
3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES



Fitchburg State College



Rehabilitation of Industrial Sites



New Housing Opportunities

The City Administration and the Redevelopment Authority declare that it is in the best interest of the City of Fitchburg and of the general welfare of its citizens to undertake an Urban Renewal Project in the Area in accordance with this Plan and in accordance with the overriding planning objectives outlined below. These objectives were developed with the assistance of the Citizen's Advisory Committee and the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority.

1. **To enhance the Marketability and promote the development of underutilized land in the Area by the assembly, replanning and subdivision of Project land.**

The underutilized land in the Area is one of the many reasons the Area is in need of Urban Renewal. Both Sawyer Passway and the former General Electric site will be acquired and subdivided in order to facilitate private redevelopment of these underutilized properties. Other underutilized sites in the Area include the DPW site, Broad Street, and the parcels on North Street. All of these locations are key for providing the jobs and residential development needed to bolster the Areas economic condition.

2. **To solidify the existing residential neighborhood by encouraging and providing incentives to Fitchburg State College faculty to locate within the adjoining neighborhood.**

The Plan intends to encourage employees of Fitchburg State College to join existing residents to improve the adjoining neighborhood. It is the City's objective to stabilize the neighborhood with the assistance of the College by asking employees to contribute to the stability of the existing neighborhood. By encouraging the employees to move into the neighborhood, the Plan will not seek to change gentrify, but to add to its residents a group of stakeholders with an interest in seeing the neighborhood continue its move towards stability.

3. **To increase local employment opportunities by providing new sites for commercial development along Main Street and commercial/industrial development at the vacated General Electric site as well as Sawyer Passway.**

The strategy to increase local employment revolves around obtaining high paying industrial jobs at the former General Electric site. Along with the former GE Site, Sawyer Passway has the potential to create a significant amount of low to medium range industrial jobs. These two sites will be redeveloped and marketed by the Authority as places for businesses to relocate. As far as jobs on Main Street, the bulk will be service orientated

and will be the direct result of increased activity on Boulder Drive, Sawyer Passway, and the evolution of the street into a neighborhood retail destination.

4. To strengthen the relationship between the College and the downtown through active participation in projects of mutual interest.

The Plan calls for the construction of a new science and technology building on the corner of Main Street and North Street. The building will insure that the College will be fully integrated into the Downtown Area and its draw of students and employees will provide a much-needed increase in pedestrian traffic to this vital intersection. In addition, the College may be interested in redeveloping one of the buildings being acquired on North Street for the creation of an "Art Center". To service the College's parking needs, the Intermodal garage will also be used for student and faculty parking. Because of the commuter nature of Fitchburg State College, and its heavy reliance on commuters, the dual use is a great way to maximize public investment.

5. To provide housing opportunities to take advantage of ease of access to commuter rail.

The MBTA commuter rail station is on Main Street and continues to draw residents to the station for travel to and from points east. The Plan emphasizes the creation of housing opportunities within walking distance to this tremendous asset to further attract potential residents to the Area.

6. To increase local employment by providing tax incentive for existing industrial and business expansion.

Just as the Plan emphasizes the need to assist existing residents to stabilize and improve the neighborhood, the Plan also tries to assist existing businesses in the Area. Wherever possible the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority will work with existing businesses to expand existing operations and improve the conditions of their current operations. It is the current business community that has worked hard to survive; this Plan will assist them and the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority will work hard for them by assisting them in tapping all of the incentive programs available.

7. To promote sound site planning and building arrangement in the development of individual parcels by private redevelopers in order to achieve coordinated and harmonious urban design.

The Plan identifies the importance of site planning and building arrangement by creating detailed set of design guidelines. These guidelines will insure that all future planning in the Area is done to maximize urban design principles.

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8. To improve the traffic pattern of the City and the Area through the correction of conditions contributing to traffic hazards and congestion and more specifically through the following project actions:

- widening and realignment of streets
- improvement of signalization at intersections
- construct new streets
- improvement of existing streets
- provision of adequate off street parking.

In the Plan, emphasis has been placed on four major streets within the Area. Main Street is currently a one-way thoroughfare with limited on street parking, which contributes to lack of pedestrian safety and retail vacancies. Boulder Drive is currently used as a bypass road to connect back onto Main Street. Blossom Street is the main access route to Burbank Hospital and Fitchburg State College. North Street is a narrow stretch of road, providing a poor entranceway for Fitchburg State College.

The Plan changes Main Street into a two-way street emphasizing pedestrian safety and slowing traffic down to attract people to the retail possibilities of the Area. Boulder Drive will be transformed into an attractive location for companies to relocate and do businesses, and its connections to Main Street will be improved to insure efficient traffic flow. Blossom Street will be redesigned to slow traffic and maximize pedestrian safety, turning the street into a neighborhood street instead of a major thoroughfare. North Street will become the entrance to the College and will be widened and improved so as to provide an attractive gateway to Fitchburg State College. These roadway improvements, done in relative concert, will do go far in removing the traffic hazards and congestion that have contributed to the over all condition of the Area.

9. To improve public utilities by constructing or reconstructing sidewalks, street lighting, water, sewer and drainage systems where necessary and installing electrical and telephone lines underground, where appropriate.

The improvement of public utilities will occur wherever is needed to promote the likelihood of private development and the safety of pedestrians.

10. To provide increased access to the river through the development of parks and other recreational activities.

Opening access to the Nashua River with a walkway, green spaces, and pedestrian bridges is a way to attract residents, employees, and visitors to this hidden asset. As other cities have used existing waterways to assist in the redevelopment of their downtown areas, Fitchburg will do the same. The proximity of the River to Main Street, Boulder Drive, Sawyer Passway, and

surrounding Neighborhoods insures that once access is created, people will come to the water and contribute to the Area's revitalization.

11. To provide sites of sufficient size and with appropriate access and improvement, so that major new construction is encouraged and sound redevelopment is facilitated.

The acquisition of parcels was purposefully limited in the Plan, but in certain areas, parcels were taken if the potential was identified for major redevelopment. Examples of these areas include the DPW site, and the Moran Square connection to Sawyer Passway.

12. To remove obsolete, substandard and deteriorated buildings and other environmental conditions that are factors in spreading blight and deterioration within the Area and to adjacent areas.

Throughout the Area there exists a high degree of substandard and deteriorated buildings that have contributed to the current economic condition of the Area. As identified in Section 2.E eligibility, there are two clearance areas where the condition of the buildings have where over 50% of the buildings are deficient. Other buildings in the Area that have contributed to the current condition experienced in the Area are slated for acquisition within the spot clearance areas.

13. To increase public safety by providing improved pedestrian access and by reducing vehicular and pedestrian interaction throughout the Project Area.

The emphasis on all roadway improvements throughout the Area is to increase the ability of pedestrians to enter and walk to various destinations within the Area. Therefore, the redesign of Boulder, Main, Blossom, North Street and the creation of the river walk will serve to improve pedestrian access and safety.

In addition the City Administration and Redevelopment Authority propose the following Design Objectives:

1. To establish an urban character, as typified by a high overall intensity of activity during both the day and the evening through diversity of related uses which will generate these activities.
2. To recognize and define major pedestrian access points to the Area and to provide safe connections to adjacent facilities and land uses.

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3. To encourage the highest quality design for the structures to be built, and for supporting elements such as lighting and planting.
 4. To encourage through urban design guidelines development actions which will improve significantly the quality and quantity of pedestrian activity throughout the Area.
 5. To reflect in architecture and site planning the uniqueness of the area in terms of location, access, visibility and historic character.

a. Specification of all proposed redevelopment

To carry out and accomplish the objectives described above, the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority proposes the following actions:

- *Revitalize Main Street*

- (1) Change the current zoning to give property owners the right to convert vacant office space into residential units, thus increasing the amount of people downtown at all times;
- (2) offer \$5,000 per unit grant to any owner who will convert upper level office space to residential use;
- (3) offer parking in the City's new garages to residents on Main Street, thereby maximizing the public investment in the garages;
- (4) draw Fitchburg State College closer to Main Street by assisting the College construct a science and technology building and an arts center;
- (5) create jobs around Main Street to provide viable patrons for Main Street businesses by making infrastructure improvements and creating industrial space around Main Street;
- (6) open up the River and construct green spaces Boulder Drive to attract people to the Area and provide a resource for surrounding residents and employees; and
- (7) redesign Main Street for two-way traffic, slowing traffic, easing congestion and making it a more pedestrian-friendly street.

- *Create Jobs*

- (1) Redesign Boulder Drive, building a bridge over the Nashua River to connect it to Broad street in order to create a desirable street for businesses to relocate;
- (2) Connect Sawyer Passway to Moran Square by taking an permanent roadway easement, which will open the site up for a new industrial park; and
- (3) hire a marketing firm to establish a marketing strategy to attract employers to the Area.

- *Integrate Fitchburg State College into Downtown*

- (1) Assist Fitchburg State College construct a new science and technology building and a new arts center, which will facilitate the College's movement down North Street to Main Street;
- (2) create an institutional zone on North Street from Pearl Street down to Main Street to establish location for future College expansion;
- (3) offer usage of the new intermodal garage to all College student, faculty, and staff to maximize all public investments.

- *Implement Housing Strategy*

- (1) improve the quality of housing in the Area by aggressively targeting the neighborhood with existing programs and new programs for renovation;
- (2) maintain current residents by creating new home ownership opportunities by changing current zoning;
- (3) assist the Fitchburg State College faculty and staff purchase homes in the neighborhood;
- (4) take advantage of the intermodal station to attract potential commuters to Boston;
- (5) Create housing opportunities for artists by redeveloping industrial space.

- *Make Infrastructure Improvements*

- (1) Redesign Main Street and Boulder Drive for two-way traffic and coordinate construction;
- (2) build a bridge connecting Broad Street and Boulder Drive for redevelopment purposes;
- (3) acquire property on North Street to complete the improvements to North Street making it the new gateway to Fitchburg State College;
- (4) redesign Blossom Street to provide more pedestrian-friendly measures for the neighborhood.

- *Open Access to the Nashua River*

- (1) Create a river walk from the Sawyer Passway area to Crocker Field, linking the entire riverfront;
- (2) construct pedestrian bridges to facilitate better access to the River and Downtown Area from the adjacent neighborhoods;
- (3) create new green spaces on Boulder Drive across from the new parking garage and behind Fitchburg Savings Bank to attract people to the Downtown Area;

- *Create New Parking Space*

- (1) Replace the Main Street Garage with a new garage to service the existing retail and office uses;
- (2) construct an Intermodal Garage to service the MBTA commuter rail and the Fitchburg State College Science and Technology Building and Arts Center; and
- (3) construct a Courthouse Garage to service the relocation of the Superior Courthouse and renovation of the Fitchburg Theatre.

- *Change Current Zoning*

- (1) Allow housing by right on Main Street to bring people to Main Street;
- (2) allow construction on vacant lots where construction is currently not allowed due to minimum lot size requirements to create housing opportunities for existing residents; and

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- (3) create an institutional zone to provide for specific expansion of Fitchburg State College.

- *Create Design Review/Design Guidelines*

- (1) Adopt a site plan review process to insure all zoning measures are being met; and
- (2) implement design guidelines to insure that harmonious urban design and architectural standards are implemented within the Area.

- *Offer Financial Incentive Programs*

- (1) Offer the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) to provide public assistance for private investment;
- (2) Work to secure the Fitchburg By Design low interest loan program designed to assist primarily private, for-profit business seeking to locate, expand, or remain in business within the Fitchburg Downtown Urban Revitalization and Development Area;
- (3) Obtain a state and/or Federal Brownfield Grant for the former Fitchburg Gas and Electric site, which is currently contaminated.
- (4) Offer, in coordination with local financial institutions, the Fitchburg Business Development Program to provide incentives to existing and new businesses to create jobs in the Area
- (5) Make available the Fitchburg Industrial Development Financing Authority Micro-Loan Program.

- *Attract Tourists*

- (1) Establish an artist cooperative in the on Willow Street;
- (2) assist Fitchburg State College to develop an existing building for an Arts Center; and
- (3) Work to find a private developer to redevelop and operate the Fitchburg Theater
- (4) Hire a Marketing firm to market the City and its attractions to potential visitors.

- *Relate Plan to City as a Whole*

- (1) Capitalize on planned improvements to Route 12 by improving traffic flow into the City and onto Main Street, North Street,

Boulder Drive and Blossom Street creating a better sense of arrival to the downtown; and

- (2) Coordinate planning efforts with the City to insure that projects in the Area will work to benefit both the Area and the City at large.

- *Engage Community in Implementation Process*

- (1) Create citizen sub-committees to work with the Authority on each major segment of the Plan, such as North Street, Boulder Drive, Housing, Historic District and other major projects;
- (2) Include at least one Fitchburg City Councilor on each sub-committee (to be appointed by the Fitchburg City Council President), one member from Pride, and one member from Fitchburg by Design, or any subsequent business association.
- (3) Include the Nashua River Watershed Association and Fitchburg Stream Team to consult the Authority on all projects dealing with the Nashua River.
- (4) Meet with the Fitchburg City Council to review the progress of the Plan as often as the Council deems necessary by giving the Authority a 30-day written notice.

These actions were developed around the objectives stated above and an overriding vision for the project Area - to create a more livable neighborhood where families and individuals can live, work, visit, shop and play. It is the position of the Authority that the actions being taken through this Plan will meet those objectives.

b. Estimate of jobs retained, created, and eliminated as a result of the proposed redevelopment actions

Job Creation is one of the major goals of the Plan. The loss of 600 jobs at the General Electric Plant was a devastating blow to the economic health of the City. Given the current state of Main Street, the potential for wide-scale job creation on that street was not seen as likely. On the other hand, with the agreement reached by the City and General Electric for the transfer of the former General Electric Site to the City, the potential was there to center any new job creation around the redevelopment of that site. In addition, other locations were identified in the Area that offered the potential for the creation of industrial jobs. Sites such as the Department of Public Works site on the Nashua River, Broad Street, and Sawyer Passway each had

potential. The proximity of all of these sites, and the potential to create new and better ways to access them, presented a tremendous core of job creation possibilities. The history of light and heavy industry in the Area led to the likelihood that any employer would find the necessary skilled workforce within the vicinity. Therefore, the Authority decided to tie these sites into a comprehensive strategy to attract light to heavy industrial companies to locate in these places and include as the way to create the necessary jobs for redeveloping the Area.

Boulder Drive, where the General Electric Plant is located, lies between the Nashua River and Main Street. The Plan seeks to transform Boulder Drive into a desirable location for businesses by making significant improvements to the appearance and accessibility of the street. The street will change from one-way to two-way, and a bridge will be constructed over the Nashua River to connect Boulder to Broad Street. The connection of Boulder and Broad to create one long Boulevard of redevelopment sites justifies the cost of the bridge and the proximity of the new sites to Main Street would offer significant ancillary activities to contribute to Main Street's revitalization.

Sawyer Passway is a confirmed contaminated site on the southeast corner of the Area. By acquiring this site and completing the necessary remediation, this underutilized property will serve as a prime industrial park to create jobs in the Downtown Area. The site will require a permanent roadway easement to provide a route for trucks exiting the site. The proposed river walk will provide an attractive draw to future employers who wish to locate to Sawyer Passway, and its proximity to lower Main Street will assist in revitalizing the Area.

In each instance, the proximity of Main Street, the Nashua River and the availability of prime industrial space, directed the Authority to gear the job creation strategy towards high paying industrial jobs. The Authority has begun marketing these sites to employers who can offer the City and the Area the kind of job opportunities that will offer the residents a chance for a decent wage. To further those efforts, a comprehensive marketing strategy will be prepared for the Area and a marketing firm will be hired by the Authority to lead the effort to attract employers to the Area.

Table 7: Job Creation

Bldg. Use	Types of Jobs	# Jobs Created
Boulder Drive	Industrial	400
Retail on Main Street	Service	100
Office on Main Street	Service	115
Sawyer Passway	Industrial	100
Institutional	Service	100
TOTAL		815

This Plan is designed to facilitate job retention in Fitchburg and initiates numerous mechanisms, outside of the urban renewal actions, to accomplish the goal of accommodating 100% of the relocated businesses within the City of Fitchburg. Field surveys conducted during preparations of the plan indicated that there are 35 commercial properties slated for acquisition, with 6 appearing to be vacant. It is estimated that the acquisition of all 67 properties will result in the loss/relocation of approximately 125 jobs. If in fact, the retention goal is accomplished, the Plan would result in the retention of the 150 relocated jobs plus the creation of 815 jobs.

c. Zoning provisions which exist or which will be established to control densities, land coverage, land uses, setbacks, off street parking and loading and building height and bulk.

The zoning code in the City of Fitchburg has in many ways hindered the economic development of the Downtown Area, and contributed to the instability of the downtown neighborhood. Lots left vacant by building demolition have turned into trash-strewn properties, contributing to the lack of investor confidence in the neighborhood. Institutional expansion has caused uncertainty in the Area leading to a lack of investment, particularly within the residential areas. Finally, the fact that property owners are prohibited from creating residential spaces on Main Street diminishes the potential for attracting patrons to Main Street.

The City is currently in the process of revising and amending its zoning code, but the Plan calls for three specific changes to the Code in order to alleviate existing conditions in the Area: 1) allow housing by right on Main Street; 2) allow construction on vacant lots where construction is currently not allowed due to minimum lot size requirements; 3) create an institutional zone to provide for specific expansion of Fitchburg State College. While the Plan is moving through the public approval process, an overlay district will be established for the Area in order to avoid the continuation of

problems associated with the existing zoning regulations (see *Appendix B*)

By changing the zoning to allow for the construction of housing units on the upper levels of Main Street, the Plan will begin to address creating a critical mass of users to support Main Street commercial activities. It is clear that public investment for infrastructure improvements on Main Street will not alone bring residents to the downtown area. However, by bringing residents to the upper levels of Main Street, and instituting infrastructure improvements, these changes will go a long way to changing the condition of Main Street.

Within the neighborhood, there are many vacant lots where multi-family buildings once stood. The City, in attempting to establish zoning controls for a more suburban population, modified the zoning to increase the required minimal lot size. This change did not allow for the replacement of structures from older, more densely populated areas of the City. By amending the present zoning requirements for building on a minimum lot size within the Plan area, the change will allow for infill housing where there are now open, trash-strewn lots. The construction of new housing units, along with the improvement of existing conditions, will spark confidence in the residents to continue to invest in their own neighborhood.

As seen in many other communities in the Commonwealth, where institutions can expand unchecked, investor confidence in that area remains low. Although the creation of an institutional zone cannot bind Fitchburg State College in its future expansion, the zone will serve as a commitment from the College to the City and residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

The allowable uses in new institutional zones will not be limited to just college structures, but will include limited housing to maintain a neighborhood feel along North Street. Non-institutional uses will be subject to site plan review and design review guidelines and the uses will need to fit within the existing residential scale of the surrounding neighborhood. The institutional zone is for the protection of the neighborhood, but is also a gesture by the City to the College that the City will view future College expansion within this Area as the College playing its part in the revitalization of the Downtown Area. Specific Changes to the City Code, including dimensional regulations and allowable principal uses, are reflected below in Table 13 and Table 14:

Table 8: Article IV, Sec. 181.23 of the Fitchburg Zoning Code
TABLE OF STANDARD DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

<i>Zoning Districts</i>	<i>MINIMUM LOT W/O MUNICIPAL SEWARAGE</i>	<i>MINIMUM LOT AREA (FEET)</i>	<i>MINIMUM LOT FRONTAGE (FEET)</i>	<i>MINIMUM LOT WIDTH (FEET)</i>	<i>MINIMUM FRONT YARD (FEET)</i>	<i>MINIMUM SIDE YARD (FEET)</i>	<i>MINIMUM REAR YARD (FEET)</i>	<i>MAXIMUM HEIGHT (FEET)</i>
Institutional	65,000	NONE	20	20	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE

Table 9: Article III Section 181.15 of the Fitchburg City Code
TABLE OF PRINCIPAL USES

USE	INSTITUTIONAL ZONE (INS)
<i>Industrial (Sec. 181.12)</i>	
Warehouse	N
Construction Yard	N
Lumberyard	N
Truck/Bus Terminal	N
Open-Air Storage	N
Research & Testing	SP-A
Publishing & Printing	SP-A
Computer Software Development	SP-A
Computer Hardware Development	SP-A
Airports	N
Light Manufacturing	N
Antenna	SP-A
Transmission	N
<i>General Uses (Sec. 181.8)</i>	
Agriculture	N
Conservation	N
Earth Removal	N
Recreation	Y
Timber Harvesting	N
<i>Residential Uses (Sec. 181.9)</i>	
Single-Family	Y
Two-family	Y
Three-family	N
Multiple-Family	N
<i>Government, Institutional, and Public Services Uses (Sec. 181.11)</i>	
Municipal	N
Educational	Y
Religious	N
Nursing Homes	N
Cemeteries	N
Hospitals	N
<i>Business Uses (Sec. 181.11.)</i>	
Retail Store	Y
Business Office	Y
Financial	Y
Restaurant	Y
Hotel, Inn, Motel	Y
Lodge and Club	Y
Funeral Home	N

Veterinary	N
Kennel	N
Personal Services	N
General Services	N
Building Trade Shop	N
Commercial Recreational	Y
Amusement Facility	Y
Vehicle Services	N
Vehicle Sales	N
Vehicle Repair	N
Parking Facility	Y
Vehicle Salvage	N

As described above, a major component of this Plan is the rationalization of land uses. Studies done in the Area and the 1998 Vision 2020 Plan, all refer to the inappropriate land use mix as a major cause of blight in the Area and a characteristic which must be changed in order to improve the Area. The plan for the redevelopment of the Area calls for the elimination of specific uses that detract from the future revitalization of the Area and the allowance of other uses more consonant with the redevelopment of the Area.

The infrastructure improvements proposed under the Plan are designed to support the uses described above, with reconstructed streets and sidewalks, redesigned streets for residential and institutional coexistence, small-scale open spaces interspersed throughout, new pedestrian paths and accessible connections to the River and Intermodal Station. The intent is to avoid any incompatible land use within the institutional zone. Both the College and the residents will benefit from a rigorous application of the site plan review and the application of the design guidelines to insure that North Street and the institutional zone benefits all affected parties.

The proposed zoning changes will help to transform the Area from its current decadent state, in which an inappropriate mix of land uses predominates, to one which is attractive for residential, commercial and public uses. The new zoning regulations will enable the City and Redevelopment Authority to respond to the concerns of private redevelopers who want to be sure that the redevelopment of the Area surrounding their new projects will be for uses that are compatible, rather than the random commercial and industrial uses, which currently are scattered throughout the Area.

Table 10 illustrates the potential future land use in the Area following implementation of this Plan.

Table 10: Potential Future Land Use

Land Use	Acres	Percent of Total
Industrial	97.75	43.0%
Residential	38.14	17.0%
Commercial	33.34	14.0%
Vacant	4.67	3.0%
Water (River)	8.91	4.0%
Institutional	14.51	6.0%
Parking (designated as off street)	7.82	5.0%
Mixed Use	5.02	2.0 %
Park (Open Space)	11.6	5.0%
Right of Way	2.58	1.0%

Design Review

These guidelines, which will reference this Plan, are detailed in Appendix C.

It is recommended that the neighborhood district and design guidelines be adopted as soon as possible, prior to approval of this Plan, in order to prevent further deterioration of historic buildings and the character of the neighborhood.

d. Anticipated Private Investment

Implementation of the Plan is anticipated to generate significant private investment. Based on the average square foot development cost for different uses, and the new retail, office and industrial development proposed on acquisition parcels, the Plan is anticipated to generate \$45,000,000 in private investment. Residential development throughout the Area, including disposition parcels and other city and privately-owned land, is expected to generate \$8,000,000 in private investment. Commercial development of other privately owned land, spurred by the revitalization activities outlined in this Plan, will result in additional private investment. To better insure such investment, the planned marketing strategy to be completed by a firm hired by the Authority will include strategies for commercial, residential, and industrial development possibilities.