

Downtown Wakefield offers tremendous potential for achieving real economic vitality within the context of its traditional New England town center. Renovating existing buildings, improving the streetscape, resolving parking problems and creating a better pedestrian environment are critical if Wakefield's central business district is to maintain its place as the focus of community life. Organizing merchants, land owners, and town officials will be required if these changes are to be realized.

True revitalization, however, is achieved by creating growth, not just by maintaining the existing urban infrastructure. Wakefield's downtown must expand into new markets and offer a broader range of shopping, living, and working options if it is to reclaim the vitality it once had. This can lead to more significant redevelopment that returns downtown to its roots as the social and commercial heart of Wakefield.

GREATER DOWNTOWN  
STUDY AREAS

LAKE QUANNAPOWITT

THE COMMON

**MAIN ST. DOWNTOWN**

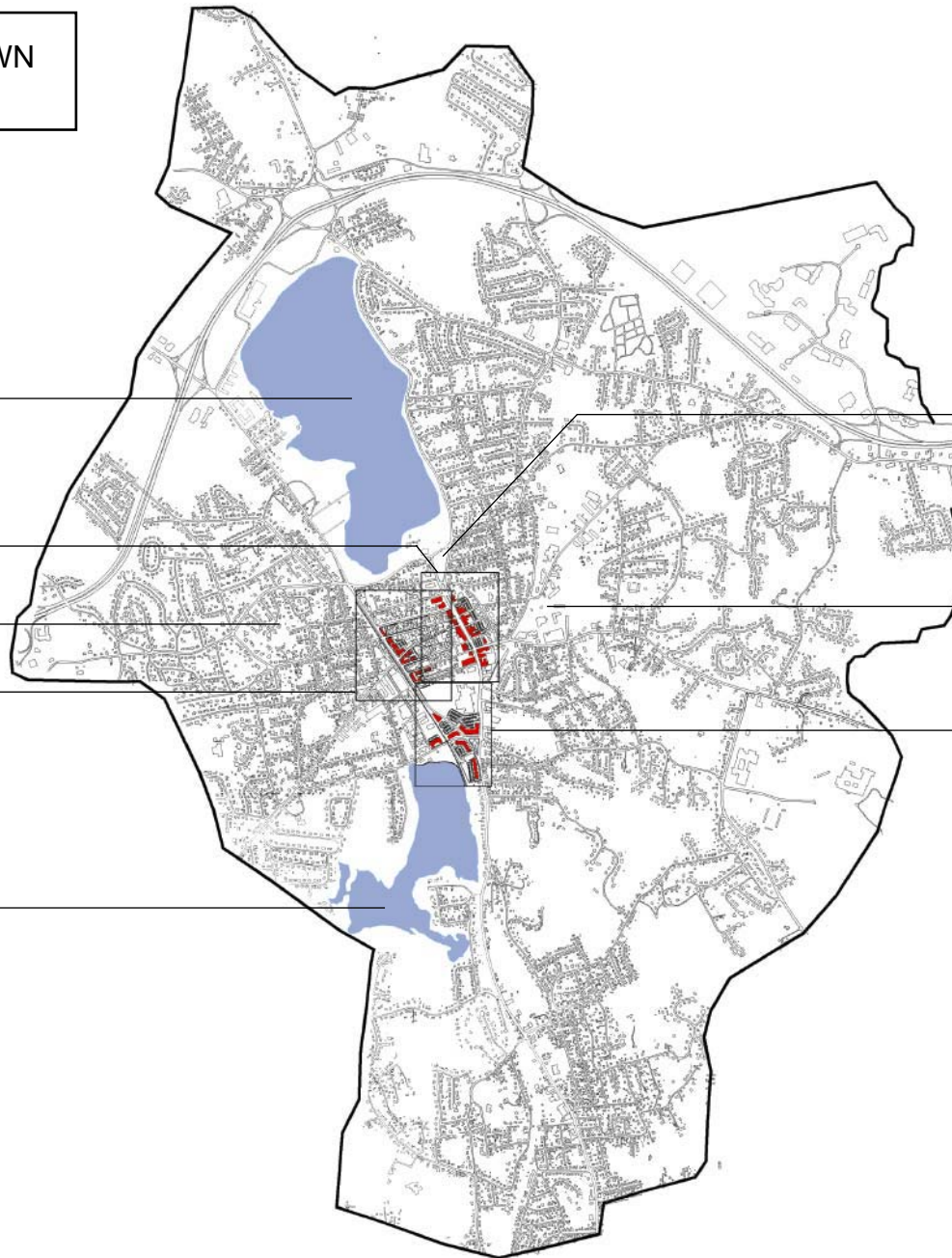
NEW SALEM ST  
INDUSTRIAL AREA

WEST SIDE  
NEIGHBORHOODS

**NORTH AVENUE**

**THE JUNCTION**

CRYSTAL LAKE





*The commuter rail station on North Avenue can contribute to the vibrancy of downtown Wakefield nearby.*

*A line of shops with one or more floors of offices or apartments above defines an appropriate pedestrian scale for downtown. Albion Street near Main Street is shown below.*



## GREATER DOWNTOWN

Main Street, North Avenue and the Junction together form a commercial core bracketed by residential areas to the east and west. With Lake Quannapowitt to the North and Crystal Lake to the south, it is an area with clear boundaries, at least on the map.

In reality, the railroad tracks, high speed traffic on major streets, awkward intersections, and expanses of asphalt adjoining the streets all interfere with the perception of the downtown as a unified, pedestrian oriented area.

Wakefield's downtown, like those in so many small and medium size American cities, has been affected by the automobile. People are no longer dependent on the central business district to meet their shopping needs. Regional malls provide a full range of retail opportunities. The roads that once brought customers and clients into town are often just seen as byways, with Wakefield as one more stop light between where people are coming from and where they are going. Yet many towns in the region, faced with similar situations, are turning things around. They are investing in their central business districts, capitalizing on their unique features and attracting people from surrounding areas.

If a coherent strategy for economic and physical development is to take shape in Wakefield, it must be based on a comprehensive long term vision. Main Street, North Avenue, and the Junction, three of the critical study areas of the Economic Development Master Plan, must be considered as a whole, with a series of interconnected activity areas reaching north to Lake Quannapowitt and south to





*Development should help knit Wakefield together, contributing green space and street trees, not just buildings to the town.*

Crystal Lake. Local and commuter parking issues, traffic problems, and streetscape improvements should be resolved in ways that don't just shift the problems elsewhere. The commuter rail station should be seen as the generator of transit oriented development - the same traditional mix of residential and commercial uses that once brought the area to life. Zoning must be used to define appropriate requirements for new buildings that will give an identity to all of downtown. The result can be a place that serves the retail, living, and social needs of Wakefield residents while providing a memorable destination for visitors from throughout the region.

A series of vibrant commercial, residential and civic uses along tree lined streets connecting Wakefield's two lakes can take maximum advantage of the town's unique assets. The creation of a "Wakefield Square" at downtown's center, accommodating a range activities and surrounded by improved facades, will offer the kind of character that shopping malls can't match. The historic fabric of the town can be preserved while allowing change and appropriate new development. To make it happen, though, will take determination and an organized effort.

## 1. EXISTING ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

We all have images of what a traditional New England town center should be. Wakefield's downtown comes close - dignified civic buildings adjacent to turn of the century commercial structures, well defined avenues marked by a sense of arrival at a significant place, and a concentrated mix of retail and service uses near residential neighborhoods.

Improvements in the regional highway system, however, have changed the way Americans shop. Wakefield's town center has been challenged by its proximity to numerous malls and retail centers in the area. The Burlington Mall is 9 miles from the center of Wakefield, the Square One Mall in Saugus is 5 miles away, and the Redstone Shopping Center in Stoneham is only 1.5 miles.

New shopping preferences and retail options have changed the way people think about shopping, and Wakefield's downtown has not kept up with expectations. Owners have not re-invested in their buildings and store owners have not always updated their merchandise. The result is a downtown that lacks the vitality it once had, and that has not yet reinvented itself for the 21st century.

The struggle to maintain a thriving downtown is not unique to Wakefield. Communities throughout Massachusetts and the United States continue to search for ways to revive their retail cores, and many are finding that it is not a hopeless cause. Significant success has been realized in Melrose, Stoneham and other nearby communities. Their achievements are the result of a concentrated effort and an on-going commitment of resources by these communities to halt and reverse the pattern of downtown decline.



*Downtown should create a vibrant image to attract people visiting Lake Quannapowitt and civic buildings around the Common. Banners shown here celebrate the town's spirit in front of the library but disappear in the retail area. Extending the median strip, banners, lighting, signage and other distinctive features into the retail area can help connect it to well-used areas to the north.*

Simply copying the policy changes implemented by Stoneham or Melrose is no guarantee that Wakefield will be able to replicate their success. Each community has its own set of challenges. At the same time, town planners do not need to “reinvent the wheel.” This section of the Master Plan suggests how Wakefield can adapt and modify proven models of town center commercial revitalization to its unique set of issues.

The town has made attempts to organize a downtown revival. Wakefield experimented with a Main Streets program in the 1980's, but the dwindling retail community was unable to sustain the financial support and participation necessary to meet the program's



*Old buildings and new businesses can work together to create a sense of vitality.*

*The intersection of Main Street and Albion St. could be celebrated as a major downtown intersection with a series of pedestrian and shopping amenities and a connection to the commuter rail station. There is little to distinguish it now from any other intersection in town.*



continuing requirements.

Yet Main Street did not die. Despite all the shopping alternatives, residents seem to understand that their town needs at least one great, well-used street as a link with tradition and to the neighborhoods and civic buildings in the area. Such streets imbue towns with character, identity, and a community spirit. There appears to be a consensus that Main Street plays that role in Wakefield.

To uncover the challenges merchants face, the Master Plan consultant team interviewed downtown business owners in person or by telephone. They were questioned about their vision for the district and their perceptions of Main Street opportunities and challenges. Additional meetings were held with the Chamber of Commerce and representatives of the business owners in Greenwood. The Team also discussed retail concerns at a series of public economic development planning meetings organized by the Town Planner. With the input received at each of these sessions the team was able to turn stakeholders' visions of the commercial district into unified development plans.

The participants represented a cross-section of retail interests. Some were the owners of thriving businesses, others were struggling to keep their doors open. Some have family businesses that have been in operation for decades, while other run stores that are brand new ventures or franchises of national chains. Despite their differences, several common themes surfaced during the interviews that have helped to focus the recommendations for this economic development area. (See Section XIV Downtown Merchant Interviews for more information on merchants interviewed and questions asked.)

## **2. KEY FINDINGS FROM MERCHANT INTERVIEWS**

### **1. Business owners in Wakefield were positive in their overall assessment of Wakefield's retail potential.**

- Business owners like and want to protect the small-town feeling created by the variety and number of small independent stores. These shops give downtown Wakefield its identity and sense of uniqueness.
- Despite the current economy, businesses located downtown are surviving.
- A retail location directly on Main Street is advantageous in terms of visibility and accessibility.
- Wakefield has destination retail shops; customers come from surrounding communities to shop in Wakefield.
- Rents tend to be affordable, although some are relatively expensive considering the property's amenities.

### **2. Downtown and Greenwood merchants would like to see specific actions taken to overcome what they see as "barriers to business". There was, in general, a consensus among merchants interviewed on what constituted the major barriers.**

- The zoning review and appeals process is time-consuming, expensive and inconsistent in its decisions.
- The high commercial tax rate is an impediment to achieving profitability for many businesses.
- Ground floor retail spaces are relatively large; there are not many 1,000 square foot shops on Main St. for smaller or new retailers concerned about start-up costs.

### **3. Business owners said that the top three improvements that would draw more customers are more parking, a better mix of retail, and more attractive storefronts and streetscape.**

- Parking is perceived to be the main obstacle to attracting and retaining a larger customer base.

- Over the past ten years Wakefield's residents have become increasingly professional, but the town does not have the right mix of stores to satisfy their shopping needs.
- Larger, national tenants that fill retail voids are welcome and can reinforce existing businesses.
- The general level of cleanliness and maintenance of streets and sidewalks is a concern for business owners.
- The relatively large number of absentee landlords contributes to a lack of building maintenance, a decline in overall appearance of the district and a lack of improvement in the retail mix.
- Some owners like the individuality of the storefront signs, and would prefer enforced maintenance to uniformity.
- Many buildings have special architectural details that could be uncovered and restored.

### **4. Business owners need assistance in addressing the specific needs of merchants.**

- Downtown does not have a strong organization that can speak for merchants and coordinate marketing, events, business hours, and other central business district issues.
- Town government does not offer a Main Street Coordinator or similar position to offer help to merchants individually or as a group.
- The Wakefield Chamber of Commerce provides valuable services but is not organized to assist retail merchants and address their specific set of needs.
- New merchants or businesses opening in Wakefield do not know who to turn to for assistance in town.
- Many business owners would be willing to pay to be a member of a merchants association or Business Improvement District if its mission was clearly defined and its actions effective.



### 3. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

The town should support the efforts of small businesses rather than allowing them to struggle for survival on their own. In order to implement the ideas set forth in the Master Plan for downtown, a person or organization must be appointed or hired to follow through on recommendations and advocate for merchants' interests. They should coordinate the activities of business owners, actively pursue implementation of Master Plan goals, and help to improve the quality of the business district that is so crucial to the economic health and sense of pride for Wakefield.

In addition to a Main Street Coordinator position under the Town Planner, there are various types of organizations that can support merchants and help implement business district goals. A number of different models are described in detail in Section XIII Implementation Resources, and include Business Improvements Districts, Merchants Associations, Main Streets programs, Community Development Corporations, and Local Development Corporations.

Creating such an organization is an even greater challenge today because there are fewer retail shops on Main Street than when the Main Streets program was in existence, and governmental assistance is very limited in the current economy. For these organizations to succeed, they require a financial and political commitment from the town and business owners. Wakefield may have to provide some catalysts for the formation of appropriate organizations until the retail community is strong enough to keep them going on its own.

A Main Street Coordinator and organizations such as those noted above can focus initially on the short term successes that will create momentum for tackling larger economic development goals envisioned for the town's retail centers. To provide guidance for such an effort, the town should undertake a full commercial district assessment and prepare a more detailed revitalization plan. This will lead to a clearer plan of action for short term and long term implementation. It will also establish objectives that can be used to evaluate more ambitious development proposals that may follow initial downtown successes.

A more detailed commercial district study should include:

#### 1. Full assessment of existing economic conditions.

- Map businesses, vacancies, ownership patterns, anchors and clusters.
- Assess barriers that prevent current owners from starting or expanding businesses.
- Quantify pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Complete a comprehensive parking analysis with recommendations.
- Conduct a sales leakage analysis.
- Continue to meet with and interview business owners to monitor progress in meeting objectives and maintain interest in the program.

#### 2. Detailed Revitalization Program.

- Create and sustain interest by business and property owners in downtown improvements.
- Allocate sufficient resources to implement the revitalization program.



- Determine what the community wants and what is viable in the short term and over the long term.
- Conduct market research.
- Create a targeted business list for recruitment including more destination retail businesses and nationally known names such as Starbucks.
- Develop marketing materials that help create a district identity in Wakefield and throughout the region.
- Promote the retail district to recruit new businesses and to attract new customers.

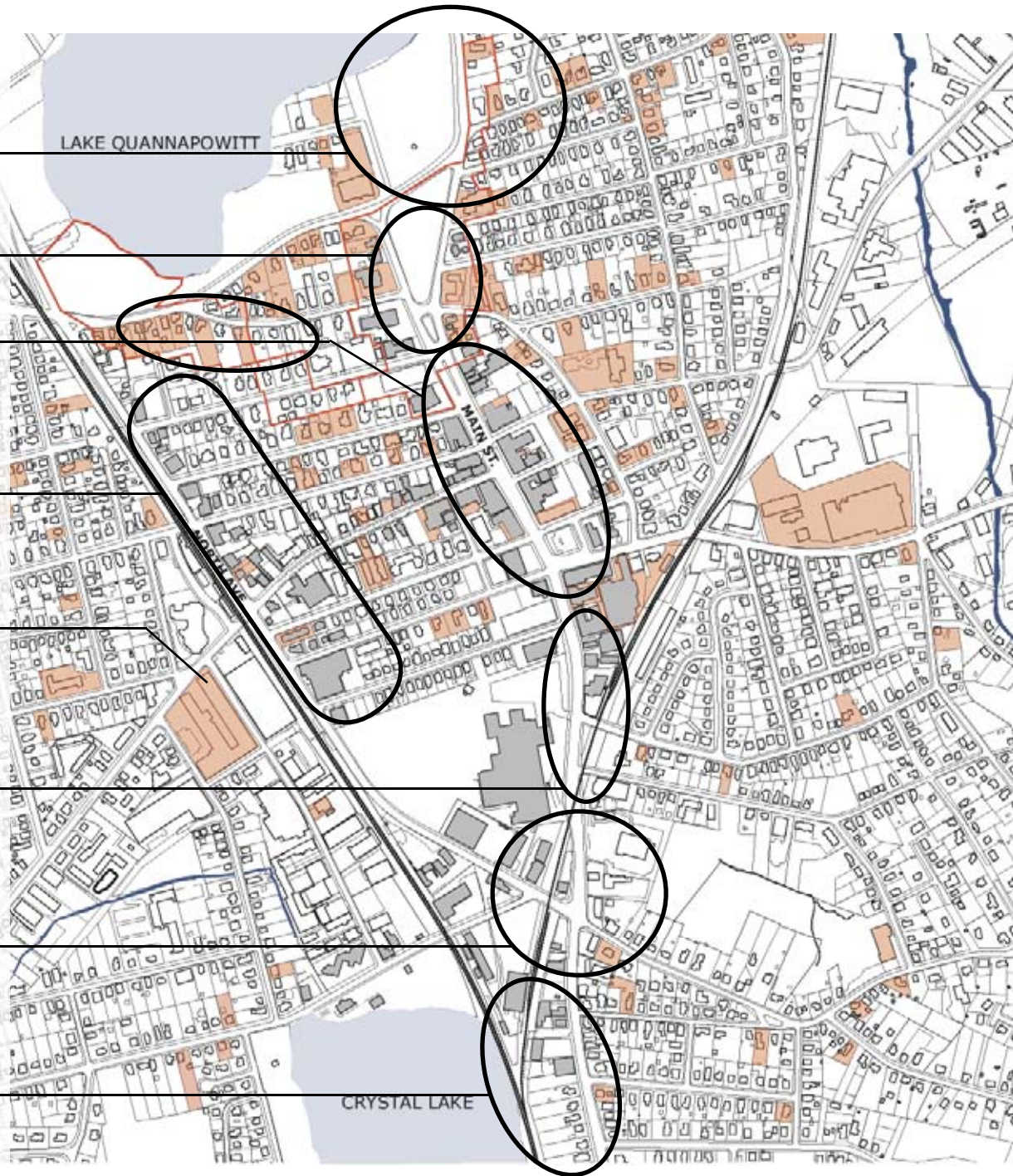
### **3. Business Assistance**

- Pursue state and regional loan programs and grants such as SBA loans, micro-enterprise loans, towns loans, or community revolving loan funds.
- Involve local banks to create loan packages and preparation assistance.
- Offer town sponsored loans and grants that are simple, focused, and minimize red tape for storefront improvement and signage programs, etc.

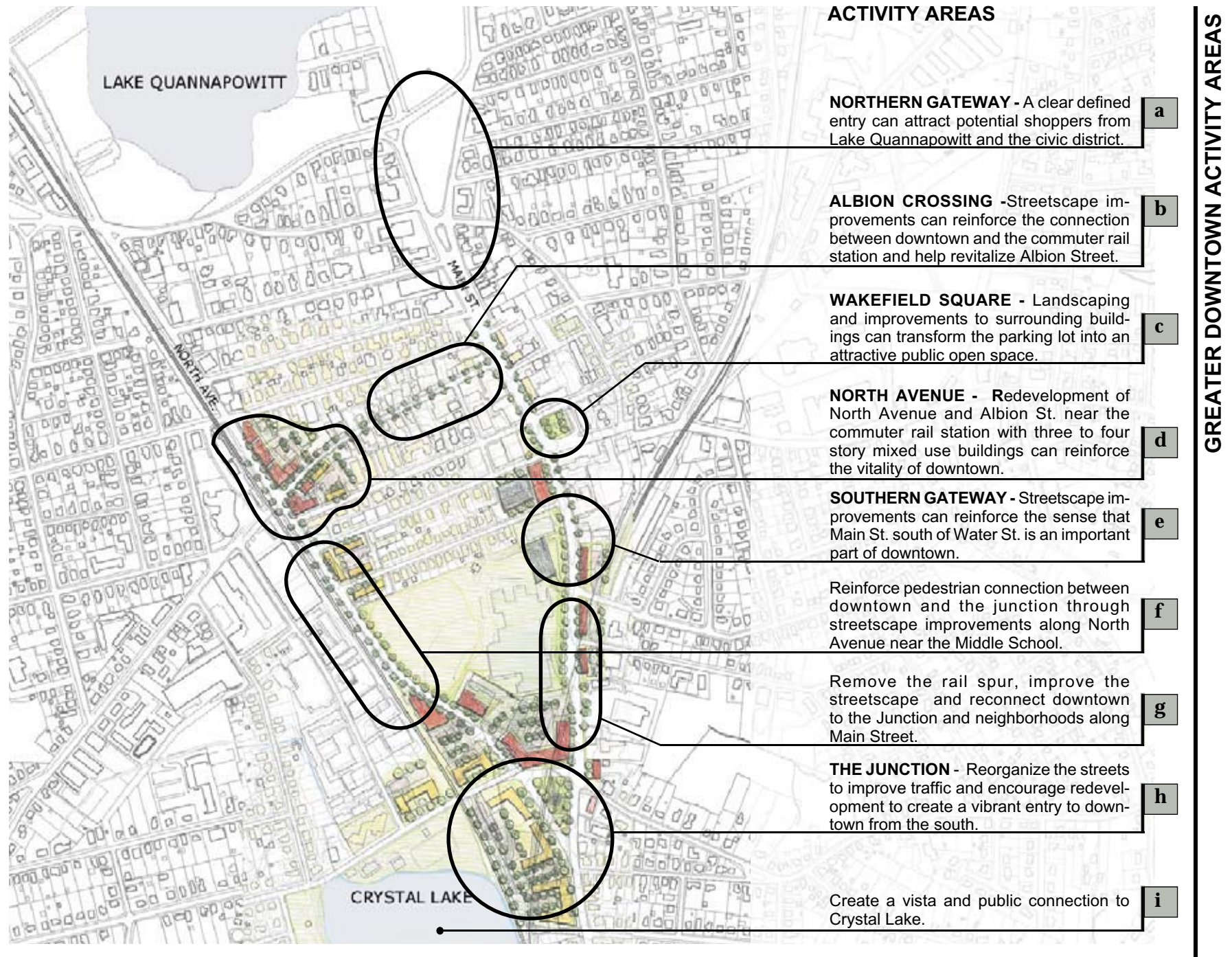
(See Section XIII Implementation Resources for more detailed information on business assistance options.)

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- a** Users of Lake Quannapowitt are not drawn to downtown by a clear connection to a well defined retail district.
- b** The civic area and Common appear more attractive and defined than the commercial district.
- c** Downtown lacks a distinct character, clear activity areas, and a coherent connection to adjacent areas.
- d** One story buildings and industrial uses do not take advantage of opportunities for retail and residential development near downtown and the commuter rail station on North Avenue.
- e** Historic buildings (colored in red) and districts (outlined in red) create a memorable cultural and architectural context for appropriate new development.
- f** The defined downtown fades into an area of parking lots and rail road tracks, without a developed streetscape along Main St.. There is no attractive approach to downtown from the south.
- g** A confusing street layout and unused rail spur interferes with the coherence of the Junction area.
- h** The public is cut off from Crystal Lake by industrial development.









*An expanded Main St. median strip offers the opportunity for a distinctive entry and orientation area for downtown.*

*Projecting banners, lights and crosswalks can help tie the two sides of Main Street together. Continuing the central median strip south from the Common can encourage pedestrians to safely cross the street.*



#### 4. DOWNTOWN MAIN ST. ACTIVITY AREAS AND USES

If downtown is to become a vital commercial area where businesses can thrive it, needs an interesting sequence of well-defined spaces sponsoring a series of meaningful activities. Other towns may offer useful design precedents, but ultimately Wakefield must build on its own strengths and work within its limitations. Main St. in Wakefield is too wide to offer the intimate scale of Main St. in Melrose. Too many of its old buildings have been torn down to give it the historic texture of Lexington or Winchester. Yet downtown Wakefield's central location, collection of dignified historic buildings, and basic economic health offer real opportunities for the Town.

Downtown must become a coherent whole while offering a diverse range of uses. A unified district can be created if Wakefield's downtown is thought of as a series of interconnected activity areas. The areas can be defined by their spatial character, how they are used, and by the types of businesses that are spread out along them. Each area must have easily accessible parking so that users are assured of finding a space near their destination. The critical areas that can define Wakefield's Downtown are illustrated on the maps in this chapter and are described in more detail below.

**NORTHERN GATEWAY** The Central Business District is just to the south of many of Wakefield's most important municipal assets. The Library, Town Hall, several churches and the Post Office create what could be called a Civic District to the north of the first commercial buildings. These dignified and historic structures surround the beautifully landscaped Wakefield Common. Just beyond is Lake Quannapowitt, a popular attraction for joggers, active families, and organized events. The lake, the Common and the civic buildings an-



chor the north end of downtown and create a truly distinctive sense of place with a picture-perfect New England quality..

People do not, however, always venture into the retail area once at the Lake, Church, or Library. The creation of symbolic and functional elements announcing the presence and vitality of downtown Wakefield can help attract them into the business district. These amenities should support a series of meaningful activities that help to define their visit. The important activities to be encouraged include:

**Entry.** Signage, banners, lighting, a literal gateway, or other monumentally scaled elements flanking either side or spanning across Main Street can mark the entry to the retail area from the north. They can suggest the presence of a vibrant shopping and dining district that can attract lake-side strollers or library visitors. From the south, this kind of marker can suggest the termination of the retail area, turning Main St. south of Crescent St. into a generously scaled outdoor room leading to the civic and recreational space beyond. Extending the Main St. median strip another block into the retail area can also help bring people into the commercial area. (see Section XII Streetscape Elements for examples of entry elements).

**Orientation.** A directory of downtown businesses in the Northern Gateway area would give establishments throughout the Central Business District a presence near Lake Quannapowitt and civic buildings. Directories and maps can be placed at the north end of the retail area and close to the lake as well.

A map and signage noting historic buildings and documenting Wakefield's past would help interest people in the community and can be the starting point of a historic walking tour.



*Street trees, attractive furniture and paving, along with well maintained storefronts create an active downtown in Lexington. Thoughtfully designed public places and retail offerings responsive to area residents' needs reinforce one another.*



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- a** Commercial buildings and downtown streetscape lack the appeal to attract shoppers from the north.
- b** Existing building is a model for historic rehab; too few other buildings have followed its lead.
- c** Parking is not clearly visible from Main Street and is difficult to access.
- d** Albion St. is an important connector to the commuter rail line with potentially attractive buildings that seem to get lost.
- e** One story buildings do not create the kind of street wall that once gave Wakefield a real downtown character.
- f** Some retail areas seem to be coming back to life; more support is needed.
- g** Retail on Lincoln street feels cut-off from downtown activities.
- h** The potential heart of downtown is taken over by parking.
- i** Retail south of Water Street feels cut-off from downtown activities.
- j** Non commercial uses bring downtown to an abrupt end.
- k** Downtown does not provide a vibrant image to attract people passing through.







## PHASE I

**NORTHERN GATEWAY** - Streetscape and facade improvements, a gateway element, bathrooms and benches can provide the functional and design elements to attract shoppers from the north.

Improve visibility and efficiency of off-street parking and investigate construction of garage to provide parking required for enhanced activities.

**ALBION CROSSING** - Mark intersection of Albion St. and Main St. to support Albion St. businesses and connect to commuter rail station on North Ave.

Reinforce restaurant and shopping area with improved facades and streetscape. Encourage outdoor dining.

Improve streetscape to reinforce pedestrian connection to the Junction and to support businesses.

**SOUTHERN GATEWAY** - Improve Americal Center and streetscape to form southern gateway to downtown.

Utilize excess (after hours) middle school parking for Downtown and Americal events.

Downtown redevelopment is an incremental process. Every step that is accomplished helps to build confidence that the next step is achievable. As parking lots become better organized and more accessible, more people come to shop. This brings a better mix of retail and improvements in storefronts. Businesses are more profitable, they become more committed to downtown improvements through their Business Improvement District, and invest in upgrading the streetscape and rehabilitating older buildings. The town benefits from the increased tax revenues and can make investments in services and infrastructure. A parking garage is constructed to meet increased needs and to open up space for outdoor activities along the street and in Wakefield Square. The newly revitalized central business district with a vibrant nightlife

begins to attract developers who establish a residential presence downtown.

Such a scenario is achievable, but will not happen overnight.

The Phase I and Phase II plans on these pages suggest two stages in the process. Each one requires public and private cooperation and public and private investment. Merchants, town officials, citizens, shoppers, developers, and banks must all have the confidence that Wakefield has a clear vision and the determination to achieve it if this revitalization process is to be sustained. Phasing suggests that it takes time, but that there are milestones that can be accomplished and that there will always be new goals to meet.



*Over the long term downtown Wakefield, through appropriate re-development, can become the thriving center it once was while meeting 21st century needs. A rejuvenated Main Street is shown here, with Albion Street in the foreground, looking south.*







*In Watertown, seasonal banners continue from the Civic district into the adjacent business district tying the two areas together.*

*A well marked series of interconnected parking lots behind civic buildings and stores serve both municipal and business uses in Watertown.*



**Refreshment.** Public bathrooms, benches and a drinking fountain will attract people from the Lake and bring them into the downtown area. These can be freestanding elements or tucked into a building along Main St. Their presence should be noted with signage at the Lake as part of a comprehensive signage program.

**Commercial/Residential Uses.** Upgrading storefronts, signage, and the retail mix can attract people who have come to the area for civic and recreational reasons. Uses can include local specialty shops or recognized chain stores with a clear identity in the marketplace. Restaurants with outdoor dining and attractive storefront displays can provide the kind of vibrancy that will draw people in. Existing one story commercial buildings are overshadowed by civic buildings. Re-developing them at three or four stories with residential over retail will reinforce the presence of the urban street wall and bring new life to the neighborhood.

**Parking.** Garage location #1 (see plan on previous page and also on later Main Street Parking Garage Options page) would serve the Northern Gateway area effectively. Improved organization and signage for existing parking behind Main St. commercial buildings would also be beneficial. Enforcement of regulations would control employee and commuter parking and keep spaces open for customer use (see extended discussion in part 7, Traffic and Parking, of this section).

**Recommendations** – Upgrade the streetscape and amenities to lead people from civic and recreational areas into the commercial area. Recruit restaurants and specialty retail. Rebuild one story buildings with office and residential uses above ground floor retail. Create additional parking and use existing parking more effectively.



**ALBION CROSSING** Much of the Central Business District retail activity is along Main Street, and it is too easy miss the fact that there are important commercial buildings and activities on other streets.

Albion St. is an intimately scaled shopping street that connects Main St. to the commuter rail station and the commercial activity along North Ave. Albion St. buildings could be filled with boutiques and cafes; instead many are underutilized. Foot traffic is insufficient to support stores and restaurants. The intersection of Main St. and Albion St. needs to become a distinctive place that can orient shoppers and suggest the range of downtown retail offerings beyond the confines of Main Street. Additional uses should be encouraged to anchor this part of downtown. Activities that could define Albion Crossing include:

**Orientation.** A map and directory of downtown businesses would help direct shoppers to Albion St. and North Ave. establishments. A gateway, vertical marker, special lighting, banners and flags, or the relocation of the clock can provide a sense of centrality to Albion Crossing.

Eliminating four or five parking spaces at Albion and Main would create an enlarged pedestrian area for seating, making a real cross-roads that can become an attractive meeting place. Distinctive paving, planters and other special urban features will provide a character to distinguish it from surrounding areas, while connecting shoppers to both Main Street and Albion Street retailers (see Arlington Heights example in Section X - Greenwood discussion of "streetscape"). Clearly defined crosswalks and traffic signals will help calm traffic and ease pedestrian passage to adjacent blocks.



*Outdoor dining can bring a downtown retail area to life. Awnings, umbrellas, and people enjoying themselves can do a great deal to attract visitors and residents to the business district.*

**Restaurants.** A group of four restaurants on Main Street near Albion Street already creates the beginnings of a dining district. More eating establishments should be actively encouraged. Additional restaurants compete, but bring in additional patrons that ultimately are beneficial to all. Outdoor dining should be encouraged along Main Street and on nearby streets where sidewalks are wide enough for tables. Restaurants continuing around the corner would begin to revitalize Albion Street and connect downtown to the Commuter Rail Station. (See feature on Cravings, Sweetbay and Sushi Island later in this section for an example of a successful restaurant cluster, and Section XII Streetscape Elements for provisions for outdoor dining).

**Commercial/Residential Uses.** Main St. is a relatively wide street, and one story structures are not tall enough to create the kind of outdoor "room" that gives retail areas character. Single story buildings with few distinguishing characteristics should be replaced by three to four story buildings with retail uses on the first floor and businesses or residences on the upper floors. In this area upper floor residential has several advantages, including lower parking requirements, day/night parking synergy, and 24 hour activity. Balconies and setbacks on upper floors help activate the taller facades. Older multi-story and mixed use buildings in the area, such as the Bourbon Building, should be restored.

**Parking.** Garage location #1 would serve the Albion Crossing area effectively. Locations #2 and #3 are close enough to be convenient. A clearly marked entrance to well organized parking behind Main St. commercial buildings would create the confidence that parking is available. New parking spaces could be developed

## Multistory / Multiuse Downtown



Before automobiles redefined small town life just before and after World War II, most people relied on walking to get to where they wanted to go. Stores, offices, and homes were packed fairly densely into the area around downtown. Offices and living spaces were stacked on top of ground floor retail. Main Street was lined with 3 to 5 stories buildings that made Downtown into a great outdoor room for shopping, socializing and celebrating.



Photo Source- Wakefield, 350 years by the Lake, ed. Nancy Bertrand, Wakefield 350 Inc.





As the automobile came into use, more options were offered for business owners and their customers, and Downtown was no longer the destination for most people leaving their homes. Needs changed, as did the economics of running a business. Many of downtown's multistory buildings were torn down and replaced with one story stores and offices.



Today, people are rediscovering the benefits of downtown living and having less dependence on cars. In many towns, the return of residences to the central business district has brought a new sense of vitality to the area.



The introduction of new, taller multi-use buildings would not be a departure from the essential character of Wakefield, but a return to it.

along Foster Street if it were narrowed and made a one way street. Enforcement of parking regulations and/or meters would help to control employee and commuter parking, insuring that there are more spaces available for customer use (see part 7 Traffic and Parking for a more detailed analysis of downtown parking issues).

**Recommendations** - Mark the intersection of Albion St. and Main St. with streetscape improvements and crosswalks that will give it an identity and help with downtown orientation. Recruit restaurants and small specialty retail that will create distinctive facades and signage. Encourage the development of well designed mixed-use three and four story buildings. Create additional parking; use existing parking more effectively.

**WAKEFIELD SQUARE** The parking lots flanking Main St. between Lincoln and Water Streets have the potential to create a center for Downtown – a traditional square with landscaping for passive activities and paving for more active uses. These lots contrast with the continuous street-wall created by buildings along Main St. and adjacent streets. Now, however, the low scale of existing buildings, the compromised quality of the architecture, and the use of these spaces primarily for parking all work against the strong sense of urban identity and open space that this area could convey.



*The variety of building facades in Wakefield creates an interesting downtown character. Multi-use, multi-story buildings can take many different forms. This grouping near the corner of Albion St. and Main St. would be enhanced by banners and crosswalks and new multistory buildings to replace lower ones nearby.*

*The parking lots between Water Street and Lincoln Street could be redesigned to create a coherent Wakefield Square as the focus for downtown activities. This view looking northwest across West Water St. and Main St. beyond suggests the potential spacial character that could be developed.*



Improvements to the paving, landscaping, the surrounding buildings, facades and signage would allow the square to become an anchor for this section of downtown. Wakefield Square could provide a place for a range of recreational, civic and commercial activities, with additional parking provided elsewhere.

Traffic congestion at the corner of Main St. and Water St. is currently a problem. Potential solutions should be investigated in a more detailed traffic and parking report. Proposed resolutions should be coordinated with long term redevelopment plans so that changes to parking and traffic patterns support Master Plan objectives

Potential uses and activities that would reinforce the vibrancy of Wakefield Square as a downtown center include:

**Open Space as a center for business.** Wakefield Square could be redeveloped as a pedestrian space accommodating a range of activities. Planting would create a green oasis sheltered from traffic where lunch purchased at surrounding cafes and markets could be eaten. Paving would allow for weekly farmers' markets, flea markets, and seasonal flower and Christmas tree sales (a huge potential draw for nearby Christmas season retail sales). Saturday morning celebrations and festivals could be sited here, supplementing those now taking place along Lake Quannapowitt. Creative planning and marketing would draw shoppers from throughout the region, supporting downtown merchants.

A redesigned Wakefield Square would connect surrounding businesses to Main Street pedestrian traffic and give them a new presence without interfering with vehicular access. Businesses to the south of Water Street, whose owners' often express the sense that they are not

included in downtown activities, would be integrated into the perception of an enlarged and rejuvenated Downtown retail area.

**Improved Commercial Uses.** Although Starbucks, The Gap, and Barnes & Noble are the kind of ubiquitous presences that sometimes contribute to the homogenization of the American landscape, they are also signs of urban vitality, youthful cosmopolitan culture, and a thriving business center. Wakefield Square, with improvements in the streetscape, landscaping, and the surrounding architecture, can attract these well known brands and the upscale local businesses that often come with them.

Farmland Grocery, Hart's Hardware, and the Fleet Bank provide a core of viable businesses. They provide a context for well-known chains that can complement a range of cafes and specialty retailers, new and existing, that give downtown Wakefield its unique character.

**Office and Residential.** A century ago, downtown Wakefield was composed of three to five story buildings that lined Main St. and the surrounding streets. Over the past decades, many of these buildings were demolished and replaced with characterless one story buildings. The Wakefield Square area, with its proximity to the commuter rail station, bus routes, shopping, civic buildings and open space is an ideal location to rebuild the urban scale buildings that could define downtown Wakefield. Office space and residential above the ground floor stores would support retail throughout the area while creating a place with a real sense of character. Rebuilding the demolished fourth floor of the Wakefield Block building at the corner of Lincoln St. and Main St. should be encouraged.

**Phased Development.** Redevelopment of taller buildings in this vicinity may be part of a Phase II of downtown revitalization after improvements in the retail mix, streetscape, and parking. Phase I should concentrate on upgrading storefronts, streetscape planting and paving, and insuring that signage is well designed. Attracting appropriate shops and cafes that can make these improvements will create a context for further development. Improving the ground floor retail design and uses in the Wakefield Block is especially important given the prominence of this corner (see Section XII Streetscape Elements).

**Parking.** Garage locations # 2 and #3 would serve the Wakefield Square area effectively. Parking enforcement and/or meters to control employee and commuter parking would free up space for customer use. The construction of a parking garage is critical to the redevelopment of Wakefield Square as a pedestrian oriented space. Until then it is likely to remain primarily parking (see the more detailed discussion of parking issues in part 7 Traffic and Parking).

**Recommendations** – Streetscape and building improvements, and relocation of parking lots can create a pedestrian oriented open space as a center for downtown activities. Restaurants and retail including recognized names and appropriate national chains should be actively recruited. A three to four story streetwall of mixed use buildings, new and rehabilitated, along with the relocation of at-grade parking lots to garages should be encouraged as a long term goal.





Bird's eye view of Wakefield Square looking to the southeast





View of Wakefield Square.

View of Wakefield Square: Improvements in facades, uses, signage and streetscape can transform Main Street







View of "Wakefield Square"



**SOUTHERN GATEWAY.** Street-front shops and restaurants continue for another block south of Water Street before auto oriented businesses with parking in front start to dominate the commercial landscape. The urban street wall that defines the central business district breaks down at that point and the comfortable pedestrian-friendly character of the sidewalk disappears. Across the street, the Verizon building, the Americal Center, and then the Middle School, break the continuity of the business district. The rail spur then cuts Main Street off from commercial enterprises to the south.

Eventually, an expanded central business district could connect to the Junction further to the south. This will require a significant effort to remove the rail spur and improve planting and sidewalks to overcome the automobile orientation of this area. In the meantime, the retail area south of Water Street should be more clearly defined as part of downtown with a continuation of the banners, paving and crosswalks used to the north.

The Americal Center forms a kind of entry to the coherent downtown area from the south, and an anchor for this area. Both non-commercial activities at the Americal Center and commercial uses across Main St. to the east should be better integrated into downtown activities. Activities to be supported include:

**Restaurants and stores.** A number of retail establishments continue to do reasonably well despite their owner's concerns that the south of Water Street location leaves them at or out-

### Cravings, Sweetbay and Sushi Island



**Build on successful clusters –** Although downtown Wakefield suffers from a gradual decline in the number and quality of retailers located in its commercial center, three retailers recently relocated their businesses near the corner of Main and Albion Street, and their business has improved dramatically. The owners of Sushi Island (Japanese restaurant), Cravings (ice cream shop and chocolatier) and Sweetbay (florist, antiques and specialty home furnishings) have operated their businesses at various locations in downtown Wakefield for many years and enjoy loyal and regular customer bases. When given the opportunity to move their businesses to Main St., none of the owners hesitated. Despite the general state of the retail environment throughout the region, and downtown Wakefield in particular, each of these owners saw an advantage to being on Main Street. According to the owner of Sweetbay, her volume doubled after she moved around the corner from Albion St.

The owner of Cravings invested a significant amount of capital in a thoughtful renovation of his building, which includes the ice cream parlor and chocolate shop as well as the adjacent space

that he is leasing to Sweetbay. Both of the spaces have special architectural features (Cravings includes the parlor's original booths, soda fountain and marble counters, and Sweetbay's interiors have tiled walls, decorated with fantastic pastoral murals that were covered over for years). The restored character of the buildings hints at the wealth the commercial district once enjoyed. Sushi Island, which originally opened on Princess Street, relocated to the space south of Sweetbay.

These different but complementary types of destination retail draw people of all ages, demographic groups and communities to Wakefield's Main Street. The restaurant and shop owners have coordinated and cooperated with each other, brainstorming on ways to improve and capture more business. There is a desire on the part of these merchants to do more. Owners expressed frustration toward the current zoning regulations, which limit their ability to make their businesses appear more customer-friendly; in particular, they are not allowed to place benches in front of the ice cream shop, create outdoor seating for the restaurant, or design more elaborate storefront and sidewalk displays.

Vibrant retail districts are destination areas where customers achieve many of their shopping needs in one location, and discover additional



surprises along the way. The town should encourage the creation and growth of businesses like these. They require little public financing, and bring creativity and the local flavor that helps create an identity for Wakefield. A series of clusters like this one can create a truly vibrant downtown.

side the effective margin of downtown. Streetscape elements should be used to clearly include these merchants within the central business district. The first of these elements south of Armory Street can become a "southern gateway" to the area. It can announce the start of the pedestrian scaled downtown retail area and distinguish it from the automobile oriented retail uses closer to the Junction. A more formalized gateway, like those illustrated in Section XII Streetscape Elements, should also be considered.

**Recreational and business gatherings.** With improvements to both its architectural character on the outside and the activities it accommodates inside, the Americal Center can serve as the southern counterpoint to the civic buildings to the north. It can be improved into a more dignified, high quality, flexible multi-purpose space.

Acoustical treatment and renovation to some interior spaces would allow the Americal Center to host shows, parties, and meetings, becoming an income generator as well as an anchor that supports nearby businesses. Athletics could continue. Lighting, banners, and landscaping that reinforce the Americal's civic qualities should be encouraged. The parking lot between the Middle School and the Americal could be developed as a parking garage, or at least shared more actively by the Americal Center during off hours, supporting gatherings at both facilities.

Although the Middle School now seems to interrupt the continuity of the streetscape between downtown and the Junction, planting and other improvements, including a well designed

parking garage, could reinforce this connection. A relocation/reconfiguration of the Middle School, as has been proposed, would offer the opportunity to rethink how the street and the open space are defined.

**Parking.** Garage location #2 and #3 would serve the Southern Gateway area effectively. Better organized parking behind Main Street commercial buildings could be connected to this area through Wakefield Square. Parking enforcement and meters to control employee and commuter parking would free up space for customer use. Off hours/excess parking in the Middle School parking lot could be used by the Americal Center and businesses in the vicinity.

**Recommendations** - Study potential uses and marketing options for the Americal Center as an anchor for this end of Main Street. Pursue streetscape improvements for Main Street and the Americal Center to define the area and connect it to downtown to the north and the Junction to the south. Create additional parking; use existing parking more effectively.

## 5. FACADES, SIGNAGE, AND STREETScape

The character of a downtown is defined by building facades, signage, and streetscape elements such as trees, lighting, and paving. These features serve two important functions. They tie different areas together to create a unified whole. At the same time, they distinguish one area from another to provide a sense of variety. The illustrations of redevelopment proposals suggest their importance in defining downtown Wakefield.

These elements must be carefully considered in terms of the activities they are intended to support, and the context in which they are intended to fit. The previous discussion of activity areas provides background for an evaluation of these design elements. The following outline describes in general terms how they can be used to further the goals articulated in this Master Plan. In addition, Section XII Streetscape Elements provides a broad range of examples for how these elements have been used to bring other downtowns to life.

**FACADES.** Main Street's downtown facades provide a continuous street wall appropriate for a retail area. However, there is very little consistency from one building to the next in either building height or style. Although this variety has its charms, it undermines the integrity of the central business district. Squat one story aluminum curtain wall buildings sit next door to three story masonry antiques. Some of the older buildings have been beautifully renovated; others have been poorly maintained, with a series of ill-conceived alterations to their facades.

It is critically important that Wakefield's historic downtown structures be maintained, and if possible, restored to their former stature. Their two to four story height and nicely scaled rhythms of windows and pilasters help to connect downtown to its past as a thriving business district. The recently renovated Oddfellows Hall at Avon and Main Street gives a dignified character to that corner of Downtown and is a model for the kind of rehabilitation that would benefit many of the older buildings in town. Historic Building or District designation can protect older buildings from demolition and may aid their rehabilitation.



Redevelopment of single story buildings in the central business district into new two to four story buildings with offices or residential above retail should be encouraged. A literal recreation of the older buildings that have been demolished is generally not possible. The cost of a high quality recreation of lost details is prohibitive and the compromises that result from an affordable attempt at simulation can lead to a theme park like quality in the architecture. New construction can be true to its own time, while still capturing the pleasing proportion, human scale, and sense of detail that brought the original buildings to life.

Awnings, projecting canopies, and the use of materials and systems that are appropriately scaled for a small-town retail commercial area can enhance both older and newer facades, giving them visual interest and a sense of spatial complexity. Wakefield needs to develop design guidelines for these elements, simplify their permitting, and encourage their construction. A Façade Improvement Program is highly recommended, although state and federal funding once available for these programs may not be available (see Section XIII Implementation Resources for programs and examples that may facilitate facade improvements). Facade alterations can be regulated through a downtown historic district designation and required design review.

**SIGNAGE.** Signs must be prominent enough to attract attention and convey the unique qualities of each business. At the same time, they must fit in with their building fronts, and with the facades and signs around them. Business owners and sign companies often do not have the design background to develop signage that achieves the right balance.

Some buildings, such as the Farmlands Market block, have standardized signage with a consistent traditional look. Other buildings are much more eclectic, with constantly changing materials, heights, sizes, styles and lighting systems. Downtown retail signage needs to be better regulated, with new guidelines for placement, size, and materials. This is especially important on older buildings. Given the limited number of structures with historic character, it is critical that signage on these buildings enhance, rather than detract from the architectural character of the facades. This does not, however, mean that there should be absolute consistency or a uniformly historicist character.

Given the stylistic variety of Main St. buildings, it is equally important not to expect a rigid consistency from building to building which fails to recognize unique uses and contexts. Santoro's signage for example, often criticized for its aggressive shape, can provide a special sculptural moment that creatively contrasts with more consistent signage on either side.

Signage can be regulated through a Sign Ordinance and guidelines incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance, or through downtown historic district designation. A Business Improvement District or Main Streets Program can help provide expertise, guidelines, and design assistance.

**STREETSCAPE.** Recent streetscape improvements, including some brick paving, historic streetlights, and street trees, are reasonably effective at giving a unity and pleasant character to the Main Street business district. Additional improvements can build off of these elements, both tying the district together and celebrating

unique activities and places.

Marking crosswalks with brick paving will help calm traffic, establish the priority of pedestrians, and create a rhythm out of space, form and color.

Banners hung off streetlights will add color and a sense of vitality to Main Street, and projecting rods are already in place for this purpose. They can also be suspended across the street to mark events or seasons. These sorts of elements are especially important given the excessive width of Main Street which reduces the sense of small town intimacy. Banners can help connect the two sides of the street together.

Planters, special lighting, benches and bollards can be effective elements for enlivening downtown streetscapes, but they should be located in appropriate areas where they can reinforce activities and mark distinct locations. The Northern Gateway, Albion Crossing, and Wakefield Square can be defined, in part, by these kinds of elements.

The most effective streetscape elements are often those that extend businesses outward, displaying goods and services to potential customers and creating an activated pedestrian area. The 14' – 16' width of the downtown sidewalks is sufficient for the display of books, clothes, or for outdoor dining. Tables and chairs along restaurant frontages should be encouraged, rather than discouraged as they are at present. Street furniture should be associated with appropriate uses, such as cafes, to create a sense of vitality and an attractive destination for shoppers (see Section XII Streetscape Elements).

### Bringing Downtown Melrose to Life



Along with its high quality residential environment, over the past 20 years Melrose has become known for its downtown commercial district. In addition to serving local residents, the charming center has become a regional destination

as well. In the 1970's and 80's Melrose began downtown improvements in both the public and private arenas. Street and sidewalk improvements, including Victorian streetlights, were installed as a part of a streetscape program. A grant program was created to replace non-conforming signage and to improve commercial facades. Loans were made available for other commercial renovations.

In the 1990's, a Community Development Revolving Loan, funded by a federal Community Development Block Grant, was allocated to the city of Melrose by the state. The Revolving Loan funded parking and sidewalk improvements downtown, including the addition of 30 spaces for the Dills Court Parking lot, accessibility improvements to streets and sidewalks, and the installation of trash cans throughout downtown.

In an effort to continue these improvements, the Office of Planning and Community Development in Melrose utilizes the Community Development Block Grant Small Cities funds for their Small Business Loans program, reducing loan rates for small businesses. These grants provide financing for 40%

of business improvement project costs at below market rates; local banks that participate in the program finance



another 40% of the project cost at market rates. Businesses are required to invest at least 20% of their own capital in the project. The Community Development Revolving Program also offers the Sign and Facade Grant Program, which funds up to 50% of the cost for new signs and facade improvements. The improvements made to downtown Melrose streets and buildings have transformed the previously deteriorated area into a very successful commercial district. Although many of these programs are no longer providing funding, alternative sources combined with town and business commitment can still bring prosperity to downtowns.

*Source: Melrose City Planning Department*



## 6. DOWNTOWN RECOMMENDATIONS

Wakefield should reduce the administrative and regulatory hurdles facing business owners wanting to improve signage or facades, or to expand dining or retail activities onto the sidewalk. The town can provide design guidelines and expertise to assist owners in making upgrades. The town, Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement District should organize, assist, promote and coordinate improvements to streetscape, facades, and signage. Regular cleaning of the streets, trash pickup, and snow removal can also be helpful in improving the downtown environment. Such efforts can involve a combination of public and private efforts; responsibilities should be clearly articulated (see Section XIII Implementation Resources for programs and financing that may be available).

A Storefront Improvement Program can be created to support these goals. It can be supported by a Main Streets program, town funding, Community Development Block Grants if available, and design assistance from local architects.

The town should help create a range of residential living opportunities in downtown that can help rejuvenate the central business district. A mix of residential and retail uses, especially near transit, creates a vibrant environment that supports appropriate growth. Live/work spaces for artists and entrepreneurs can be especially desirable in creating a "scene" that will attract new residents, shops, and cafes. Housing for seniors allows them walk to neighborhood businesses and downtown services.



Financing of small scale mixed use projects can be a challenge. The town should work with developers to facilitate required financing and permitting of well designed buildings.

The town should create an overlay district, provide zoning relief, or change its zoning restrictions to allow the kinds of mixed use developments that support town goals. Wakefield can make a concerted effort to recruit and work with developers who share the vision articulated in this Master Plan.

The use of 40C historic district designation may be appropriate in the preservation of historic buildings and the character of the downtown area. It is an option that should be pursued.

A Main Street Coordinator or similar position working under the Town Planner should be created within town government or through a public/private collaboration to help promote business interests. Entrepreneurial expertise and experience working with diverse interests should be required of candidates who are seeking the job.

## **7. TRAFFIC AND PARKING**

Lack of parking is the most frequently given reason for Downtown Wakefield's inability to achieve the vitality that business people and citizens desire. It is practically impossible to measure the parking shortfall, and the difficulty in finding a space changes throughout the course of the day, the week, and the year. A preliminary investigation undertaken by the Master Plan team

suggests that parking for downtown shoppers may be easier to find than commonly believed. Nevertheless, identifying parking needs and finding solutions is important for downtown's continued development. Clearly defined parking areas and regulations build confidence in the town and in the convenience of the retail district as a destination.

Any measure taken to add or control parking has costs and benefits: business owners, employees, shoppers, nearby property owners, commuters, and the town are all affected differently by different parking solutions. It is important that all stakeholders are consulted before changes in the parking programs are implemented. It is also important that an entity – the town, the Chamber of Commerce, or a Business Improvement District, take a leadership role in proposing and implementing these changes.

The traffic and parking issues addressed below should be studied in more detail by the appropriate professionals as part of a comprehensive traffic and parking plan.

**Incremental Parking Improvements.** Given the difficulty of precisely determining parking needs, the effectiveness of alternative solutions, and the expense of creating new parking, it would be prudent for the town to pursue incremental improvements in parking policy. The first step would be enforcement, and the ultimate step would be the construction of structured parking, with a series of options in between.

**Time-limit parking with enforcement.** Establishing and enforcing parking limits would be the first step for the Town to pursue in resolving downtown parking problems. Currently there is a

posted “One Hour Parking” limit throughout the central business district. It has been noted that this is rarely enforced.

Two-to-four hour parking limits with enforcement within the central business district would allow customer parking for downtown businesses while preventing the all-day commuter parking that makes spaces for customers difficult to find. One hour parking may discourage potential customers who intend to make several downtown stops. In limited areas - near the post office for example - 15 minute parking may be desirable to allow quick stops for specific purposes.

Local business owners have voiced concern over parking limitations in the past, suggesting that successful implementation will require coordination with area stakeholders if enforcement is to be successful. This is especially true since local business owners and their employees are among the commuters who take prime Central Business District parking spaces for all day use.

Entrenched habits are hard to break, so education will be an important component of the coordination effort. Businesses must understand that they will benefit by locating employee and owner parking outside of the retail area to insure that there are spaces for their customers. Establishing satellite parking lots in areas surrounding downtown could provide parking for business owners and employees that are close enough to be convenient, but utilize open areas that may be perceived by customers as just too far for shopping. A morning and evening shuttle to downtown could be provided. On-street parking dispersed in residential areas is also an alternative.

**Metered Parking.** Wakefield can both control and profit from parking in the central business district by installing parking meters and establishing parking limitations in the vicinity of downtown businesses and nearby residential areas. Parking policy must be carefully coordinated to insure that parking problems do not merely shift from one area to another. Parking meters provide time-limit enforcement as well as revenues to the city, but run the risk of alienating potential customers and creating a “big city” atmosphere. They also run the risk of pushing substantial numbers of cars onto nearby unmetered residential streets unless parking time limits on those streets are also enforced. Meters should be considered as an incremental step beyond the measures noted above.

Parking meters on Main Street, Albion Street, North Avenue, and streets immediately off of these main commercial streets would allow the town to control how long cars can remain parked. Limiting meters to two hours would insure that only patrons, not commuters, use the spaces. Eight hour meters would allow employees of area businesses to park but would again discourage commuter parking. With all approaches, enforcement is essential. Commuters soon learn if parking violations are not punished. Parking costs should be cheap and violations expensive to discourage all-day parking without discouraging shoppers.

To be effective, the all-day rates at the MBTA North Avenue parking areas adjacent to the commuter rail station should increase above the current \$2.00 per day, and be brought in line with the town's overall parking strategy.

Establishing resident-only or time-limited parking in nearby residential areas is important if the problem is to be solved rather

than merely shifted. Establishing a system of signage, permitting, and enforcement for residents-only parking is costly, but insures that those living in the surrounding neighborhoods (or downtown when apartments or condominiums are built) can continue to park near their residences. A two hour parking limit in residential areas near the commuter rail station is recommended. It allows shoppers to park while preventing all-day commuter parking.

**Parking Lot Aggregation.** Parking lots behind the stores fronting the east side of Main St. are privately owned and associated with adjacent buildings. The small size of the properties, which are often fenced off from one another, leads to inefficient parking layouts. Aggregating these parking areas into larger, continuous lots can lead to a significant increase in available parking. With signage and entries located in appropriate places, and attractive landscaping and curbing, a coherent parking system can be created that will make parking seem, and be, more accessible (a schematic plan for reorganized parking in this area is illustrated earlier in this Section with the heading Proposed Main Street Improvements Phase I).

As with any parking solution, it will take leadership on the part of the town, and an entity representing property owners, to implement a plan that requires sacrificing private control to the common good. The result will be the kind of easy-to-navigate community parking that Melrose, Stoneham, Watertown, and many area municipalities now offer, and that shoppers have come to expect.

**Additional parking.** Creating new parking areas – without

destroying existing buildings that give character to the area – can contribute to solving parking problems. Yet given the intensive use of the Downtown area, it is difficult to create significant new parking areas immediately adjacent to businesses. In a few locations, such as Foster Street, travel lanes may be able to be reduced offering additional on-street parking.

The demolition of existing buildings to create at-grade parking may be difficult to justify if it erodes the fabric of the area while providing only a limited number of new spaces. If significant demolition needs to take place, it may be worth building structured parking on the site.

**Parking Garage/Parking Deck.** Many towns have found parking garages to be a cost effective solution to parking problems. In Wakefield, it is not clear that the parking problem is severe enough, that there is an appropriate parcel, and that the money will be available to warrant this kind of construction. Many people feel that the “big city” quality suggested by a parking garage is at odds with residents' image of the town.

Structured parking should be pursued only after the incremental steps noted above have been taken, and proven inadequate. Ultimately, a parking garage may be necessary for downtown to thrive, and possible locations are shown on the following plan. A long-term strategy to bring new multi-use development to downtown Wakefield will require the construction of a parking garage, as it is unlikely that contemplated new three to four floor buildings will be able to accommodate required parking on site.

A parking garage must be part of a comprehensive parking strategy. Parking rates in a garage should be equivalent to or less than the



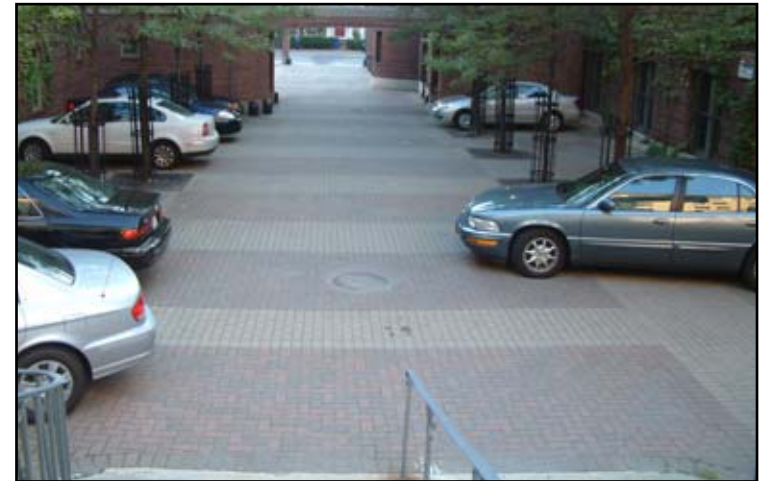
cost of on-street parking if they are to free up existing spaces for casual shoppers passing through. This would require meters on the street and enforcement of parking regulations. Garage rates should be low enough to not discourage downtown shopping and high enough to produce income when used for all-day commuter parking. Per hour costs can rise to subsidize shoppers while profiting off of all-day commuter parking. The high cost of downtown Boston parking suggests that commuters can be charged significant rates in Wakefield while still providing a bargain in comparison. Employees of downtown Wakefield businesses can get stickers or cards to allow for subsidized rates to reduce their use of on-street parking which should be reserved for customers.

*A rate schedule could be as follows:*

<i>1<sup>st</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>free</i>
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$.50</i>
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$.75</i>
<i>4<sup>th</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$1.00</i>
<i>5<sup>th</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$2.00</i>
<i>6<sup>th</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$3.00</i>
<i>7<sup>th</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$4.00</i>
<i>8<sup>th</sup> hour</i>	-	<i>\$5.00</i>

**Financing options for downtown garages.** Identifying funding sources for a town-owned garage may be challenging. One option is to establish a Parking Authority that would sell bonds through a state agency. Potential revenue sources to repay the bonds include user fees charged to developers and property owners to satisfy their parking requirements, monthly parking rates for business district owners and employees, daily and hourly parking fees for customers and

*Multi-colored pavers and trees turn a parking lot into a public plaza in Cambridge near Harvard Square. They are a relief from the usual striped asphalt.*



*Signs in Watertown direct shoppers and town hall users to well-organized parking lots and then clarify parking regulations.*



receipts from parking meters. Community Development Block Grant money may be available as security.

The rough outline for parking garage construction and financing costs are as follows:

*With a hard and soft cost of \$25,000 per space and 5% financing for 25 years, each space must return \$130/month/space including operations and expenses. Assuming 15% vacancy, each space must return \$7.00 per day. \$5.00 per day may be more in line with the market, requiring a \$2.00 per day subsidy from the town or other sources.*

## 8. ALTERNATIVE GARAGE LOCATIONS

**Garage Option #1** This garage is located between retail buildings on Main St. and residential buildings on Crescent St. If kept at two levels it would not have a significant visual presence except on Centre Street. It would serve the heart of the Downtown commercial and civic district. Access could be from Centre St., Main St. or both. The slope of the land might allow “at-grade” access to two different parking levels, perhaps without the need for a connecting ramp, to maximize the number of spaces provided. Several properties, both private and town owned would have to be consolidated to make development worthwhile. The garage as shown could accommodate approximately 100 cars per level. A garage at this location was proposed in the 1980s but was not pursued after an initial investigation.

**Garage Option #2.** A Verizon facility and truck maintenance and parking area currently occupies the west side of Main St. between West Water St. and Armory St. The Verizon building offers no public access that contributes to the vitality of Main Street. The existing buildings could be replaced by a parking garage on the rear 75% of the site with retail or commercial uses along the front 25%. These uses would contribute to street life while screening the larger garage from view. Access could be from Armory St., West Water St., or both. The garage as shown could accommodate approximately 120 cars per level for a total of as many as 360 cars.

**Garage Option #3.** This site between the Americal Center and the Middle School is currently used as a parking lot along a stretch of Main St. where the downtown commercial fabric gives way to parking lots and railroad tracks. A parking garage structure could reinforce the downtown street-wall while providing multi-level parking where only single level parking now exists. Trees and an attractive garage façade would be desirable to screen the garage interior from view. The site is convenient to the Middle School, the Americal Center, downtown, and the Junction. Approximately 180 cars per level could be accommodated.

*Plans must be coordinated with ongoing use of the school or possible reconstruction of the Middle School in an alternative location on the site.*

**Long Term Commuter Parking Solution** - Wakefield has become a regional transportation hub, with commuters, often from other towns, parking near downtown and taking buses or the commuter rail line. Although this influx of potential customers has possible benefits for the town, it has increased the parking burden on the central business district and is not considered to be desirable. A



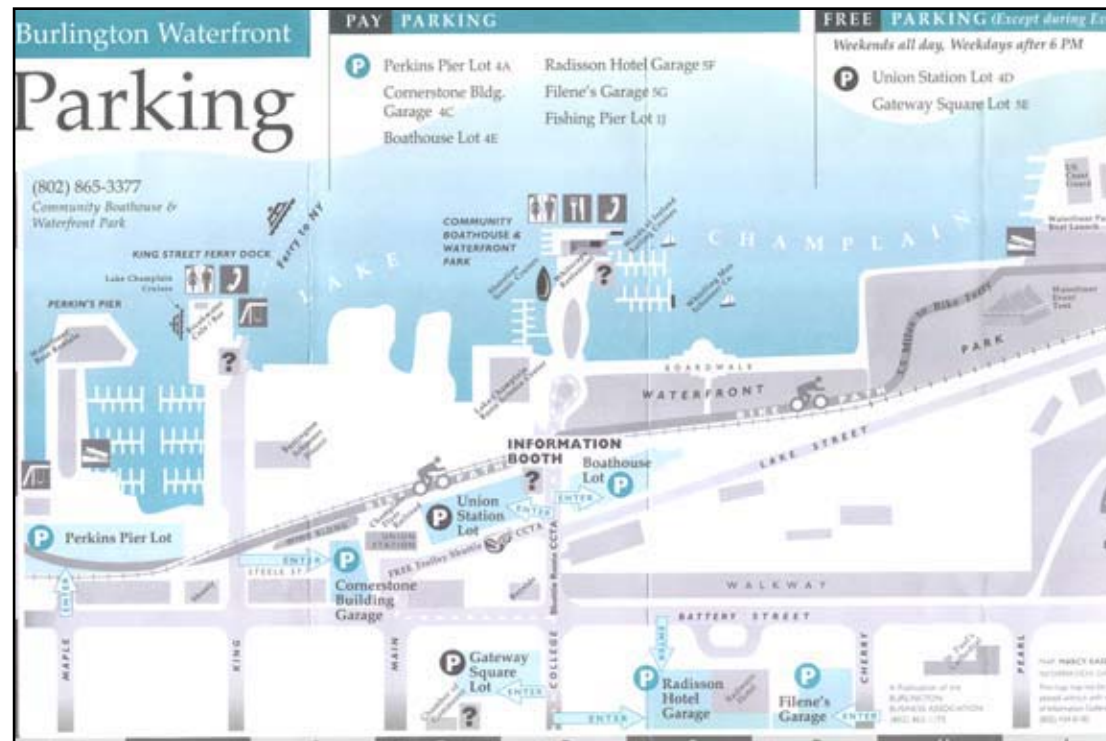


new commuter rail station with large parking lots, located near Rt. 128, would solve many of these problems. This is a long term solution at best, however, and more easily achievable interim solutions are required.

**Implementation** - Given the importance of resolving parking problems to the long term health of downtown, it is important that the business community and town government work together to develop a program for incremental improvements. Leadership

can come from a Main Street Coordinator hired by the town, a representative of a Business Improvement District, or an outside consultant hired to make recommendations and develop a detailed implementation program.

Broad community input will be required to build support for proposed solutions. Parking policy must be clearly explained and regulations enforced to build confidence in the town's ability to provide convenient parking.



*Burlington, Vermont has produced a map of downtown to highlight where parking and other town features are located. These maps are distributed in stores and at other locations throughout the town.*