

New Bedford Upper Harbor Community Visioning Workshop

The City of New Bedford and the New Bedford Economic Development Council, assisted by planners from Goody Clancy, sponsored a Community Visioning Workshop focused on New Bedford's Upper Harbor on February 16th, 2008. The Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corporation made its cafeteria available for the event. This poster documents the workshop and the vision that emerged from a day of work by over 60 New Bedford residents and leaders.

Community members approved the Vision Plan in three public meetings during the summer 2008, focusing especially on access to the river and developing Acushnet Avenue as an international marketplace. (The meetings are documented in *City of New Bedford, Upper Harbor Vision Plan Community Meetings*, summer 2008.)

Funded by MassDevelopment and the Garfield Foundation with assistance from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.



Building the Vision

THE PLACE

The study area for the New Bedford Upper Harbor Community Visioning Workshop is bounded at the south by I-195, at the west by Acushnet Avenue, at the north by Wood Street, and at the east by the Acushnet River. It can be divided into three distinct zones:

- A **waterfront zone** comprised of both valuable underutilized land and historically significant mill buildings that limit physical and visual connections to the waterfront from the neighborhood to the west
- A **culturally rich commercial corridor** with community centered businesses along Acushnet Avenue
- A **residential zone** that lacks connections to the many wonderful existing assets within the community

ASSETS

- Brooklawn Park and Riverside Park
- The Acushnet Avenue commercial area
- Diverse neighborhoods
- Numerous schools and churches
- Museum of Madeiran Heritage
- The site of the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament and other Portuguese cultural traditions
- Historic mill buildings
- The Acushnet River itself
- Thriving manufacturing in some mill buildings
- Successful adaptive reuse in some mill buildings
- Three Portuguese social clubs

ISSUES

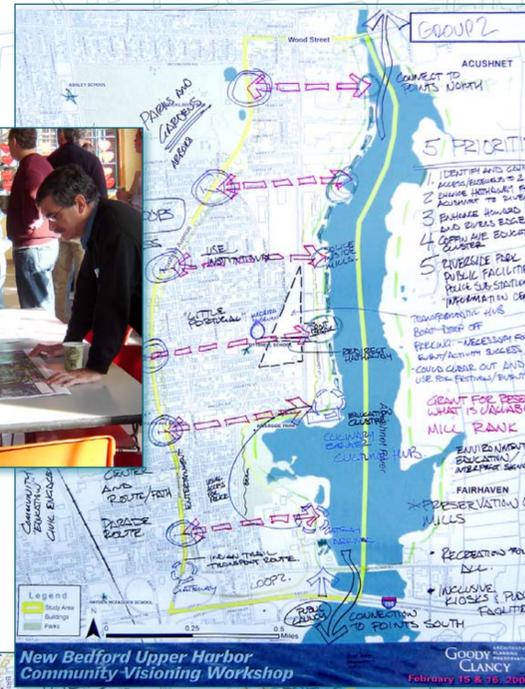
- Vacant or underutilized land along Belleville Avenue
- Vacant historic mill buildings
- Continuing periodic dredging for environmental clean-up of river
- Neighborhood-incompatible uses, such as a junkyard
- Historic storefront facades covered with newer, less attractive materials
- Parking lots in front of newer businesses detract from pedestrian experience along sidewalks
- Need to accommodate festival and business parking
- Concerns about gangs and crime in some parts of the neighborhood



THE WORKSHOP

The workshop event included analysis maps of the area, a brief presentation by the Goody Clancy planning team, and two sessions of small group activities. A week before the workshop, the planning team met with a focus group of local residents, city officials, and staff to identify a set of themes for the first round of small group discussions.

Five small groups discussed these themes in a morning session. In the afternoon participants worked in three groups to create visions for the Upper Harbor area by working with maps and markers and focusing on improving connections between the waterfront, the surrounding neighborhood, and Acushnet Avenue. These visions were presented to the larger group at the end of the day. The common priorities and elements from these visions provided the basis for the final Vision Plan. The findings are summarized below:



PRIORITIES FOR THE VISION PLAN

Group 1 - Key priorities:

- Create a pilot site for public waterfront access and events behind the Coalition for Buzzards Bay building with appropriate signage and cameras for safety
- Increase signage along key east-west connector streets
- Obtain the easements needed to gain public access to the River at key points and to create a riverwalk
- Create a pilot access point to the River at Howard Avenue
- Provide additional bus service throughout the neighborhood, especially along Acushnet Avenue
- Improve Acushnet Avenue between Coggeshall and Phillips streets with Community Development Block Grant funds for facade improvements, streetscape enhancements, and crosswalks
- Initiate an "eyes on the water" web-cam program to increase safety
- Improve housing
- Strengthen the connection between Brooklawn and Riverside parks

Group 2 - Key priorities:

- Identify and gain easements to create a recreational "loop" around both sides of the river
- Enhance Hathaway Street from Acushnet Avenue to the River, Howard Avenue, and the River's edge
- Create an educational cluster in the Coffin Avenue area
- Create public facilities, a police sub-station, and an information center at Riverside Park

Group 3 - Key priorities:

- Create a plan for a riverwalk and secure funding
- Secure funding to build a dock at the end of Sawyer Street
- Continue the City's strong effort to stabilize the area between Sawyer and Nye streets to eventually accommodate a walking loop and streetscape improvements
- Create a safe, structured after school activity for the youth
- Create a map and walking trail that incorporate the history of the neighborhood, the River, a variety of landmarks, and restaurants
- Create a plan for the future use of the Coalition for Buzzards Bay building

Strengthening the Upper Harbor: Improving connections to the Acushnet River and preserving the community's rich cultural heritage

Early Action Initiatives

- Create the Upper Harbor Heritage Trail by connecting a variety of landmarks and important institutions with Riverside and Brooklawn parks with interpretive signage and public art
- Create an Acushnet Avenue Corridor Plan to strengthen its identity, appearance, and character
- Create two public access points to the River behind the Coalition for Buzzards Bay building and at the end of Howard Avenue
- Install "River-Cams" (cameras with live video feeds to the internet) at the two priority access points to the River and at Riverside Park
- Work with property owners to screen the junk yard from the neighborhood through the use of mural and/or ivy covered walls
- Host free festivals, movie screenings, and farmers' markets—short-term projects that could help give the redevelopment momentum
- Create the Upper Harbor Walking Club, possibly run by the Parks Department, to promote the Heritage Trail, increase public health, and increase public education
- Work with property owners to construct Phase I of the Acushnet Riverwalk between Coffin Avenue and Hathaway Street



THEMES FOR THE VISION

Group 1: Jobs and Small Business

This group was keenly interested in building on the area's rich cultural heritage. Ideas that emerged from this group included:

- Business collaboration and the organization of a business association
- Expanding festival areas towards the River
- Educational opportunities and government programs to keep talented people and businesses from leaving the area
- Resolving transportation access from Interstate 195 to Belleville Avenue, and for a "gateway" experience to create a better draw into the area

Group 2: Waterfront Access

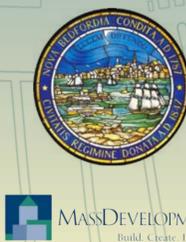
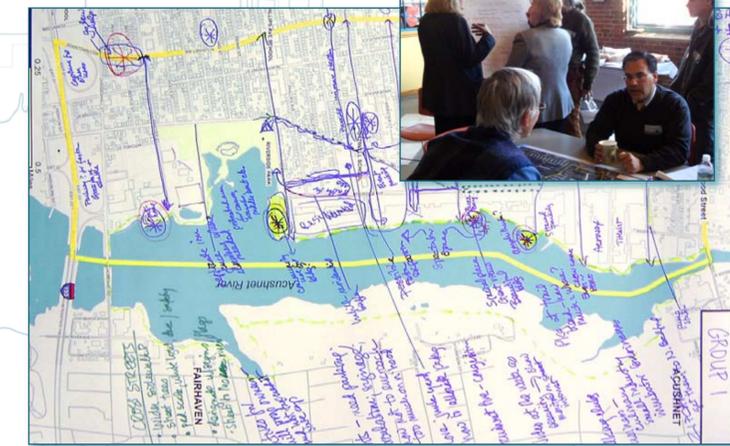
Priorities for the group included:

- Improving access and views to the water
- Enhancing connections to existing neighborhood assets, especially Riverside Park and local schools
- Promoting pedestrian, bicycle and bus routes
- Connecting to Hicks-Logan and points south

Group 4: Historic Character and Reuse

Themes that emerged from this group included:

- Document and inventory historic structures
- Create programs to educate children and the public on the historic importance of the Upper Harbor
- Determine whether historic storefront facades could be restored
- Determine best opportunities for underutilized mill buildings



Our Vision for New Bedford's Upper Harbor is to connect people to a cleaned-up Acushnet River and waterfront while celebrating cultural and historic heritage and strengthening Upper Harbor neighborhoods and businesses.

- Bring people to the river by creating a boathouse, riverwalk, view corridors, access points, and river activities.
- Preserve and promote historic and cultural heritage by adaptive reuse of historic mills and other buildings, creating a heritage trail that tells the story of the Upper Harbor, and enhancing cultural traditions with water connections.
- Strengthen Acushnet Avenue as a vital commercial street by enhancing walkability, joint promotions, and connecting it to waterfront activities.
- Enhance and support neighborhood life through police and security improvements, housing and streetscape improvements, youth activities.
- Attract new residential and job-creating investment to the mill corridor.

Come Down to the River! – Our Community's Vision for the New Bedford Upper Harbor

Create an Upper Harbor Heritage Trail

Tell the story of the Upper Harbor Neighborhood with a heritage walking trail:

- Identify key buildings and sites of historic and cultural interest to be linked by the trail, such as the mills, churches, the Feast, the Museum of Madeiran History, and the first settlement site of New Bedford on the river near Wood Street.
- Create a map of the trail with descriptions of significant sites and identify the sites with interpretive signs.
- Create a neighborhood-based Upper Harbor Walking Club to promote the Heritage Trail and increase public health, seeking funds from public health foundations and similar sources to help support creation of the trail and the walking club.



Continue community-building investment in the Riverside Park neighborhood

The City has designated this area as part of a North End Community Development Target Area to fund storefront upgrades, housing rehabilitation, and infrastructure improvements. Other needed neighborhood stabilization efforts include:

- Initiatives to improve real and perceived security, such as community policing, enhanced lighting, and youth programs.

Improve the streetscape on "riverview streets" that connect the neighborhood to the River

Designation of a few streets as primary connectors to the river will make river access visible to Acushnet Avenue visitors and to neighborhood residents:

- Use simple signage or banners to identify streets that lead to river access points, with future plans for streetscape improvements.
- Focus first on a few key streets, such as Sawyer Street, Hathaway Street and Howard Avenue.

Draw people to the river with programs and events

The Feast already brings thousands of people to the neighborhood annually. Draw them to the river at other times with fun and exciting activities:

- Host free outdoor movie screenings, concerts, festivals, a farmers' market, and other events in Riverside Park and other riverfront areas.
- Encourage extension of the Feast activities to the mills and the river.
- Develop programs for children and youth focused on local history and the Upper Harbor environment.
- Install "RiverCams"—video cameras with live video feeds to the internet—at activity points on the river for security and to raise awareness about the river.

Gateway to Acushnet Avenue



This distinct arch serves as a gateway to Federal Hill in Providence, RI.

Belleville Playground



Possible event parking



Strengthen Acushnet Avenue as a vital commercial corridor



Resign the avenue to emphasize its character as an international marketplace

- Organize a merchants' association or "Main Streets" program to encourage business collaboration for joint marketing and improvements
- Support businesses that will help expand work options for local residents
- Improve storefronts and facades, particularly the historic buildings from Eugenia Street to Davis Street, using community development funds
- Require parking to be located at the side or rear of new buildings to promote a higher quality pedestrian-oriented environment
- Identify a location for a public parking lot to help support business activity along the corridor
- Investigate providing additional bus service throughout the community, particularly along Acushnet Avenue

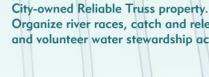
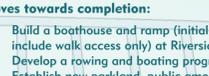
Parking and other mill redevelopment uses



Create the Acushnet Riverwalk for public river access from Coggeshall Street to Tarklin Hill Road

Work with the City and property owners to establish a continuous Riverwalk:

- Create a wide river promenade and associated amenities – viewing areas, open spaces, natural shoreline plantings, etc.
- Work cooperatively with property owners to provide river access.
- Identify potential early segments – demonstration projects.
- Secure public easements as part of Chapter 91 compliance.
- Identify and secure funding for design and construction.
- Over the long term, work with the Towns of Fairhaven and Acushnet to extend a Riverwalk loop to the other side of the river via Howland Road and Slocum Street.



Attract new investment to the historic mill corridor

Create a plan and investment strategy for the mill corridor to preserve and create jobs, add complementary new uses, identify public infrastructure and amenity improvements, and secure riverfront access – high priorities include:

- Ensure the protection of the Coalition for Buzzards Bay building by identifying an appropriate new user when the Coalition leaves the building.
- Encourage the adaptive reuse of the Cliftex buildings, including exploration of the potential to create a visual connection to the river from the neighborhood through the building.
- Build on the existing Whaler's Cove and Whaler's Place redevelopment by exploring residential redevelopment opportunities nearby.
- Find interim uses for vacant sites, such as event parking, farmers' markets, community gardens, or other community uses, taking appropriate measures, such as site clean up and fencing for interim uses.
- Identify a relocation site for the junkyard and, in the short term, work with property owners to screen it with walls suitable for murals or plantings.
- Invest in public realm improvements.
- Consider creating a District Improvement Financing area to support public improvements.



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Create a Community Boathouse and other opportunities for water-oriented activities



Plan for water activities as the river cleanup moves towards completion:

- Build a boathouse and ramp (initial phase could include walk access only) at Riverside Park.
- Develop a rowing and boating program.
- Establish new parkland, public amenities and a public launch site for kayaks and canoes at the City-owned Reliable Truss property.
- Organize river races, catch and release fishing, and volunteer water stewardship activities.

Public Water Access



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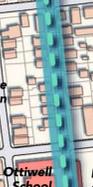
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