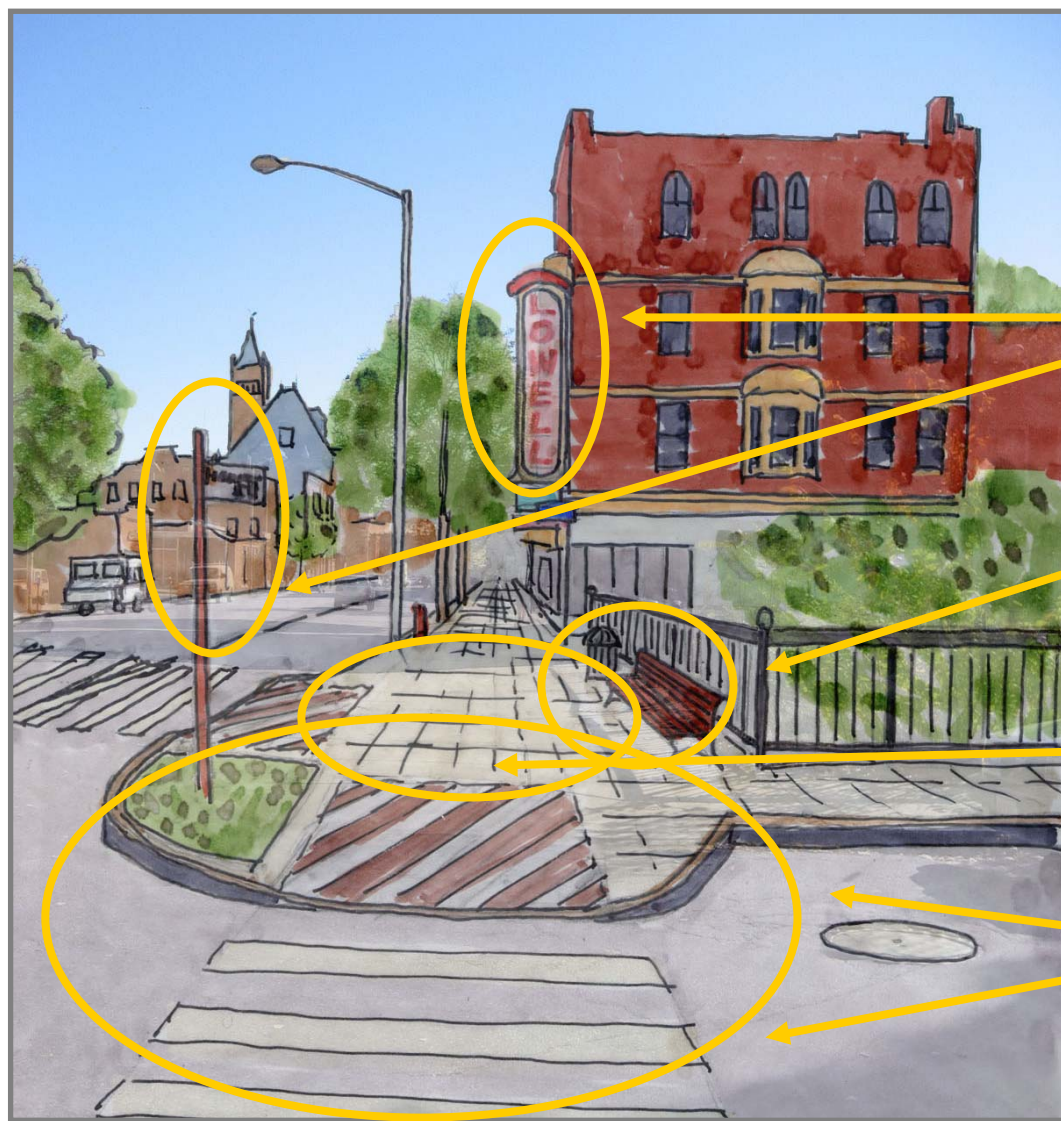


Upper Merrimack Neighborhood



Canal Streetscape **After**





Signage: wayfinding, colorful business signings

Street furniture: trash cans, benches and updated fencing

Sidewalks: better pavement materials

Pedestrian environment: marked crosswalks and bump-outs

Canal Streetscape Improvements



Merrimack Street **Before**



Merrimack Street **After**





Pedestrian environment:
increased activity

Street furniture: benches
and trashcans

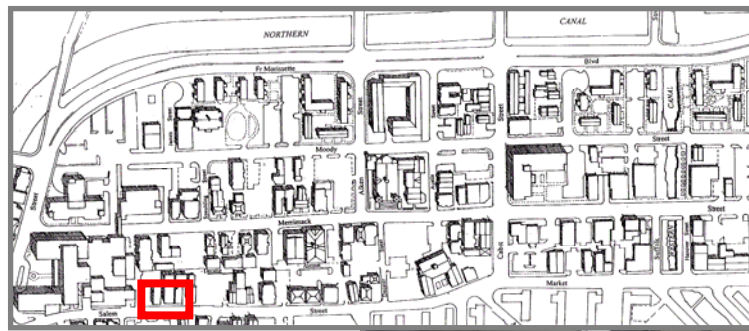
Landscaping: wider
sidewalks can
accommodate tree
plantings and furniture

Sidewalks: better
pavement material

Merrimack St. Streetscape Improvements



Salem St. Facades **Before**

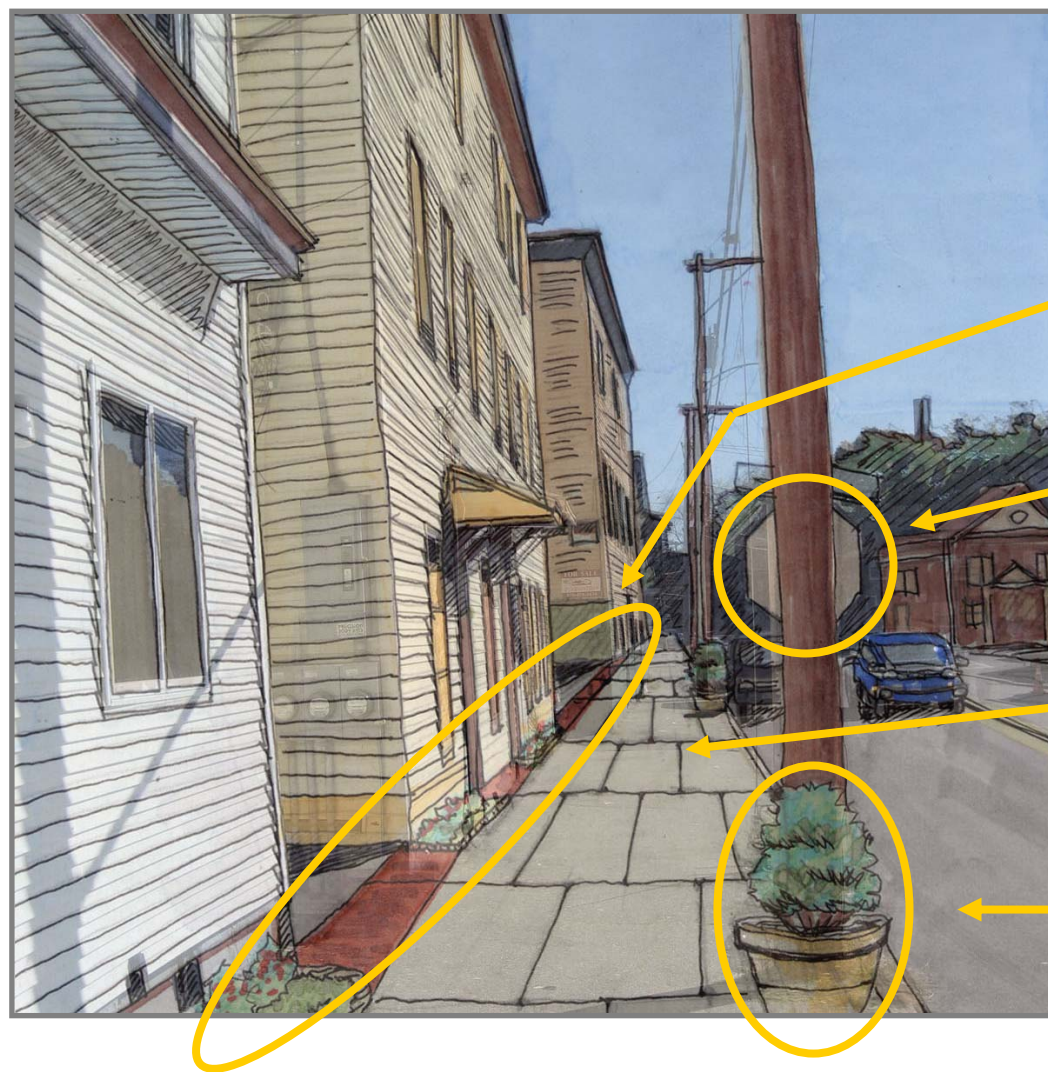


Upper Merrimack Neighborhood



Salem St. Facades **After**





Setbacks: consistent for all buildings

Signage: stop sign added increasing pedestrian safety

Sidewalks: wider, better materials

Landscaping: planters on the street in front of houses

Salem St. Streetscape Improvements



Streetscape short-term action steps

Safety

- Repaint existing crosswalks
- Paint in new crosswalks where needed
- Address critical sidewalk repairs

Aesthetic/Comfort

- Install benches (especially at bus stops), more trashcans (matching) along Merrimack Street
- Replace chain-linked fencing with landscape or fencing alternatives
- Require streetscaping improvements for new development



Streetscape long-term goals

Safety

- ✓ Replace all asphalt sidewalks with uniform concrete or pavers
- ✓ Work with traffic engineers to improve intersections with traffic calming measures

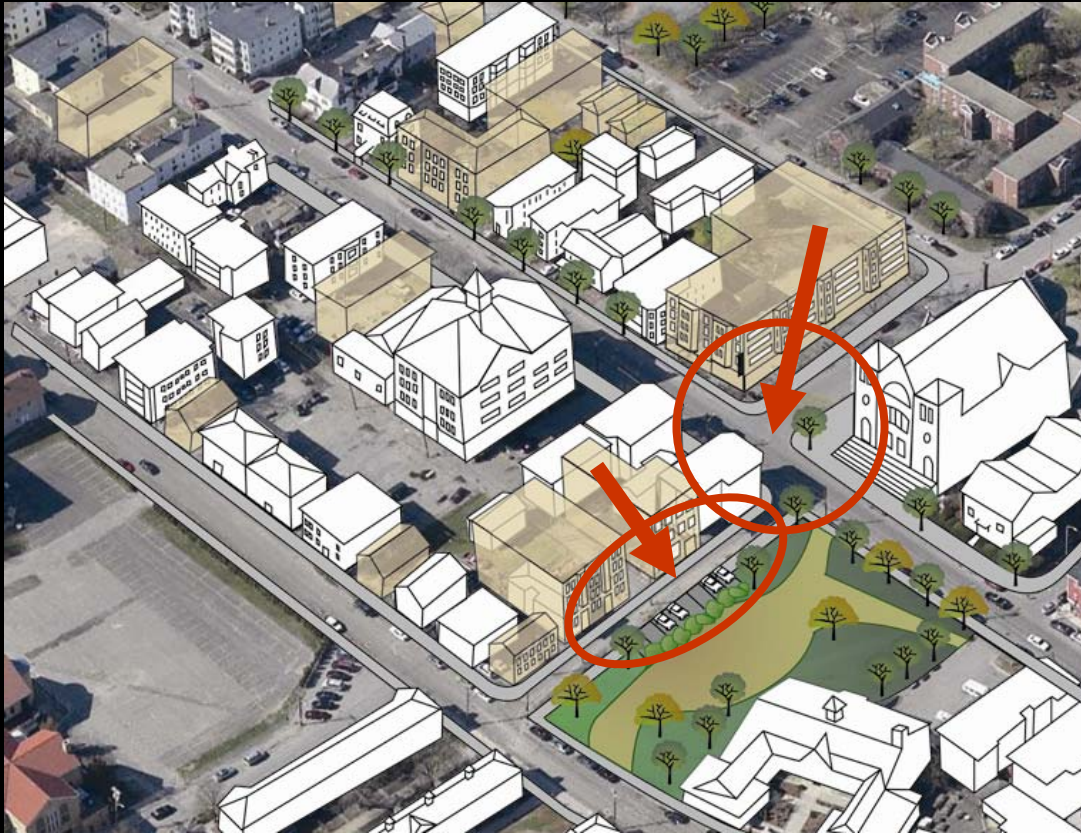


Streetscape long-term goals

Aesthetic/Comfort

- ✓ Develop uniform signage for the neighborhood to improve wayfinding and create neighborhood identity
- ✓ Develop comprehensive design guidelines pertaining to the public realm:
 - Signage on buildings
 - Fencing
 - Landscaping
 - Setbacks
 - Street trees
- ✓ Include a specific streetscape plan for west Merrimack Street in the overlay zoning district





Transportation

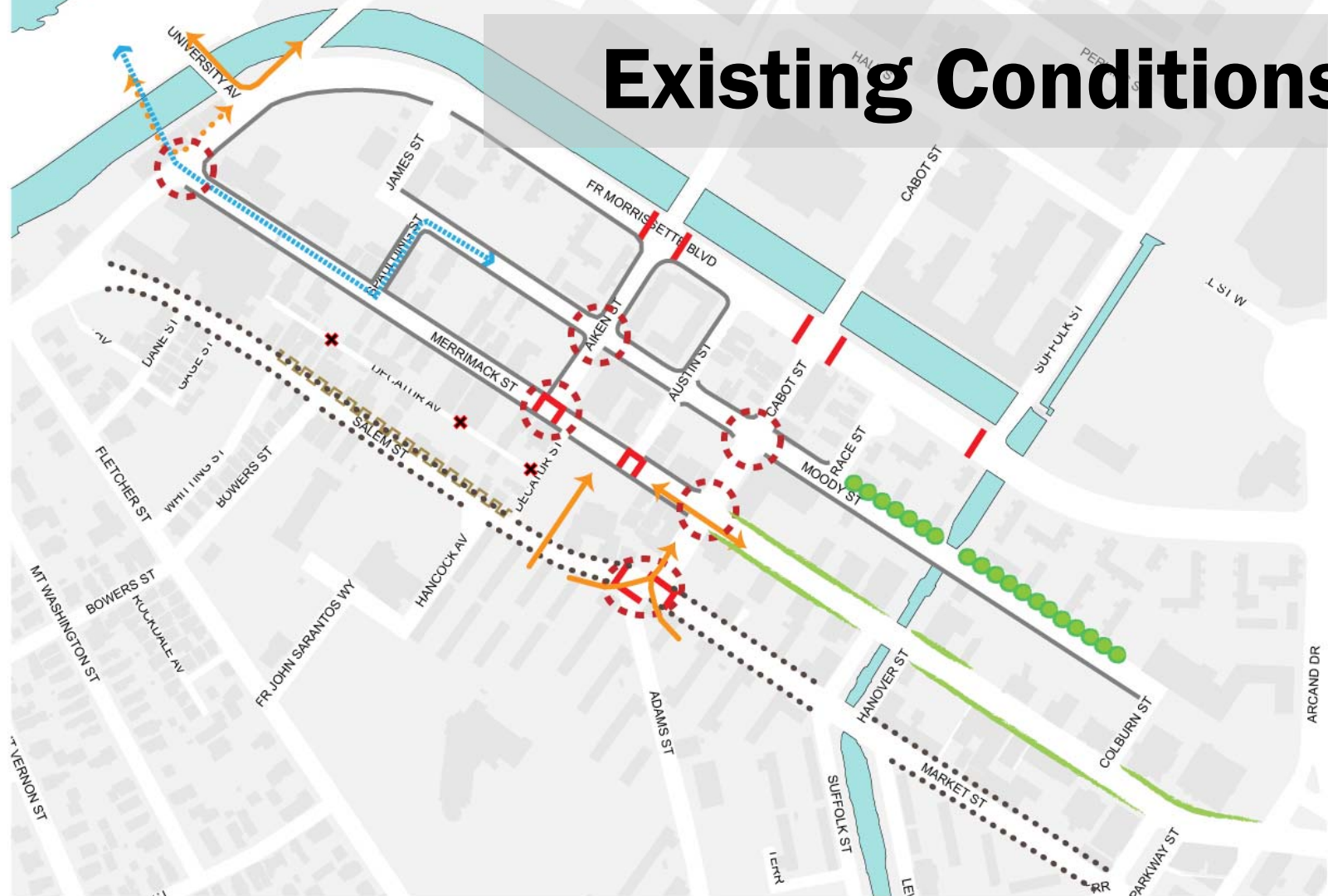


What is traffic calming?

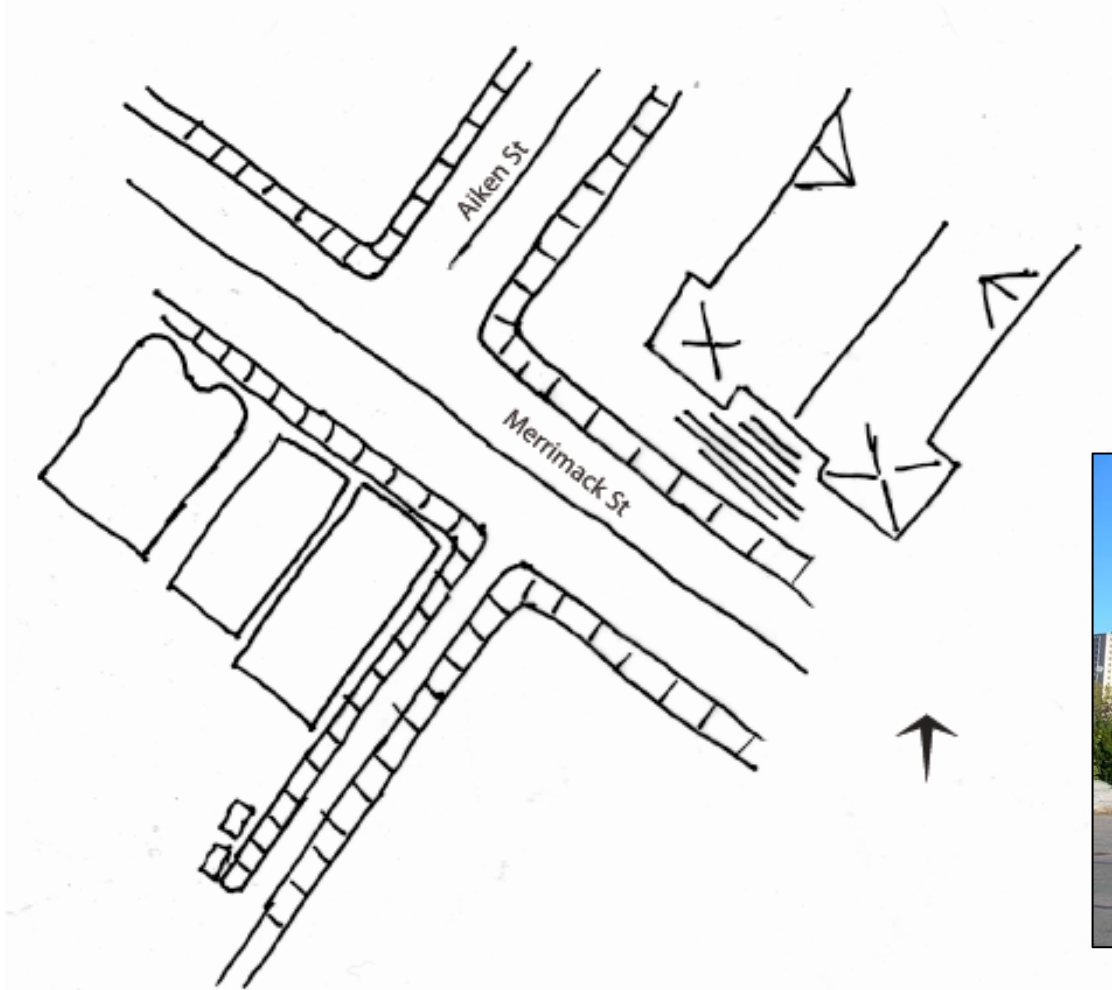
- Changes to street design that slow traffic or reduce traffic volumes.
- Can either force vertical movement (e.g., speed humps) or horizontal movement of cars (i.e., sidewalk corner bump-outs).
- Complemented by streetscape improvements.



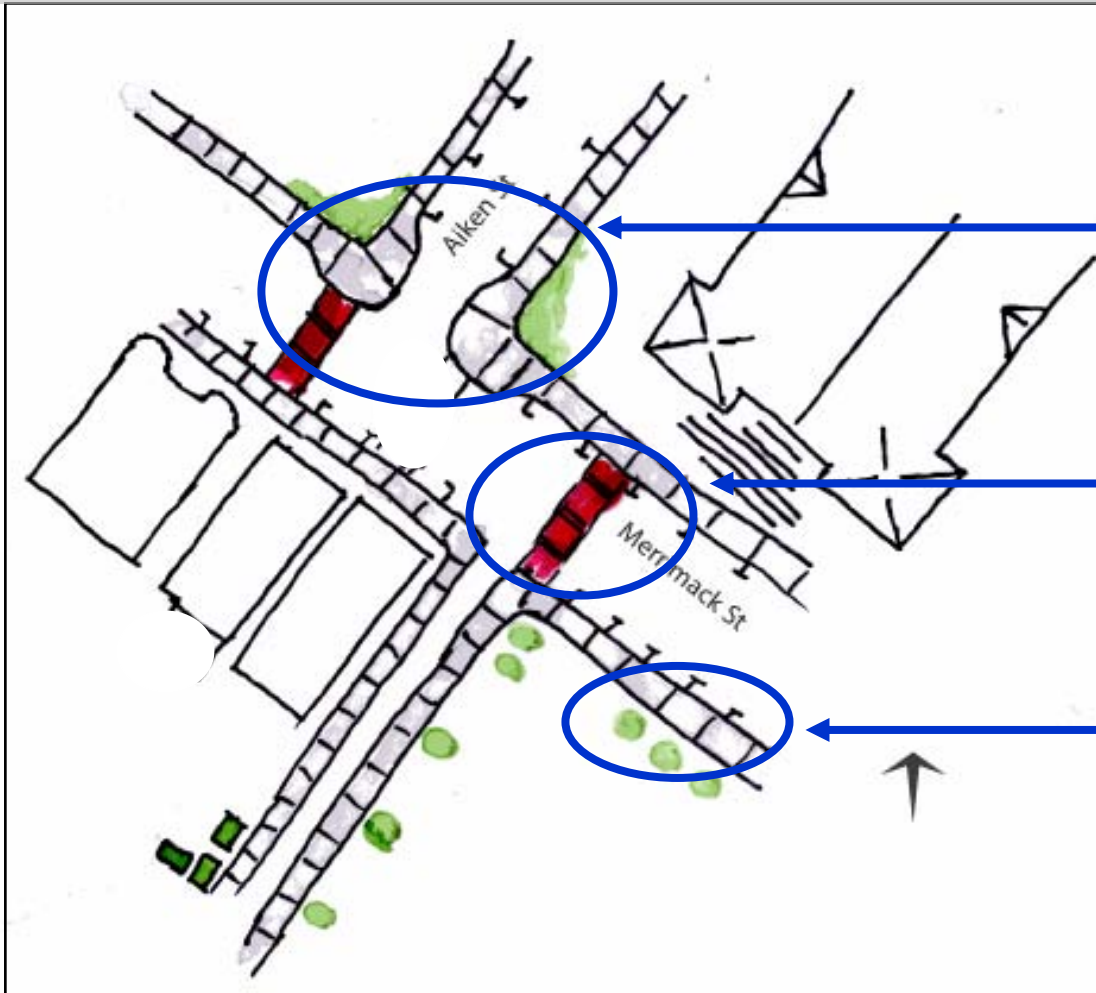
Existing Conditions



Aiken & Merrimack Streets **Before**



Aiken & Merrimack Streets **After**



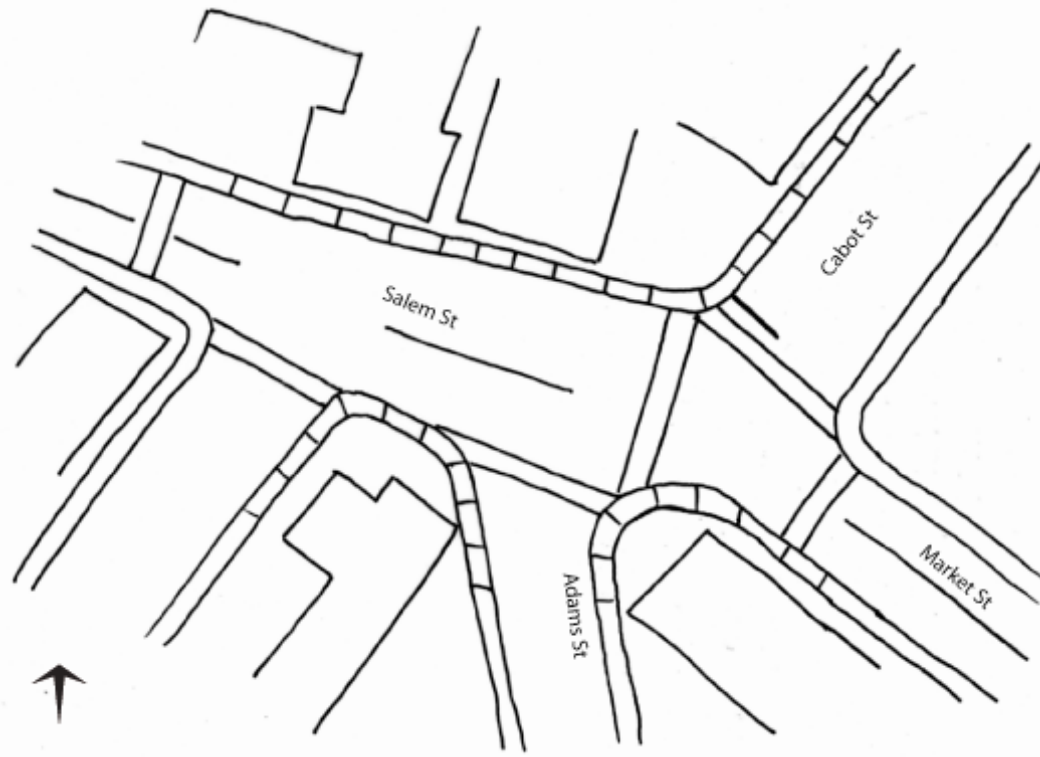
Bump-out corners to force slower turns; make street appear narrower

Textured pavement on crosswalks to warn drivers of pedestrian crossing

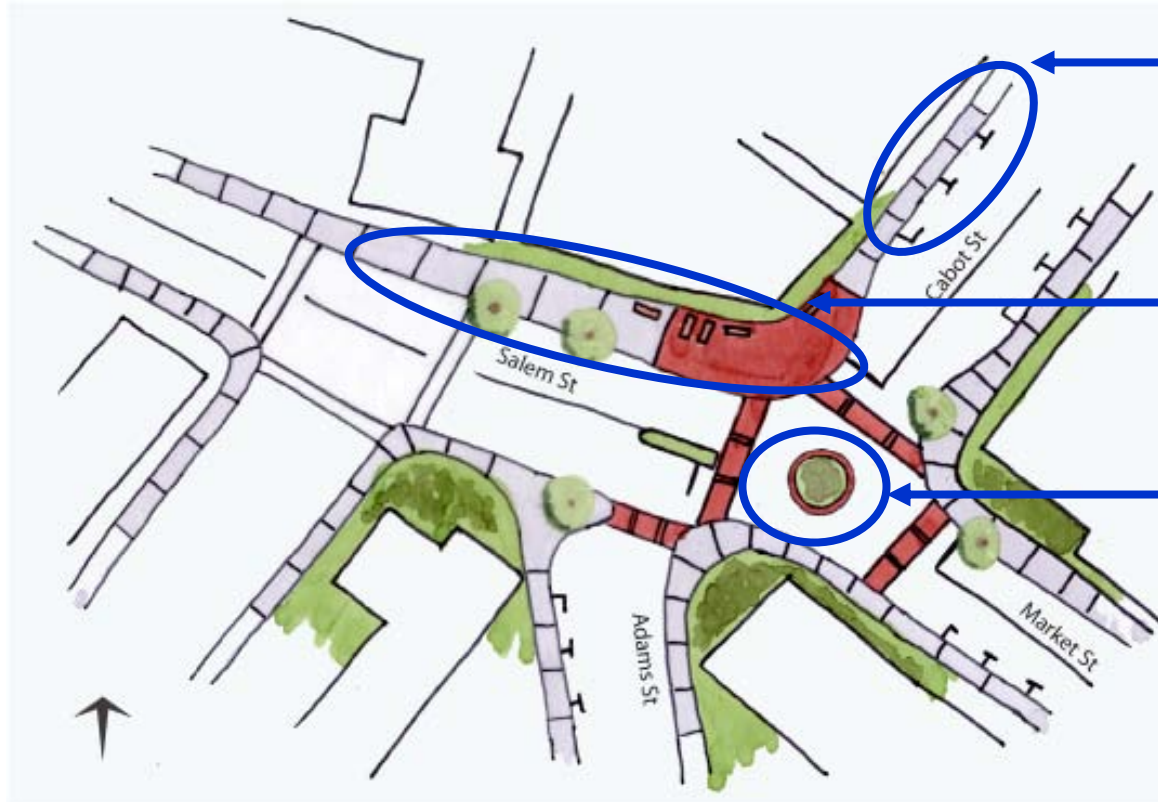
On-street parking to make street appear narrower; slow traffic



Cabot & Salem Streets **Before**



Cabot & Salem Streets **After**



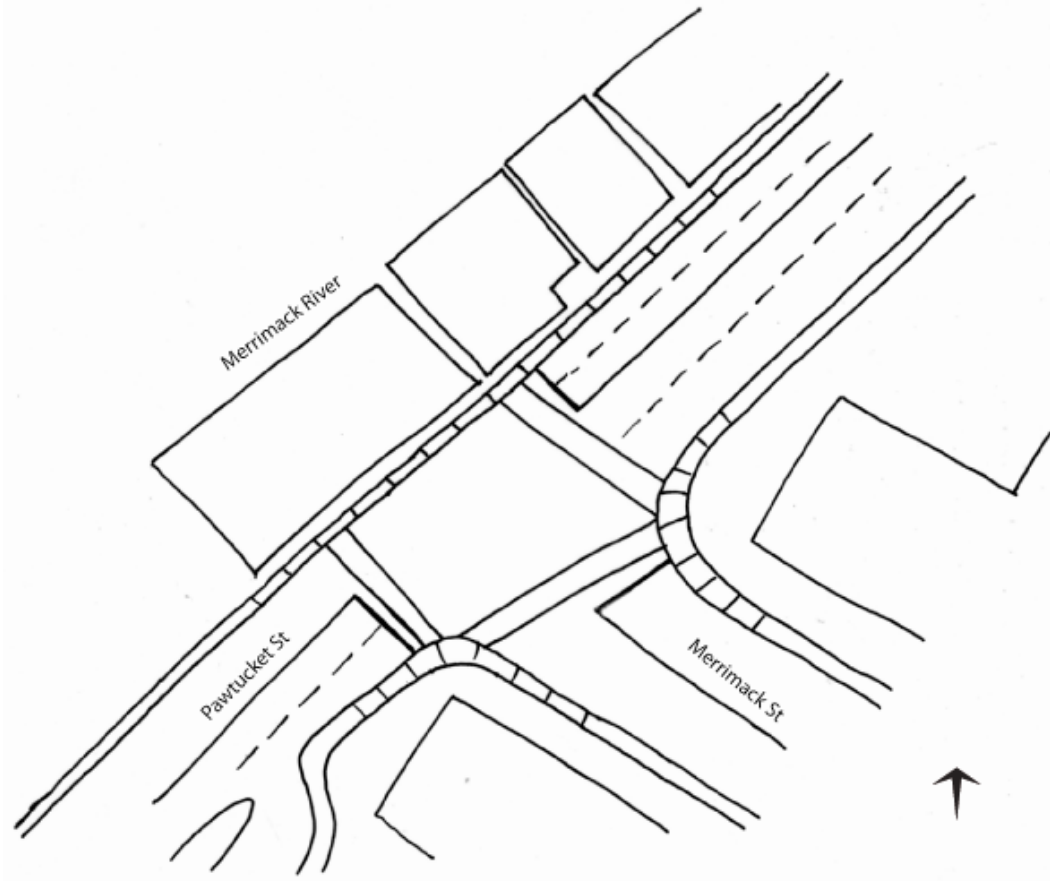
On-street parking to make street appear narrower; slow traffic

Narrow street to slow cars; increase pedestrian safety at crosswalk

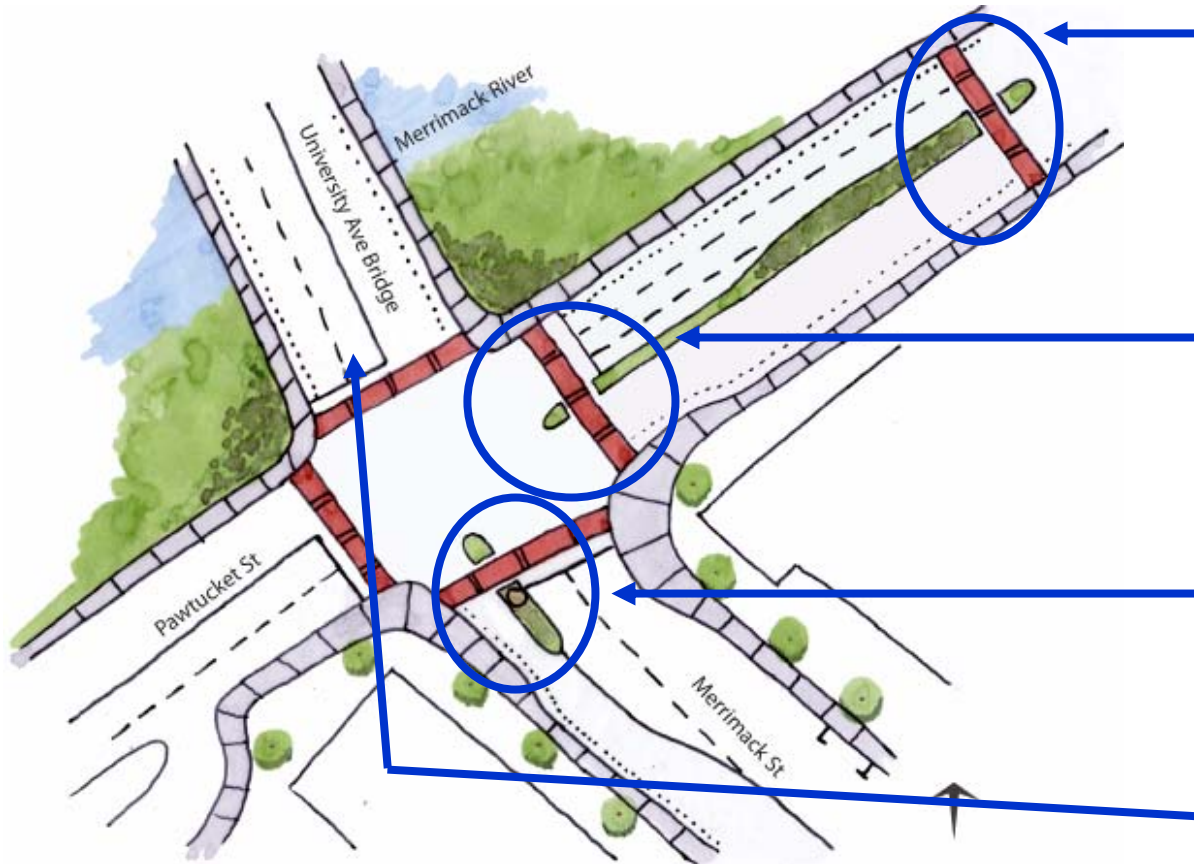
Traffic island to slow cars as forced to turn slightly; discourage through traffic



Merrimack & Pawtucket Before



Merrimack & Pawtucket **After**



Pedestrian activated signal at crosswalk provides safe park access

Textured pavement on crosswalks to warn drivers of pedestrian crossing

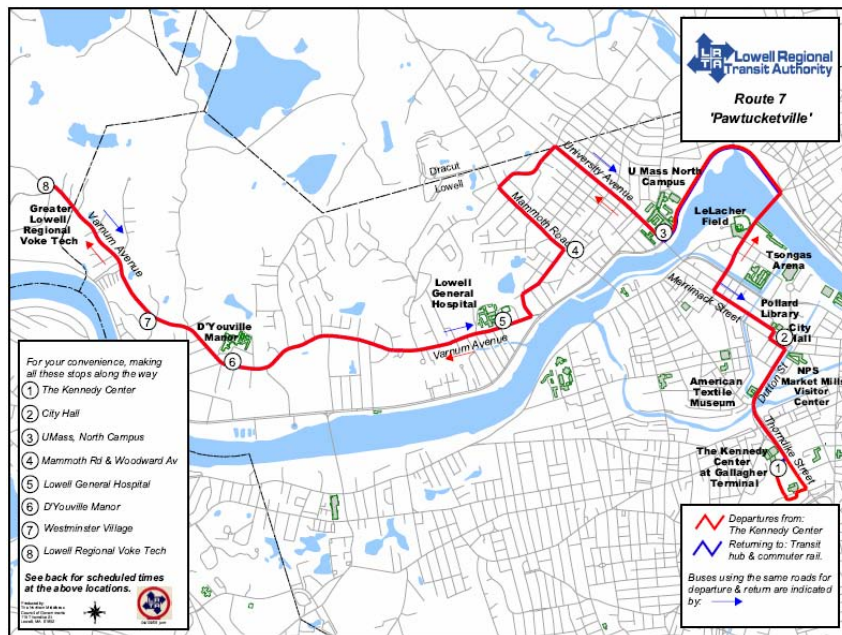
Gateway entrance to Upper Merrimack Neighborhood

Advanced green encourages left turn onto Pawtucket Street

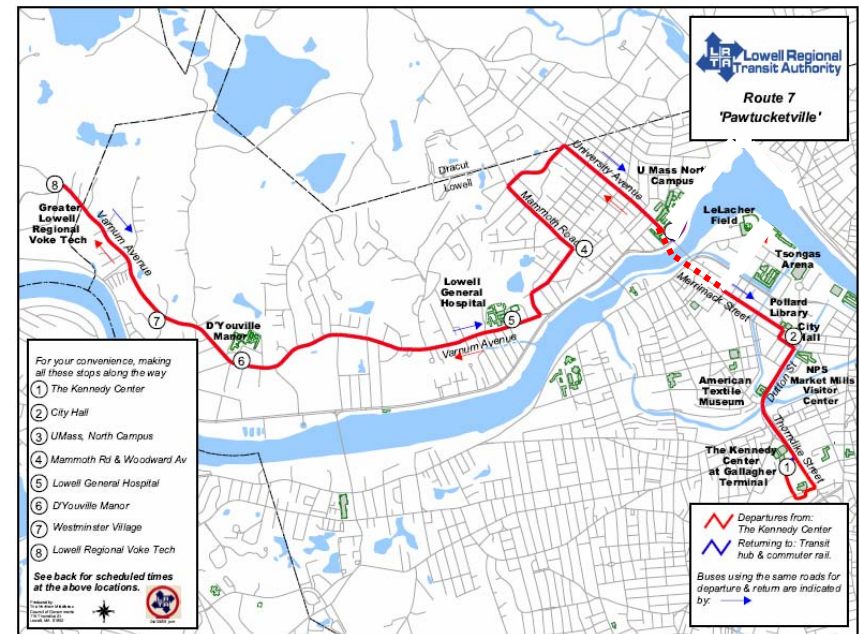


Public Transportation

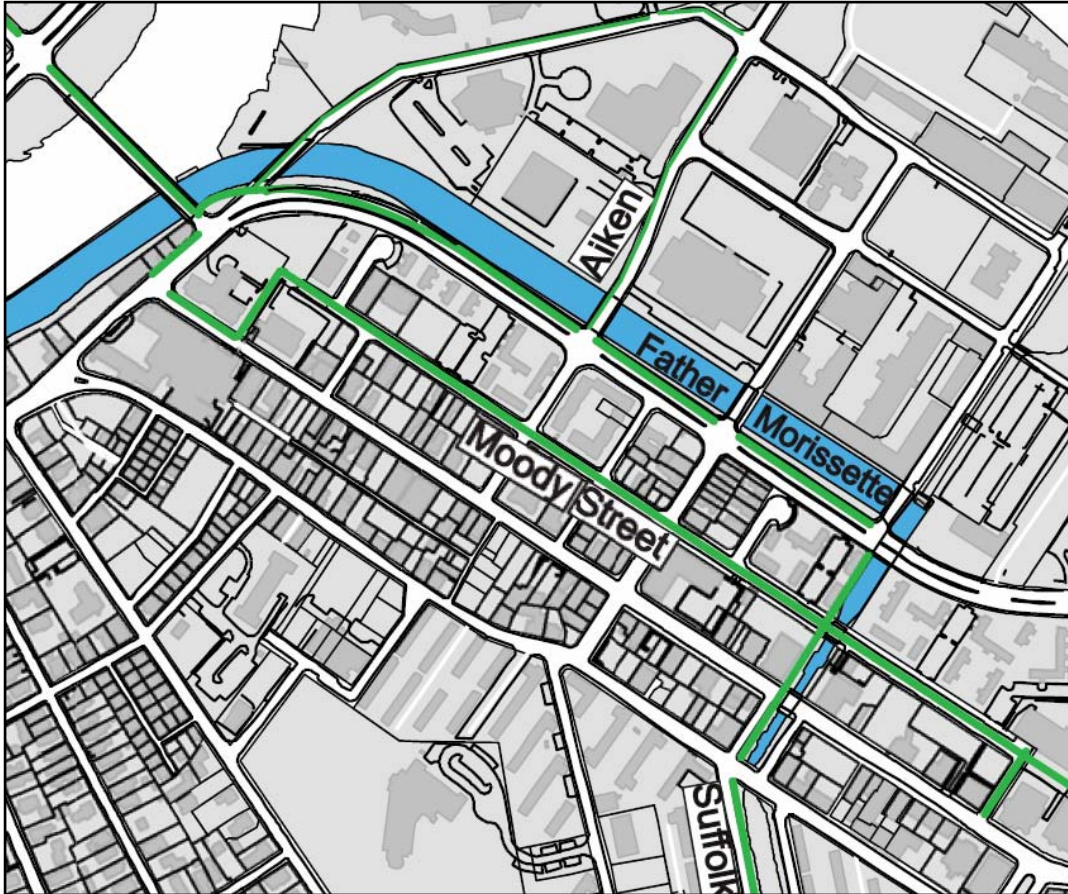
Current



Future



Bicycle Lanes



Underutilized Parking



Proposed Parking Changes

Purpose

- Decrease cost of development
- Increase development on unused land

Reduce parking requirements for

General Housing

- from 2 spaces per unit to 1 space per unit

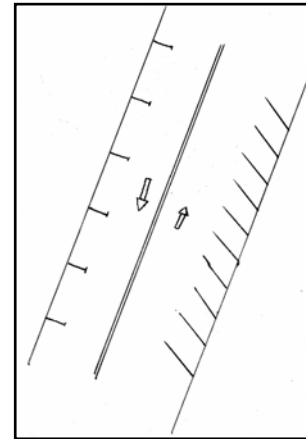
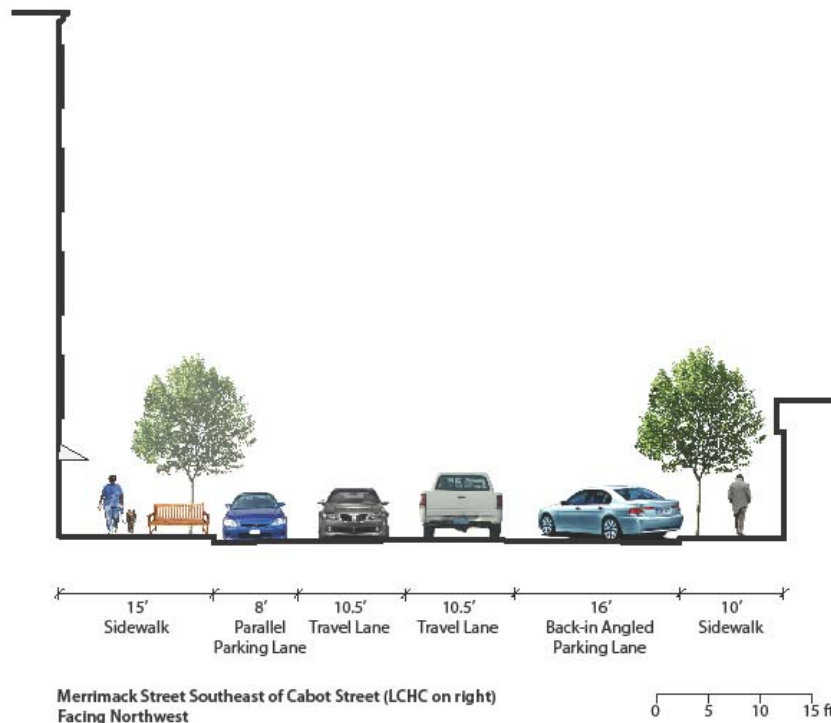
Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing

- from 2 spaces per unit to .5 spaces per unit



Proposed Angled Parking

On Merrimack Street



Provides nearly double the number of spaces as parallel parking

Calms traffic speeds





Housing & Community Services



Housing & Community Services

Goals within the Upper Merrimack:

- Preserve affordable housing
- Create a continuous urban pattern where parking lots and underutilized parcels exist
- Maintain level of social services through the neighborhood that service existing residents



Preserving Affordable Housing

Tools for preservation:

- Infill Housing
- Incentivize developers to meet community needs and improve urban environment
- Bring alternative housing types to neighborhood



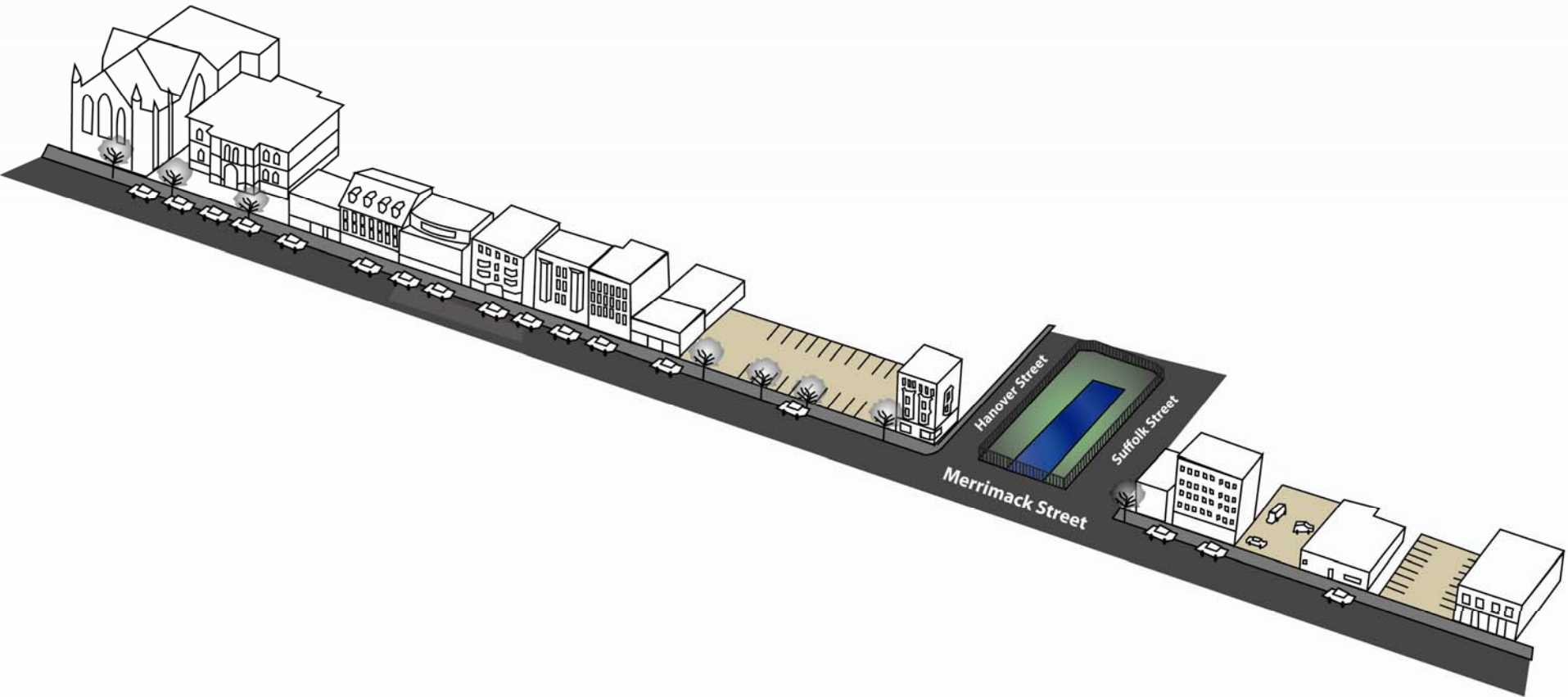
Neighborhood **Before**



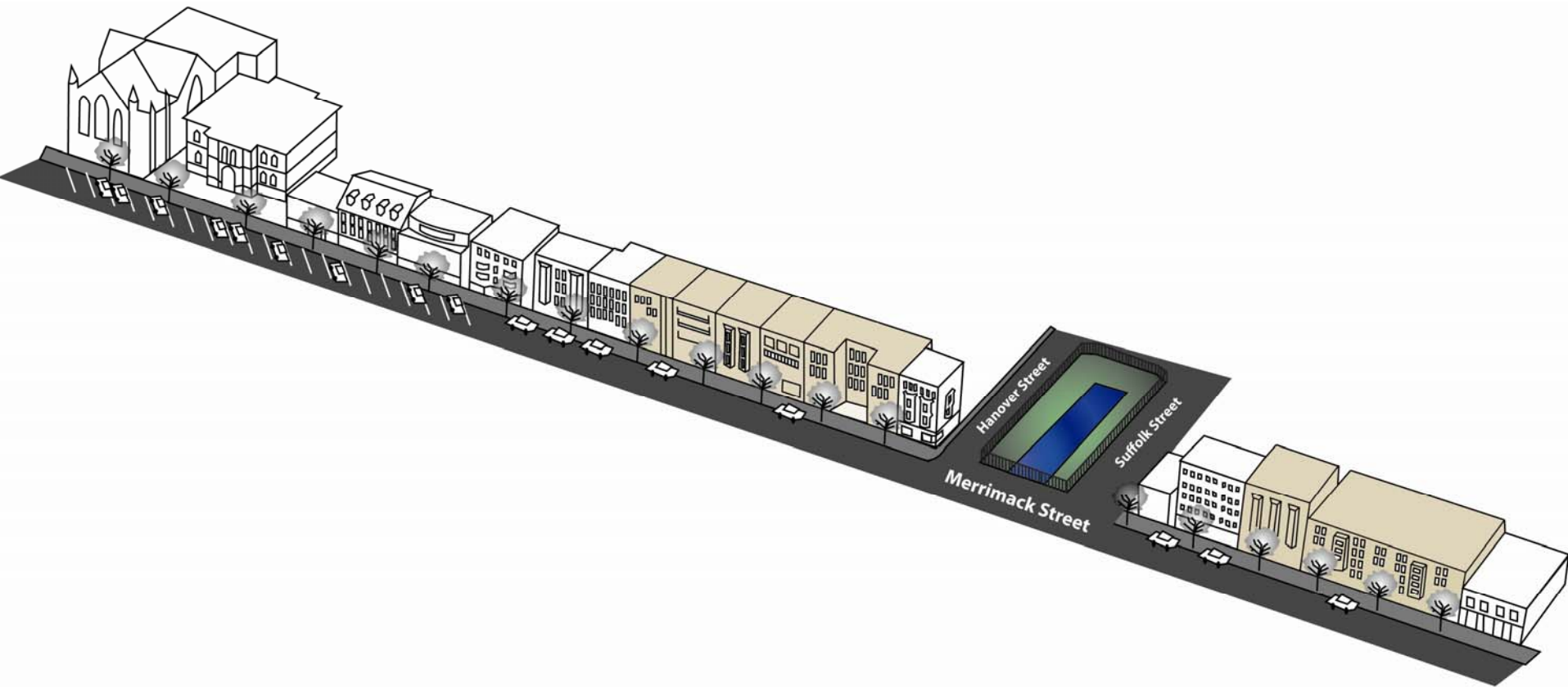
Neighborhood **After**



Merrimack Street **Before**



Merrimack Street **After**



Upper Merrimack Neighborhood



Moody Street **Before**



Moody Street **After**



Alternative Housing Types

- ✓ Encourage mixed income development
- ✓ Encourage student, current resident mix
- ✓ Encourage meeting needs of all income levels through:
 - Housing for families
 - Single Room Occupancy (SROs) for transitional residents



Davenport Commons



➤ 75 condominiums and townhouses for low- to moderate-income families \$75,000 and \$225,000 based on income levels

➤ 585 student beds for Northeastern University students

➤ Integrates university into the community while increasing affordable housing.



Potential Lot for SROs



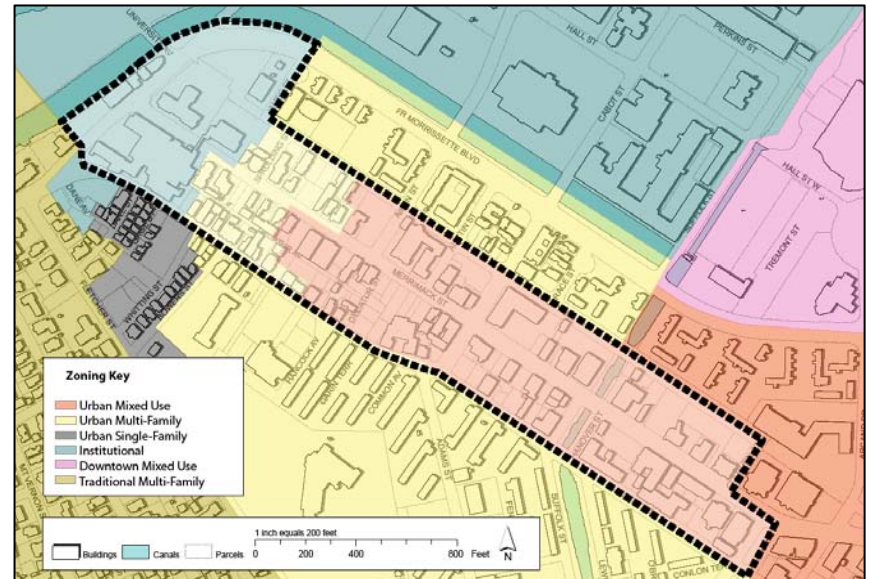
Lot infilled with SROs



Upper Merrimack Overlay District



Existing Zoning



Zoning Overlay District



Upper Merrimack Overlay District

Zoning for Affordable Housing:

- Require that 15% of units in buildings with more than ten units be affordable; define affordability appropriately for this neighborhood
- Reduction in parking requirement for Single Room Occupancy development

Encourage a Vibrant Merrimack Street:

- Provide density bonuses for residential buildings that include first floor retail on Merrimack



Maintaining Social Services

Physical Changes:

- Maximize use of Holden Center by centralizing health and social services within existing building

Organizations Improvements:

- Neighborhood coalition of social service organizations, for new and existing residents





Catalyst Properties



Nuestra Senora del Carmen Church

➤ Significance

- Physically located at the heart of the neighborhood
- Significant to the community's developmental history

➤ Status

- Church complex sold to developer during Boston Archdiocese parish reconfiguration

➤ Goal

- Reclaim church, rectory, and associated buildings as a focal point for the community



Existing Resources

Main Church (1)

Strong massing commands attention:
prime potential to serve as a focal point
for the community



Rectory (2)

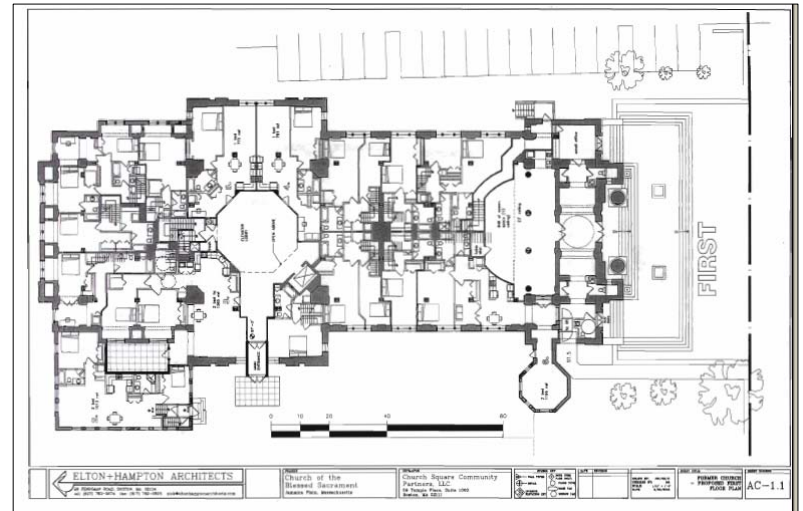
More modest in size, more easily
adaptable



Scenario 1

Rectory

- Convert former rectory to provide housing
- More versatile shell allows for less costly renovation; opportunity to provide quality affordable units



Main Church

- More challenging, but could provide a diversity of housing options



Scenario 2

Paul Robeson Theater
Brooklyn, NY



The Vintage Theater
Greensboro, NC



Miracles Spa
Alverstoke, UK

Rectory

Convert to housing, as in Scenario 1

Main Church

Reinstate church as community focal point:

- Dance hall
- Event space/reception hall
- Movie theater
- Neighborhood fitness center



Making it Happen



- Suggested changes in zoning would accommodate both proposed scenarios
- Owner/developer should consider partnering with group(s) that: has experience with:
 - Historic rehabilitation to develop affordable housing
 - Taking advantage of affordable housing and/or historic rehabilitation incentive programs.



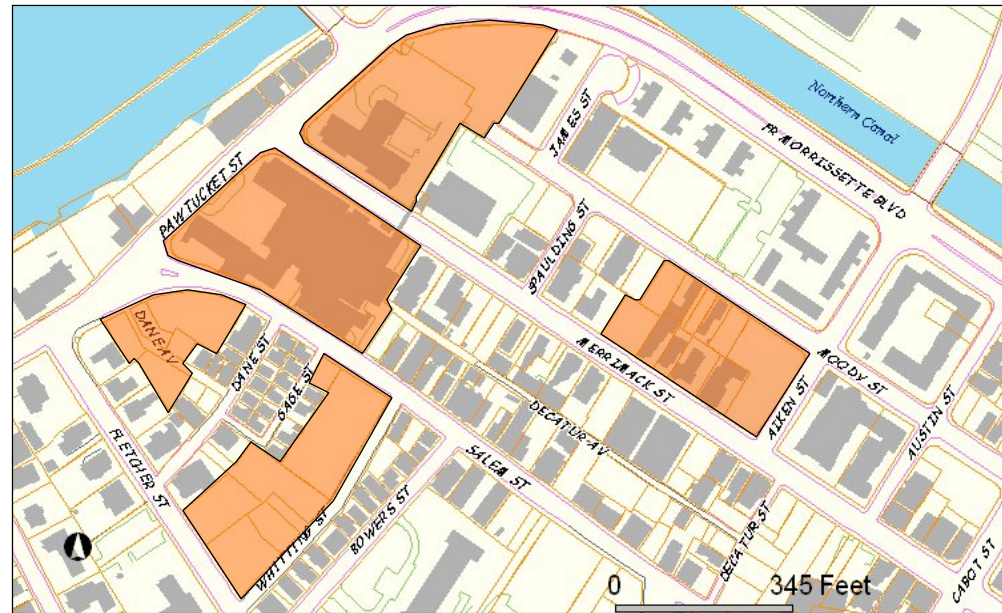
Other Catalyst Properties

West Merrimack Gateway

- Holden Health Building/Parking Lots
- Arcadia Center/Parking Lot

Mid Merrimack Anchor

- Aiken/Merrimack/ Moody Block



Goals

- Redevelop under utilized property
- Develop anchor projects that include affordable housing, office, parking and a variety of amenities
- Promote foot traffic and street activity
- Improve the quality of the street experience
- Spur further investment in other neighborhood properties



Holden Health Parcels

Hospital Building

- Current 6 flrs, 180,000 sf
- Mixed use health services
- UMass offices or housing

Rear Parcel

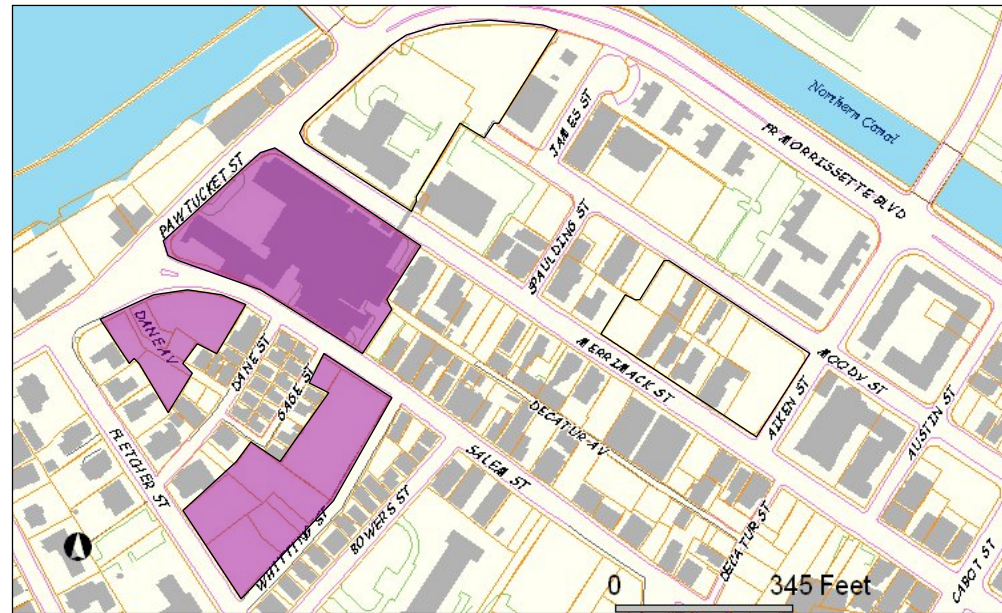
- Redevelop up to 6 flrs
- Senior/affordable housing
- UMass offices or housing

Salem/Pawtucket Parcel

- Housing over street level retail

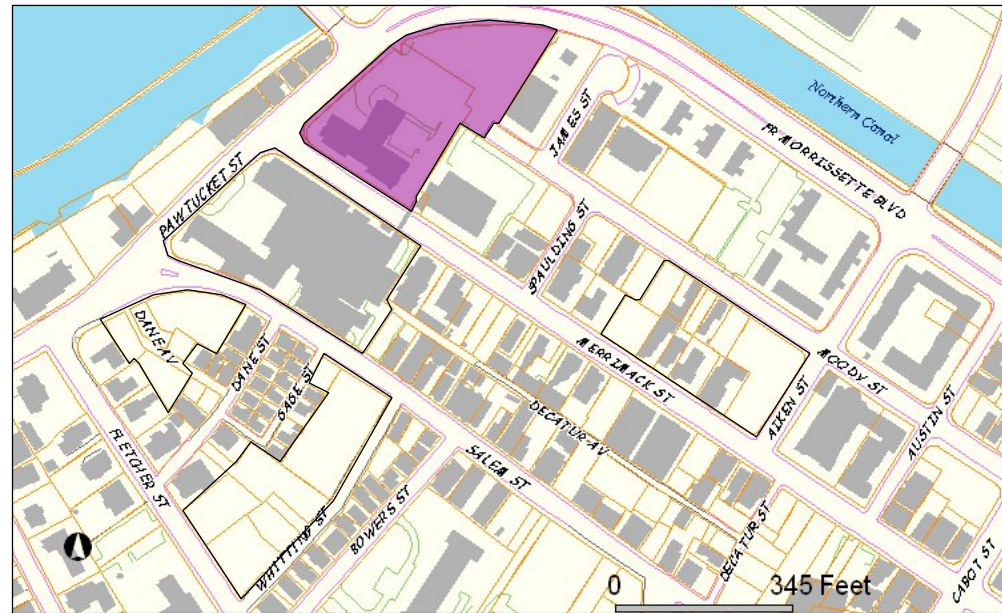
Whitting St. Parcel

- Develop to surrounding use



Arcadia Center/Parking Lot

- 54,000 sf lot
- Opportunity for up to 8 flrs new mixed use development
- Senior/affordable housing
- Student housing
- Street level retail (Dunkin' Donuts, dry cleaner, etc.)
- Wraps 780 space parking structure



Gateway Site Plan



Gateway Site Plan

- New bridge



Gateway Site Plan

- New bridge
- New housing, retail, services



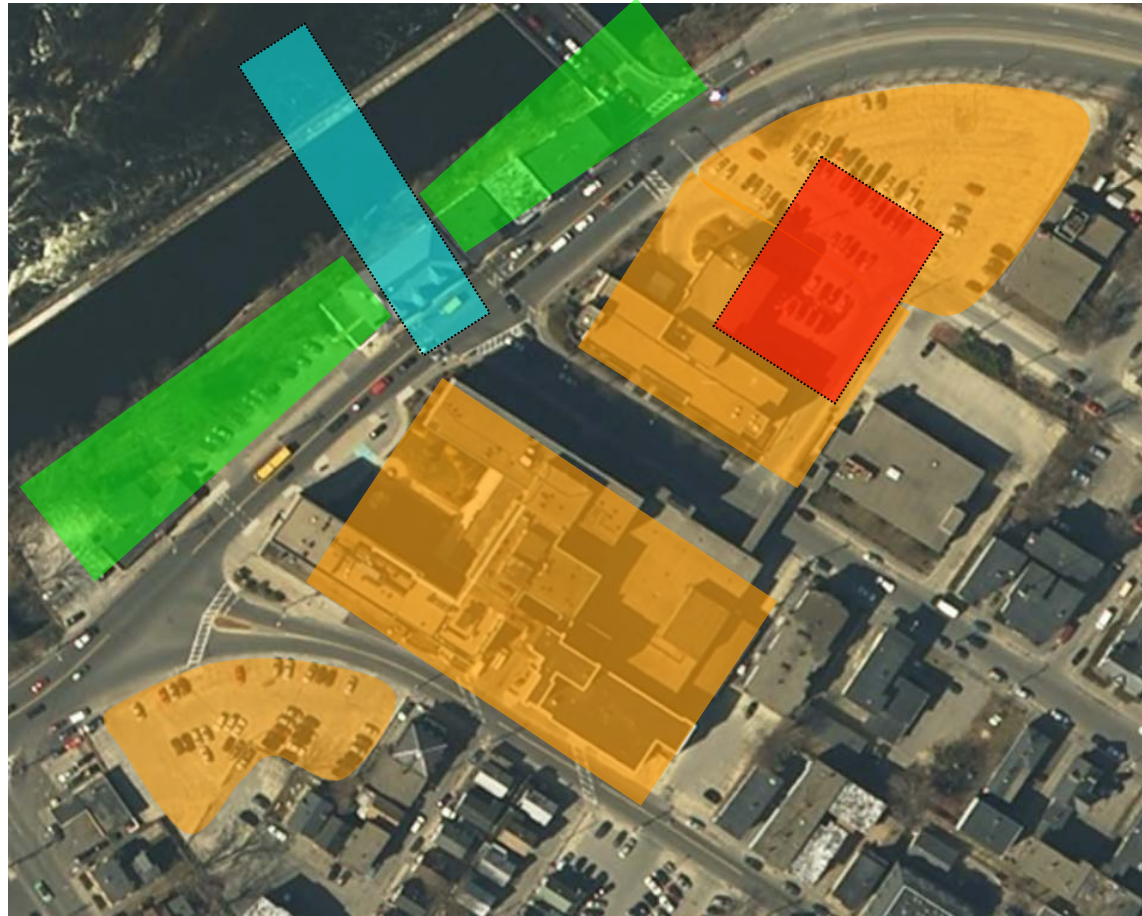
Gateway Site Plan

- New bridge
- New housing, retail, services
- **More parking**



Gateway Site Plan

- New bridge
- New housing, retail, services
- More parking
- **New public space**



Current Merrimack Gateway



Upper Merrimack Neighborhood

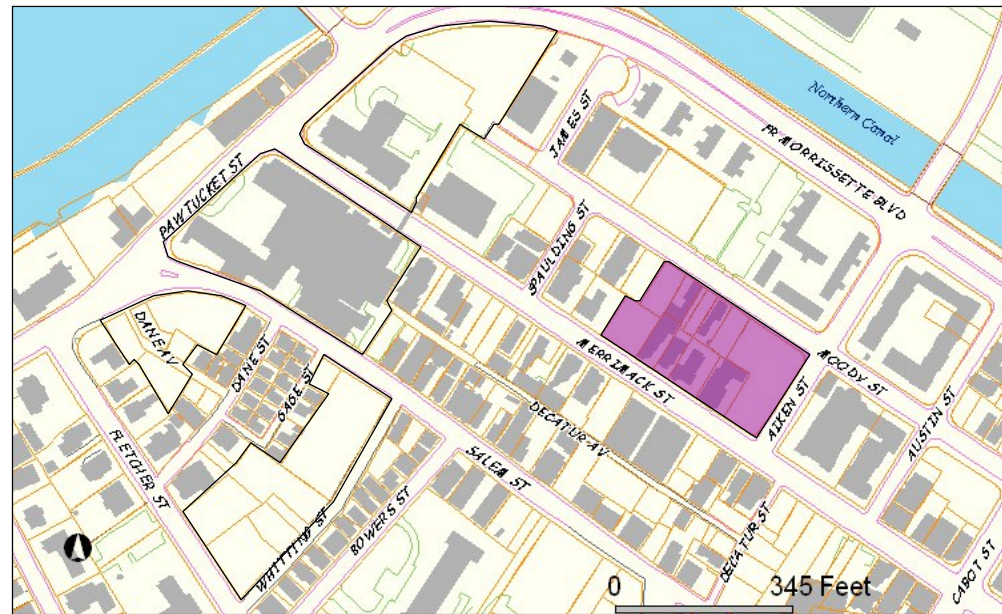


New Entrance to the Neighborhood



Aiken/Merrimack/Moody Block

- Assemble land including del Carmen Church parking lot, aging and dilapidated housing
- 66,000 sf
- Opportunity for up to 6 flrs
- Anchor retailer promotes street level activity
- Ex: CVS, Trader Joes, Stop & Shop
- Second floor parking
- Upper levels housing



Aiken/Merrimack/Moody Block

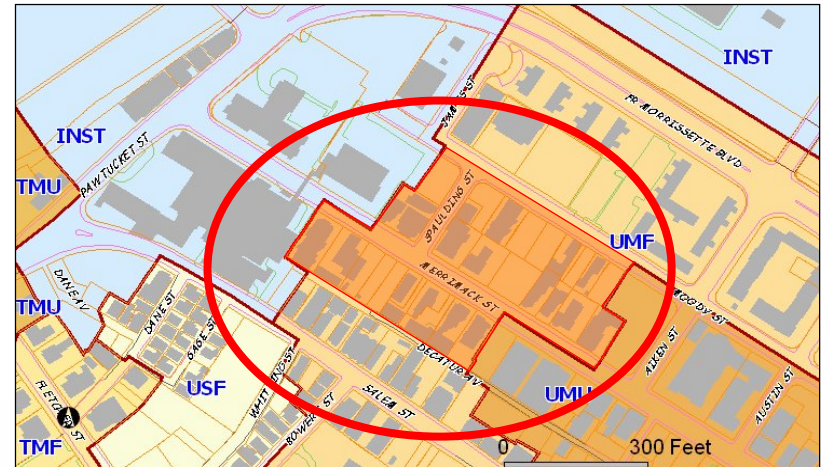
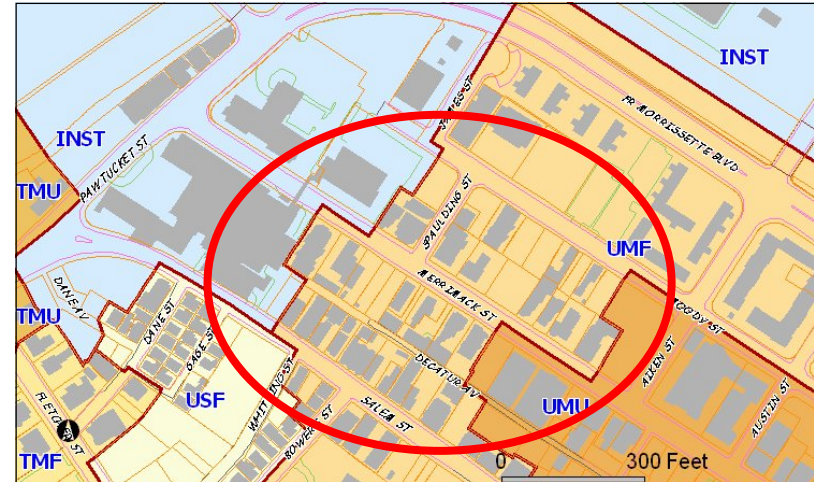


New Aiken/Merrimack/Moody Block



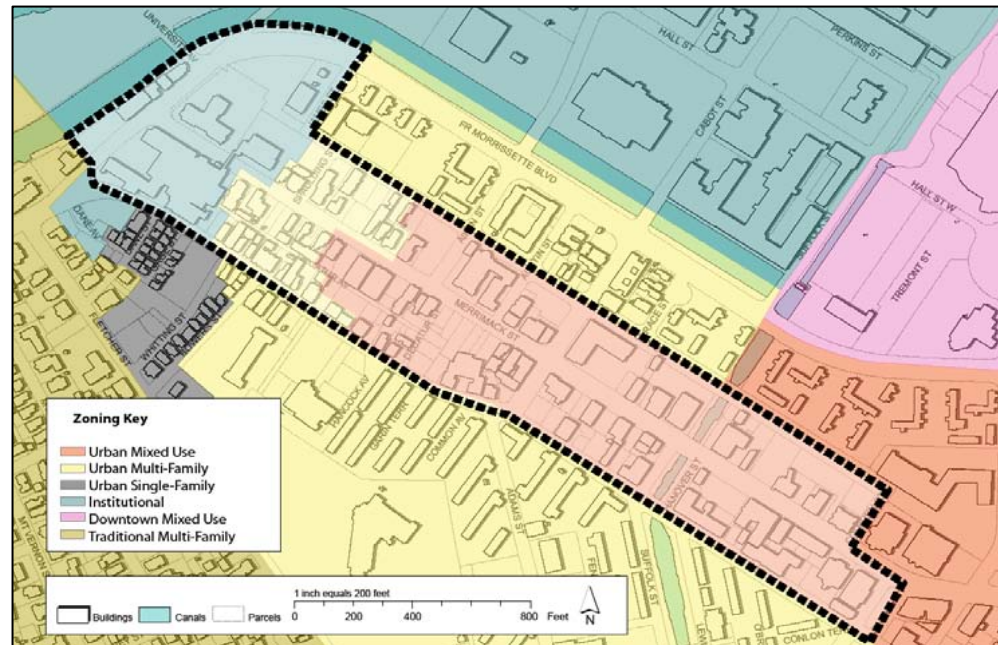
Economic Development Overlay District

Change Urban Multi Family (UMF) to Urban Mixed Use (UMU)



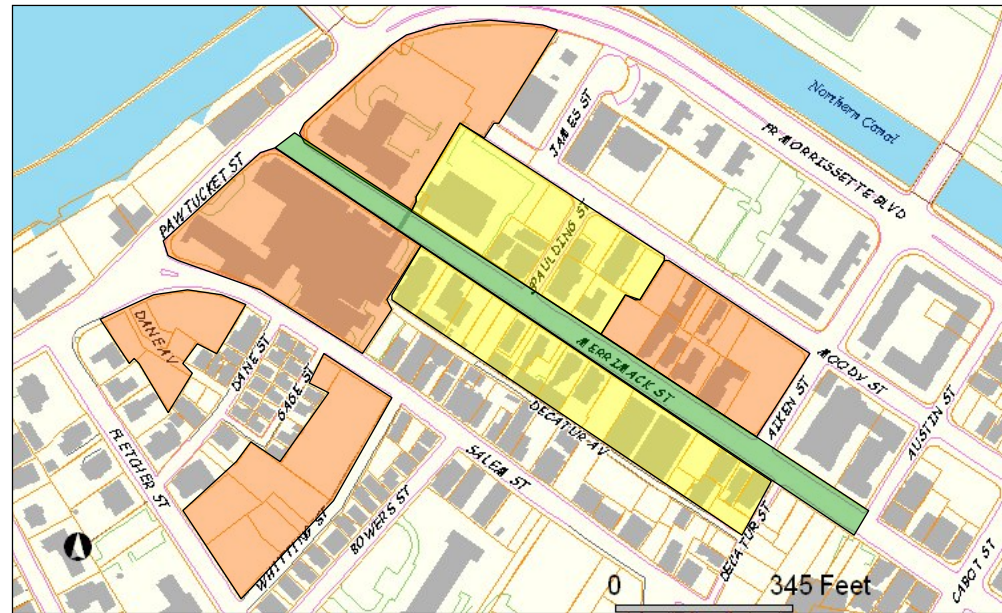
Economic Development Overlay District

- Allow street level commercial/retail throughout
- Density bonus for street level retail on Merrimack St.
- Residential parking requirement reduced from 2 to 1 space/unit



Outcomes

- New development with additional amenities and quality housing
- Catalyst anchors
- Increased foot traffic cultivates a community atmosphere
- Encourages additional Investment



Thank you

Please feel free to ask questions.

We are happy to hear your feedback.

Contact us by e-mail at 11.360@mit.edu

