

Task 5 Technical Memorandum

Market Analysis Part 2

DRAFT

Regional Intermodal Transportation Center
Master Plan and Efficiency Study

Southeastern Connecticut
Council of Governments

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EXPERIENCE | Transportation

and

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Part 2: Transit Oriented Development Opportunities/Downtown Development Opportunities

1.1 Introduction

This brief memorandum, prepared by Crosby, Schlessinger and Smallridge LLC, constitutes Part 2 of the Task 5 Technical Memorandum on Market Analysis. It builds on the quantitative market analysis of Part 1 and identifies the specific candidate transit oriented development opportunities in downtown New London that can be further developed as part of the Master Plan (Task 10) and considered in the development of improvement options for the RITC (Task 6).

This is not an all-inclusive list. The purpose of this list of potential development candidates is to establish a range of typologies for discussion with the Steering Committee, City officials, members of the real estate community, property owners and others as appropriate. Should we focus on rehabilitation candidates, infill parcels or large potential redevelopment parcels, or a combination of all of the above? Should the focus be on Water, State and Bank Streets or should new districts evolve? Should an outdoor “events space” be integrated into the TOD opportunities plan?

1.2 Assumptions and Guiding Principles

In the identification of development sites and their potential build-out, we have adopted the high square footage scenario described in the market analysis (Task 5 Technical Memorandum Part 1): 1) 62,460 sq. ft. of retail space (80 percent new or renovated retail space and 20 percent existing retailers increasing sales productivity); 2) 347,000 sq. ft. of residential (347 units); and 3) 66,616 sq. ft. of office space.

Additional assumptions include:

- New development should be compressed into an area proximate to Union Station and the RITC; it should reinforce and support existing land use patterns, particularly the retail concentrations on Bank and State Streets.
- The development of a “higher-amenity” environment is critical to attracting future residents and visitors who pass through the RITC. Emphasis should be placed on creating both an active, lively street life and a beautiful pedestrian environment, leveraging the amenity value of Union Station and The Parade.
- TOD opportunities should include a range of potential sites – rehabilitation of older buildings, small infill parcels, larger vacant parcels and large potential redevelopment sites. Short-term opportunities should not preclude more ambitious long-term (20-30 year) opportunities.
- The “face” of downtown as seen by the thousands of people passing through the RITC daily is the blank wall of the Water Street Garage, and this should be substantially altered in any redevelopment plan.
- The creation of a large “event” space should be incorporated into one or more redevelopment options. Events (outdoor antique automobile shows, craft fairs, etc.) are a proven way to attract tourists and should be able to lure RITC travelers into spending time in the downtown New London.

1.3 Potential Development Sites

There is a range of TOD opportunity sites running the gamut from small infill sites to large, long range redevelopment opportunities. To accommodate the development program, a combination of site typologies will be needed.

A. Small Infill Parcels:

There are a few scattered infill parcels within a quarter mile radius of Union Station in the 3,500 sq. ft. to 14,500 sq ft. range (see Figure 1). An 8,500 sq. ft. parcel could accommodate eight dwelling units per floor, or 40 units in a five story building.

Pros

- Infill development will quickly fill in “gaps” in the streetwall and, in some instances, provide continuous retail frontage.
- Sites are within a quarter-mile of Union Station.
- Helps ensure a variety of building types.

Cons

- Sites are small and existing zoning/bulk and area regulations may provide insurmountable development obstacles; achievable densities as-of-right may not be great enough to make it worth the investment for developers.
- Awkward parcel geometries and lack of visibility.
- Piecemeal approach takes time to make transformative changes.
- Insufficient number of parcels to fulfill a significant portion of the future land use program.

B. Large Undeveloped Parcels

The two large parking lots on Eugene O’Neill Drive could accommodate approximately 20 dwelling units per level or 100 structured parking spaces per level with some surface parking (see Figure 1).

Pros

- Opportunity to create development that serves as a visual gateway to downtown.
- Significant frontage (about 700 linear feet) on the south side of Eugene O’Neill Drive provides the opportunity to make a transformative change in the downtown streetscape.
- Opportunity to enhance the city’s land use mix.
- Parking lots are large enough to accommodate contemporary retail, office, and residential floor plates.
- Sites are within a quarter-mile of Union Station and adjacent to the entertainment/retail district.
- Sites are relatively flat, publicly-owned and adjacent to one another.

Cons

- Over most of their lengths, the sites’ widths fall just short of 120 feet, the full width of a two-bay parking garage.

- Need to replace existing parking spaces, which puts a significant constraint on the potential development program.

C. Large Potential Redevelopment Parcels

Two large parcels currently in use might be positioned for redevelopment (see Figure 1). There are several other similar parcels in downtown, and these three have been flagged to begin a dialogue with the Steering Committee.

Pros

- Sites are clustered at a prominent intersection (Governor Winthrop Boulevard & Union Street).
- High visibility.
- Sites are relatively flat.
- Present significant opportunity to restore the streetwall.
- Potential water views.

Cons

- Relatively long, indirect walks from Union Station and entertainment/retail district.
- Significant grade change between Water Street and Governor Winthrop Boulevard/Union Street intersection contributes to a lack of site visibility for visitors entering the RITC.
- Sites not related to the existing Bank and State Streets activity corridors.
- Would require a proactive public redevelopment policy and strategy including, potentially, land assembly.

D. Water Street Parcels

The crescent-shaped parcel in front of the Water Street Garage (see Figure 2) can be developed for 90 dwelling units (see Figure 3). The assumption is that new development in the Union Station/RITC area would be guided by a newly drafted TOD Overlay District zone, which would allow mixed-use and higher densities. However, currently, the parcel is in a CBD 1 zone which has no minimum front setback and requires side and rear setbacks only if the parcel abuts an R zone. This site is proscribed by sites in the same CBD 1 zone. The height is restricted to the prevailing height of buildings on adjacent blocks, and five-story housing, as illustrated, would fall within this guideline.

Alternatively, this parcel, in conjunction with the Parade (see Figure 4), the Water Street frontage at Union Station and, possibly, the short term closing of a portion of Water Street, could be designed as part of a 3.5 acre “events plaza” (see Figure 5). Large banners representing the summer’s events can be hung in front of the garage, creating a festive environment and attracting tourists using the RITC into downtown New London. Union Station can serve as the tourist information office and be visually integrated into the events plaza.

The area identified as “Union Station Property” in Figure 5 may continue in its current use for intercity buses or could become commercial property or public open space if bus operations are relocated. These options will be considered and analyzed in the next phase of the study.

Pros

- The parcel fronting the parking garage is large enough for housing development.
- Potential water views.
- Proximate to and highly visible from Union Station and The Parade.
- Attractive redevelopment in this area could significantly change the “face” of downtown, especially for visitors arriving by rail.
- Parcels are large enough for potential events space; a potential events space would attract visitors and would inevitably lead to more economic activity in downtown.

Cons

- Parcel dimensions only allow for single loaded housing and are generally not large enough for other land uses that require larger floor plates.
- Potential achievable density is limited.
- Adjacent bus operations, daily operation of the public parking garage and rail noise are discordant with housing and may limit desirability.
- A potential events space would occupy a desirable development site and would require an event management structure.

Figure 1: Development Site Typologies

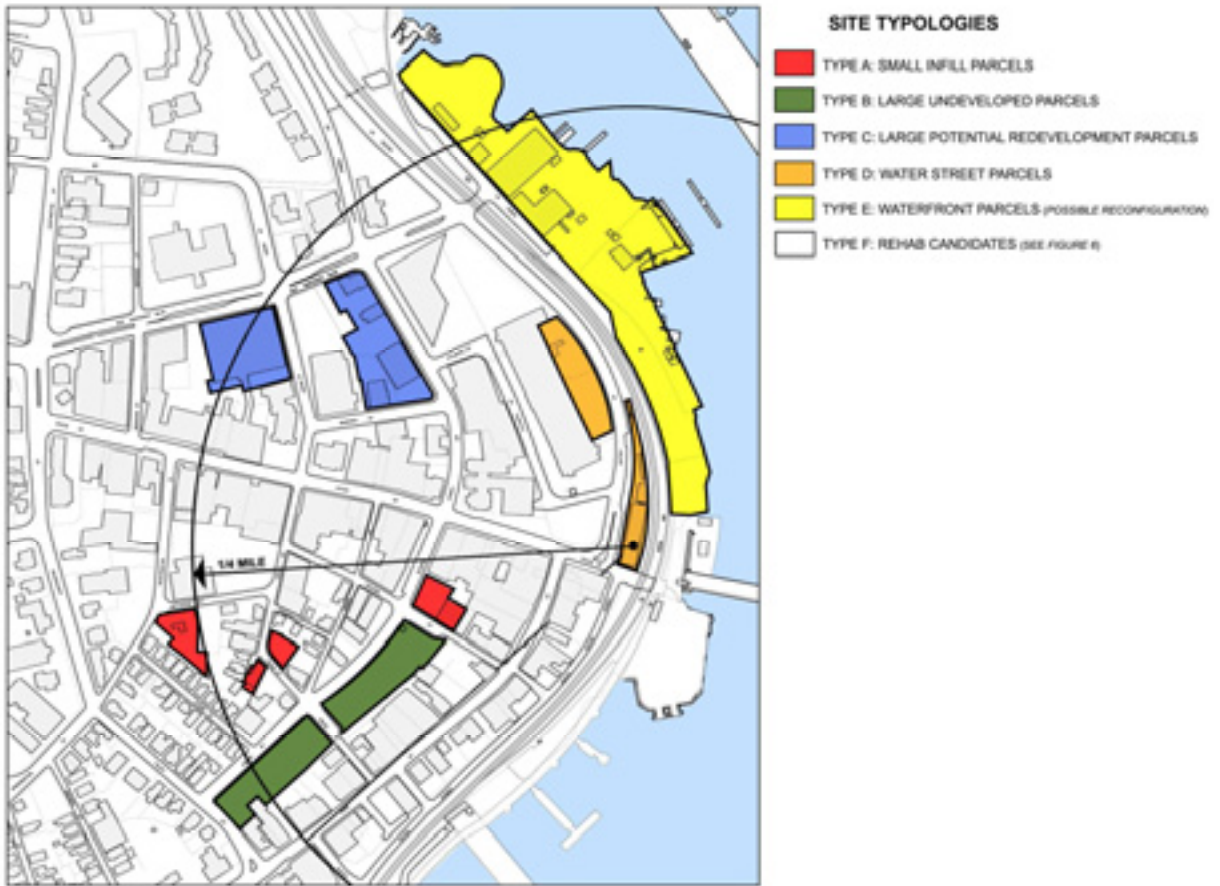


Figure 2: Bird's Eye View of Water Street Parking Garage



Figure 3: Plan View of Water Street Parking Garage

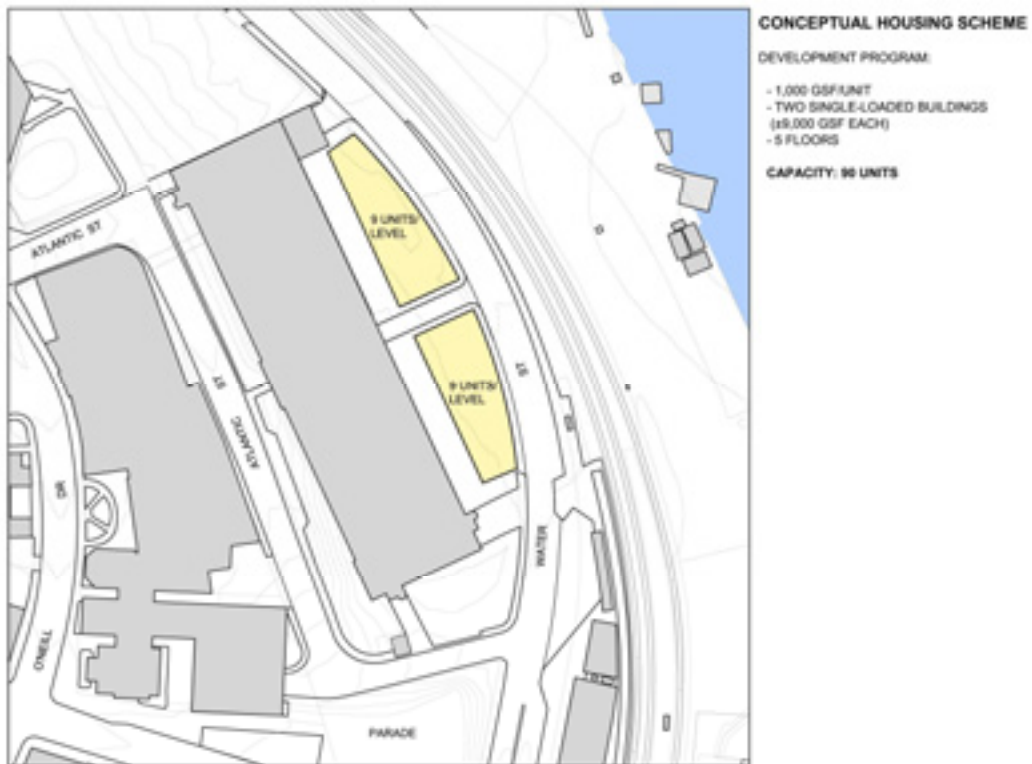


Figure 4: Overall Site Plan for The Parade

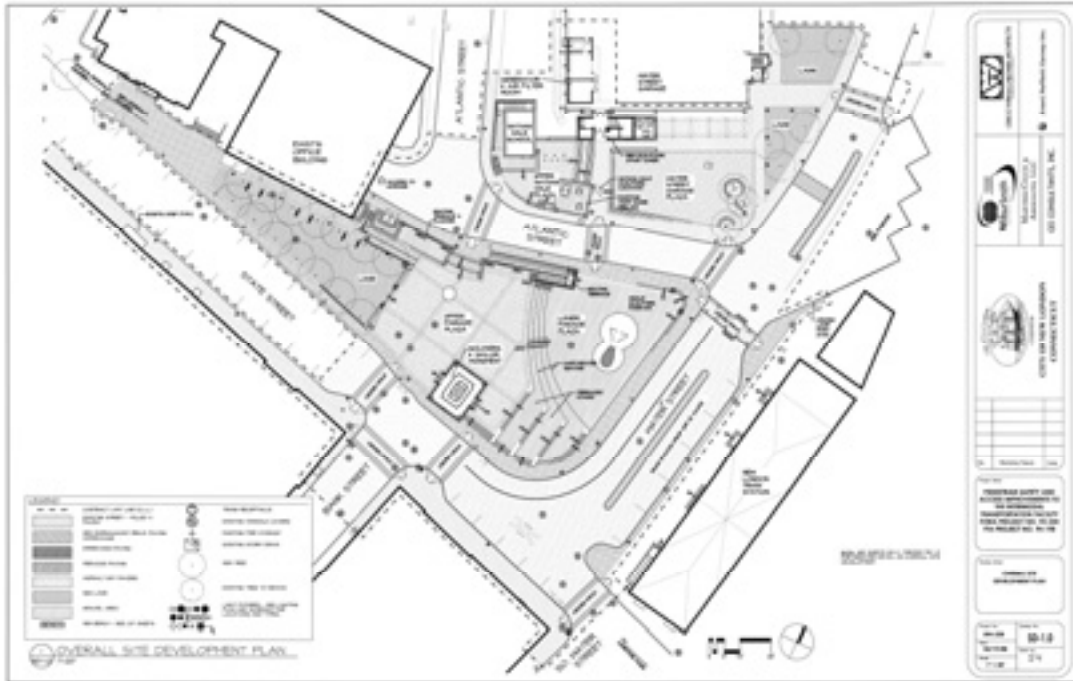


Figure 5: Potential Events Space



E. Waterfront Parcels

There may be opportunities for some reconfiguration by the owner of parking and staging areas, which would create an opportunity for modest development sites (see Figure 1). These should be explored with the landowners.

The Connecticut Coastal Management Ordinance limits waterfront property to water dependent uses with some exceptions. There are many examples in other New England states of waterfront mixed-use development with generous public access at the water's edge. Public access, in these instances, has been deemed a "water dependent use." Transportation and non-transportation options for small select areas will be examined in the next phase of the study.

Pros

- Opportunity for waterfront housing with beautiful views.
- Proximate to Union Station.
- Redevelopment would activate the waterfront and potentially provide additional public access and passive recreation.
- Sites are relatively flat.
- Could contribute to the "visual gateway" image for arriving ferry passengers.

Cons

- Would require parcel reconfiguration and the reorganization of the parking and vehicle staging areas.
- Limited vehicular and pedestrian access to sites from Water Street.
- Noise impacts.
- Internal vehicular circulation may be difficult due in part to the sites' narrow widths.

F. Rehabilitation Candidates

There are many fine buildings on State and Bank Streets which offer both ground floor retail and upper floor commercial and housing rehabilitation opportunities (see Figure 6). The emphasis should be placed on sites close to the RITC. The difficulty will be retrofitting older building floor plates for contemporary uses. For example, many of the ground floor retail spaces are very narrow and very deep.

Pros

- Most rehab candidates on Bank and State Streets would reinforce the existing entertainment/retail presence on these two lively streets, and would help create an active "destination."
- Rehab candidates are plentiful in the downtown.
- Would help stabilize historically and architecturally significant buildings; blocks on Bank and State Streets are virtually intact.

Cons

- In many cases, the configuration of the floor plates and square footage per floor are not adequate for and/or inefficient for many uses.
- Structural requirements, building code compliance and utility upgrades, among other potentially necessary improvements, create significant financial obstacles.
- Rehabs will put additional constraint on on-street parking supply.

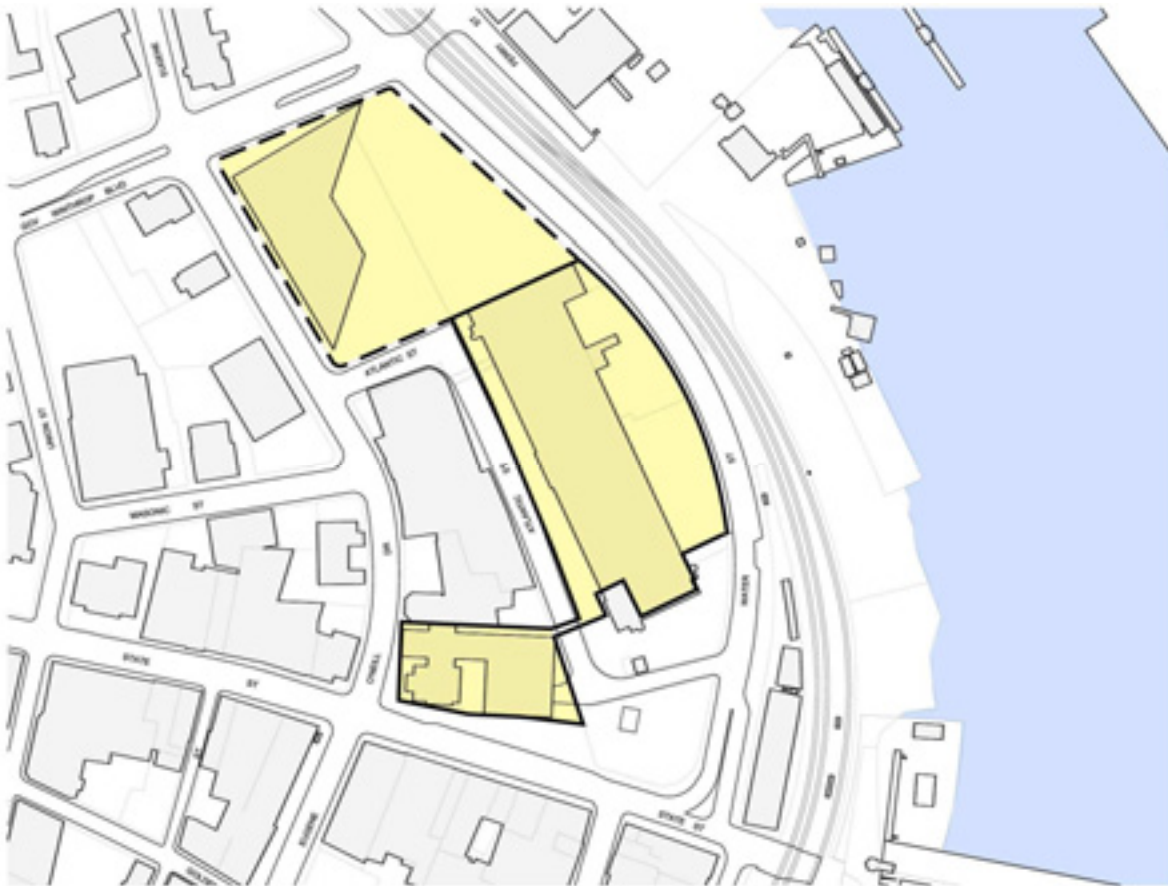
Figure 6: Diagram of Existing Commercial Occupancy; graphic provided by *The Day*



1.4 A Long Range Opportunity

If there is a decision to raze and replace the Water Street Garage in the future (e.g., 20 or 30 years from now), consideration should be given to redeveloping the “superblock” bound by Water Street, State Street, Eugene O’Neill Drive, and Governor Winthrop Boulevard. This 235,000 sq. ft. site (5.4 acres) represents an opportunity to use the site more efficiently, create a new “face” for downtown New London fronting on Water Street and create a lively, pedestrian-friendly interior street pattern linking Bank and State Streets to the new multi-use district (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: A Long Range Opportunity



1.5 Downtown Conceptual Development Programs

As illustrated in Figure 8, significant rehabilitation of existing buildings along Bank and State Streets as well as the development of several small infill sites within the downtown would accommodate the low downtown development program of 20,215 SF office, 19,422 SF of retail, and 93,000 SF of housing (93 units).

As illustrated in Figure 9, in combination with the rehab/development under the low scenario, the development of larger development parcels, including the Eugene O’Neill Drive parking lots and Water Street parking garage frontage would accommodate the mid downtown development program of 39,000 SF office, 40,675 SF of retail, and 211,000 SF of housing (211 units).

Lastly, in combination with all of the above, the redevelopment of large potential redevelopment sites on Atlantic Street, Eugene O'Neill Drive and Union Street, as indicated in Figure 10, would accommodate the high downtown development program of 66,616 SF of office, 62,460 SF of retail, and 347,000 SF of housing (347 units).

Figure 8: Low Scenario

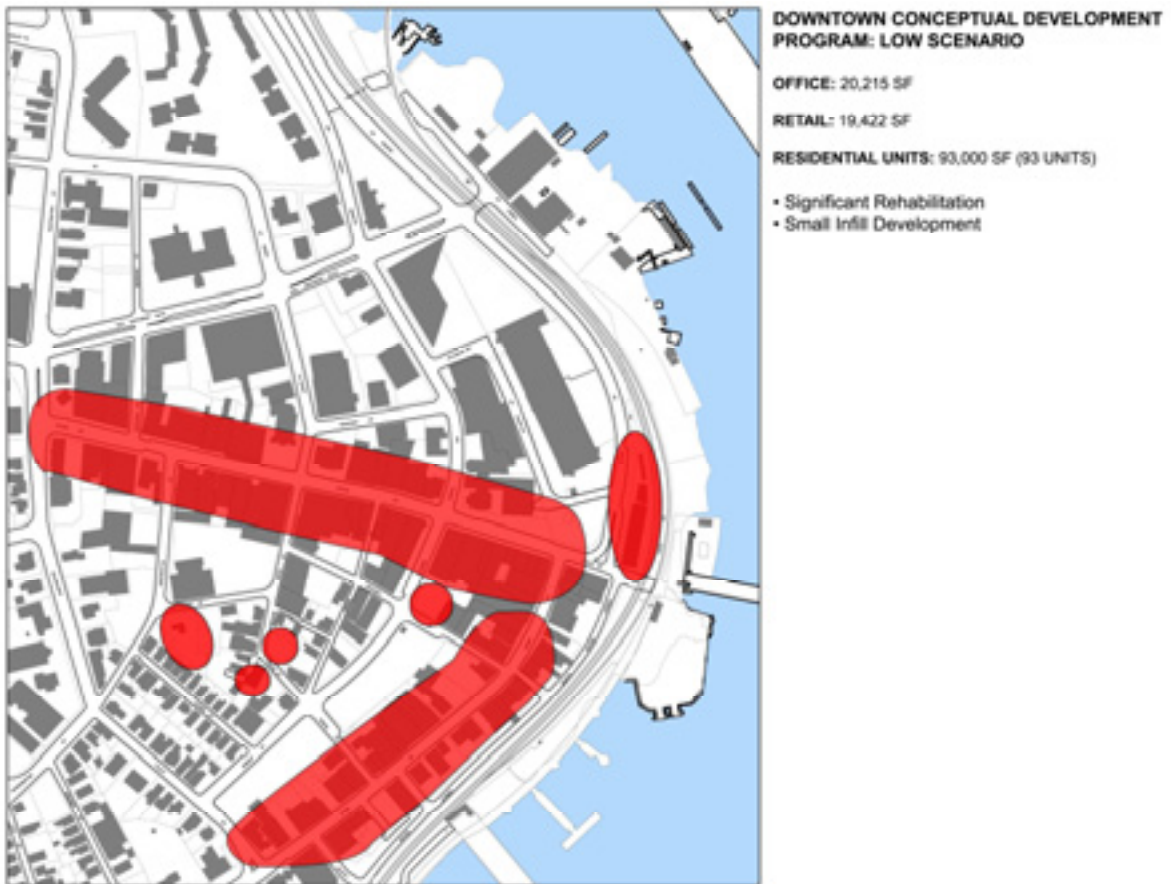
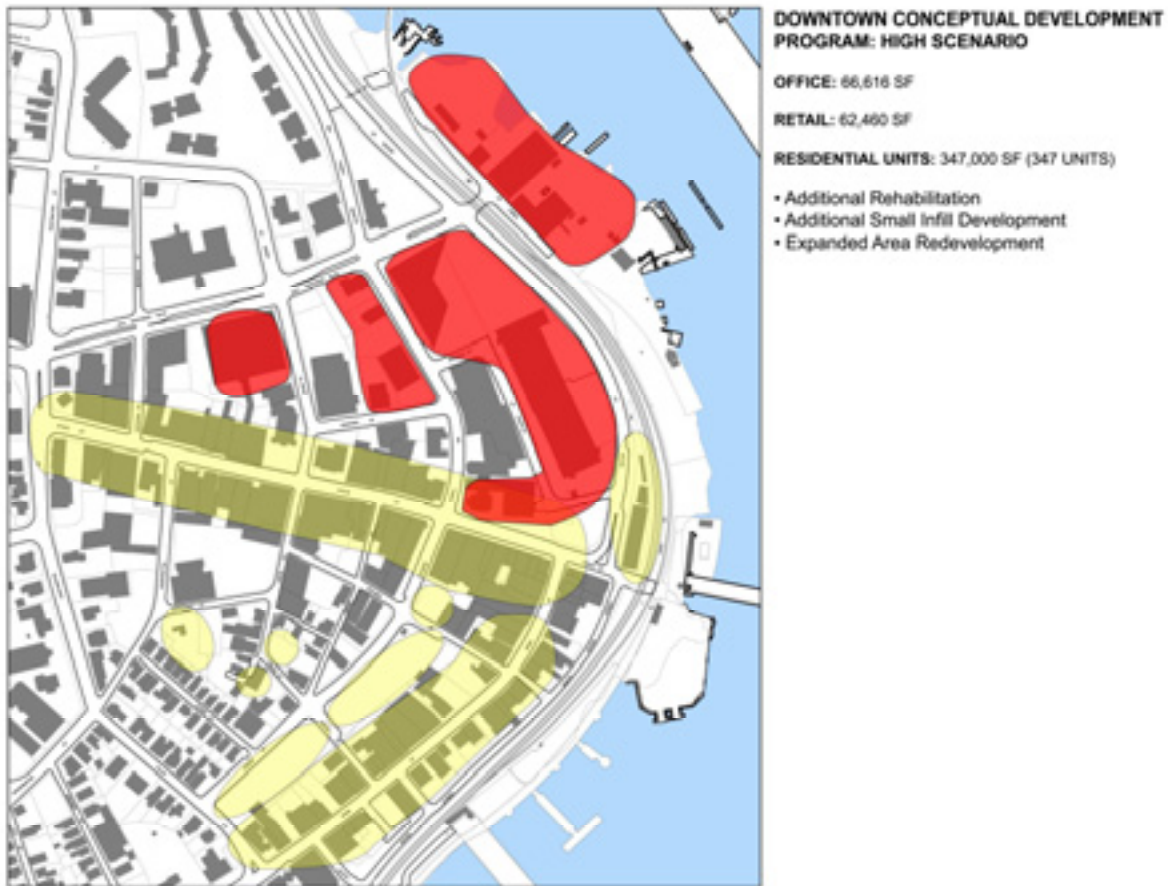


Figure 9: Mid Scenario



Figure 10: High Scenario



1.6 Next Steps

Following the March Steering Committee meeting, we will incorporate the Committee's comments and observations into a work plan for testing the most promising sites. Several alternatives will be developed in which the full retail, office, and housing program will be accommodated in short range and long range scenarios.

These alternatives will be based on:

- Comments from the Steering Committee.
- Additional meetings with City officials and members of the real estate community and land owners.
- A more rigorous examination of potential candidates, with a focus on rehabilitation, infill and large potential redevelopment parcels.



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