Town of Peterborough Village Commercial District Design Charrette

May 5 & 6, 2005

PLAN NH

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Town of Peterborough
Village Commercial District
Plan NH Design Charrette
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Sponsored by
The Town of Peterborough, New Hampshire
and
The Village District Committee

Plan NH

Peterborough Charrette

Who is Plan NH?

Plan NH is a professional association established to create a forum to bring together those focused on the built environment and interested in community development. Plan NH members include architects, planners, engineers, landscape architects, bankers, contractors, historic preservationists, and others. A principle aspect of Plan NH's mission is to make a positive contribution to New Hampshire communities. One way in which Plan NH is doing this is by offering each year pro-bono design assistance to New Hampshire communities with demonstrated needs.

What is a Design Charrette?

Simply stated, a design charrette is a brainstorming session where lots of ideas are brought forth by both professional designers and local citizens, in an attempt to resolve a problem of local interest. Because of the compressed time frame, the recommendations reached are usually conceptual. Recommendations present the relationship of different plan elements, as opposed to the details of how a particular building would actually be constructed. The charrette process blends the broad experience of design professionals with local citizens' detailed knowledge of their community to produce a plan of action to address a particular development issue of the community. The charrette provides an overall framework in which final solutions can be developed and gives a direction against which future decisions can be measured. The Plan NH charrettes are typically two day workshops that produce a number of design ideas and possible solutions, which are documented in booklets and presented to the town to be used as a starting point in their design process.

Why did Plan NH come to Peterborough?

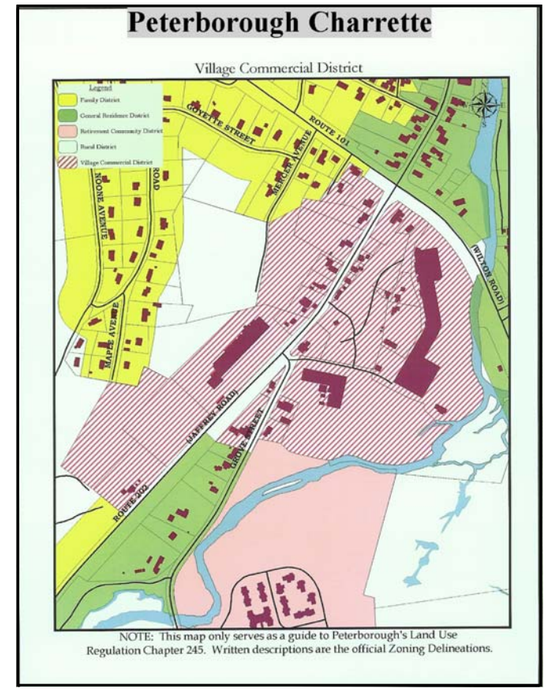
Each year Plan NH invites communities to submit proposals outlining a community design opportunity. The proposals are examined and three are chosen for a weekend charrette consisting of volunteer professionals to brainstorm and develop creative ideas addressing a problem of local interest. Plan NH assesses the proposals on the basis of: importance of the project to the host community, interest in the design problem, and probability of actually being implemented. Communities that are organized, have done some early work on a project, thought out its needs, and how it would implement the recommendations are favored by the selection committee.

The Proposal

"The Town believes that this area is very likely to undergo dramatic changes in the near future, and that what happens here will be critical to the future economic vitality of Peterborough."

Responding to the development pressures and interest on the land around the Rt. 101/202 intersection, Peterborough completed a Master Plan in 2004 that established the 'Village Commercial District', (VCD). This area, of approximately 60 acres, is adjacent to the downtown district on the Contoocook River located at the junction of Routes 202 and 101. The Village District Committee applied to Plan NH for assistance in taking the next step to take a closer look at the opportunities for development and possible solutions to the challenges of the area.

In February, 2005 the Town of Peterborough submitted an *Application for Design Assistance* to Plan NH. The Village Commercial District is viewed as the greatest opportunity for economic growth in the town and is presently facing strong development pressures from major retail corporations. The VCD is made up of several land parcels owned by various stakeholders. A strip mall development presently occupies the largest parcel. The building on this parcel is leased by a Stop & Shop, Brooks Pharmacy, Shaws Supermarkets, and several small retail businesses. Smaller parcels located along 202 are owned by Stop & Shop, Brooks, Ocean Bank, and residential land owners. The Master Plan also included another strip mall and parcel in the VCD, located further to the south along 202.



End of bike path and Contookoock River along the edge of the VCD

The proposal sought assistance with the development of a Master Plan for the Village Commercial District and recommended that the charettte consider:

- the establishment of a new street grid for the area,
- related traffic pattern issues
- “tax positive” types of development
- the physical design of buildings
- the installation of a district-wide stormwater management system.
- recreational opportunities along the Contoocook River

The Charrette Process

On Friday and Saturday, May 5th and 6th, eleven charrette team members, town officials, and community members met in the Town House in downtown Peterborough to brainstorm ideas for the Village Commercial District (VCD). Friday morning the design team met with representatives from the Board of Selectmen and the Community Development Department at the Town House. Plans and aerial photographs were printed for the team using the town’s GIS. A brief discussion as held describing the property ownership, zoning, watershed, wetlands and other attributes of the district. The Director of Community Development also explained the recent development proposals and applications.

The team members then took a walking tour of the VCD to view the properties and buildings included in the design program. This gave the charrette team an opportunity to walk the entire land area, experience the vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns, view existing buildings, and the Contoocook River.

Two discussion sessions, open to the community,

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AT PUBLIC LISTENING SESSIONS

TRAFFIC

- Too much vehicle Traffic at the intersection Rt. 101/202
- Entrance/exit to shopping center and 101 is a traffic problem
- Establish Internal street grid
- Re-use old DOT bridges
- Traffic calming needed
- Connect Maple Street to 202 west of intersection

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

- Universal access
- Dangerous pedestrian crossing at 101, improve pedestrian safety
- Pedestrian links to Rivermead and existing pedestrian walkway/ bike path along river
- Access to the River

BUILDING TYPES

- Higher density, mixed used, mixed income
- Multi Story buildings
- Limit footprint scale of buildings
- Multi generational
- Historic buildings on 202 should be saved
- Historic buildings on 202 should be razed
- Sustainable design principles should be used

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

- Preserve character of Downtown Peterborough
- Link area to Downtown
- Create a ‘gateway’ to the downtown area

were held later on Friday, one in the early afternoon and another in the evening. This process is essential to the development of the project vision, the formulation of ideas and recommendations and community consensus building for the future implementation. Many citizens took advantage of this opportunity to voice their opinions, share ideas, and impart local knowledge regarding the many issues included in the design program. During these session the primary objective of the charrette team was to listen and record the comments and ideas expressed. During the 'Public Listening Sessions' many ideas and concerns were brought forth focusing on traffic, Pedestrian access, building types, and development character

At the conclusion of the evening session the design team had a good understanding of the needs, opportunities, and constraints surrounding the VCD and began to prepare concept plans, sketches, cost analysis, and strategies to be presented at a public forum on Saturday afternoon.

The Issues

Traffic:

The issues of traffic speeds, congestion and flow were at the forefront of the comments and perceived problems. There were several 'problem sites' that effected the traffic patterns around and within the VCD: Granite Street and 101 intersection; 101 and 202 intersection; traffic cut-through from the Stop & Shop parking lot to Grove Street/202W intersection.

Granite Street is a small, local road that provides a bypass around the downtown to Rt. 101. However, many drivers passing through choose to drive through the downtown area rather than take Granite St. The intersection at Granite St. and 101 is not signalized and the speeds at which vehicle are traveling on 101 make the turn onto that road very hazardous.

Traffic at the intersection and through the site is a problem; The volume of cars and trucks circulating through the intersection at peak evening hours reached over 950 traveling on 101 and 700 traveling on 202. This intersection was deemed to operate over ca-

pacity by an independent traffic study completed in late 2001. This is a signalized intersection with dedicated right turn lanes. The pedestrian crossings at the intersection, in all directions, are unsafe. The team noted that a pedestrian, attempting to cross 101, (heading towards the VCD), would first need to cross the right turn lane in order to operate the pedestrian signal button located in the traffic island. This intersection presented a virtual barrier to pedestrian flow from the downtown area to the VCD.

The team heard from many participants suggesting an established street grid within the VCD area. Presently many vehicles enter into the parking lot from 101, circulate along the river to the back of the strip mall, connect to a small road running along the west side of the shopping center, and ultimately to 202 west. This 'cut-through' is the principle cause of traffic problems at 202 and the continuation of Grove Street, (west of the 202/101 intersection). The road connecting to the parking lot and Grove is privately owned by the Peterborough Basket Company, who has agreed to allow delivery trucks to access the shopping center via this route. This intersection is further complicated by vehicles crossing 202 from the Monadnock Plaza shopping center located on the west side of 202.

Pedestrian Access:

The pedestrian safety issues expressed were intrinsically linked to the traffic calming needs of the major routes. Improving the pedestrian access and safety would be a major component to vehicular traffic solutions Other pedestrian access needs were discussed including connecting the existing walking trail, providing access along the Contoocook River, and connecting to Rivermead, an assisted living community located along 202 west.

End of Bike path from downtown to VCD

End of bike path heading west along Rt. 202

The existing walking and bike trail is presently made up of two segments, with the 'missing link' occurring at the VCD. North of the downtown the trail extends from Hancock, , follows and old rail right of way through the down town, under the 101 Contoocook River bridge to end at the Stop & Shop parking lot. The trail then picks up again at Grove Street and 202 and continues on the rail bed along 202. It was agreed that the Master Plan for the VCD must include linking the trail segments together. This new trail segment would also provide pedestrian access along the portion of the Contoocook River that borders the VCD.

Several participants discussed the desire to provide a walking path from Rivermead to the VCD or linking to the existing trail. This would provide a safe and enjoyable pathway to the new VCD development for the many senior residents of Rivermead. Currently there is no safe pedestrian route to and from this area.

Building Types:

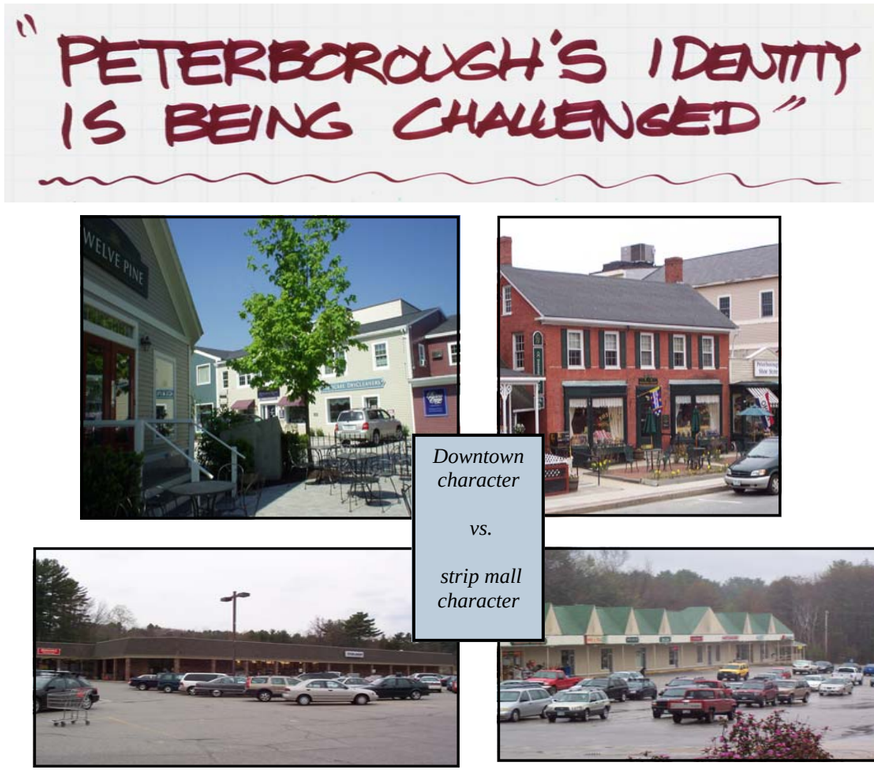
As a starting point, the general consensus for the new development in the VCD was to maintain the current use, retail, and possibly add office space and residential on upper floors, for a mixed use program. In addition, the structures should be 2-3 stories and maintain a scale and density compatible with the downtown building masses. Although specific architecture was not discussed, the character of Peterborough should be reflected in the new buildings. Sustainability and environmentally friendly design was also mentioned.

Historic dwellings along Rt. 202

There are several houses along the 202 edge of the VCD that are candidates for historic registration. Two opposing opinions were expressed on the topic of preserving these structures. While not outstanding examples of period architecture the opinion to preserve these structures was based on the age, dating to the late 1800's. On the other side of the argument, the opinion was that the structures were in poor condition, not especially attractive, and the land could be better used.

Historic Victorian farmhouse along Rt. 202

The town is presently in the process of approving an application from Brooks Pharmacy to construct a new 11,000 square foot store adjacent to the bank on the southeast corner of the 101/202 intersection. This structure follows the standard one-story architecture conventions used by the company. There was some discussion on ways to 'hide' this building.



Development Character and Identity:

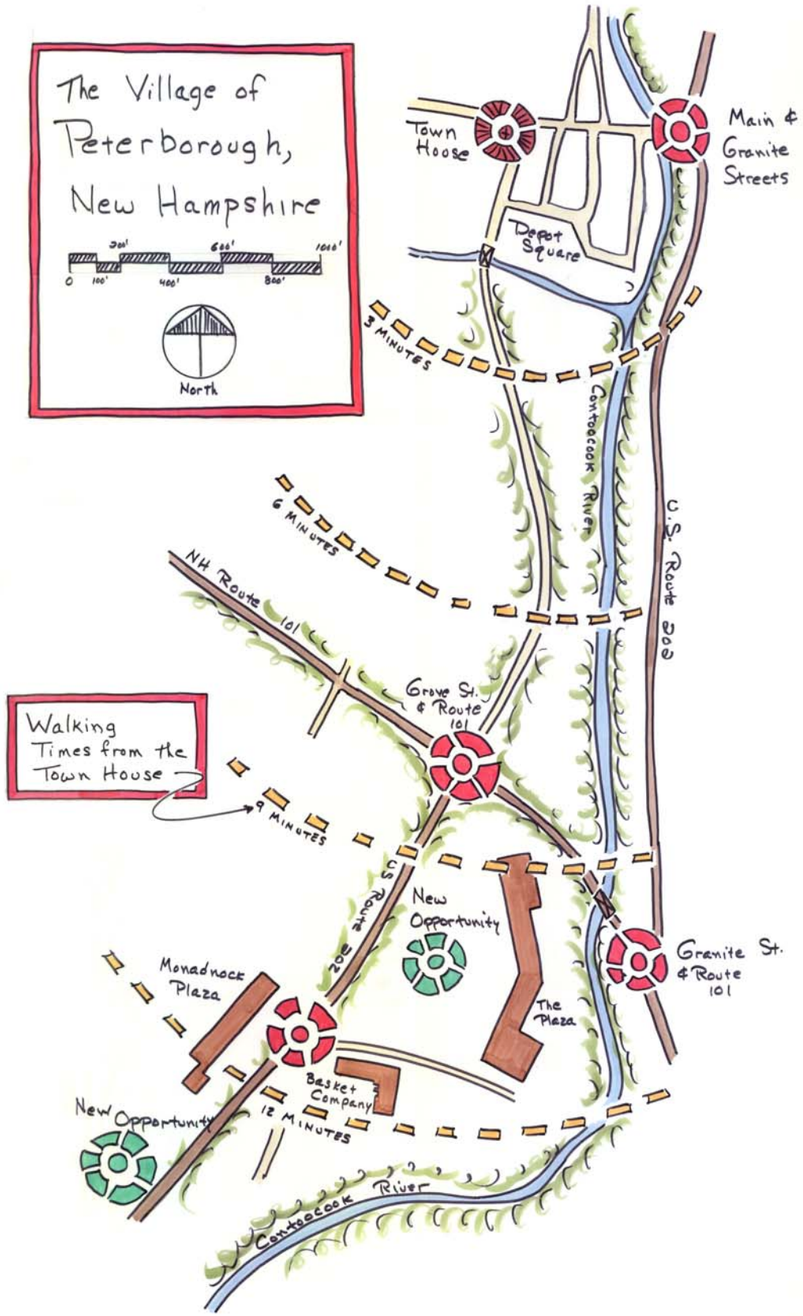
The preservation of the Character of Peterborough is perhaps the single most critical concern surrounding the issues involved in the charrette challenges. The message that "Peterborough's identity is being challenged" by the development pressures came through loud and clear. Images of sprawl and "big box" development along with the realization of the value and economics of 'character' are prompting the effort to preserve this identity. The VCD development needs to become a part of the downtown linked both physically and aesthetically.

The intersection of 101 and 202 is considered and important gateway to the town. The town recognizes that the opportunity to change the character of this gateway and establish it as a part of the downtown area is imminent. . Presently however this intersection, primarily Rt. 101, acts as an edge and barrier separating the downtown and the VCD. At the intersection, traveling west, there is a definite sense of having left the downtown district, the scale, architecture, and sense of place is lost. The new development ideas will be required to recapture the elements of Peterborough character in order to successfully link the VCD to the downtown area. Understanding those elements that make up the attractive look and feel of downtown Peterborough will steer the new development design guidelines

Recommendations and Options

In an afternoon meeting on Saturday May 6th, the Charrette team presented their ideas to the public. The team looked at the project from several aspects and divided the presentation into tasks as follows;

- **Economic Overview**
- **Overall Context**
- **Traffic Calming Solutions , Pedestrian/ Bicycle Safety**
- **Site Planning Ideas for the major VCD area (Peterborough Plaza)**
- **Site Planning ideas for the Monadnock Plaza Area**

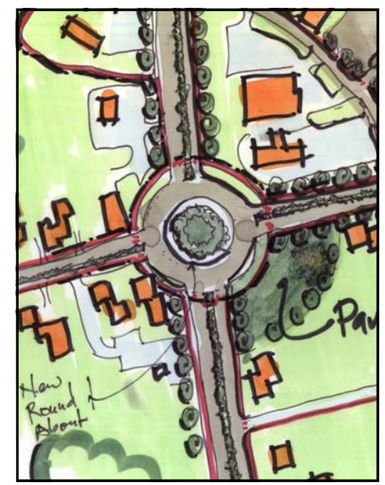


Context

The Charrette team noted that although the areas west of Rt. 101 and 202 are cognitively separated from the downtown core, the walking distance from The Peterborough Town House along Grove Street to the VCD was only approximately a 9 minute walk at a leisurely pace. The design team suggested that with pedestrian and traffic improvements this 'walkable' proximity of the VCD and the downtown area could unite the two districts as one 'village core'.

Traffic Calming and Pedestrian Safety

At the suggestion of the VCC, the team looked at replacing the 101/202 intersection with a traffic roundabout. This idea was unanimously agreed upon to solve many of the intersection vehicle and pedestrian traffic issues.;



New roundabout concept at intersection of Rt.101 and 202

- Roundabouts are designed to be as small as possible for the environment and traffic load, reducing the design speed of the road to approximately 18 mph.
- The roundabout will cause traffic approaching the intersection to slow down.
- The roundabout would also eliminate traffic back-up by elimination the signals and allowing a continuous vehicle flow.
- Intervals between vehicles in any given direction would be increased, allowing easier turning to and from side streets and parking lots.
- Roundabouts reduce vehicle to vehicle conflicts 50% to 90% over signalized intersections.
- Pedestrian safety would be significantly improved by requiring the pedestrian to cross only one lane at a time and providing a refuge island between lanes.
- The center of the roundabout could become a green space for a gateway signage, public art, or street trees.
- Roundabouts require no signalization and are relatively inexpensive to build and maintain.

Economic Overview

The charrette recommendations were focused on a mixed-use development which included retail, housing and office space, however would the market support this type of development? The team needed to gain a general understanding of the economics of Peterborough and the demands for the future. One of the team members involved in real estate development researched and compiled the data that would guide the development concepts.

Population and Income

The data revealed that within the central area of Peterborough the median income was below the regional average, however further from the center the income level rose.

Miles from center	Population	Growth Ave. '00-'09	Income
1	2,259	1%	$57,210
3	5,338	3%	$62,279
5	8,249	5%	$65,097
10	28,736	13%	$70,549

The income data was analyzed to asses the housing market for the proposed condominium/townhouse type of housing. The sales of condominiums and/or condexes were averaged at $225,000, and were sold out prior to completion. This would imply a demand for this kind of housing. At $225,000 a monthly payment of $1,416 + taxes of $626 + $250 for utilities and maintenance leads to $27,495 per year for housing costs or $83,318 annual salary, either strong wage earner or two wage earners. Even at $175,000 price point, the household income is $65,857. What this data is suggesting is an influx of population from outskirts of downtown or other areas of the region.

The strongest potential for the residential market is for professional residential and work site combined (live/work) and condominiums for working families, both are teachers or work at the hospital

Retail

The current retail in the downtown is generally small service retail, with some boutiques and locally owned restaurants. There are a couple large chain stores located in the VCD and on the outskirts of downtown. Vacancy is close to 0 for retail and around 10-15% for office.

Rents for retail space is currently as follows:

Peterborough Plaza Retail	$10 to $12 /sf NNN
Depot Square Shops	$14 to $16 /sf NNN
Office downtown	$15 NNN

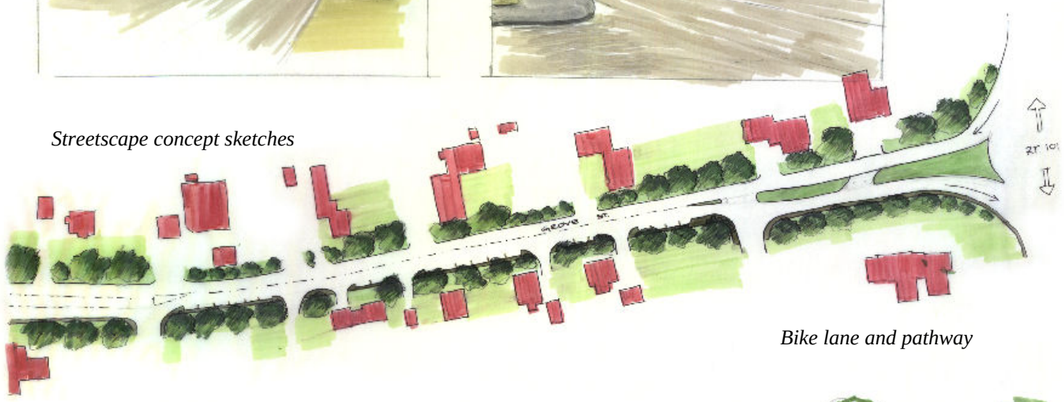
The strongest retail market potential according to the data if for local boutiques, small chains and casual restaurants. There is also a need for a large grocery store near the center.

Regional Retail:

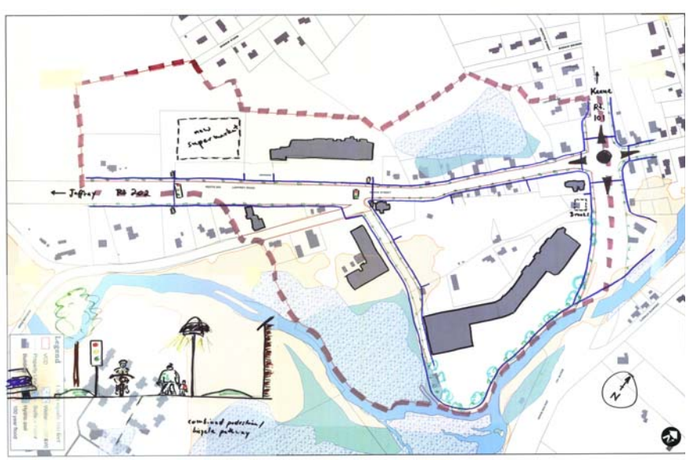
- Grocery Store of 55,000 s/f, needs new site
- Regional Clothing
  - Talbots
  - Coldwater Creek
  - J Jill
- Casual Theme Restaurants
  - Chicago Bar and Grill
  - Applebees
  - Steak houses
- Automotive Supply
- Appliance store if combined with strong service

Small specialty retail shop in downtown Depot Square

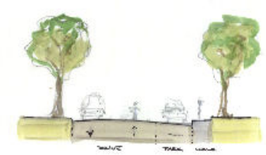
Streetscape concept sketches



Bike lane and pathway



Bike route recommendations



Concepts for traffic calming and streetscape enhancements were recommended. These ideas included;

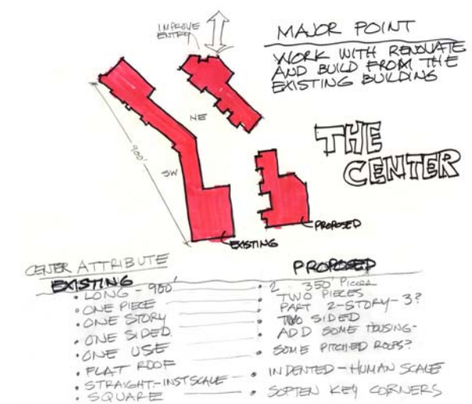
- On-street parking
- Corner curb extensions
- Street trees
- Bike lane
- Defined, curbed sidewalks
- Clearly marked crosswalks

Site Planning Ideas for the Major VCD Area (Peterborough Plaza)

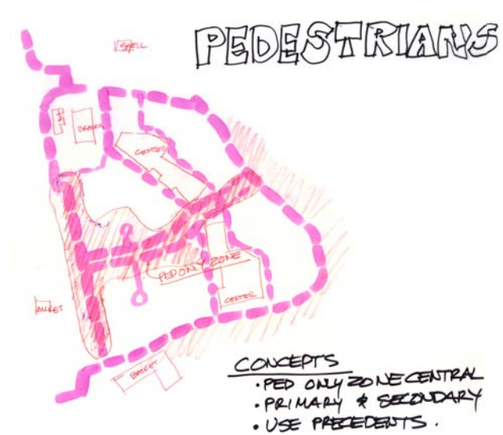
The concept plan for the VCD Peterborough Plaza area pulled together many of the ideas, suggestions and needs that were expressed during the two days.

In addition to a roundabout at the 101/202 intersection the plan recommended a new street network within the VCD. This new pattern would provide an increase in street frontage for new retail and commercial development within the VCD, as well as additional choices for routes of travel, thus easing the congestion at the roundabout. The team also recommended extending Maple Street to intersect Rt.202 to be integrated into the new street network.

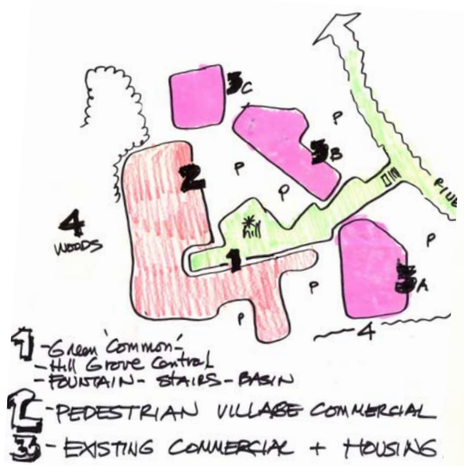
The decision was made to split apart the existing structure, maintaining parts for revitalization through additions and architectural treatments. The 'new' buildings would be multi story structures with retail on the first level.

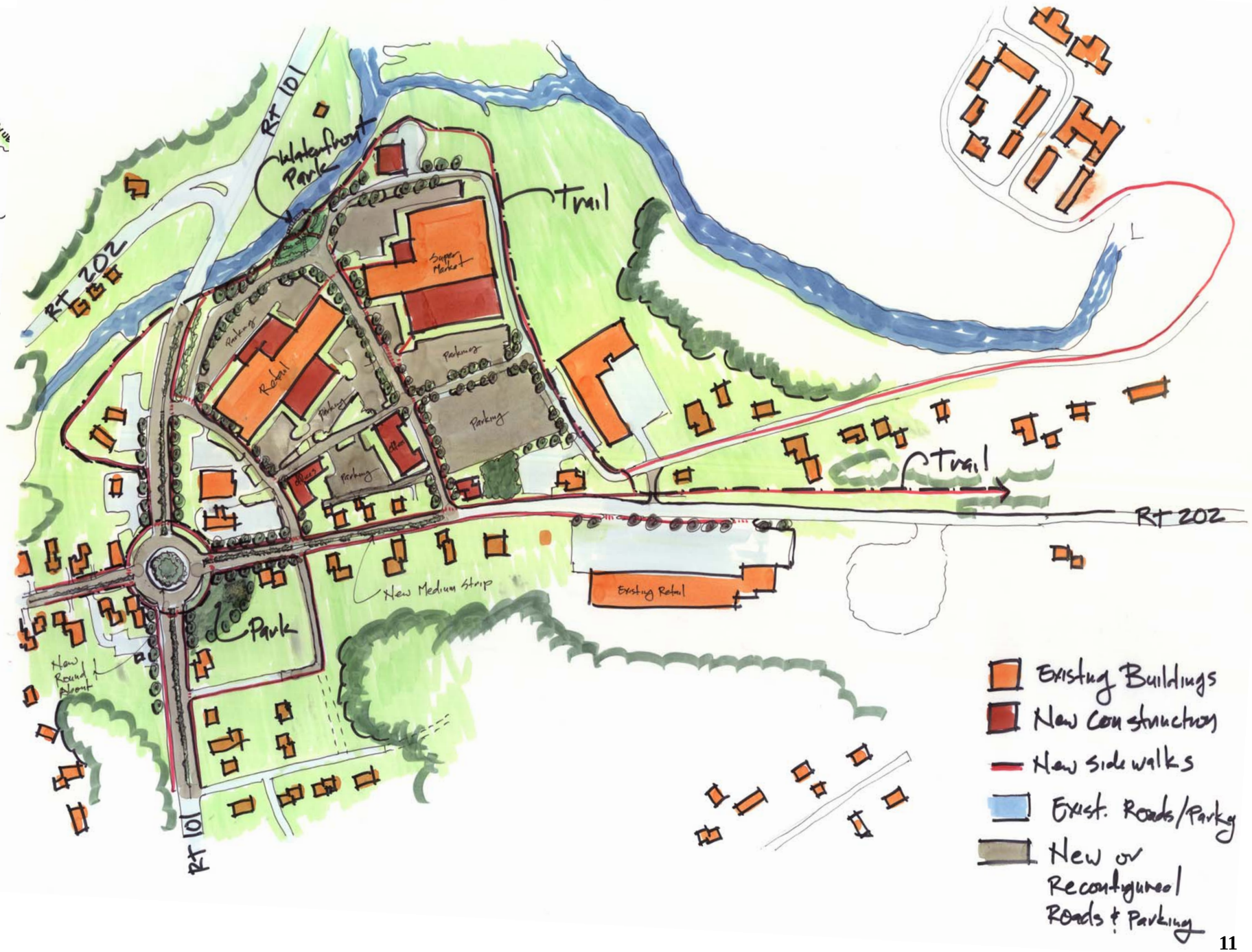


Introducing interconnected green space was an important aspect of the concept. The plan proposed to link the existing bike route along the river and develop a waterfront park. A pedestrian path following Grove Street to Rivermead was also recommended.



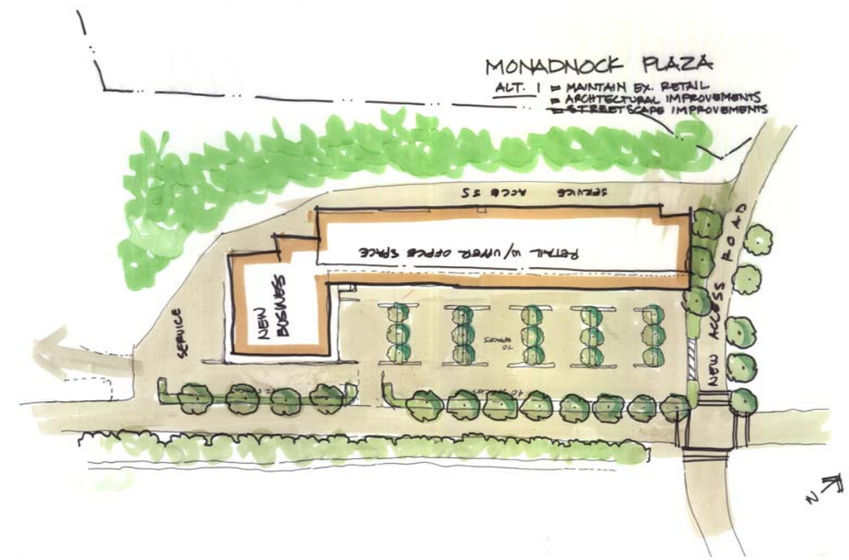
Conceptual Plan for the Peterborough Village Commercial District





Site Planning ideas for the Monadnock Plaza Area

Two alternatives were explored for the Monadnock Plaza site. The alternatives addressed the issues of strengthening the street edge along the expansive parking lot, recommendations for architectural enhancements, alternative land uses, and Rt. 202/Grove Street intersection treatment.

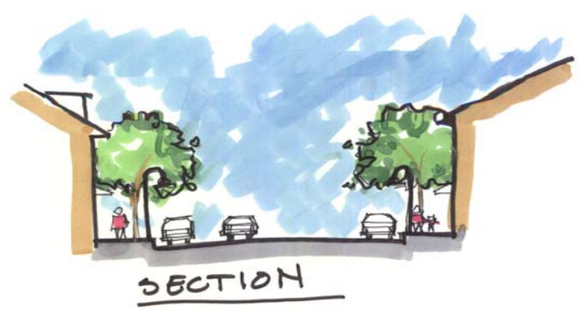


Plan Alternate One

- Maintained the existing buildings with the addition of a second story and architectural enhancements
- Add palnting to parking lot
- Street trees along Rt 202 to define street edge
- Possible connection to adjacent development parcel to west
- Defined intersection with Grove Street and Rt.202, New road extension connecting to Maple Ave.
- Relocate entrance to Parking

Plan Alternate Two

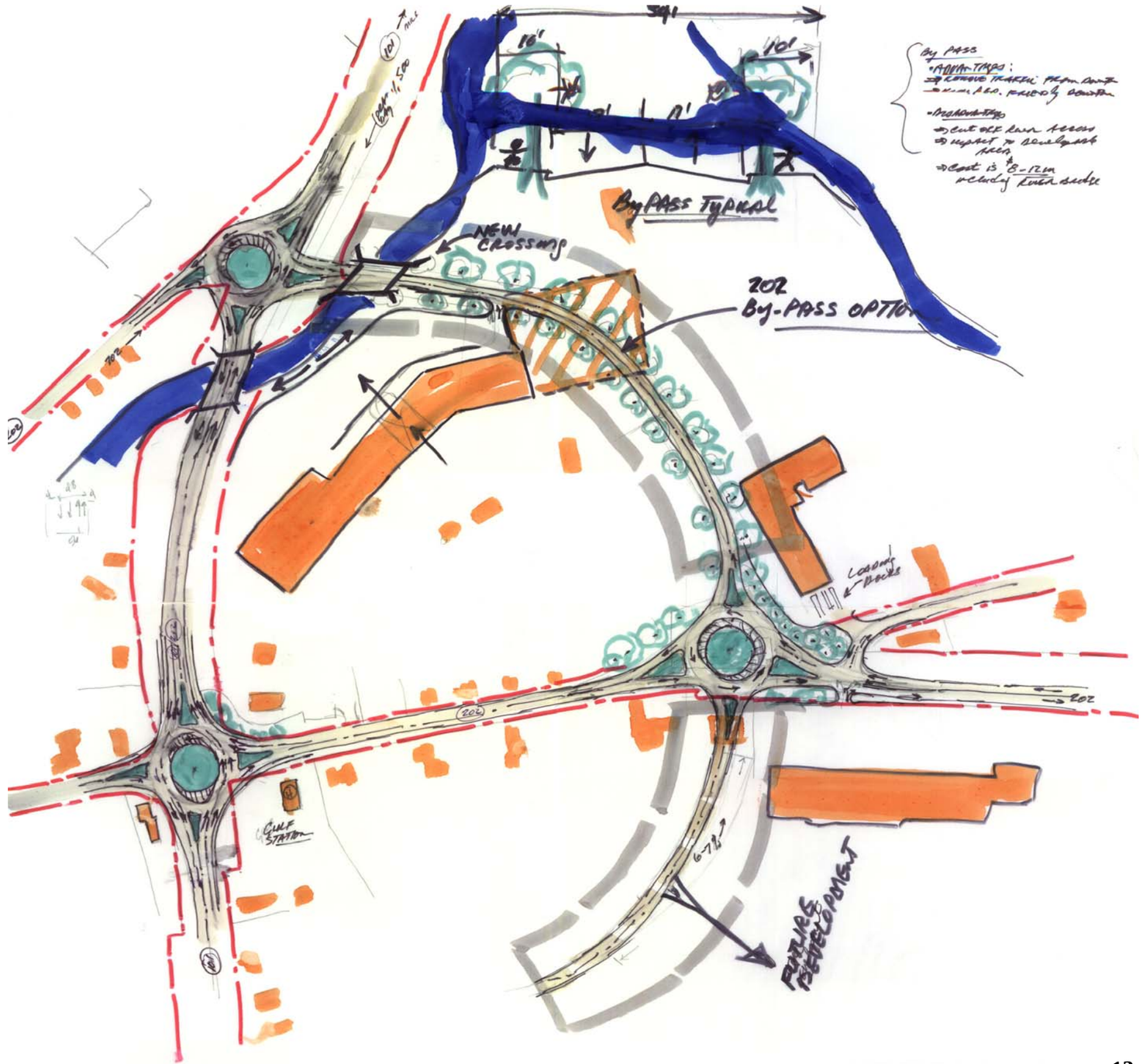
- Change use to Townhouses and live/work units with small service retail
- Locate new structure closer to road to create street-scape edge.
- Street trees along 202
- Interior road with parallel parking
- Possible connection to adjacent development parcel to west
- Defined intersection with Grove Street and Rt.202, New road extension connecting to Maple Ave.



Other ideas: 101 Bypass Road

The Charrette team explored the option of a new by-pass road that would link Rt. 101 and Rt.202 west of the existing intersection. This roadway would reduce traffic at the intersection by giving drivers the option of taking the by-pass to head west on 202 or south on 101. The road would intersect Rt.101 at Granite Street , skirt the southwest edge of the VCD, and intersect 202 at Grove Street.

The team agreed, however that the negative impacts of this option outweighed the positive. A cursory examination of constructability revealed that the bypass would be a massive structure crossing the Contoocook River. The elevated grade at 101 and Granite, compared to the existing grade at the VCD area would require an elevated roadway and considerable earthwork to meet Rt.202. Not only would the by-pass be aesthetically obtrusive, it was agreed that the probable cost of building this road would out weigh the traffic reduction benefits.



Next Steps:

The recommendations clearly involve the decisions and consensus of many public agencies and stakeholders. Sorting out what should and could be done first is a critical step towards implementation. Often it is the small improvements that are the catalysts for bigger changes. The flowing list, developed by the charrette team, includes action items which are easily accomplished in the near future along with long range tasks. Resources for services and funding are also listed below.

1. Start

- Plant flowers around the VCD area, intersections, bridge railings, pedestrian crossings
- Institute traffic calming measures
- Construct bike way link through VCD
- Meet with NHDOT to discuss street improvements and funding strategies
- Meet with landowners and stakeholders to encourage involvement and consensus building

2. Financing

- NHDOT
- RBOG—Rural Development (Rural Business Opportunity Grant)
- CDBG - Community Development Block Grant
- EDA

3. Resources

- **NH Department of Transportation** a source of public funding for state road improvements

  Ms. Carol Murray Commissioner
  NH DOT
  Hazen Drive
  Concord, NH 03301

- **Rural Development Administration** provides low interest loans and grants for municipal projects

  Mr. Rob McCarthy
  U.S. Rural Development Administration
  Ferry Street
  Concord, NH 03301

- **NH Division of Historic Resources** may be used as a source for historic property advice and expertise

  Mr. Jim Garvin
  State Architectural Historian
  NH Division of Historic Resources
  19 Pillsbury Street
  Concord, NH 03001

- **NH Business Finance Authority** is a source for tax-exempt bonding and other subsidies for private and non-profit investment

  Mr., Jack Donovan
  NH Business Finance Authority
  14 Dixon Avenue
  Concord, NH 03301

- **NH Community Development Finanace** Authority is a source fort ax credits fro pubically supported projects

  Mr. Paul Denton
  NH Community Development Finanace Authority
  14 Dixon Avenue
  Concord, NH 03301

- **NH Community Development Block Grant Program** provides grants and loans to projects which assist low to moderate income residents.

  Ms. Pat Garvin
  NH Community Development Block Grant Program
  14 Dixon Avenue
  Concord, NH 03301

- **NH Municipal Bond Bank** provides low interest funds for publicly bonded projects

  Mr. George Zoukee
  NH Municipal Bond Bank
  10 Park Street
  Concord, NH 03301