

Strategic Planning Committee for Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Revitalization

A City of Portsmouth Blue Ribbon Committee

Final Report and Recommendations

Civic Open Space



Parking for
the Public



Architectural
Character Reflective
of Portsmouth



Active Building Uses



Abutter
Opportunities



Councilor Rebecca Perkins, Chair
Councilor Nancy Pearson
Vince Lombardi (HDC Member)
Dexter Legg (Planning Board Member)
Everett Eaton (EDC Member)
Barbara DeStefano (Downtown Resident)
Jay McSharry (Downtown Business)
Assistant City Manager David Moore, Ex-officio Member

November 29, 2017

Introduction

Portsmouth has experienced incredible success in its development as a walkable and attractive downtown. This successful urban fabric is an amenity to the City and attracts quality private development to the City. The Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Committee was convened in order to address how this success can be extended and replicated in the study area, and fully realize the City's investment in the new Foundry Place parking garage.

The Vision presented in this report embodies the 2016 Master Plan's ethos – Authentic, Resilient, Vibrant, and Connected. The Vision is to transform the surface parking at the Bridge Street and Worth Lot as well as the Vaughan Mall to extend the vibrant downtown fabric emanating from Market Square into new and renewed public spaces to create more opportunity for Portsmouth's civic life to grow and express itself. This Vision is about creating appealing places for residents to access the downtown and expanding opportunities for all to participate in the cultural life of the City. In this way, the Vision should be seen as an investment in the future social fabric of the City. This Vision for this area - so drastically-altered as a result of urban renewal policies centered around the car – represents a return to design that focuses on people and social connections.

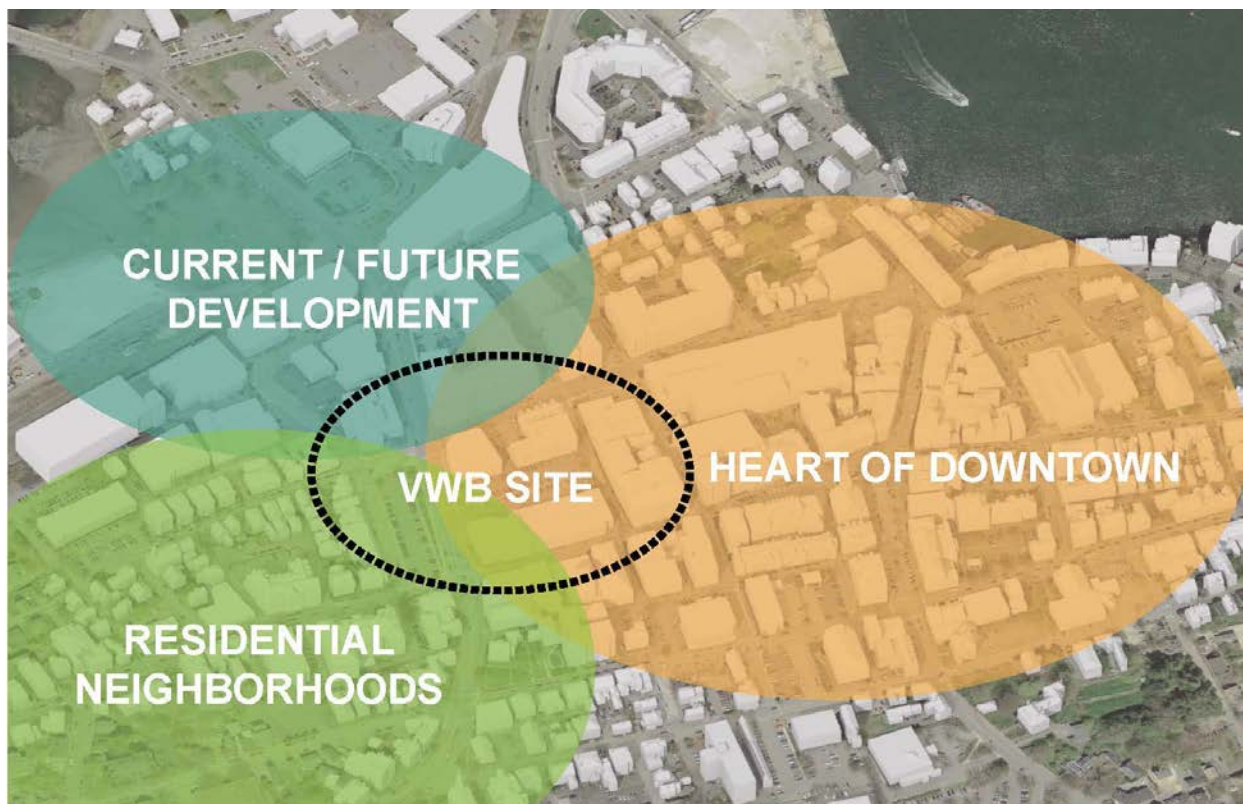


Figure 1 The study area currently lies within the City's traditional downtown Core, is adjacent to the North End development and redevelopment and on the edge of the residential neighborhood and beginning of the Islington Street Corridor.

The Vision also promotes a much needed, inviting and useful connection between the downtown Core, the new development in the City's North End, the beginning of the Islington Street Corridor and the West End, and the Foundry Place parking garage, while protecting the majority of the parking needs determined to be necessary for the uses in the study area.



Figure 2- This figure depicts the strong urban fabric around Market Square and the Committee's vision for extending it to the rights-of-way and City-owned parcels within the study area

This Vision is aspirational and represents the first step needed to advance significant changes contemplated for the study area. Following the adoption of the Vision by the City Council, additional work is needed to gradually implement the Vision. Such work may include greater understanding of the City needs for the future and significant public input and discussion into initial design work. Creating a long-term vision allows the City to lead in promoting good urban design and encourages private investment in the vicinity consistent with the City's vision.



Figure 3- This existing conditions plan shows existing uses abutting to the Bridge Street Lot, Vaughan Mall, and Worth Lot, including current door openings onto the street level (red arrows). A larger depiction of this plan is included in Appendix I.

Recommended Vision for the Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Study Area

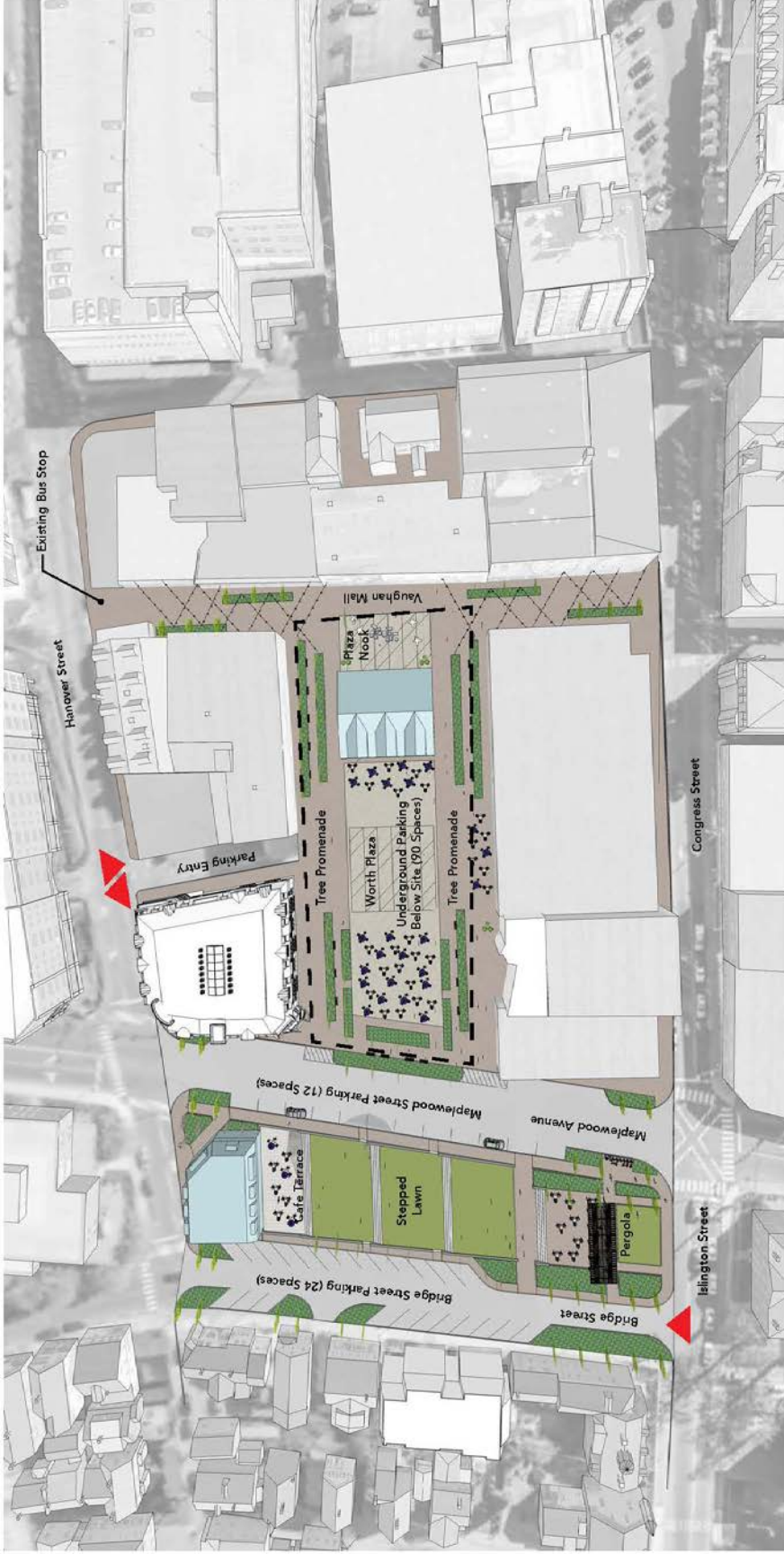


Figure 4- This is the overall Vision for the study area portion that focuses on the Bridge Street Lot, Worth Lot, and Vaughan Mall. The Vision aims to create several distinct but connected spaces for the community as well as extend the urban fabric into this area.

Recommendation to City Council and Potential Next Steps

The Committee recommends the City Council adopt this report and its vision for the Study Area. Adoption of this Vision by the City Council will stimulate critical steps and thinking toward its realization. These and related recommendations are listed below:

1. The adoption of the Vision will be a policy statement of the City Council about the eventual use these valuable city-owned assets.
2. This Vision will serve as a baseline for additional public involvement that will result in refinements and enhancements as implementation work moves forward.
3. The Committee recommends the City Manager include an element sheet based on this Vision in the next Capital Improvement Plan (for feasibility, additional design, or other steps).
4. The Committee recommends the City Manager invite and cooperate with community-led (or City-led) initiatives to illustrate the concepts of the proposed future uses through demonstration projects similar to the 2017 Vaughan Mall Green project. This interim activity might include introducing food truck activity in the Worth Lot or park-like uses at Bridge Street Lot.
5. An adopted vision will stimulate new and innovative thinking about ways to implement this Vision potentially with partners.
6. An adopted vision will foster greater discussion and even more excitement about the opportunities for “programming” including the opportunity for outdoor performance spaces; food trucks, festivals and markets; space for civic engagement and free expression; and outdoor dining emanating from building fronts.
7. An adopted vision will inform abutting property owners and businesses about the direction the City is interested in moving and inform considerations of investments in abutting properties.

Process and Background

The Blue Ribbon Committee for the Strategic Planning Committee for Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Revitalization was appointed by Mayor Blalock in April 2017. The Committee’s charge was to develop options for future use of City-owned property in these areas and report back to the City Council with strategic recommendations as to how the City can best use its property in service to the community. In its work, the Committee was to address land use, urban design, public infrastructure, and timing.

The study area included the City-owned parcels known as the Bridge Street Lot, Worth Lot, and the Vaughan Mall, as well as the public rights-of way between the future Foundry Place Garage and the Islington Street and Maplewood Avenue Intersection.

The Committee membership included Councilor Rebecca Perkins Kwoka, Chair; Councilor Nancy Pearson; Vince Lombardi (HDC Appointee and Commission Chair); Dexter Legg (Planning Board Appointee and Board Chair) Everett Eaton (EDC Member and Commission

Chair) Barbara DeStefano (Downtown Resident) Jay McSharry (Downtown Business) and Ex-officio Member (Appointed by the City Manager) Assistant City Manager David Moore.

In addition to a general listening session for the public and the listening session for direct abutters and business owners. Over 60 web comments and survey forms were submitted in total. Drawings were also submitted to the Committee along with comments from members of the public at Committee meetings.

Principles to Guide the Vision

At the beginning of its process the Committee concentrated on developing a series of principles that would guide its work. Key information about the project area, which was used to craft the principles include:

1. The City's *Portsmouth 2025 Master Plan* (Authentic, Resilient, Vibrant, and Connected)
2. Historical information about the area as presented in the March 27, 2017 presentation to City Council.
3. The new, under construction and planned private developments on parcels within or abutting the project area
4. The City's new Foundry Place Parking Garage; the 2012 Nelson Nygard Parking Demand and Supply Report; 2011 Parking Principles as well as the traffic circulation model under development
5. The Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, Complete Streets Policy, Islington Street Corridor Study; the Vaughan Mall Green Demonstration Project by PS21; and the RFP for the Maplewood Avenue Complete Streets Project

The following principles define the goals for the Committee's work. These principles have been distilled to serve as a summary of the key concepts derived from information and values expressed in the materials from above as well as Committee discussions, listening sessions with the public and abutters, and work with City staff. In addition to guiding the Committee's work, these principles should also be applied prospectively as the City works to implement the Vision in the future.

- a. Reflect Master Plan priorities and recognize the value of urban placemaking and design.
- b. Create high functioning civic space which are inviting to the Portsmouth community and enables variable programming/uses of the spaces.
- c. Promote connections within and between the study area and its surrounding neighborhoods and wayfinding to transportation and cultural destinations.

A Vision for the City's Use

The Committee's work was assisted by Halvorson Design Partnership a landscape architecture and urban design firm and its architecture subconsultant Touloukian Touloukian Architects. In several meeting and workshops with the Committee, City staff and the consulting team worked to translate the principles into working drawings of an

overall Vision for the area. These concepts and progress drawings were presented at several Committee meetings and were refined and adjusted to reflect public and Committee input.

The Vision is presented in the next several pages through a series of images and captions illustrating key concepts and elements.

Additional views and materials of encompassing the Vision are presented in Appendix I of this report. The Committee meeting video from November 21, 2017 is a good resource for a more detailed and narrative presentation of the Vision. The video can be viewed by accessing this link via the City's YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hp6YA9aT4c>.

In summary, the Vision for the study area is to transform the surface parking at the Bridge Street Lot and Worth Lot as well as the Vaughan Mall to extend the vibrant downtown fabric emanating from Market Square into new and renewed public spaces to create more opportunity for Portsmouth's civic life to grow and express itself in new and varied ways. The vision also promotes a much needed, inviting and useful connection and transition between the downtown Core, the new development in the City's North End, the beginning of the Islington Street and Corridor and the West End, and the Foundry Garage.

Proposed conceptual design site plan with design character precedent images

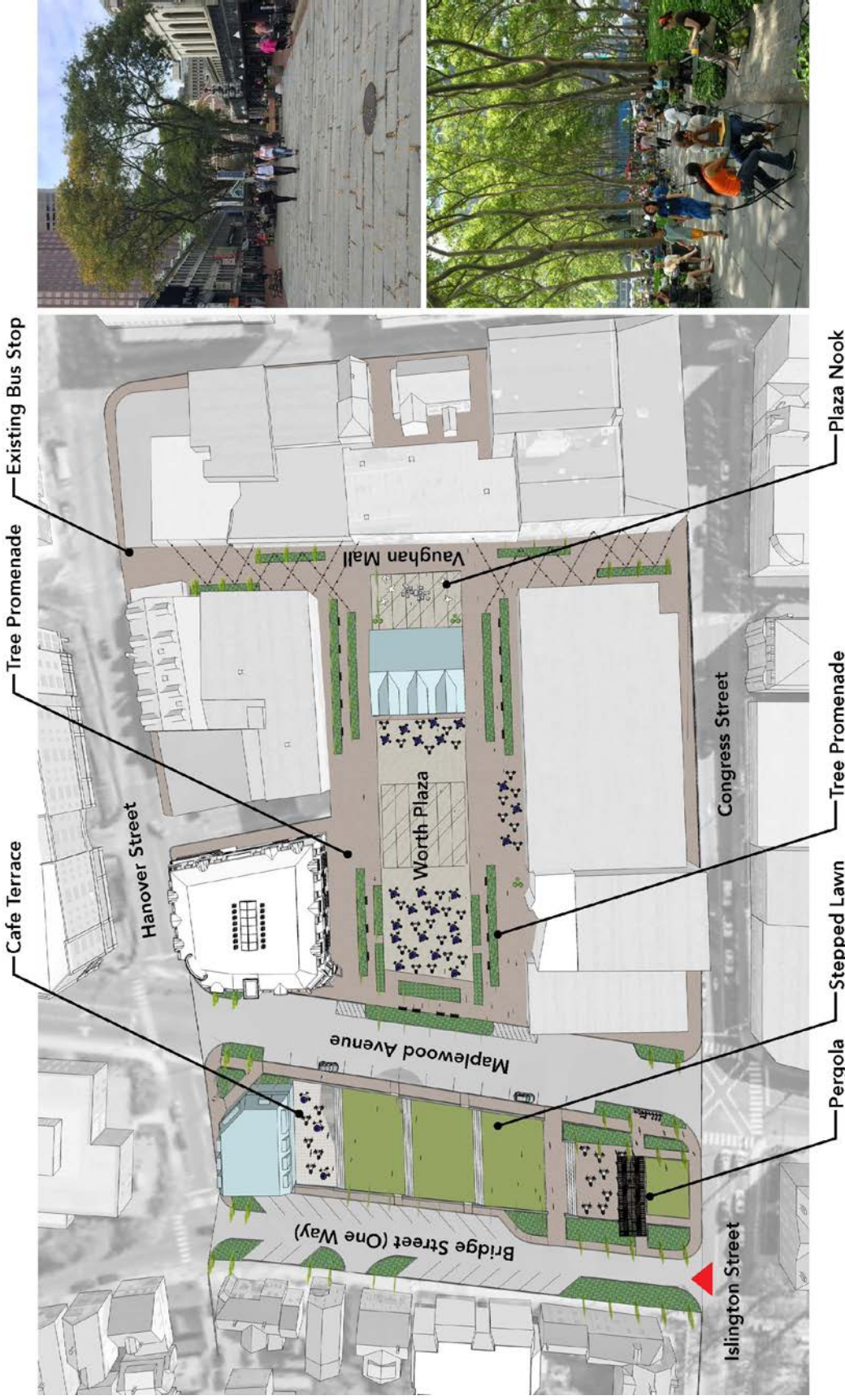


Figure 5 The Vision for VWB is to create unique, complimentary open space opportunities within the three site areas to be both flexible and adaptable to support uses and programming not currently found in Portsmouth. Bridge Lot Open Space is conceived of as a more verdant open space with trees over a lawn whereas Worth Lot and Vaughan Mall are envisioned as paved plazas of varying scales framed by deciduous canopy trees (see precedent images).

Proposed conceptual design aerial plan with proposed pergola shade structure and civic buildings

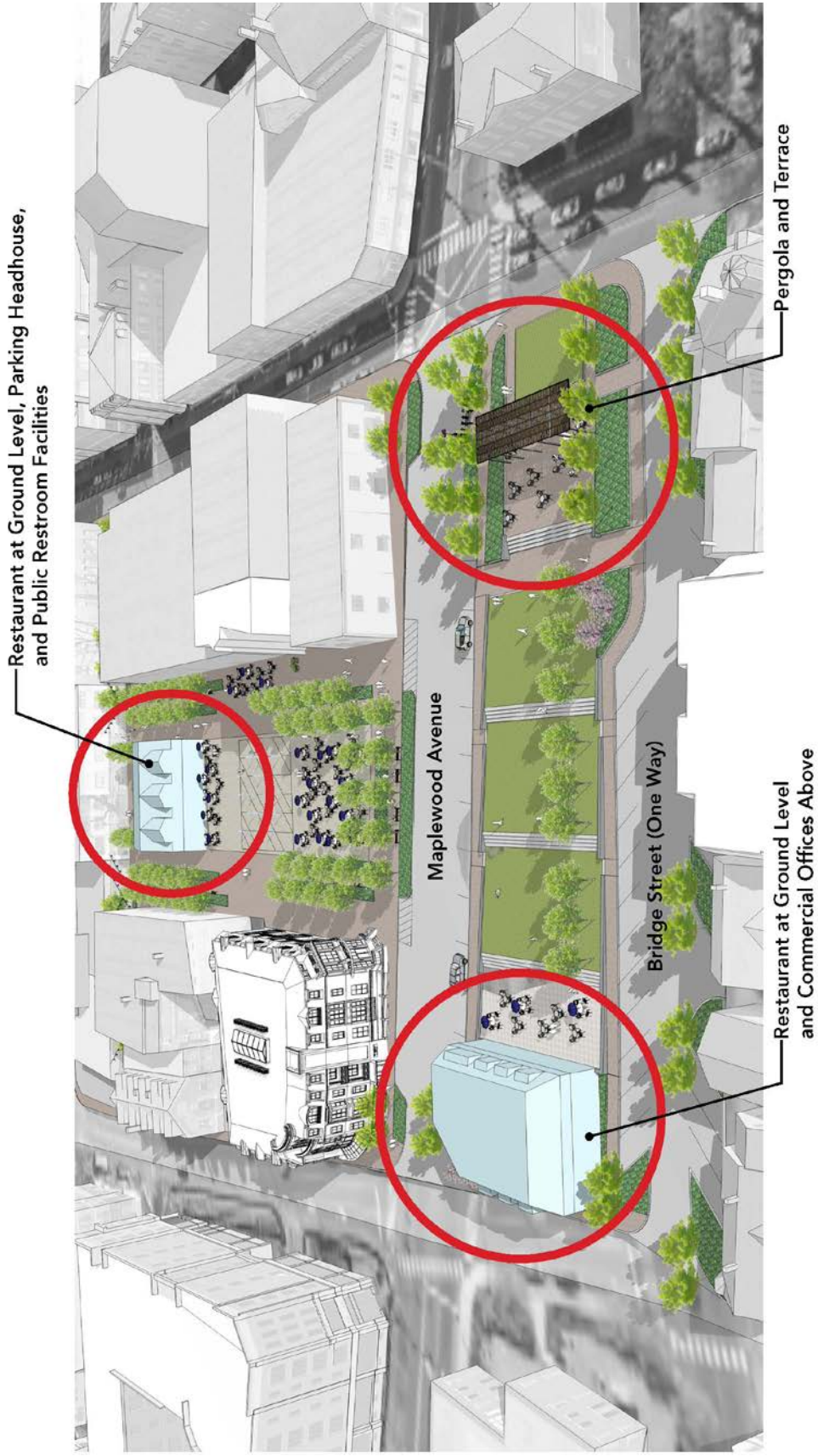


Figure 6 The Vision includes integrating civic building types located to optimally activate and engage the civic open space on Bridge & Worth Lots and Vaughan Mall. The open air pergola is an invitation to the Bridge Lot Open space and is set back from Islington Street in deference to the architecture of the Academy (Discover Portsmouth) building. The Civic Buildings provide ground floor restaurant opportunities and public amenity program to activate and energize the open spaces year round.

Design precedents of proposed civic buildings and pergola shade structure



Precedents for Building at Hanover and Maplewood



Precedents for Building at Vaughan Mall



Precedents for Pergola Terrace



Figure 6 The precedent images convey the varying character and roles that each building and structure can play within each site through contemporary architectural expressions which are forward looking while reflective of scale and materials appropriate to Portsmouth.

Proposed conceptual design aerial plan with site features and civic use precedent images

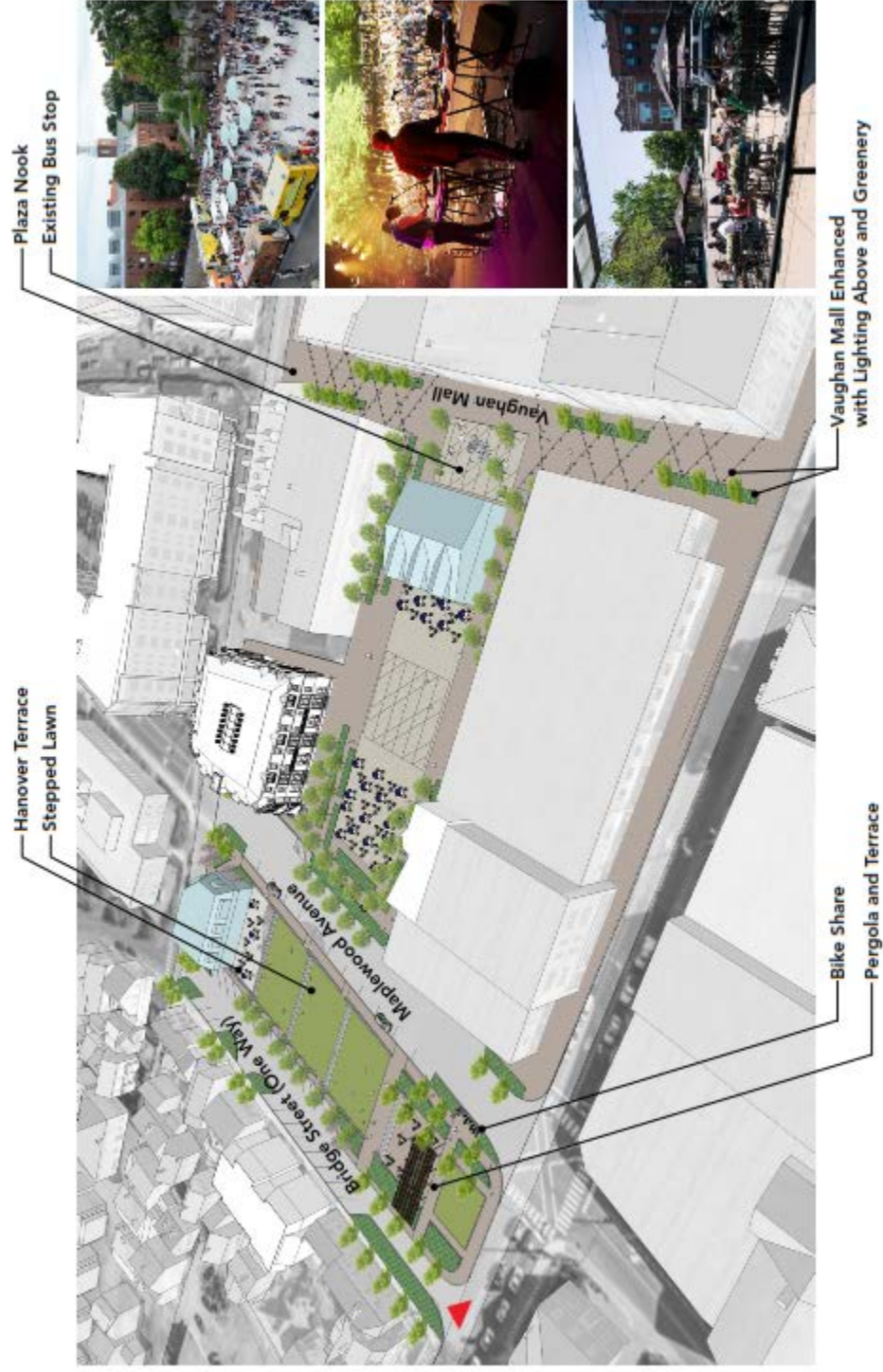


Figure 7 New attractive open spaces become a new destination in downtown and a "civic canvas" to which the public is invited and existing abutting businesses can engage with café tables and chairs that expand their business opportunities and bring life and activity throughout the day.

Civic movement and activity

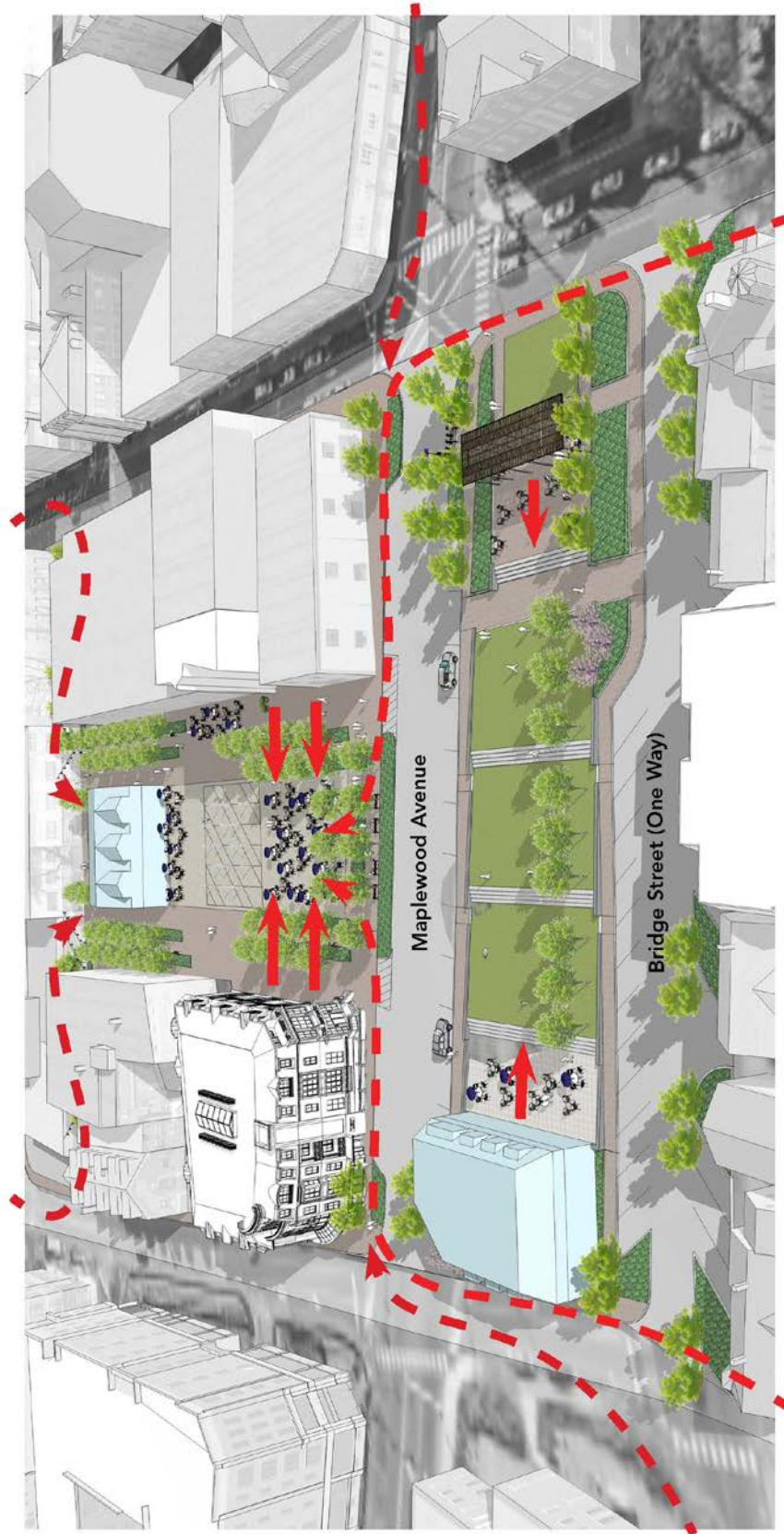


Figure 8 The collective presence of the Vaughan, Worth Bridge Open Spaces will create a new identity on Maplewood Avenue, a gateway between downtown and the new North end development as well as connecting existing neighborhoods to the south and east. New developments proposed on Congress Street and Maplewood Ave create a new presence on Worth Lot plaza. The open space and structures on Bridge Lot will provide a transition and an intuitive movement to the Foundry Place parking garage.

Bridge and Worth parking accommodations

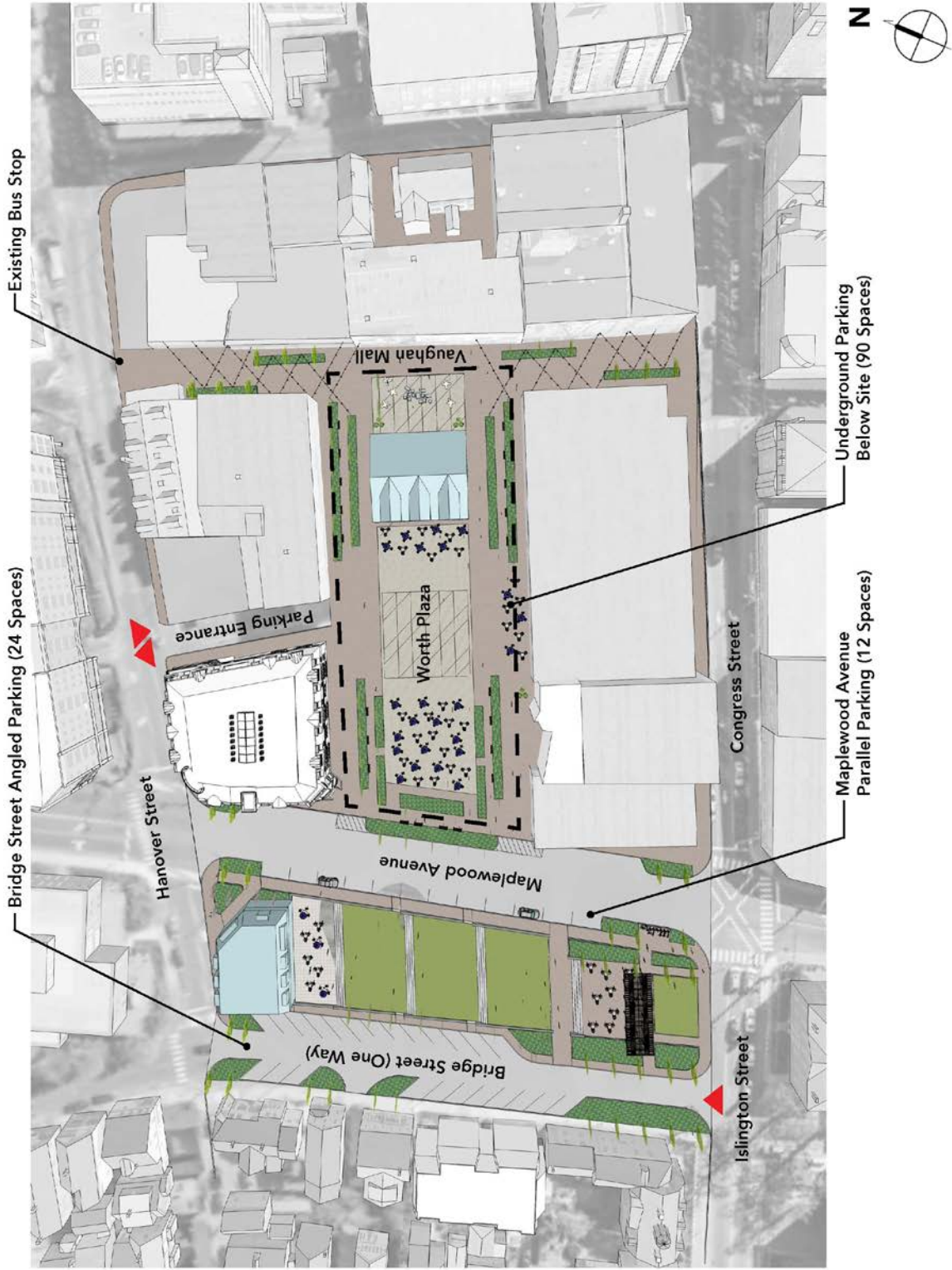


Figure 9 The vision provides parking accommodations for local businesses in the context of a larger Portsmouth parking plan. The plan envisions underground parking beneath the Worth lot open space to and from Hanover Street, on-street parallel parking on Maplewood Avenue and angled parking on Bridge Street for a total of 126 spaces.

The following important ideas are intended to provide additional insight about key components of the Vision.

Connection and a New Vaughan Mall

The Committee identified the need to create a connection between the new development in the North End, the Foundry Place Garage, the Islington Street Corridor, and the downtown Core. In addition, the Committee saw tremendous value in connecting the emerging “Vaughan Mall Spine” pedestrian corridor linking the African Burying Ground with Portwalk Place to the new civic anchor illustrated in the Vision. The widely-held goal of revitalizing Vaughan Mall is front in center in this Vision and its importance grows with the build-out of other elements of the “Vaughan Mall Spine”, including the streetscape improvements in front of The Music Hall to be completed in June 2018 and related pedestrian connector to State Street.

Quality Urban Design

The enthusiastic support for - and reactions to - initiatives like the Bike and Pedestrian Plan, complete streets concepts and demonstration projects like the PS 21 Vaughan Mall Green and the tactical urbanism street lab on Islington Street, has made continued pursuit of purposeful and functional urban design that complements the life of Portsmouth an imperative for every undertaking in the public realm.

Successful streets and places accessible through a variety of modes of transportation will create value both in terms of increased commercial activity and growth in the tax base but also in invaluable and incalculable benefits to the social and cultural life of the City. This is achieved through designing for a vibrant street life where people linger casually and visit with one another and where points of interest are intuitive and inviting to move between. It is also achieved through the creation of other places (large and small, formal and informal, greenspace or hardscape, covered and uncovered); where groups can meet for public expression or to observe an occasion; where audiences can attend musical, dramatic or spoken word events; or where pop-up markets, stalls or food trucks can be staged. In addition, the Committee recognized that it is the community that will eventually lead and develop the most successful uses for the spaces. The Vision is intended to create opportunity for this activity in a variety of forms.

Open Space

As the development patterns of the North End emerge and preparations are made for new construction, the value of City-controlled open space and its role in balancing development with livability and the life of the City has come into sharper focus. When it comes to the Bridge Street Lot and Worth Lot the value of these assets in achieving a counter balance to the development activity in this area is apparent.

Use of Buildings:

The Committee discussed at length the role of the structures to frame and activate public spaces. A variety of uses adjacent to open space plazas and park-like amenities are critical to ensuring success of these spaces. The opportunity for the City to control what happens on Worth Lot and Bridge Lot means the City can choose the extent of building development and its use and character. While the introduction of buildings presents an the opportunity for building the tax base and other revenues, the primary driver for their inclusion is for the opportunity to complement the existing built environment, frame the open spaces, and provide space for uses (both public or private) that will complement the outdoor civic spaces they abut year-round.

In addition, these structures present opportunities to introduce new architectural innovation and materials that will complement the existing built environment in these areas.

Strategic Issues

The study area is large and the possibilities and excitement related to potential future uses are many and complex and often tied in with other City priorities and needs. As a result, the Committee identified the following strategic issues.

Parking

Together, the Bridge Street lot and Worth Lot and adjacent on-street parking on Bridge Street are major contributors to the supply of parking in this part of the City. While a new vision for the surface parking lots is compelling for many reasons, the concerns about the City's parking supply as a whole is a critical issue. As a result, the Committee recognized the following:

1. The value proposition of the Bridge and Worth lots as high quality civic spaces that prioritize park and civic uses over surface parking is critical to the vibrancy of the City in the future.
2. The Committee recognized that evolution in public transportation options and technological development of "self-driving" vehicles are certain, however their impacts on Portsmouth's parking and transportation landscape are not. Future implementation of the Vision should be mindful of and be reassessed as more is known about these variables, which will impact land uses.
3. When it comes to addressing parking supply in the vicinity of the Worth and Bridge lots, the emphasis should be on providing supply for abutting uses over requiring these assets to provide supply for the City as a whole. As a result, this Vision proposes maintaining 70% of the existing supply of spaces.
4. A new 600-space parking garage will be open in the fall of 2018 and many other strategies for addressing parking demand are being evaluated. The City Council has authorized a new study of parking supply and demand that will inform the future parking policy decisions; provide guidance on phasing strategies for this Vision; and provide additional information that may warrant revisiting this Vision in light of the City's needs.

Phased Implementation

The Vision calls for a transformation of surface lots into exciting new places anchored with new architecture, place making, and sense of openness. Portions of the Vision, such as the creation of walkable and inviting street edges throughout the study area from the new Foundry Place parking garage and along Bridge, Deer, Hanover Streets and Maplewood Avenue, are a long way toward realization through investments, which are part of in-progress private developments as well as the complete streets project currently in design for Maplewood Avenue.

Other portions of the vision (reuse of the Bridge Street and Worth Lot surface parking and Vaughan Mall renovation) do not have any specific time frame for implementation.

The extent of the transformation and investment required in discussion, planning, and designing this work will necessitate strategic phasing, which was not addressed in detail by the Committee. However, several factors were identified as key phasing considerations, including the overall parking strategy and needs at the time of implementation; construction sequencing strategies that make sense for the Vision as well as the timing of adjacent redevelopments at key parcels abutting the City property; and capacity to finance certain elements needing public financing.

Financing

While the majority of the transformation is called to take place on City property, the City is not necessarily required to finance it. The value of property and the opportunities to attract investment are significant. In addition to being critical frames for the new civic and park uses, the buildings and structures proposed for the sites will be critical to activating them. Also, the mixed-use structures proposed for Bridge and Worth lots are opportunities to generate significant revenues, which can be used in support of the public amenities. This can be done through ground leases and request for proposal instruments. In addition to being critical to the success of the Vision and the spaces, the buildings will also add to the City's tax base.

Potential sources of revenues to support the implementation of the Vision and development and maintenance of the public spaces include:

1. Revenues from ground leases or other agreements;
2. Tax revenues generated from building uses;
3. Parking revenues;
4. Payments for permitted uses such as sidewalk cafes and/or;
5. Payments for event uses.

Conclusion

The transformation of the study area and, in particular, the large City-owned parcels at Bridge and Worth Lots holds tremendous potential for the vibrancy of the City. Adding to the options for civic life to flourish and reinvigorating places that can also contribute to the authenticity of Portsmouth is exciting and important work. This Vision is a starting point for realizing the potential of the study area and additional work is needed in order to prepare for implementation, the timing of which must be considered alongside other important City priorities. Strategic thinking, ongoing evaluation of the City's needs, and phased implementation will be necessary to translate the Vision into action and great results for the Portsmouth community.

Appendix I

**Presentation of the Proposed Vision for the
Vaughan-Worth-Bridge Revitalization**

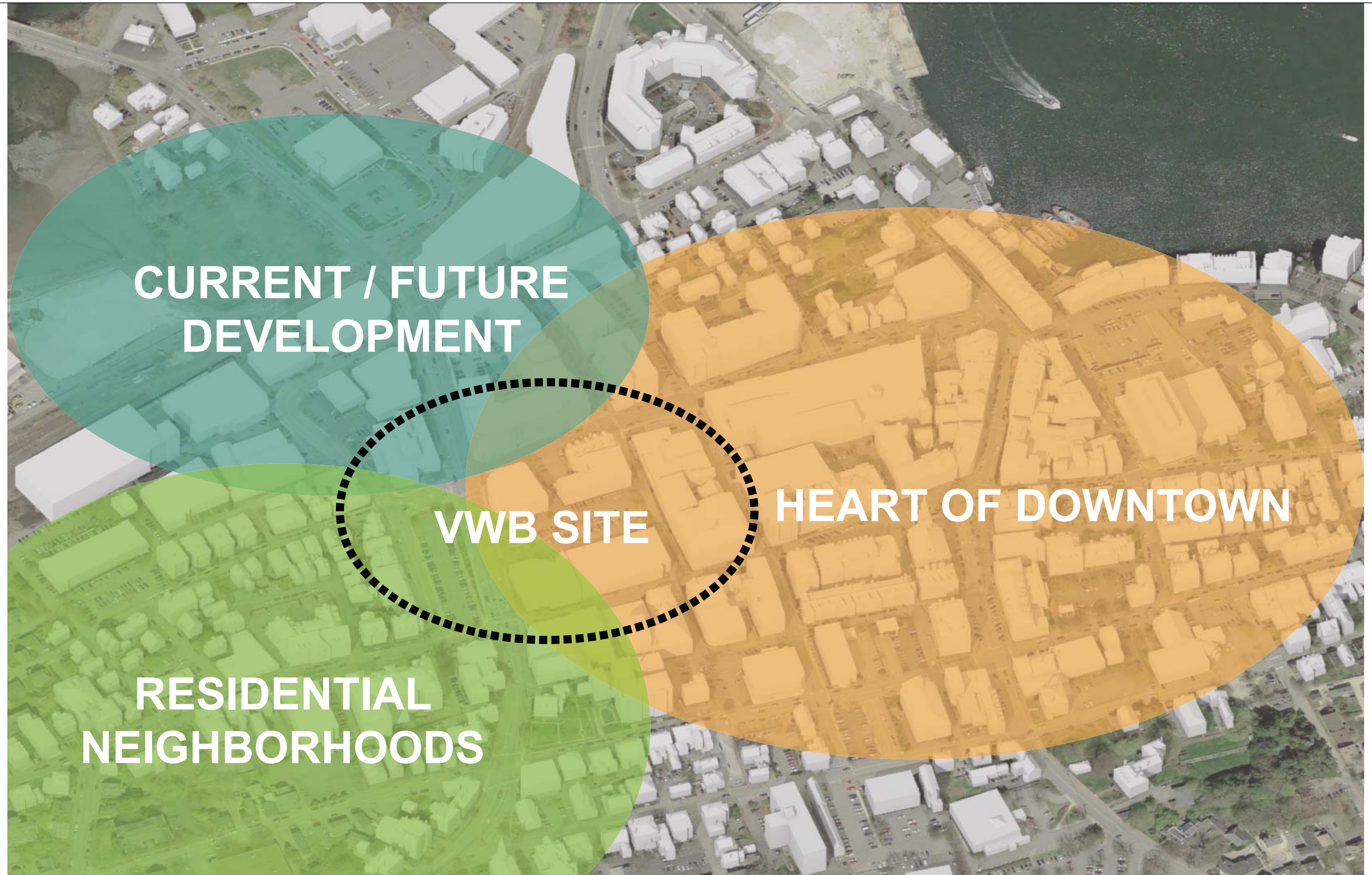
**to the Blue Ribbon Committee on
November 21, 2017**

VAUGHAN, WORTH, BRIDGE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
CONCEPTUAL DESIGN VISION

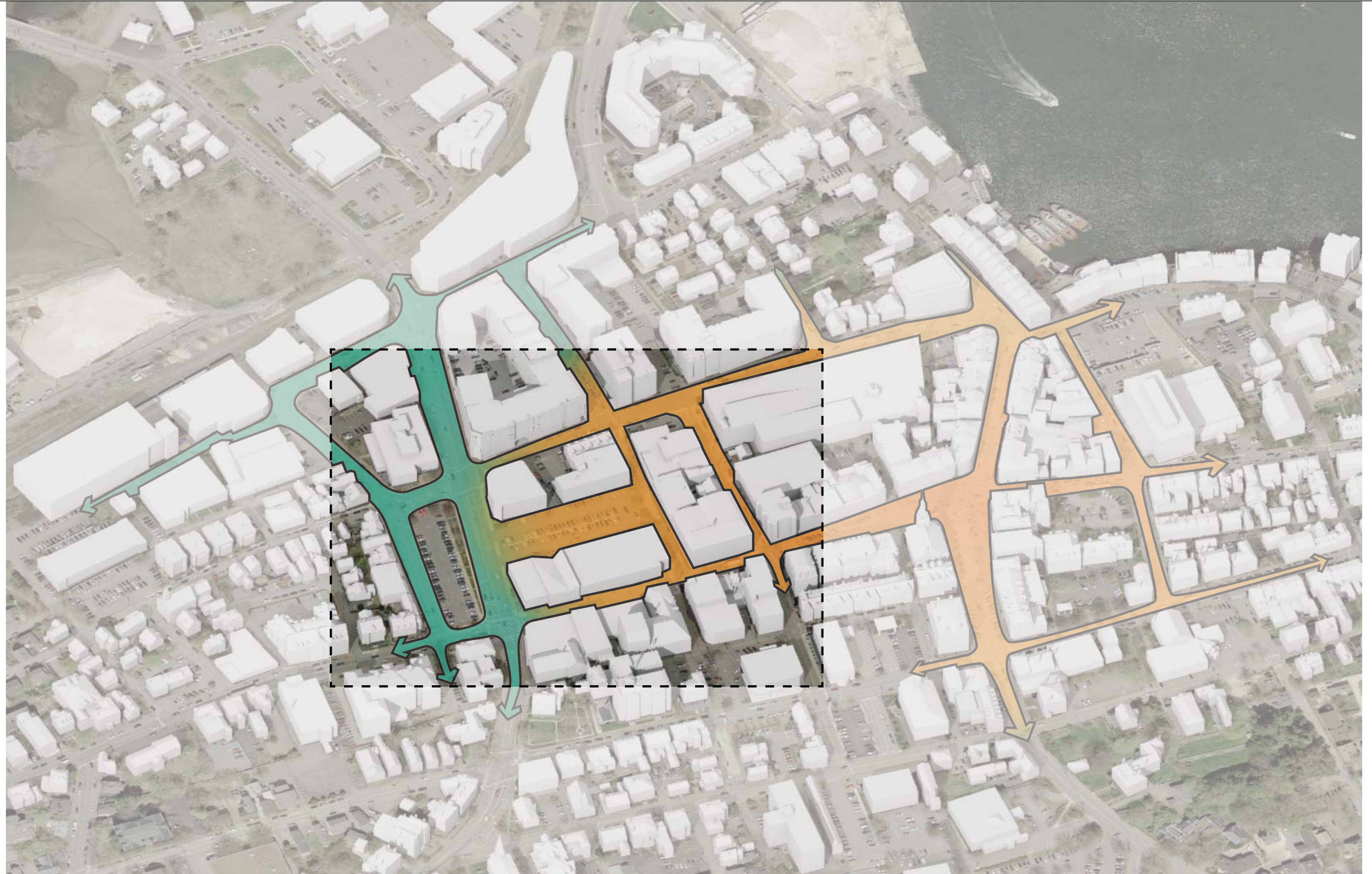
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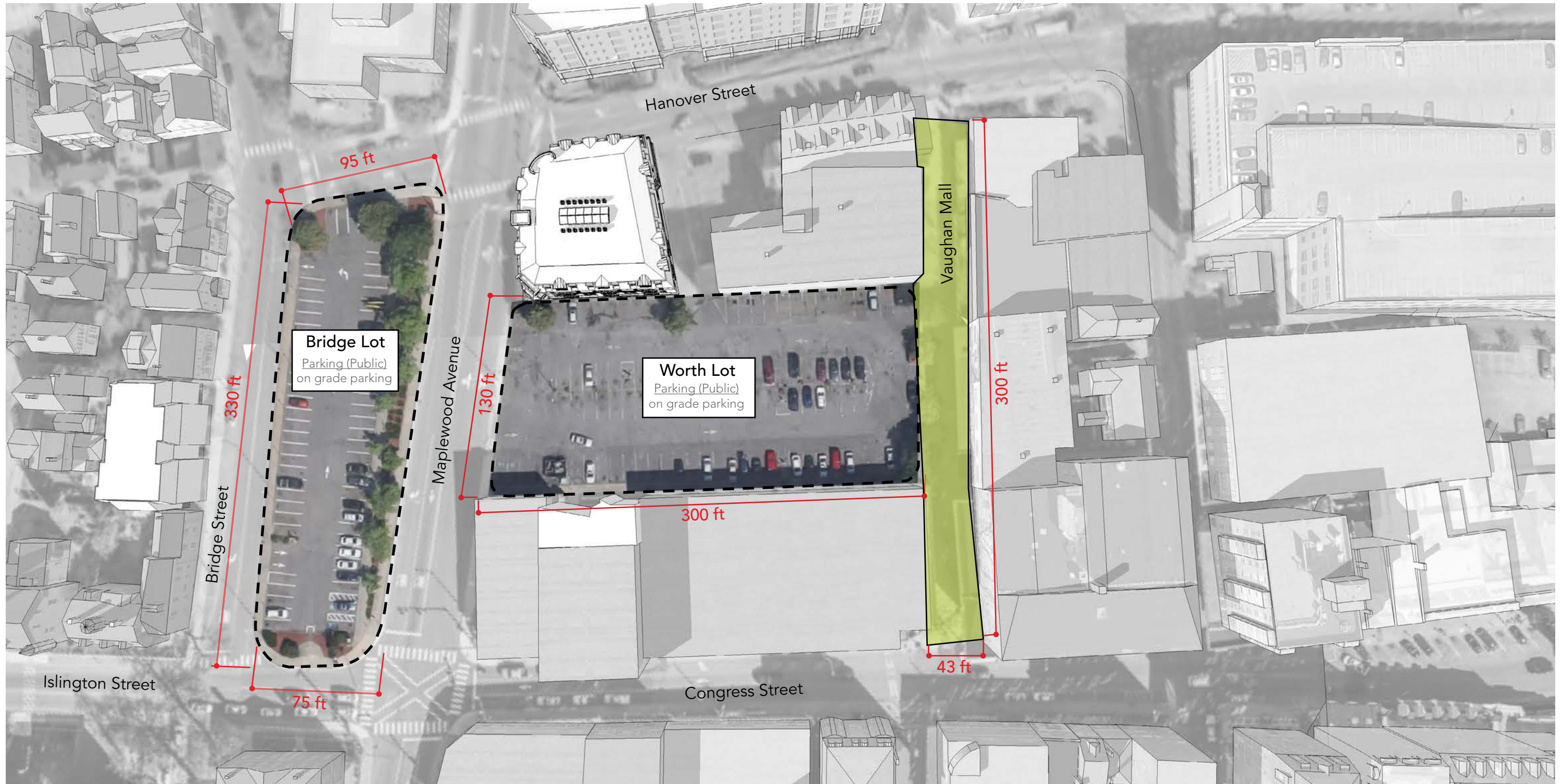












FIVE POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Civic Open Space



Parking for the Public



Architectural Character Reflective of Portsmouth

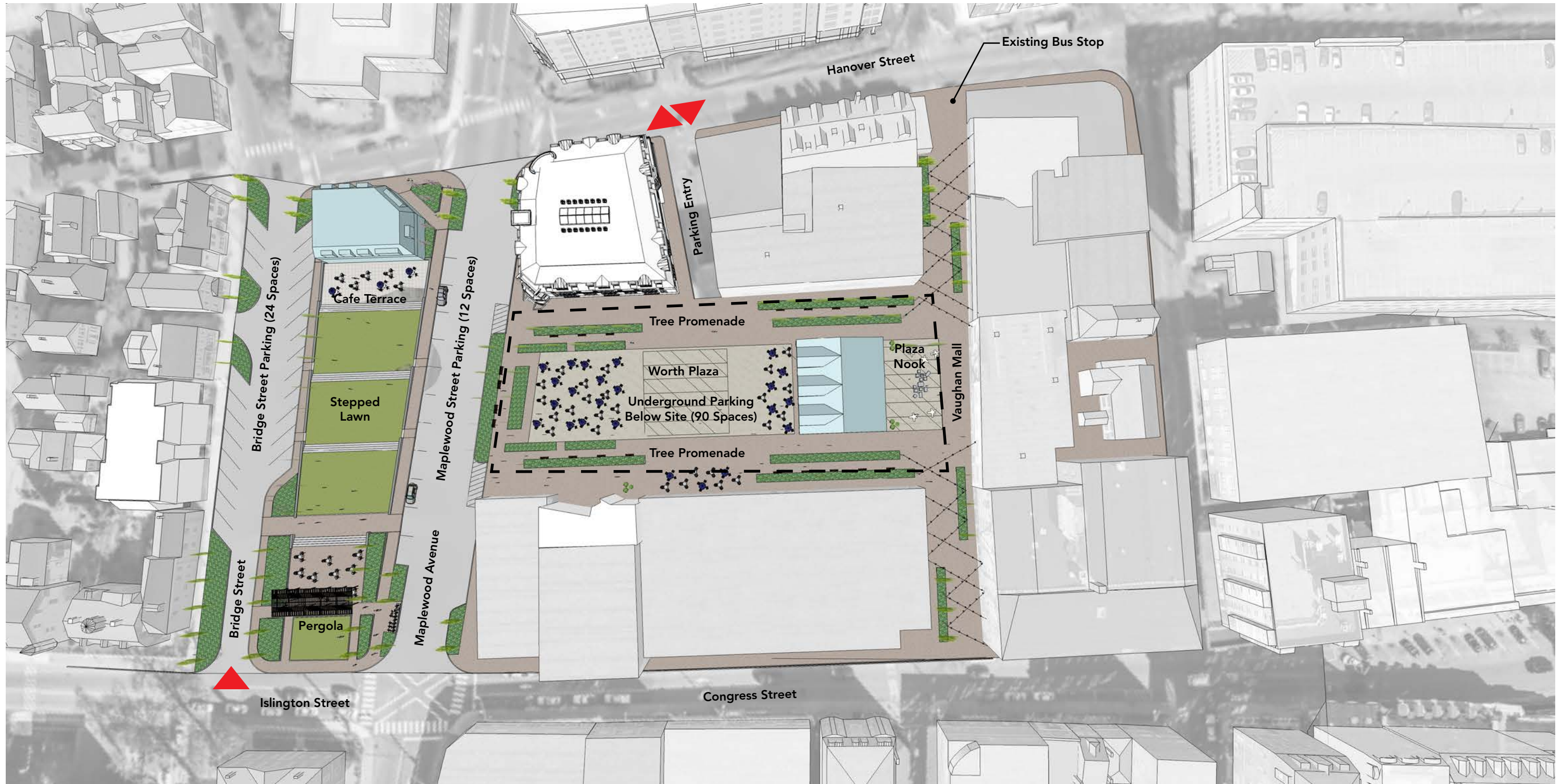


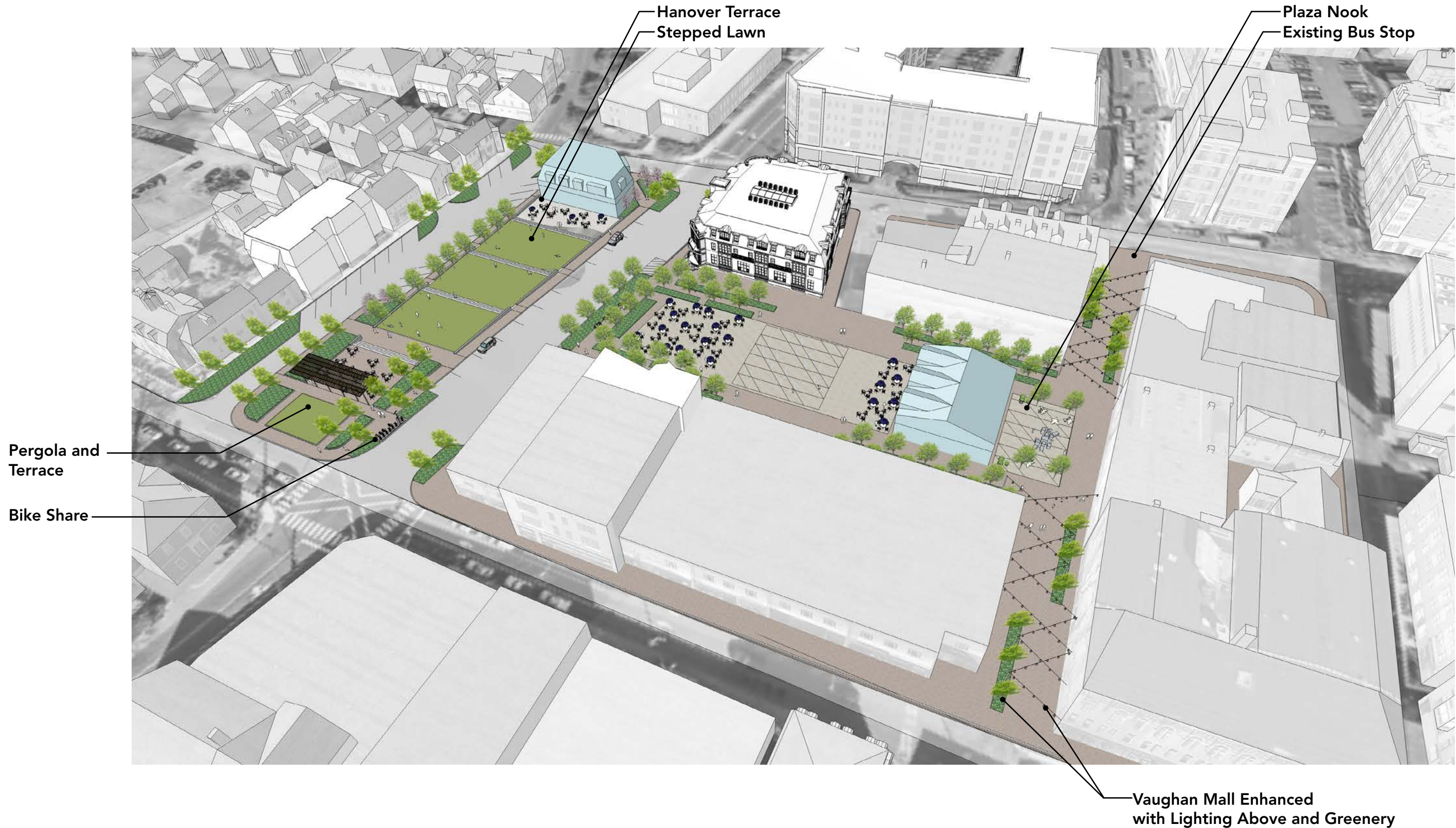
Active Building Uses



Abutter Opportunities







Restaurant at Ground Level, Parking Headhouse,
and Public Restroom Facilities



Restaurant at Ground Level
and Commercial Offices Above





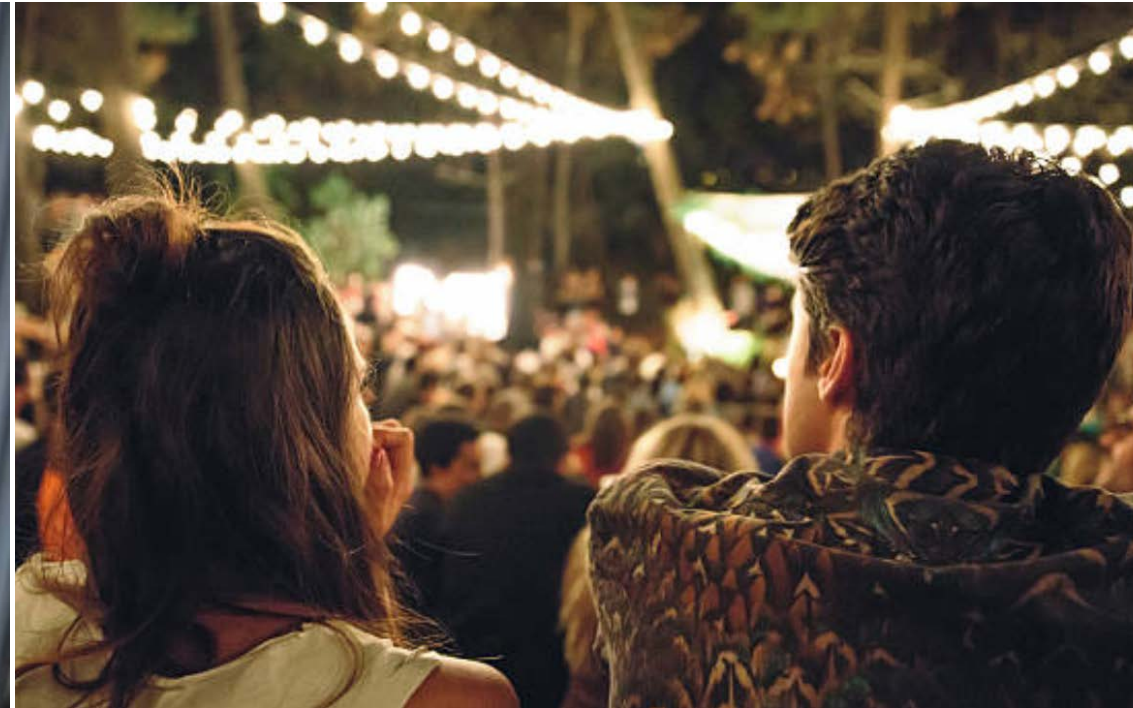
FOOD TRUCKS/CARTS

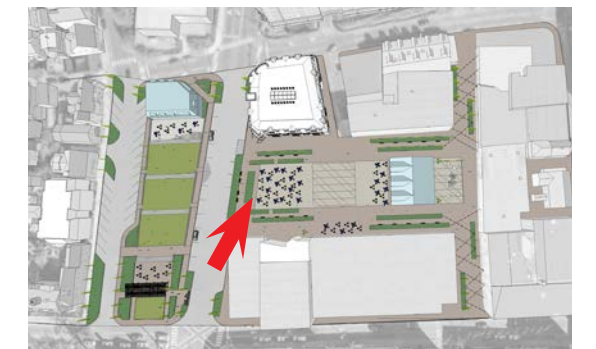


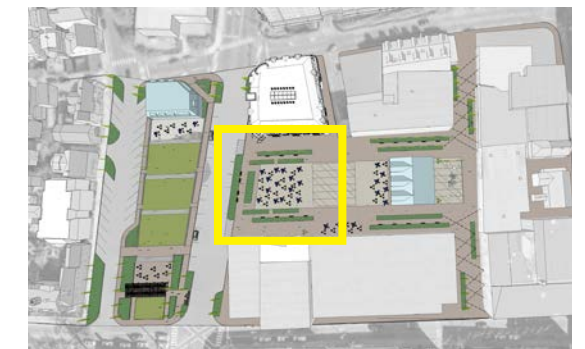
OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT

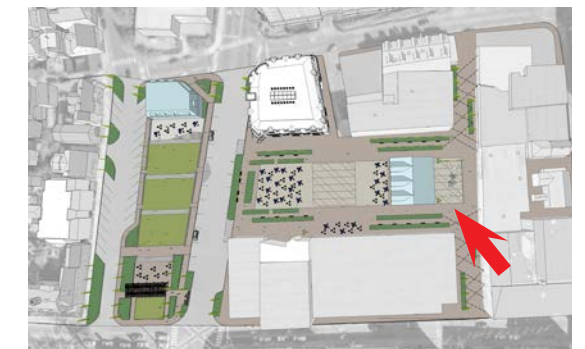


OUTDOOR SEATING FOR CAFES

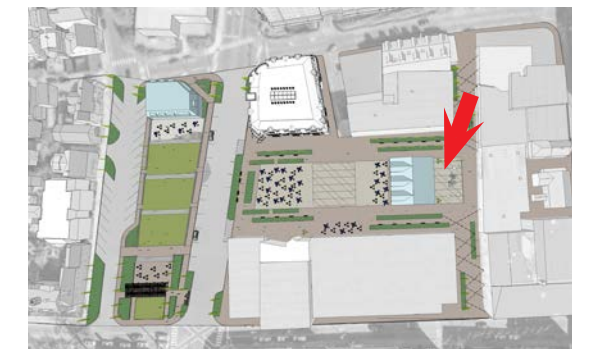




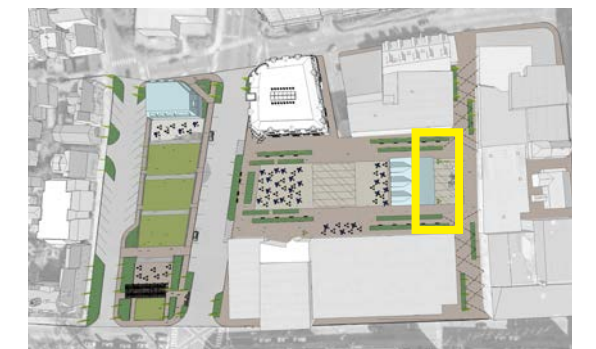


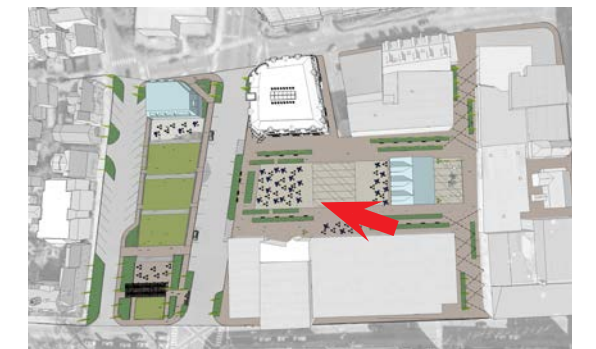


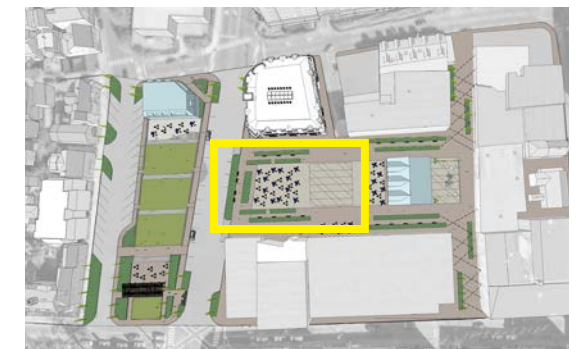
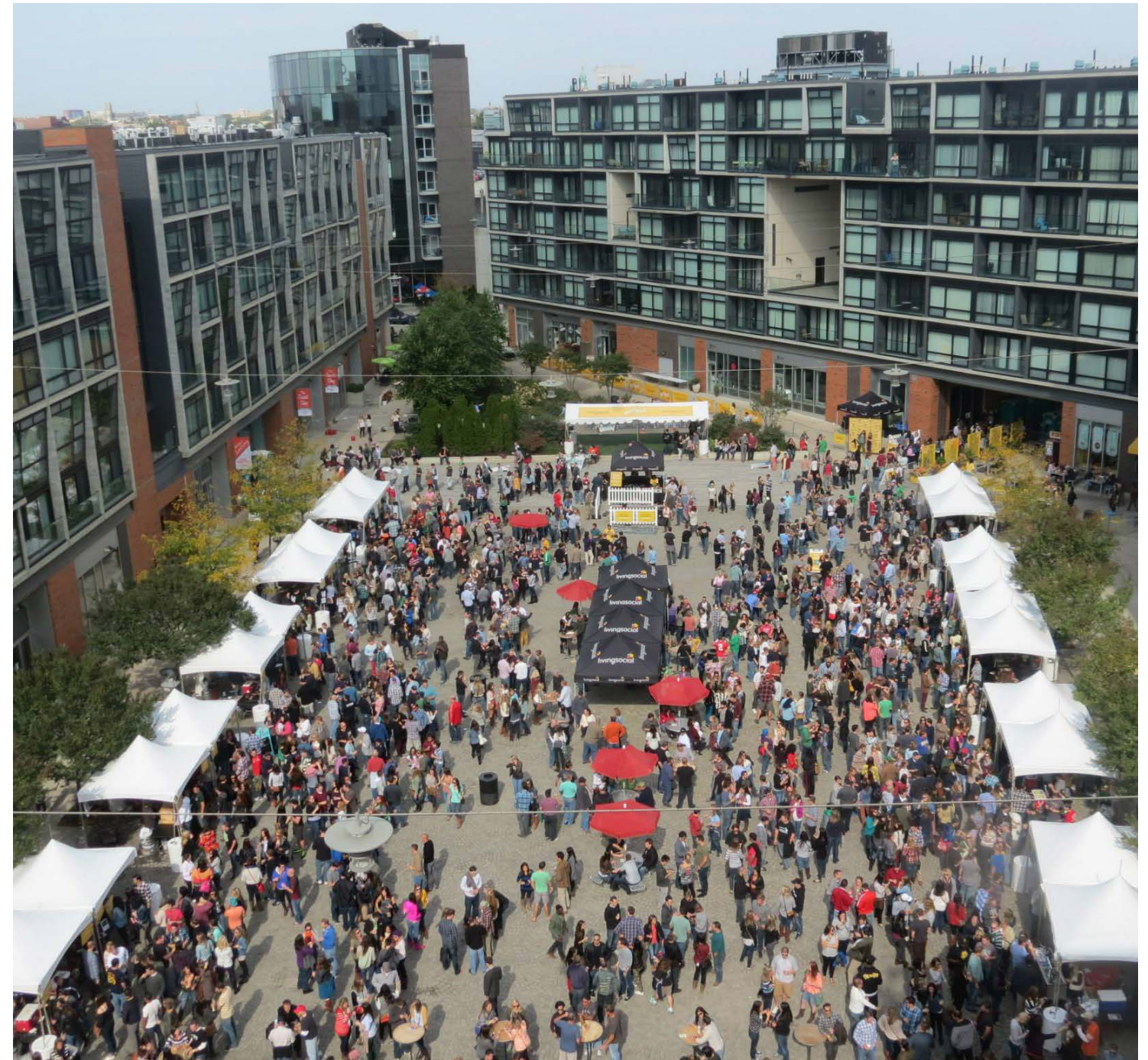
PLAZA NOOK LOOKING WEST

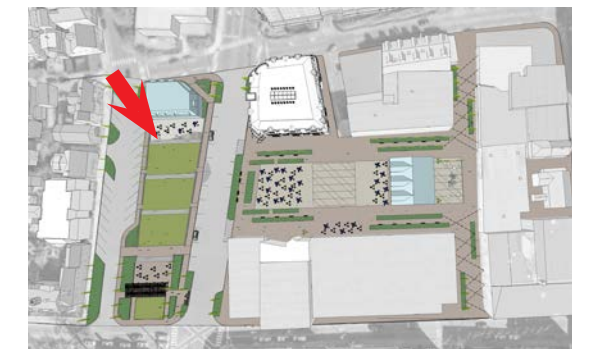


PLAZA NOOK LOOKING SOUTH







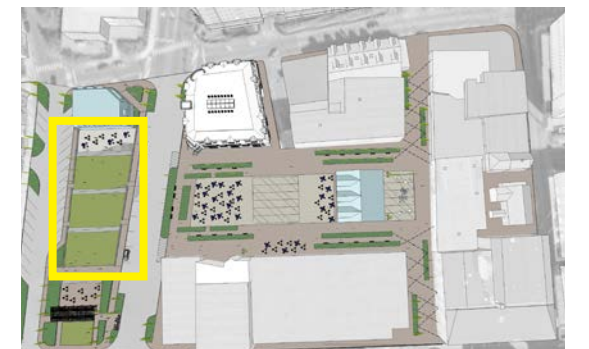


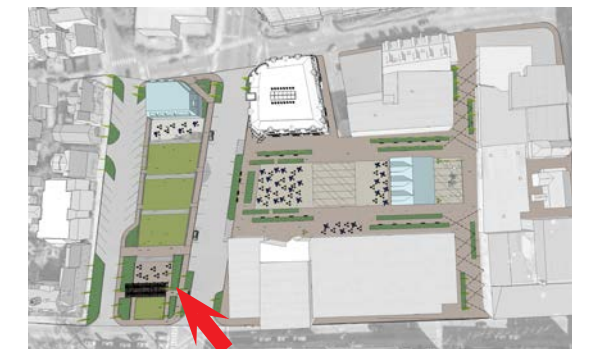


STEPPED LAWN PRECEDENT

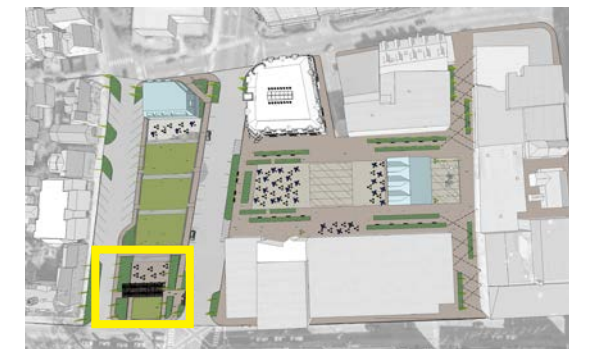


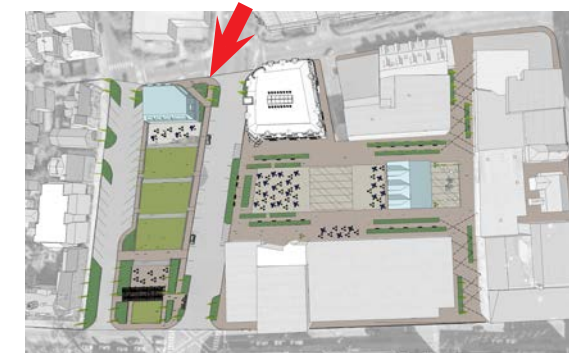
CAFE TERRACE PRECEDENT





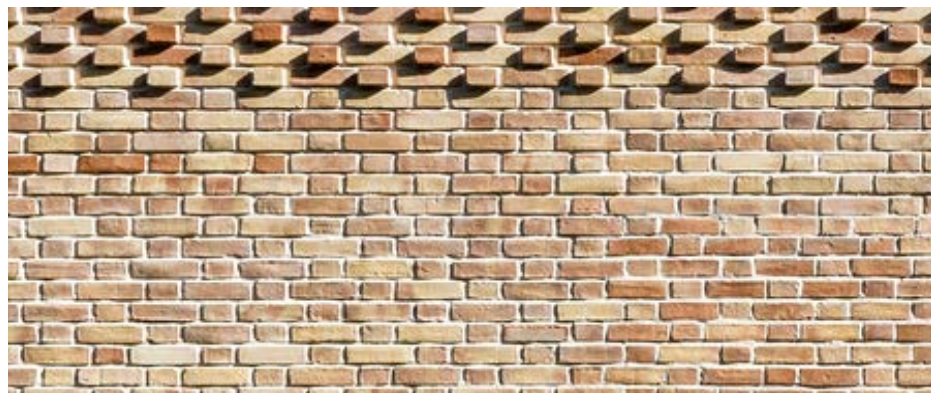








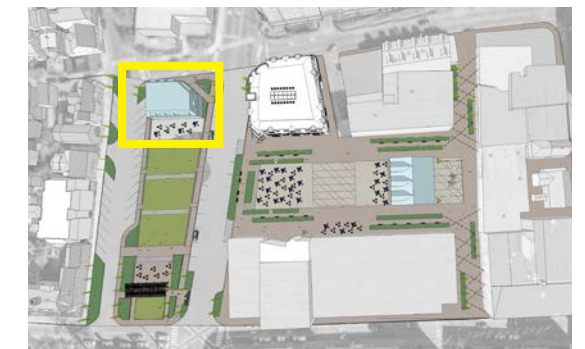
TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

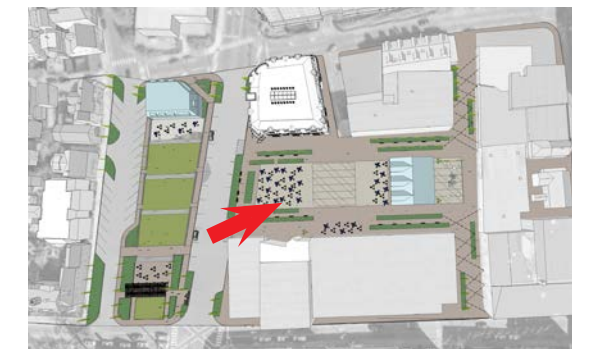


CONTEXTUAL FENESTRATIONS



SCALE AND PROPORTION OF MASSING







TRANSPARENCY BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE



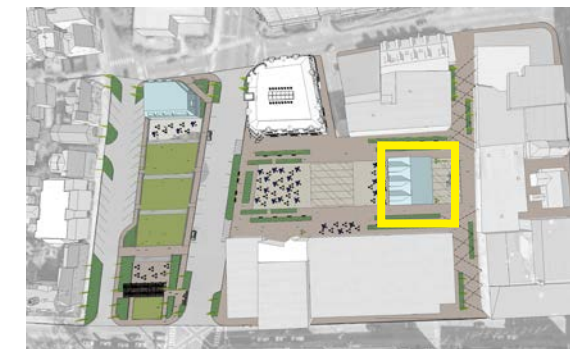
FLEXIBILITY OF USE



BRIGHT AND AIRY



TWO-STORY MIXED USE ARCHITECTURE





VISIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY



WARM, NATURAL MATERIALS



SAFETY AND LIGHTING

