

# New Bedford/Fairhaven Harbor Plan

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City of New Bedford  
Town of Fairhaven

Harbor Master Plan Committee

**VHB**/Vanasse Hangen Brustlin  
in association with  
FXM Associates  
Heaney, Edelstein & Company  
Seafood DataSearch  
Childs Engineering

August 2000

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

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The Harbor Master Plan Committee and the communities offer special thanks to the many harbor stakeholders, residents and businesspeople who have contributed their time and effort to shaping this Harbor Plan through participation in public meetings, workshops and in other public forums.

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# 1

## Executive Summary

New Bedford Harbor has shaped the identities and economies of both New Bedford and Fairhaven for over 150 years. Today, New Bedford Harbor is one of nation's preeminent fishing ports, ranked first in 1996 among East Coast ports, and second nationally based on the value of product landed. The harbor's seafood processing industry has grown in size and sophistication in recent years and is a nationally and internationally established industry center. Marine service and vessel repair industries, centered in Fairhaven, have an established reputation all along the East Coast and have diversified to capture markets associated with recreational vessels. With over 950 recreational boat slips, the harbor is an important center for recreational boating and has potential for expansion. And with the recent establishment of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, the harbor's history and cultural heritage is gaining increased visibility and recognition nationally, resulting in growing tourism visitation.

This Harbor Plan defines the communities' vision for the future of the harbor that builds on its strengths; it also identifies costs, responsibilities and strategies associated with implementing the Plan. The Harbor Plan combines immediate-term lower cost public initiatives that can leverage private sector investment and job creation with longer-term initiatives that expand the harbor's capacity and potential. *Immediate-term public investment of \$12 million, of which \$7 million is already committed, has the potential to leverage the creation of 700-800 private sector jobs and \$50-60 million in private investment.*

The Harbor Plan also has a key regulatory function. Projects within the Harbor under the Commonwealth's waterways regulations (Chapter 91) jurisdiction will be evaluated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for conformance with the Harbor Plan. In recognition of the harbor's prominence as a location for water-dependent industry, most of the New Bedford waterfront and a portion of the Fairhaven waterfront have been established as Designated Port Areas (DPAs) under state regulations. The Harbor Plan carries significant weight in DEP's assessment of individual projects during the permitting process. The

communities have worked closely with officials from DEP and the state's Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) in developing the Plan.

The Harbor Plan is guided by four overriding principles:

- Develop Traditional Harbor Industries—preserve and enhance the harbor's traditional strengths in fishing, seafood processing, and related port industries.
- Capture New Opportunities in Tourism and Recreational Use—take advantage of economic and community enhancement opportunities presented by National Park designation and future development of the Aquarium and its related commercial development.
- Rebuild Harbor Infrastructure—upgrade infrastructure that is essential to the success of both port-related development and tourism including dredging, road, rail and pier improvements.
- Enhance the Harbor Environment—further develop the harbor as an asset for the communities and the region and improve public access and enjoyment of the waterfront.

The area of the harbor addressed through this Harbor Plan extends from the hurricane barrier to the I-195 and Coggeshall Street bridges. The Harbor Plan provides a strong framework for advancing significant development and conservation activities within this area. Planning for the harbor did not begin with this process, but builds on the successes of numerous previous planning efforts within New Bedford and Fairhaven. The Harbor Plan integrates earlier planning work with new initiatives in order to provide optimum benefit to the communities and the region. Key planning analyses that have provided a framework for development of the Plan include the report of the Governor's Commission on Port Development of 1994 and two studies on port management, the SRPEDD/EOTC "Section 269 Port Authority Feasibility Study" and the Massachusetts Seaport Advisory Council "Port Governance Study."

Years of work by the communities of New Bedford and Fairhaven are now coming to fruition as several major infrastructure projects within the Harbor area are moving from planning into implementation. The New Bedford Intermodal Transportation Center to be located within the North Terminal area is being advanced by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and will restore commuter rail service to the area, as well as providing improved freight rail access to the port. The redevelopment of Route 18 that will enhance access between the waterfront and downtown is soon to enter a design phase following New Bedford's successful initiative to secure \$15 million in state and federal funds to support implementation. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is moving into implementation of the harbor cleanup dredging—following years of discussions on appropriate sediment disposal methods—that will remove contaminated sediments from the harbor and will create approximately 30 acres of new land in the North Terminal area. Harbor cleanup will pave the way for

subsequent harbor restoration efforts under the auspices of the New Bedford Harbor Trustees Council.

Several proposed projects have the potential to further enhance local employment opportunities, community identity, and tourism development:

- Revitalization of the State Pier, will be anchored by the new Quick Start Ferry Terminal facility that will provide roll-on/roll-off freight ferry capabilities commencing in 2000, complementing existing cargo use of the Pier. In addition, the establishment of a waterfront visitor destination space on the downtown edge of the Pier combining an open air seasonal market, views of the fishing fleet, a floating dock to provide berthing for commercial fishing charters and excursion vessels and the Schooner *Ernestina*, and a National Park presence will strengthen all important links between downtown and the waterfront.
- Redevelopment of Standard Times Field as an industrial park providing 300-500,000 square feet of new development with the potential to serve the expansion needs of the seafood industry—and other industrial uses—in a location convenient to the Fish Auction.
- Development of the New Bedford Aquarium project and its associated attractions have the potential to substantially enhance tourism within the region and to establish the central New Bedford waterfront as the area's premier destination attraction.

Improvements to the harbor's natural environment and open space network can also be advanced through acquisition and preservation of Marsh Island in Fairhaven for use as community open space. Improvements to the open space and structures on Palmer's Island in New Bedford, together with a long-term management strategy, are also needed to promote expanded public use and enjoyment of an underused harbor island.

Despite clear strengths, the harbor is also encountering problems. The difficulties of the fishing industry have had a substantial impact on fishing families throughout New England, no more so than in New Bedford and Fairhaven. Waterfront land south of the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge is in short supply, and land with deep-water access north of the bridge is underutilized due to the significant constraint the bridge poses for waterside access in this area. This situation is further exacerbated by the unreliable operation of the bridge, which again failed in December 1998, temporarily eliminating water access to and from businesses located to its north. Ultimately, the constraint placed on the harbor by the current bridge location will only be resolved by relocating the bridge further to the north, a key proposal of this Harbor Plan. Harbor maintenance dredging has not been undertaken since the 1950s and the silting of channels and berthing areas is placing an increasing access constraint on businesses. An extensive dredging program is needed with disposal of dredge sediments in the harbor area creating new waterfront land, expanding the harbor's capacity. The statewide Dredge Materials Management Plan (DMMP) being advanced by CZM represents the key first step in

resolving the environmental, siting and permitting issues associated with dredge disposal. Implementation of dredging will depend on the availability of federal, state and private-sector funding, including state funding allocated for this purpose under the Seaport Bond Bill.

The vision for the harbor advanced through this Harbor Plan will support and strengthen the competitive positions of the harbor's traditional strengths in fishing, seafood processing, vessel repair, niche cargo operations and recreational boating, while advancing emerging compatible opportunities related to tourism development and visitor services. The Harbor Plan reinforces the strength of the DPA as a location for water-dependent industry and identifies specific DPA locations where compatible tourist-related uses may be accommodated. Supporting DPA Uses in the New Bedford DPA are located primarily in the central area of the waterfront adjacent to the downtown business district and are not accommodated at the expense of maritime operations on State Pier or the needs of the fishing fleet.

### **Economic Context**

Harbor-related businesses account for an estimated \$671 million in sales and 3,700 jobs within the local area. The core seafood industry comprising harvesting vessels and dealers/processors contributes nearly \$609 million in sales and 2,600 local jobs.

*Fishing Industry*—New Bedford accounts for 45 percent of employment in the harvesting sector in Massachusetts. The harbor's fishing industry has experienced severe problems over the last 5-7 years due to the scarcity of product and restrictions on fishing operations. Over this same period the number of vessels based in the port has declined but has now stabilized at approximately 265 commercial fishing vessels, plus some part time commercial vessels and lobster boats. The fleet includes 183 draggers—harvesting flounder, sole, yellowtail, other flatfish and also cod—and 83 scallopers. The vessels currently spend extended periods of time in port due to federal regulations/restrictions, increasing congestion in existing berthing areas. With a rebound in fish stocks over the next 5-10 years, landings in New Bedford could double. Such an increase in landings could probably be accomplished by fully utilizing existing vessels, without adding new vessels in the fleet.

*Seafood Processing/Wholesaling*—Despite the problems experienced by the harvesters, seafood processing businesses have continued to expand. Seafood processors and wholesalers within New Bedford have been successful in diversifying sources of supply both nationally and internationally to overcome local shortages of product, with approximately 40 percent of sales now representing imported product. Many processing businesses have significant expansion plans. In the near term (5 years), it is anticipated that an additional 150,000-230,000 square feet of space will be required to meet the needs of the seafood processing industry. The concentration of seafood processing businesses in New Bedford represents an industry cluster that enhances the competitive position of individual businesses. Future expansion of

the industry should be concentrated adjacent to existing seafood businesses and any dilution of this industry concentration should be avoided.

*Seafood Auction*—The existing display auction has been successful in its first two years of operation with over 50 percent of the total volume of groundfish landed in New Bedford now being sold through the auction. Further development of the auction system is needed if it is to contribute fully to the growth of revenues and employment in the seafood industry. Currently the auction is meeting the needs of sellers, however buyers do not accept it, and consequently they have an incentive not to purchase all their fish through the auction. Effective public oversight of the auction process will be needed to address current concerns.

*Waterborne Freight*—In 1997-1998, and for the first time in memory, no ocean-going cargo was off-loaded in the Port of New Bedford. The State Pier is not now, nor will it be with rehabilitation, the logical and cost-effective location for handling ocean-going vessels carrying containerized or break-bulk cargoes. To regain the economic benefits of handling ocean freight in New Bedford, a strategy must be developed for marketing and facilities development. Future development of these facilities will need to be focused in the North Terminal area where the land exists to develop competitive facilities with appropriate road and rail access. By contrast, immediate market-driven opportunities exist for initiating freight service to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket as well as other East Coast ports from the Quick Start Ferry Terminal at the State Pier. If New Bedford were to capture the wholesaling and distribution activity associated with the Quick Start Ferry Terminal, it could realize \$50-75 million in new wholesale business, supporting 125-150 full-time equivalent jobs.

*Commercial Recreation and Tourism*—The goal of the Harbor Plan is to assist in advancing the development of these industries in a manner that is compatible with the needs of the working port. The Harbor has not been marketed or used effectively as a resource in attracting visitors to the New Bedford Waterfront. The newly designated New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is likely to increase the visibility of the community and contribute to expanded visitation. Based on conservative estimates, a modest level of investment could result in attracting an additional 120,000 visitors to the communities annually, a 60% increase, with gross receipts of close to \$4 million. To fully capture the benefits of their waterfronts, New Bedford and Fairhaven must create waterfront destinations/activities that are attractive to visitors and ensure that these visitors extend their stays in a manner that increases downtown activity. Current opportunities include expanded visitation at significant attractions such as the Schooner Ernestina; development of a waterfront visitor destination for charter and excursion vessels at the State Pier; initiation of service by the Nobska, an historic coastal steamship currently being restored with service planned to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket; an expanded program of waterfront festivals; and initiation of harbor tours on land and water. With development of the proposed New Bedford Aquarium and associated attractions, this level of expanded visitation would be greatly exceeded. Market demand exists within the already large

recreational boating industry for the addition of 200 new recreational slips which can be accommodated outside the DPA. Initiation of water taxi/launch service is an important factor in the development of the harbor from a tourism perspective. Such a service would bring people from boats in Fairhaven and at Popes Island Marina to the restaurants and attractions on the New Bedford side and vice versa.

### Plan Elements

This Harbor Plan encompasses major initiatives that will ensure that the harbor continues to capture its potential as a significant economic and cultural asset for Southeastern Massachusetts. These initiatives are summarized on the Harborwide Concept Plan of Figure 1.1 and are described in detail in Chapter 6, on both a harborwide basis and for each of six separate sub-areas. It should be noted that while Figure 1.1 itself is not intended to be prescriptive for purposes of any state or local permitting within the harbor planning area, various elements of the Harbor Plan text in Chapter 6 do contain provisions that generally will be enforceable as a matter of state licensing under M.G.L. Chapter 91 and/or municipal regulations. In addition to Chapter 6, both Chapter 7 and the Supporting DPA Use Eligibility Credit Program contained in Appendix A of this document provide specific guidance to regulators.

The initiatives proposed under the Harbor Plan are further categorized into a Five-Year and a Ten-Year plan. The **Five-Year Plan** (Tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3) addresses immediate harbor needs. The **Ten Year Plan – 2005-2010** (Table 7.4) focuses on the implementation of major enhancements to harbor capacity – with a particular focus on the development of the North Harbor area – where additional planning is needed and where funding sources to advance projects have not yet been identified.

The following list identifies the highlights of the Five and Ten Year Plans.

**Five-Year Plan–1999-2004:** addresses immediate harbor needs, including the implementation of harbor-related projects that are already planned and fully funded or where funding sources have been identified.

#### *New Bedford:*

- Extend Homer's and Leonard's Wharves to provide expanded fishing vessel berthing.
- Repair public piers and wharves in the New Bedford Central Waterfront.
- Revitalize/Redevelop/Repair the State Pier as an active multi-use water terminal facility with freight ferry service, break bulk cargo activities, Coast Guard vessels, and central berthing space for charter fishing and excursion vessels, and incorporating cultural uses (including the Ernestina and potential National Park Service facilities).

- Develop a Quick Start Ferry Terminal (providing freight service to Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and other locations) at the State Pier and repair of its north wharf.
- Develop a center for visitor services, programs and support for the Schooner Ernestina, the official vessel of the Commonwealth, on the southwest corner of the State Pier.
- Develop a floating dock on the southwest corner of the State Pier to provide berthing space for commercial excursion and charter fishing vessels.
- Initiate cross harbor water taxi and launch service between the New Bedford and Fairhaven central waterfronts, marinas, and other significant tourism destinations.
- Develop the New Bedford Aquarium and its associated attractions on the Commonwealth Gas and Electric Site.
- Develop an industrial park at Standard Times Field to provide expansion opportunities for seafood processing and related industrial uses, while providing improved public access at the shorefront without preemption of future vessel activity or other incompatibility with maritime industry.
- Initiate improvements, including public oversight, to the Electronic Display Fish Auction.
- Enhance pedestrian and bike access to the waterfront including development of a pedestrian and bike network in all proposed infrastructure projects.
- Initiate EPA Harbor Cleanup dredging resulting in the creation of more than 30 acres of new land for marine industrial use within the harbor planning area (approximately 10 year process).
- Develop Palmer's Island as a city park including landscape and access improvements and a park management strategy.

#### Infrastructure

- Develop a major Intermodal Transportation Center in the North Terminal area to include commuter rail, freight rail, local and regional bus service, taxis, and waterfront trolley service (with future expansion to include links to a water terminal).
- Redesign Route 18 to provide improved waterfront access, including substantially enhanced pedestrian access between downtown New Bedford and the Waterfront. This includes a connection at the end of Union Street and at Water Street and other locations.
- Initiate maintenance dredging of driveways and berthing areas outside the federal channels.

#### Immediate Action

- Undertake a detailed inventory of vessel movements within the harbor to provide a framework for assessing the future harbor carrying capacity.
- Undertake a Waterfront Public Access/Open Space study.

- Undertake a North Harbor/North Terminal Study, including port marketing and facilities development strategies, bridge relocation and infrastructure improvements.
- Initiate a process to evaluate the need to adjust the state Harbor Line at State Pier, Fisherman's Wharf and Homer's/Leonard's Wharf to facilitate construction of proposed projects.

*Fairhaven:*

- Conduct wharf repairs at Union Wharf.
- Acquire Marsh Island for use as public open space for passive recreation.
- Implement streetscape improvements along major gateway streets – Main, Middle and Green Streets.
- Initiate maintenance dredging in the 10 and 15 foot federal channels and associated private sector berthing areas and driveways.
- Expand mooring fields for recreational vessels north and south of Popes Island (outside of DPA waters)
- Enhance the Pease Park Boat Ramp area, including provision of tie-ups for transient vessels, a dinghy dock, and associated dredging.
- Initiate cross harbor water taxi and launch service between the New Bedford and Fairhaven central waterfronts, marinas, and other significant tourism destinations.
- Develop a central berthing area for charter fishing and excursion vessels.

**Ten Year Plan—2005-2010:** projects involving major enhancements to harbor capacity where additional planning is needed or where funding sources have not yet been identified.

*New Bedford:*

- Develop a major Multimodal Port Terminal south of the proposed new bridge on over 30 acres of land created as a result of harbor cleanup dredging.
- Expand Popes Island on its north side through land creation resulting from harbor maintenance dredging (to include area designated for berthing of fishing vessels).
- Implement combined sewer outflow (CSO) improvements to reduce inner harbor contaminants.
- Undertake additional structural repairs/enhancements to the State Pier.

*Infrastructure*

- Relocate the Route 6 harbor crossing including the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge to facilitate development of port operations and expand harbor capacity.
- Develop a Freight Haul Road between I-195 and the North terminal area to provide designated truck access to port areas.
- Conduct maintenance and improvement dredging in the 30 foot federal channel and turning basins.

*Fairhaven:*

- Develop wharf extensions within the Fairhaven Designated Port Area to expand berthing space for fishing vessels.

## Implementation

Responsibility for implementation of significant portions of the Harbor Plan in New Bedford falls to the New Bedford Harbor Development Commission (HDC). The HDC already possesses the legislative authority to enable it to serve as the lead entity in implementing the Harbor Plan within the City of New Bedford for Chapter 91 purposes under 310 CMR 9.34 (2)(a) 1. However, the HDC has neither the dedicated funding sources nor the staff resources to enable it to significantly expand its role in harbor management or development. In the immediate term, resources are needed to enable the HDC to expand its staff by hiring a Marine Superintendent, a senior-level Waterfront Planner/Development Manager, and a Market Development Officer, all reporting to the Executive Director of the HDC.

The HDC will assume management control over the State Pier under a cooperative agreement with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). Local control over the State Pier will enable the HDC to have a more direct role in pier revitalization and redevelopment efforts.

The Plan identifies potential funding sources for each project that is proposed. In addition to the Seaport Bond Act, these include a variety of state and federal funding sources.

The HDC will play an expanded governance role with all Chapter 91 applications reviewed by the HDC prior to issuance at the state level. Within Fairhaven, harbor management and planning functions will continue to be undertaken by the Harbormaster and the Town's Department of Waterways Resources under the direction of the Board of Selectmen, working in close cooperation with the HDC. The Town's Planning and Economic Development Department in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen shall serve as the lead entity in implementing the Harbor Plan within the Town of Fairhaven as referenced in 310 CMR 9.34 (2)(a) 1. Over the longer term, creation of a joint Port Authority represents the most effective approach for securing comprehensive harbor management and development.

This Harbor Plan establishes a Designated Port Area (DPA) Master Plan for New Bedford and Fairhaven. Implementation of the DPA Master Plan within the City of New Bedford will involve modifications to certain requirements of the Chapter 91 regulations regarding allowable development. These provisions, implemented by the HDC, will ensure that the development of commercial uses within the DPA is strictly controlled.

### Planning Process

The Harbor Plan has been developed over an 18-month period and has incorporated diverse public input. The Harbor Master Plan Committee, a 13-member group including seven members from New Bedford and six members from Fairhaven has played a primary role. Additional public input has been solicited through public meetings, smaller meetings with industry groups, and more than 100 individual stakeholder interviews. The Planning Process has also benefited directly from continuous participation from representatives of the state's Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). The planning process has been undertaken in accordance with state guidelines for preparation of municipal harbor plans.

Land/bulkhead creation related to harbor cleanup dredging; provides new space for creation of new ferry/marine terminal linked to rail/bus terminals

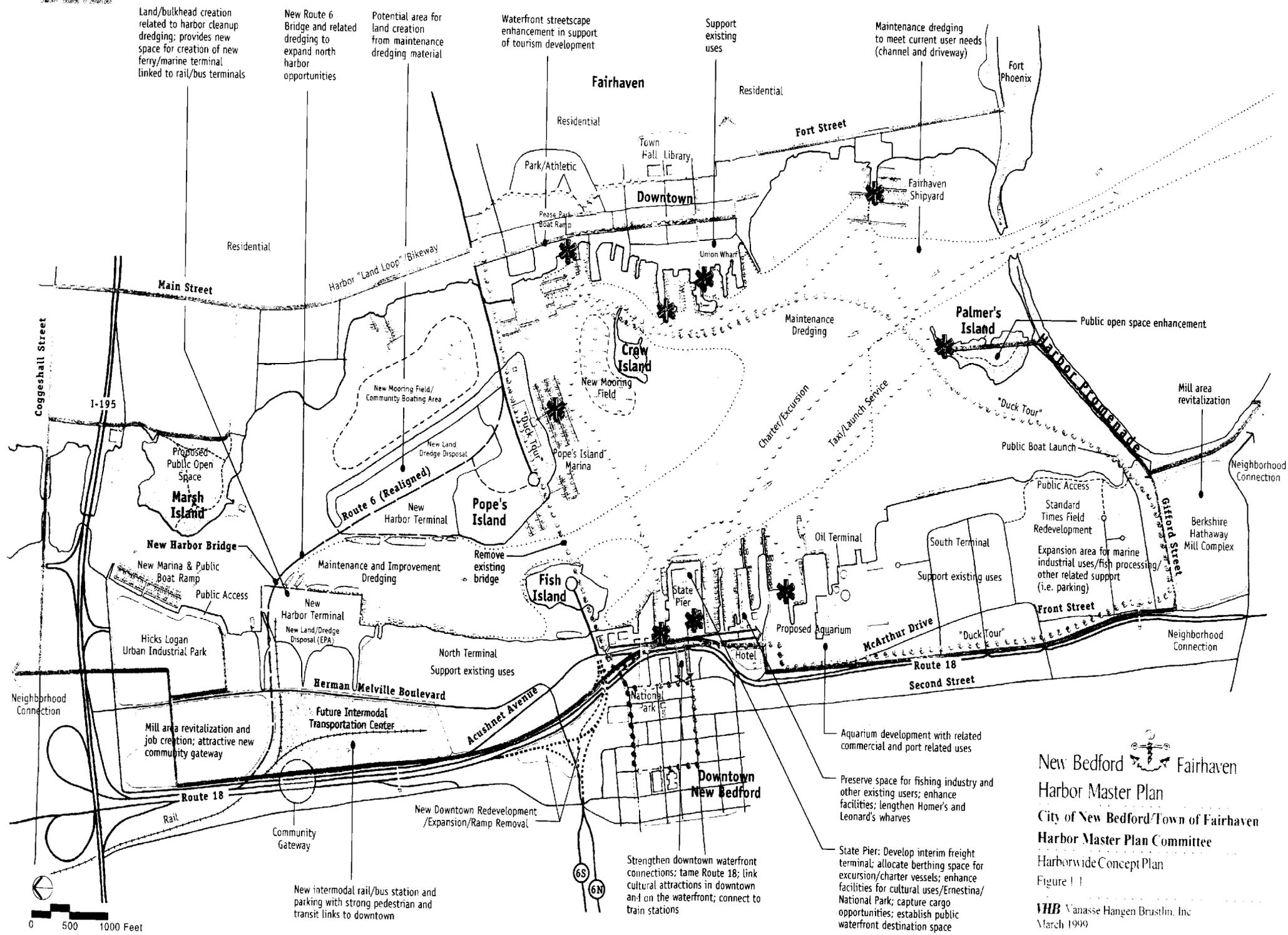
New Route 6 Bridge and related dredging to expand north harbor opportunities

Potential area for land creation from maintenance dredging material

Waterfront streetscape enhancement in support of tourism development

Support existing uses

Maintenance dredging to meet current user needs (channel and driveway)



Originals in color

New Bedford  Fairhaven  
 Harbor Master Plan  
 City of New Bedford/Town of Fairhaven  
 Harbor Master Plan Committee

Harborwide Concept Plan  
Figure 1.1

VHB Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.  
March 1999

- Aquarium development with related commercial and port related uses
- Preserve space for fishing industry and other existing users; enhance facilities; lengthen Homer's and Leonard's wharves
- State Pier: Develop interim freight terminal; allocate berthing space for excursion/charter vessels; enhance facilities for cultural uses; Ernestina/National Park; capture cargo opportunities; establish public waterfront destination space