



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

Powering Forward: A Vision for the Turners Falls Canal District

Item Type	article;article
Authors	Demski-Hamelin, Desiree;Fenton, Kellie;Gallagher, Brett;Kirkland, Kenneth;Price, Jeremy
Download date	2026-04-15 23:23:47
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/31986

Executive Summary

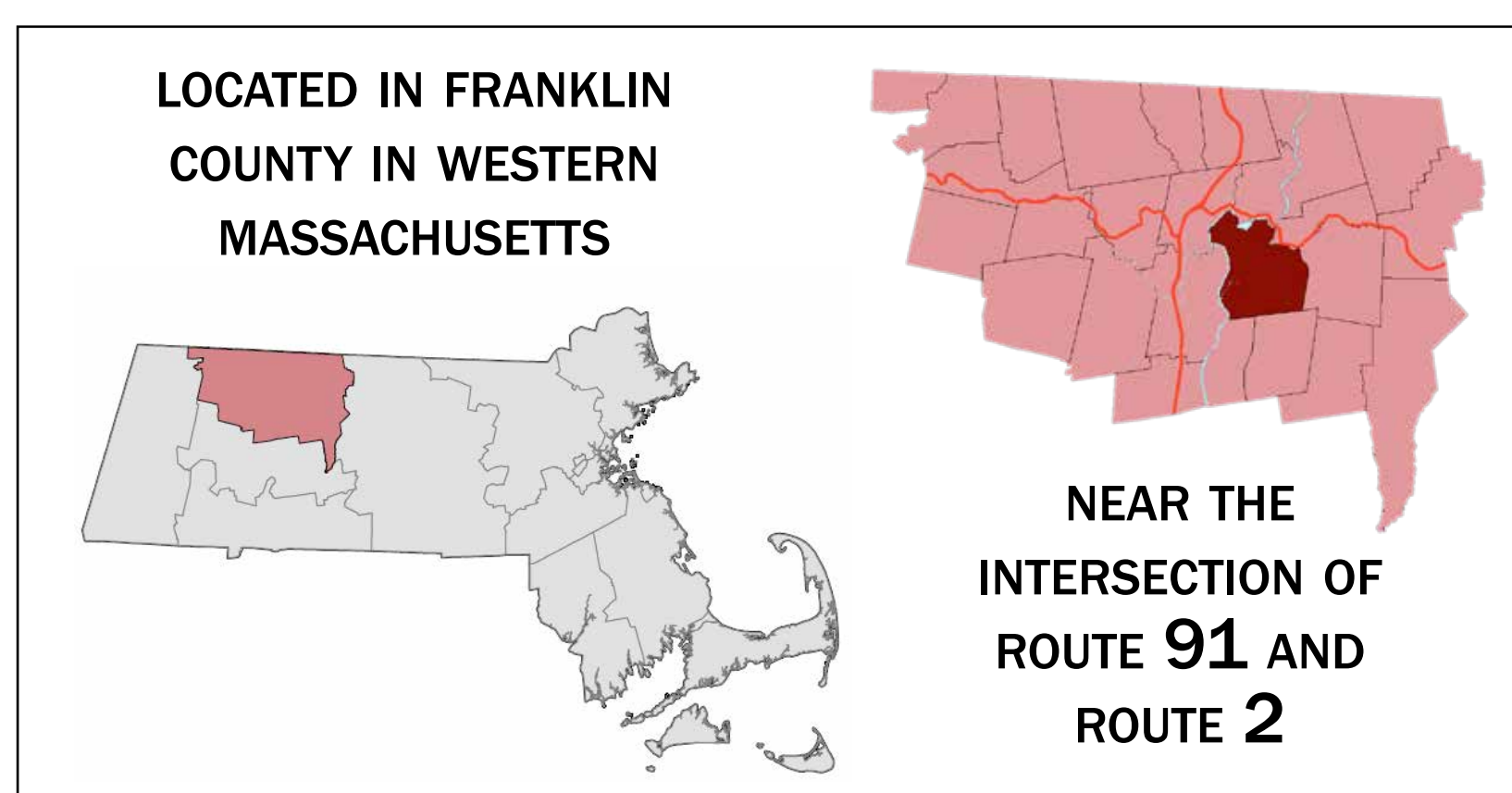
The Town of Montague (The Client) has requested that NewLeaf to recommend a brand (District Vision) for the Turners Falls Canal District (The District). The District Vision will direct the creation and components in a conceptual plan (District Plan). The District Plan shall address various elements such as land-use, housing, natural and cultural resources, open space, and circulation. The District Plan will incorporate a mix of land-uses that reflect the community vision including recreation, residential, commercial, and light industrial. Our selection of land-uses should represent the highest and best use of each property within The District. The Client expresses that existing industry (a specialty paper mill) is to be retained to the fullest extent feasible. The Client has also requested that NewLeaf identify key public infrastructure and investments that would enable The District's successful redevelopment. These improvements require the examination of public safety needs, utility upgrades, vehicular and pedestrian access, and bridge and intersection improvements.

History

Turners Falls is one of five villages within the Town of Montague, Massachusetts. While the area served as Native American settlements for nearly 10,000 years, the Village was the result of Alvah Crocker's 1868 vision for one of the first planned industrial villages. Crocker's Power Canal harnessed the flow of the Connecticut River and its Canal District (also known as Power Island) provided abundant hydropower to its numerous manufacturers. Even though the post-industrial economy saw the loss of manufacturers, the decline also enabled Turners Falls to preserve much of its Downtown's architectural design and pedestrian-oriented layout.

Demographics

The Village of Turners Falls accounts for over half (4,470 persons or 52.9%) of the population within the Town of Montague (8,437 persons). Despite a drop to 7.4% in 2010, unemployment in the Village remains significantly higher than the County and the State. The Village's housing stock includes a rich variety of types. Median household income in the Village has lagged behind both the County and the State. The Village has experienced a rise in educational attainment since 1990.



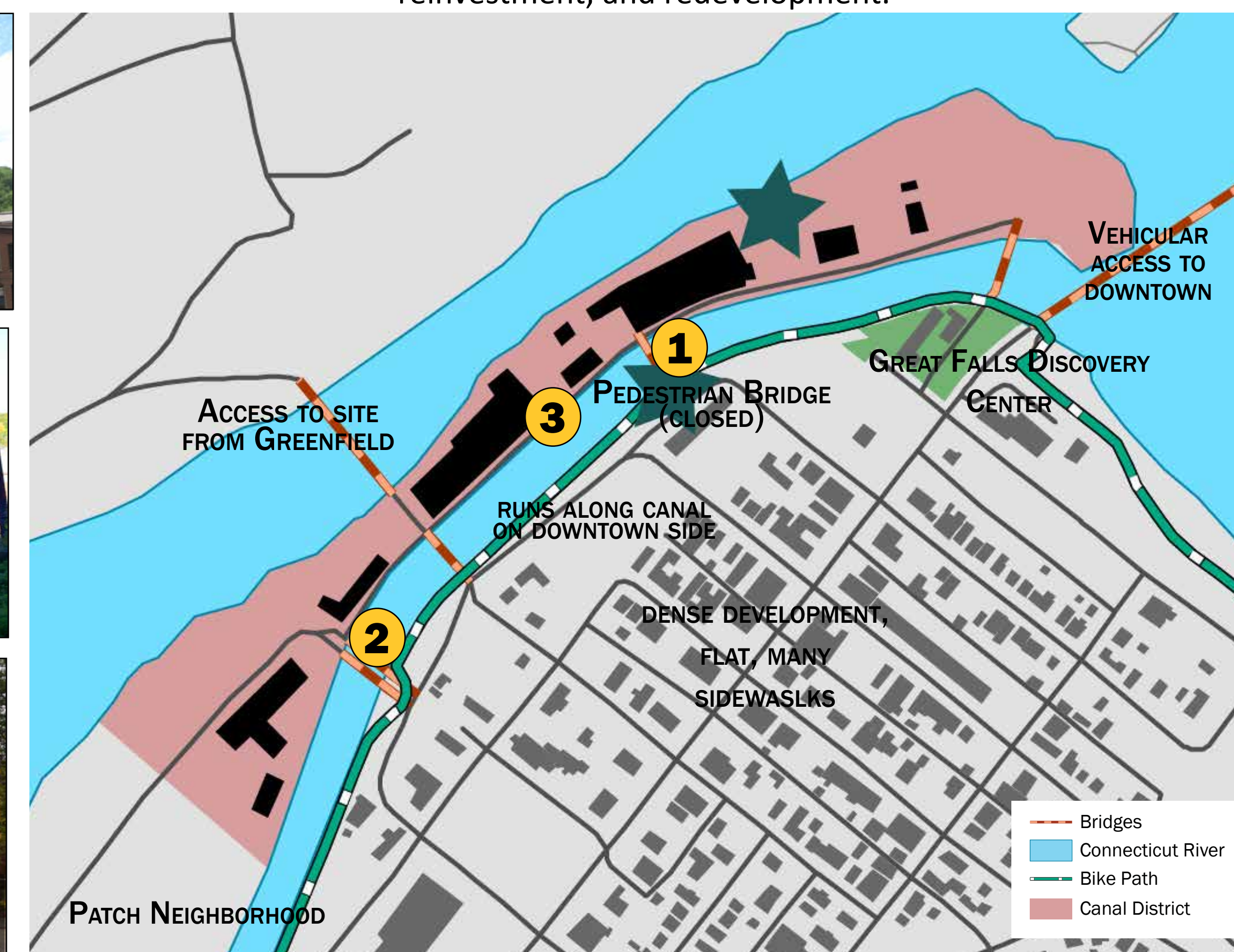
Acknowledgements:
Jennifer Stromsten, Jen Stromsten Consulting
Prof. Michael DiPasquale and Yanhua Lu, UMass Design Center
Department of Planning and Development,
Franklin Regional Council of Governments
Joe Heslin, Joe Heslin Strategies
Dutch Walsh, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
Jeff Lewis, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
Dr. Darrel Ramsey-Musolf

Problem Statement

The Town of Montague owns a majority of the properties within The District. Aging infrastructure, limited access, no parking, and sheer size and scale have prevented The District's redevelopment. Successful redevelopment of The District would allow the Town to relinquish ownership to a developer and restore The District as a revenue-generating area.

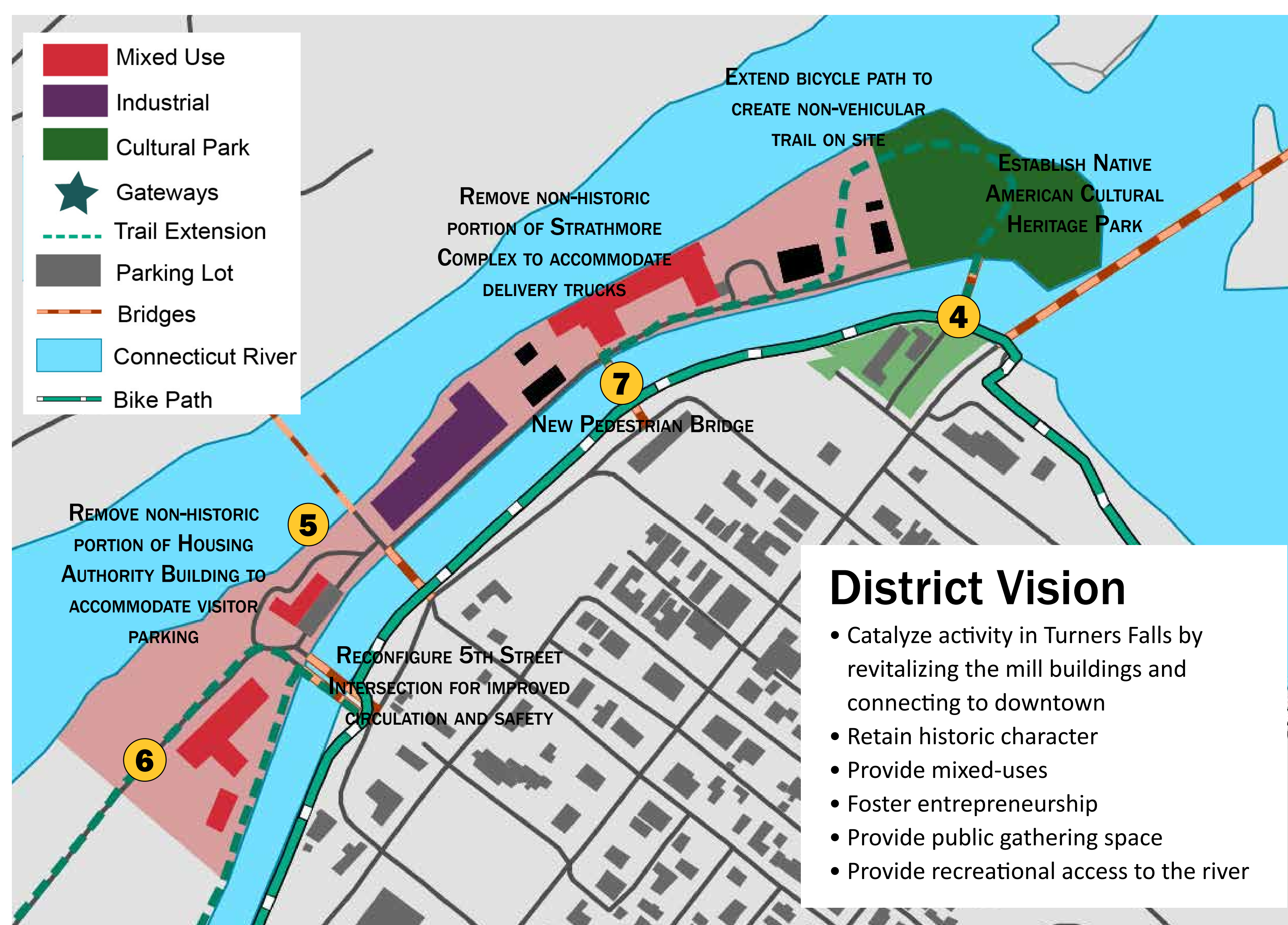
Public Participation

Based on an assessment of previous public engagement processes and the Client's Directives, NewLeaf conducted structured interviews with key stakeholders who are property owners within The District, as well as current tenants and various community officials. The interviews were intended to provide NewLeaf a better understanding of specific challenges and opportunities as seen by those persons that are directly involved in District activity. These interviews were also meant to stimulate collaboration between stakeholders. NewLeaf utilized interview input to develop recommendations.



Why Turners Falls?

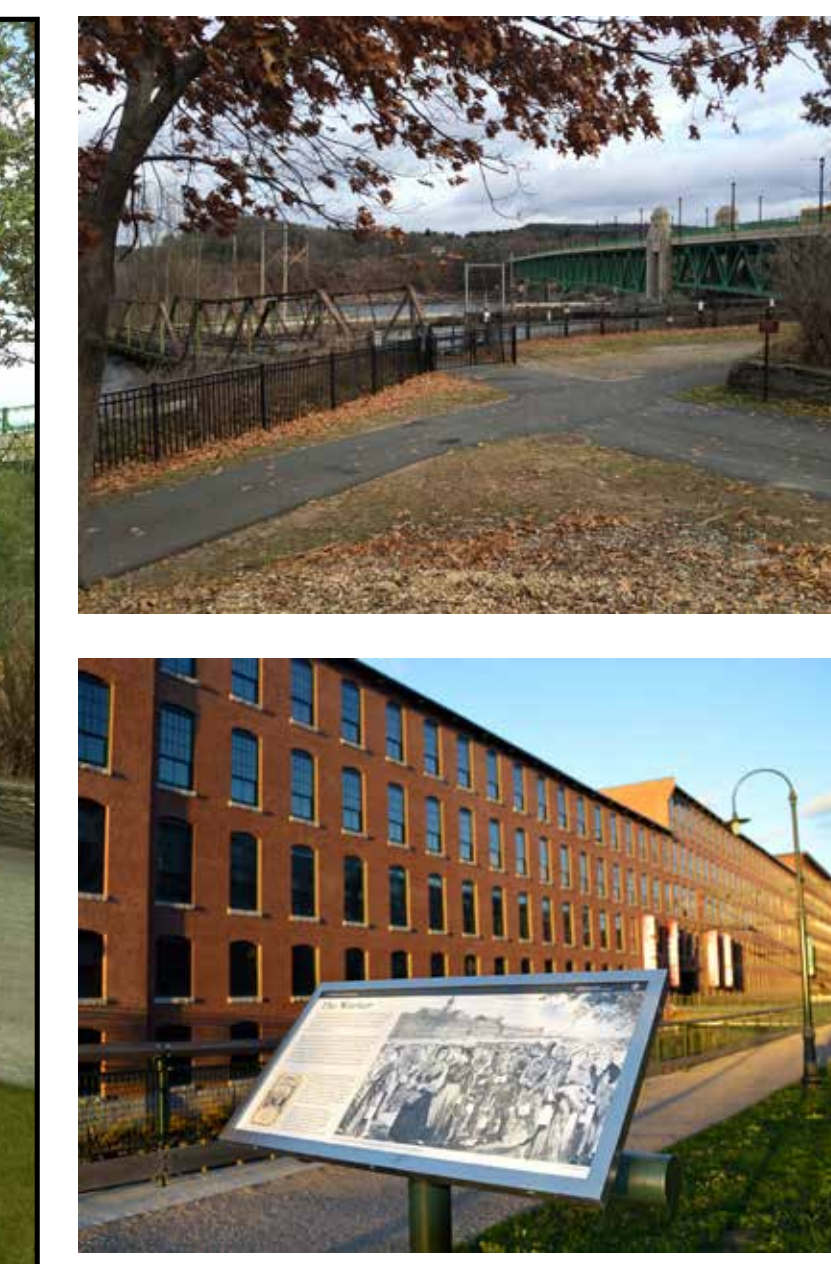
Turners Falls close proximity to Route 2 and Interstate 91 with convenient access to the cultural resources of the "Five College Area" makes it a prime location for those seeking a rural life within a short drive to the cultural centers of Greenfield, Brattleboro, Northampton, and Amherst. Turners Falls' growing arts community is supported by a full program of recreational, cultural, and entertainment events hosted throughout the year under such organizations as Turners Falls RiverCulture and the historic Shea Theater. While industry may not retain the same regional presence as in the past, industry retains a niche within Turners Falls and The District itself. Despite isolation and development neglect, much of The District's mill buildings retain their historic character and structural integrity. In addition, The District's proximity to a fiber optic connection, the Connecticut River, and the vibrant Downtown represent an opportunity for reintegration, reinvestment, and redevelopment.



District Vision

- Catalyze activity in Turners Falls by revitalizing the mill buildings and connecting to downtown
- Retain historic character
- Provide mixed-uses
- Foster entrepreneurship
- Provide public gathering space
- Provide recreational access to the river

Activate with Recreational Opportunities



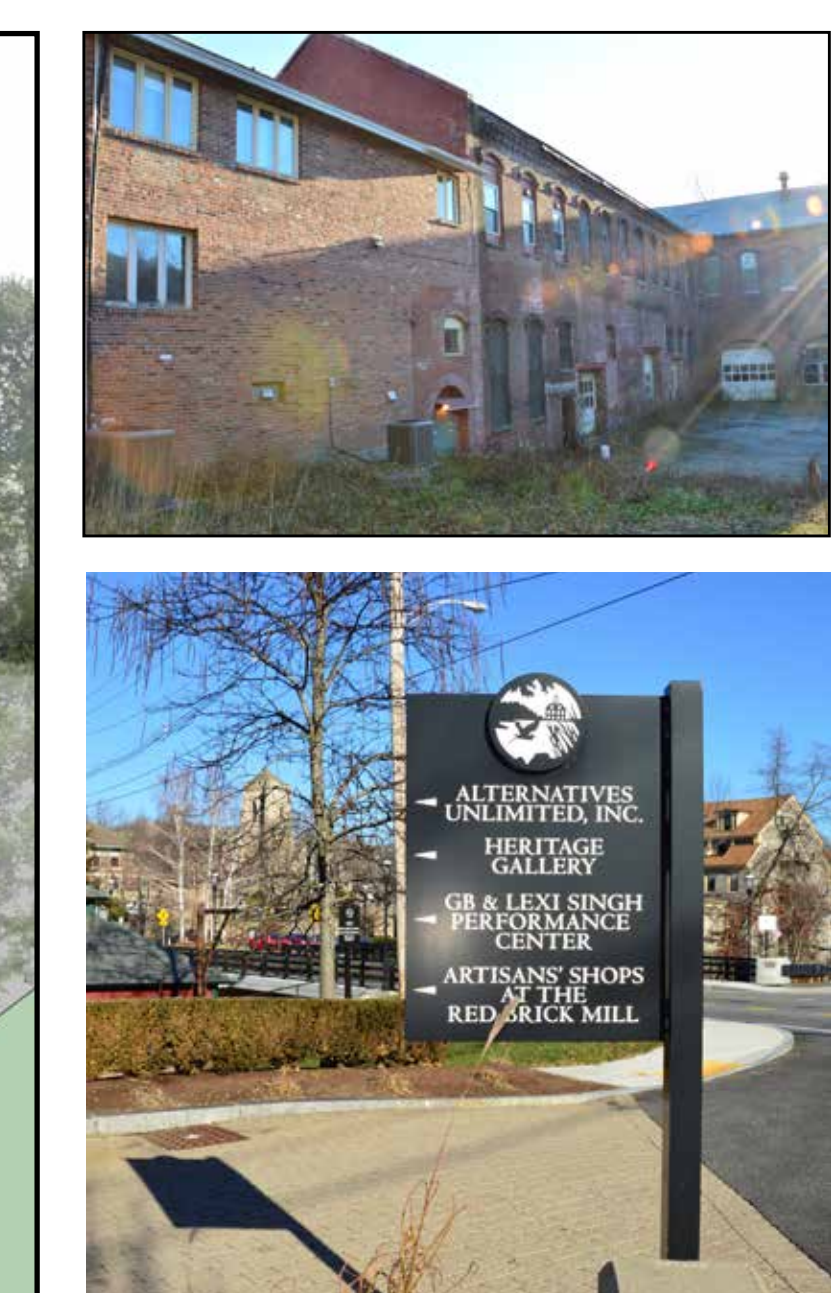
The proposed Canalside Connector creates a gateway to The District's North End. As the point of access to a proposed District Rail Trail extension, as well as proposed Open Space, potential River Access, and a Native American Cultural Park, the Connector represents a key junction of multiple activities that can be accomplished in a short timeframe and with minimal expenditure.

Redevelop the Railroad Salvage Yard for New Tenants



The traditional pathways of Turners Falls Mill workers heavily influenced the Village's pedestrian-friendly design. The Strathmore Pedestrian Bridge was the workers' main connection from their Downtown homes to their Canal District work. The bridge remains a critical connection between Downtown and The District due to limited parking and access, as well as serving as the primary conduit for all of The District's utilities. Preliminary plans indicate a redesigned Bridge extended to meet Strathmore Building 1, and could provide stunning visual access to the Connecticut River.

Restore the Keith Paper Storehouse



The surviving portion of the historic Keith Paper Company Storehouse serves as the current location of the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FCRHA). FCRHA would like to relocate to a more suitable space within Turners Falls. If relocation is accomplished, then the vacancy could represent an opportunity to restore the building's historic character. Additionally, this particular property offers adequate vehicular access – a rarity. Restoration coupled with proper traffic design could provide a much-needed visual gateway to The District and the Village.

Reconnect District with Downtown



The former Railroad Salvage Yard area offers a vast tract of potential parking, and over 100' of frontage on 6th Street. While the Annex building is in excellent condition and recently approved for redevelopment, the Main building is in advanced stages of ruin and will require total demolition. However, a small, adjacent portion of the Main structure has salvage potential, and a redevelopment plan based on historic photography, includes this portion, and utilizes the overall building footprint can recreate the original structure that can suit potential owners and tenants.