Envisioning Centralville
Lowell, Massachusetts

George Proakis
Chief Planner
City of Lowell
City of Lowell

- Population: 105,167
- Population increased 11.9% since 1980
- 4th largest city in the Commonwealth
- 13.8 square miles
- 7,635 residents per square mile
- 30 miles to Boston, 20 miles to Nashua, NH, 40 miles to Worcester, MA
- Located at confluence of Rte. 3 & 495
A Brief History

- Renaissance ongoing since the 1970’s
- Creation of the National Park in 1978
- Diversification of local economy: technology, education, health care
- Symbols of rebirth: Arena, Ballpark open in 1998
- Artist loft housing
Lowell’s Downtown
Lowell National Historical Park

- First urban national park in the country
- Over 750,000 visitors per year
- Park includes: 5.6 miles of canals, textile mills, worker housing, 19th century commercial buildings, operating weave rooms, trolleys, guided tours on foot and by boat, etc.
Roving Museum

- In Boston for 16 years
- Opened in Lowell in 2002
- Community Involvement engine
Downtown Projects

Ayer Lofts: 51 units, gallery & retail
- All units sold prior to completion
- Catalyst to future development

305 Dutton: 129 Market Rate Apartments
- $14 million investment
- Walk to transit & downtown

Fairburn Building – Kearney Square
- 27 market rate condominiums under construction
  - First units complete February 2005
    - $3.5 million investment
# Downtown Projects

## Inventory of recent & current projects

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<th>Recently Completed</th>
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Total: 956
Lowell’s Neighborhoods
The Acre Neighborhood: Selected Urban Renewal with Historic Board Review
Lowell’s Neighborhoods: Traditional Development Typologies
The Neighborhoods: The Infill Housing Challenge
Neighborhood Revitalization
Hosford Square
Lowell’s
Centralville Neighborhood
Scope of Work

What is an appropriate vision for the neighborhood?

What interventions can the City of Lowell make to encourage that vision?

How might the city finance those interventions?
Project Deliverables

- Address key in-fill sites and project ideas
  - Bridge and West Sixth
  - Bridge and West Third
  - Riverfront and Gateway
- Current zoning code (specifically the NB district).
- Costs and Risks
Questions to Ask

• How should Lowell’s neighborhoods grow and evolve?
• Is there a place for neighborhood service businesses?
• What are the greatest challenges facing Centralville?
• How can the City best provide its resources to the neighborhood?
• How does the DPD bring all stakeholders to the table?
Parking Lots
Sunoco Site
Bridge and West Sixth
Farther along Bridge Street
The Residential Neighborhood
Infill Townhouses
Moulton Square
The Riverfront
Neighborhood Groups

We the people of the...

Centralville Neighborhood Action Group Say

Let's Not Forget 9/11. Support our nation, our city, and our neighborhood.
HUD

- Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA)
- Concentrates federal grant funding on implementing the plan
- Project report should be able to serve as NRSA document for the Bridge Street area
DPD Assistance to the Planning Process

- Site tour(s)
- Neighborhood group meetings and interviews
- Additional stakeholder interviews
- Presentations and feedback
Successes so far:
An introduction to Lowell’s Master Plan and Zoning
Land Use Regulation in Lowell

- May 2003: Comprehensive Master Plan
- December 2003: New code to improve structure of code, close loopholes, expand site-plan review, and ensure consistency with recent case law
- December 2004: New map, districts, dimensional table, use table, parking table building conversion ordinance and special permit requirements
- December 2005: Proposed: New Subdivision Regulations
The Lowell Zoning Ordinance

- Designed to address concerns about infill and new construction not matching neighborhood character:
  - Inappropriate multi-family housing
  - Car-centered activities and development
  - Misunderstanding between urban and suburban forms
- Interest in not shutting down development, but seeking better form of development
Masterplan Goal Chapters

- Neighborhood Quality of Live
- Lifetime of Housing Opportunities
- Unique Waterfront Environments
- Vibrant and Diverse Downtown
- Institutional and Cultural Development
- Economic Growth
- Regional Retail
- Transportation
- Sustainability
Zoning Strategies

- Innovations in setback regulations
  - Multiple front-yard setbacks, particularly in ‘traditional’ districts
  - Limitations on front-facing garage doors
  - Limitations requiring front landscaping
  - Allowances to match existing buildings on each side
ARTICLE V. DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS

SECTION 5.1 TABLE OF DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

No building or structure shall be built nor shall any existing building or structure be enlarged which does not conform to the regulations as to maximum ratio of floor area to lot area, minimum lot sizes, minimum lot area for each dwelling unit or equivalent, minimum lot frontage, minimum setback dimensions of front, side and rear yards, minimum open space, and maximum height of structures, and all other dimensional requirements in the several districts as set forth in the Table of Dimensional Regulations, except as hereinafter provided.

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* Front setbacks in these districts shall be consistent with existing setbacks on the block.
† Side and rear yard setbacks in these districts must be at least 15 feet when abutting a residentially-zoned lot.
Zoning Strategies

- Innovations in parking regulations
  - Shared parking table
  - New regulations for driveway setbacks and lawns
  - Allowing multi-family to use parking leases downtown
  - Allowing neighborhood businesses with limited on-site parking
  - Allowing for off-site parking lots to be used in some situations
Zoning Strategies

Site Plan Review and Special Permits

- More planning board review means more staff oversight
- Specific criteria for approval for site plan and special permits
- More multi-family use by special permit to allow rejection of inappropriate development
- Includes many developments created on ANR lots
- Excludes developments downtown reviewed by historic board
Zoning Strategies

- Artist’s Live-Work Overlay District
- Downtown Parking Flexibility
Zoning Strategies

- Building Conversion Ordinance
Results:
New Residential Site Plans
Results:
The Neighborhood Business Zone
The Future: Subdivision Standards

- Address different standards for different transect zones
- Design streets appropriate for pedestrians as well as vehicles
- Encourage traffic calming measures to keep traffic slow on subdivision streets
- Encourage stormwater management practices that are appropriate for the level of urban or suburban development
The Future:
Form-Based Codes for the Hamilton Canal District
The Future:
Form-Based Code for the proposed 40R Overlay District in the Acre Neighborhood
The Future: Solutions for Centralville

- Additional neighborhood planning
- Better zoning in the NB districts
- Appropriate solutions for Bridge Street
- Additional regulatory innovation for the neighborhoods of Centralville
- Traffic calming
- Incentives and financing
- Etc., etc., etc. . . .