

Methuen Technical Assistance Panel, June 18, 2015



City of Methuen, Massachusetts



About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

Mission

To provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI is a research and education institution with nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

ULI at the local level

- Boston/New England District Council covers nearly all of New England
- Over 1,200 Members—developers, architects, planners, public officials, financiers, students, etc.



Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

City of Methuen, MA

ULI Boston/New England is committed to supporting communities in making sound land use decisions and creating better places. A TAP brings together a group of ULI members with a range of professional expertise to provide focused, collaborative consultation to a local government or qualifying non-profit organization.

This TAP

- **Sponsored by the City of Methuen and MassDevelopment.**
- This panel looked at the full range of options from an unbiased perspective.
- Panelists include experts in the fields of architecture, development, design, planning, and transportation planning.
- **Panelists have donated their time**
- Final Deliverable – Written report (8 weeks) will be available at <http://boston.uli.org>



The Panel

Larry Spang, Co-Chair

Principal
Arrowstreet
Boston, MA

James Shanley, Co-Chair

Newburyport, MA

Meera Deean

Urban Designer & Project Manager
Utile
Boston, MA

Kristina Johnson

Manager of Transportation Planning
Howard Stein Hudson
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City Planner,
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Panel Sponsors



MASSDEVELOPMENT
Build. Create. Innovate.

Panel Assignment – Address these questions

Market Issues

What strategic marketing approach should be utilized to attract appropriate developers to the project area?

Planning & Design

What zoning should be in place to attract the kind of development desired? What methods can help the City maintain the desired character of the downtown during redevelopment?

Feasibility & Financing

What kinds of establishments should the City try and attract? What is the best way for the City to determine feasibility of attracting the kind of development desired?

Management & Implementation

How can the City encourage the owners and stakeholders to undertake development and action that supports the vision of the downtown?

The Process

Briefing

- Panelists met with sponsor and received briefing materials

Site Visit:

- Panelists toured downtown Methuen

Panel interviewed stakeholders today including:

- Town officials
- Local business leaders
- Private property owners
- Local merchants
- Local residents





What we heard

Common themes

Downtown was more active in 1990's but has suffered from severe disinvestment.

Now seems to be opportunity for revitalization

- Starting to be private investment in properties
- Political commitment – Mayor's priority
- City has strong financial position
- Planning Department has new capacity

Goals

- Bring more people to downtown
- Revitalize restaurant and retail activities
- Encourage residential development.
- Plan needs to be visionary not incremental

What we heard

Varying Opinions:

Downtown is amorphous – not clear where the boundaries are

No agreement on parking: some think there is plenty; others think there needs to be more.

Historic District Commission can be help reinforce historic fabric but can be hindrance to individual property owners.

Any tenant is a good tenant vs. priority on higher / better tenants

Assets

River and falls are attractive and unique

Historic buildings are a good resource and create strong civic fabric.

Can bring federal and state resources.

Methuen Music Hall is unique attraction that should be better integrated into the community

Parks and pedestrian pathways create a green fabric that can help link together the separate parts of the downtown.

Near to I-495 and I-93 regional transportation network

Opportunities

Large vacant parcels – centrally located

Gateway City designation

New Investment

Spicket River

Odd Fellows Hall is ripe for residential redevelopment *now*

- Historic Tax Credits / Housing Development Incentive Program

Constraints

Zoning: requires special permit approval

Challenging Topography

Not large fabric of historic buildings, particularly mill buildings ready for redevelopment

State financial programs not centered around large vacant parcels
Scattered core assets

Planning fatigue/Lack of implementation/Lack of downtown champion

Financial Recommendations

Start implementing state incentives for redevelopment: 40R, HDIP, MassWorks, etc.

Establish local incentives: TIF, DIF, CPA

Market to developers through MassDevelopment and ULI

Focus CDGB funds on large, strategic opportunities

Redirect Meals Tax revenue towards downtown revitalization

Educate property owners/developers on Historic Tax Credit resources/grants

Focus on ISD vacant lot enforcement

Target affordable housing projects – helps set the stage for market rate housing

Tactical Urbanism

Music

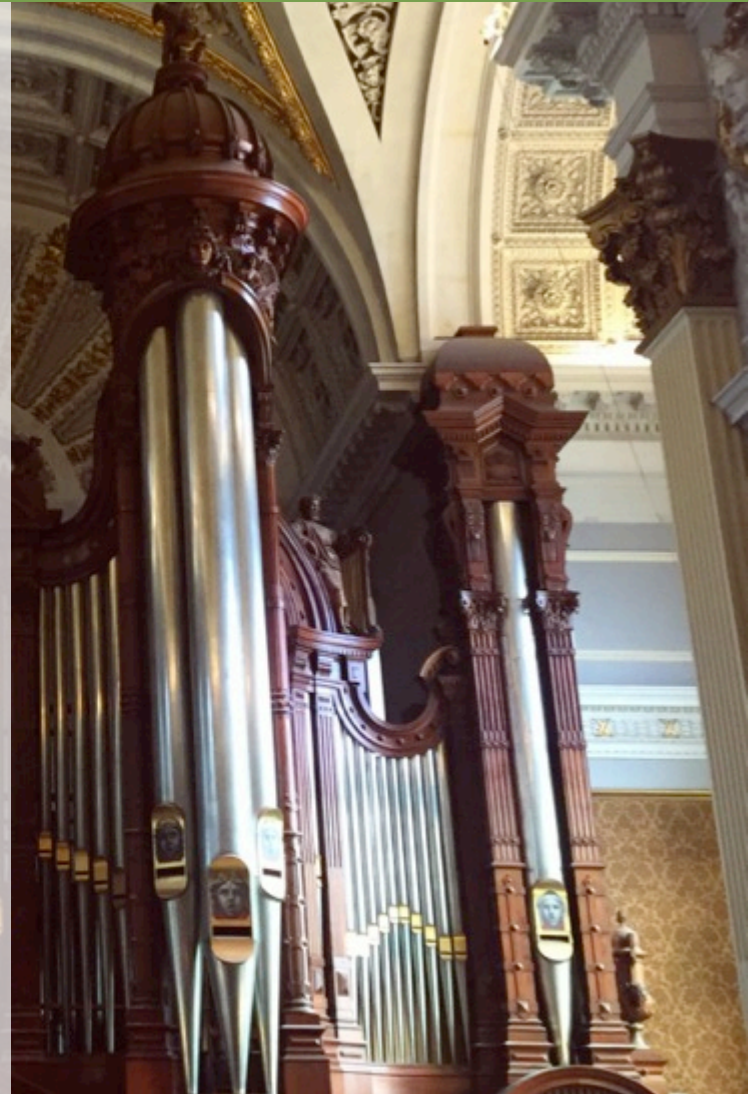
Parklets

Test Traffic patterns



Cultural/Programmatic

- Identify Existing Assets
- Methuen Music Hall (instagram photos)
 - Consider changing schedule to broaden audience
 - Consider hosting other types of music performances
- River and Open Spaces
- Scale and character of buildings
- Thriving local business (Yelp reviews)



Cultural/Programmatic

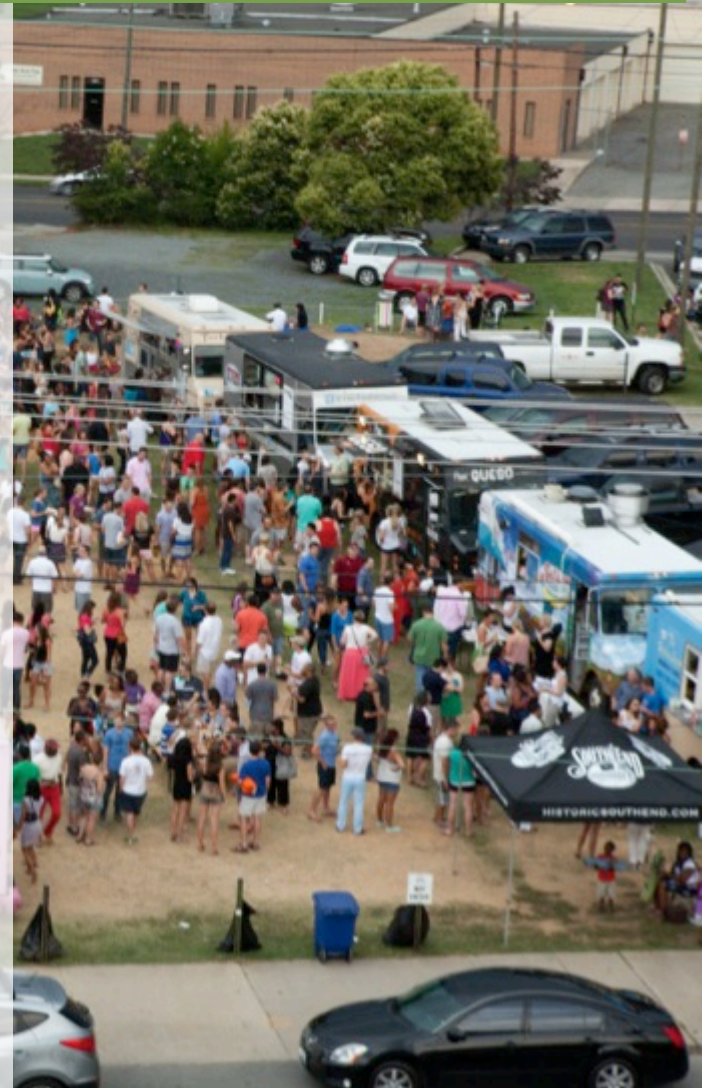
Build programming around Methuen's assets

Programming should serve two purposes:

- 1) building community and*
- 2) testing planning concepts and community interests.*

Arts programming

- Example: A-HA, New Bedford
- Example: Porchfest, Somerville
- Block Parties
- Farmers Market (Mann Farms, turkey farm, local produce), food trucks



Cultural/Programmatic

Publicize!

Publicize the existing assets – music hall, riverwalk, etc.

Publicize walking distance to local destinations from central parking lots



**Methuen Memorial
Music Hall**

.8 mi.

10 min walk



Riverwalk/Boat Launch

.3 mi.

4 min walk



Methuen Downtown

.1 mi.

2 min walk

Physical Improvements

Define downtown boundaries

Temporary Closure of Hampshire Street for festivals, food trucks, etc.

Program activities for Gaunt Park and parking lot

Connect Hampshire Street to river

- Improve alley connection at Bada Bing – better lighting, paving, signage, etc.
- Potential stair connection at 1859 property

“Road Diet” for Rt. 28 / Broadway at Hampshire Street

Long term improvements to create gateway intersection at Five Corners





