



An initiative of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Secretary Bob Durand, in partnership with the City of Lawrence

## Dear Friend of Community Preservation:

UrbanRiver Visions is the Community Preservation Initiative's newest project. The initiative provides community leaders with the tools, information, and technical assistance necessary to help them plan for future growth. This new project represents an important next step because it helps facilitate the community's vision and planning to explore ways in which the downtown can be revitalized using the river as a focal point. All of the initiative's efforts have the same goal, to empower communities to make balanced and forward thinking growth decisions that preserve and enhance the quality of life in our communities and throughout the Commonwealth.

Rivers have long defined the core of many of the Commonwealth's urban areas. The harnessing of these rivers for power and manufacturing characterized the Commonwealth's growth in the nineteenth century as a center for commerce and prosperity. The legacy of this era is reflected in the mill buildings that define the heart of many cities and towns and represent a celebrated element of our built environment. Recently, our communities suffered with several decades of decline in the industries these mills once housed. The legacy of land and water pollution that accompanied earlier industrial development has been a burden to our communities.

Now, many communities are poised to reexamine the role of their rivers as a source of urban vitality, as an amenity, and as an attractor of new enterprises and jobs. UrbanRiver Visions is designed to take these efforts a step further by working with individual communities to help shape their future and reconnect them to the river, making it once again a focal point for commerce and community.

This project defines and provides the framework for reclaiming these rivers as environmental and economic assets, integrating them back into our civic lives. It is a celebration of rivers, communities, and creativity.

I hope that you find the accompanying information useful. Electronic versions of these documents are available on the UrbanRiver Visions web site at [www.urbanrivervisions.org](http://www.urbanrivervisions.org). I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to continuing our partnership as we work to make these dreams a reality.

Very truly yours,  
  
 Bob Durand



## UrbanRiver Visions Lawrence Gateway/Canal Neighborhood Charrette: Spicket River

The communities of Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Hudson, Fall River, Lawrence, and Worcester held charrettes in the fall of 2002 as part of EOE's UrbanRiver Visions project. After the charrettes, all the communities came together in Hudson on December 10, 2002 to share their visions. Each of the UrbanRiver Visions communities seized this opportunity to define its vision for the future. The visions reflect an overall community consensus about the relationship between the community and its riverfront. These visions represent important starting points that can continue to be refined and modified over time in response to new information, opportunities, changed circumstances, or unforeseen difficulties.

This poster summarizes the findings of the Lawrence Gateway/Canal Neighborhood UrbanRiver Visions Charrette that was held on November 16, 2002 at 60 Island Street. The charrette resulted in a vision plan and action plan that are summarized here. This side of the poster documents community goals, issues, and possible next steps. The reverse side includes a Vision Plan and describes actions needed to achieve this vision.

Additional charrette information is on file at the Lawrence Planning Department in a project binder that contains verbatim notes from the charrette, copies of powerpoint presentations, base maps, and other technical information.

For additional information, please visit [www.urbanrivervisions.org](http://www.urbanrivervisions.org)

UrbanRiver Visions Consultant Team:  
 EOE selected Goody, Clancy & Associates and its team of consultants to provide professional assistance to each of the communities in the program. Lawrence Gateway/Canal Neighborhood consultant team members also included Maria Van Dusen and Landman Planning Consultants.

# Lawrence Gateway/Canal Neighborhood Charrette

## Redefining the River's Edge

### The Place

The study area for Lawrence's Gateway/Canal UrbanRiver Visions charrette includes the area surrounding the confluence of the Spicket River and the North Canal with the Merrimack River and the land and buildings along the North Canal. The area includes a number of Lawrence's large 19th century mill buildings, a waterfall at the end of the canal, numerous canal bridges, and a large vacant parcel of land at the canal's eastern end. Much of the area is known as the Canal District. On November 16, 2002 charrette participants developed strategies that could build on other community initiatives and contribute to the rebirth of this beautiful urban district.

### A Shared Vision

The "Reviendo Gateway Initiative" is a community planning process that has been underway in Lawrence for the past year. The study area of the UrbanRiver Visions charrette is one part of the area covered by the initiative. The charrette provided the opportunity to extend and add to the Initiative's community planning process and to focus specifically on the Canal District and the confluence of the Spicket and Merrimack Rivers. The district has seen a number of successful public and private redevelopment projects over the past decade and excitement is building as the time is ripe to fully realize the potential of the district as a vibrant mixed-use destination.

### Next Steps

The Reviendo Gateway Initiative has already brought together a committed and active group of people who are in the process of moving their vision forward. The UrbanRiver Visions charrette provided an opportunity to extend that vision and describe it in more detail.

The next steps identified for the Canal District include:

- Support the Reviendo Gateway Initiative and use it as the key vehicle to implement the vision
- Stay organized - don't let the energy and enthusiasm diminish
- Work with the canal's owner to allow activities to happen on or adjacent to the waterway
- Explore what liabilities are involved in public use of the canal and assess the impacts of transfer of canal ownership to the city
- Continue the Spicket River cleanup initiated in October by Groundwork Lawrence
- Consider what zoning modifications may be needed to support implementation of the vision
- Support continued growth of arts activities along the canal



### Morning Sessions

Small group discussions focused on three themes:

- (1) Connections;
- (2) Community programming;
- (3) Mix of uses along the canal.

Key recommendations are listed below:

### Connections

- The canal is the center of the district - geographically, programmatically, and historically
- Walking is very common in Lawrence, both for transportation and for recreation - plans for the area should build on this
- Developing safe and attractive connections to the water are important in many parts of the area. This will require strategies to deal with the topography of the riverbanks and the walls of the canal
- Think about connections for "tourists" from Lawrence and from elsewhere - heritage walking trail, bicycle trails, a river trail with access to the falls, and recreational boating on the Merrimack River and along the canal
- Include new boating access to the water at the end of the Island
- Provide access for fishing along the river and in the canal. "The canal is loaded with fish"
- Think about maintaining the integrity of the canal: should the canal be transferred from private to public ownership? if so, how and under what conditions?
- Consider access along the south side of the canal; consider a trolley in the long term
- Make connections from the island under the new Canal Street Bridge to the old Oxford Paper/GenCorp site
- Make connections from the Canal District to the Spicket River Greenway (North Common Neighborhood and beyond), to Lawrence General Hospital, and up the hill to the Prospect Hill neighborhood

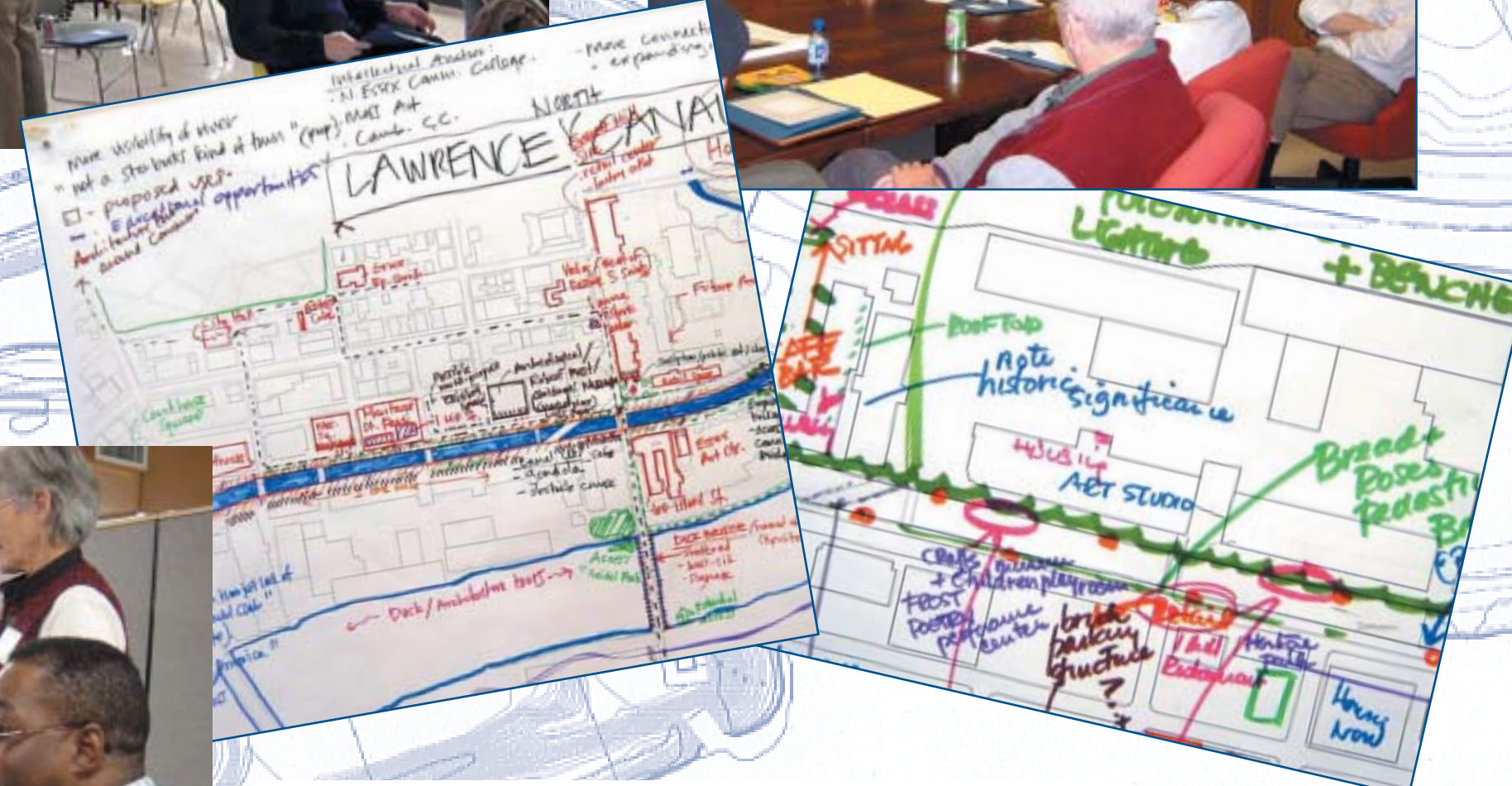
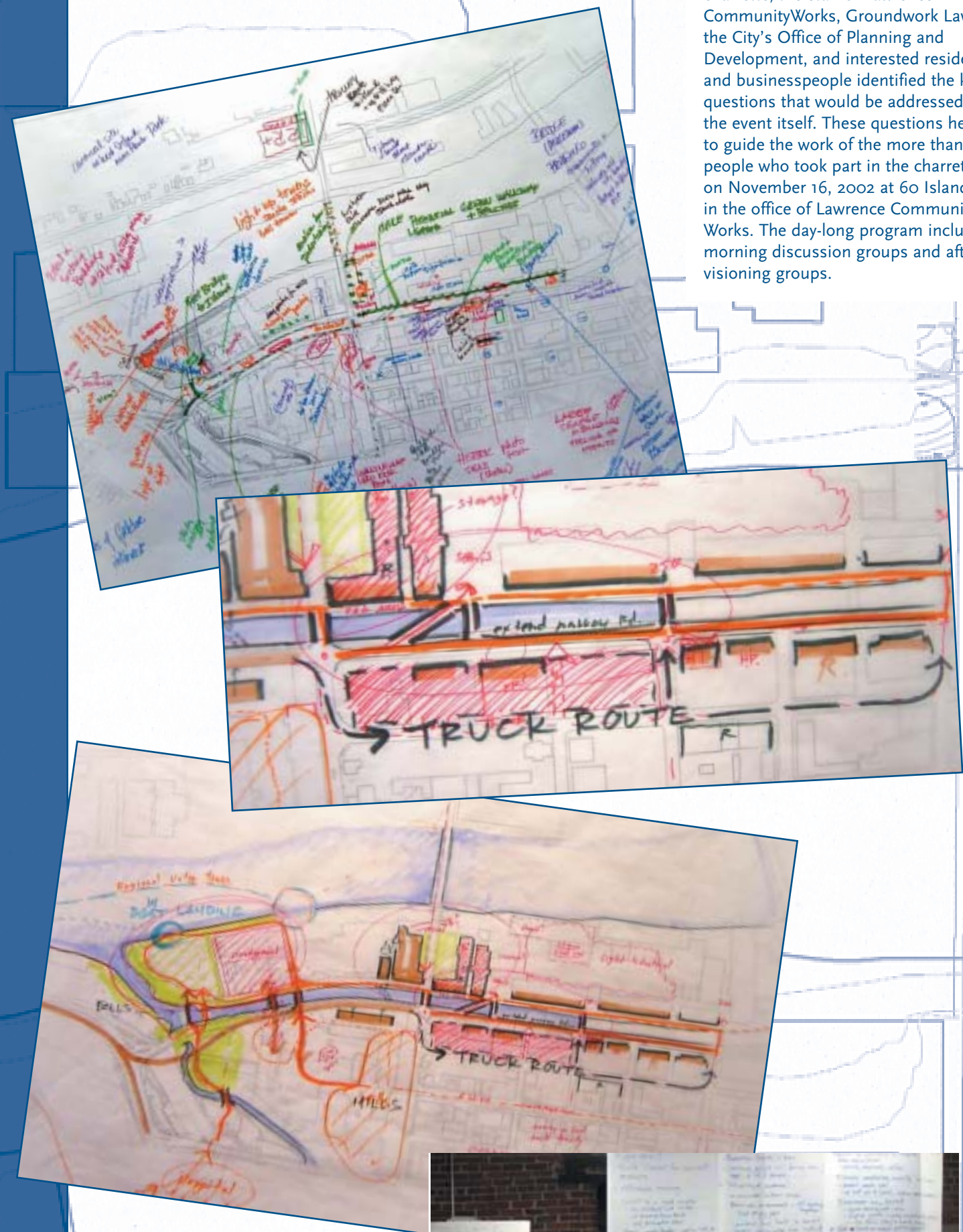
### Community Programming

- Advertise events in Lawrence as part of the "City of Festivals." Use more large banners, billboards and signs on buildings such as the John Walsh, Riverwalk, and Cummings Park buildings visible from I-495; print wallet-sized cards listing the events and dates
- Reuse mill buildings along the canal to create an arts district. Develop studios/housing, performance spaces (Robert Frost poetry reading), cultural centers, and a children's museum (Lincoln Food, Pemberton Mill, Washington Mill)
- Establish a movable gallery for art
- Expand community support for events in the area. Children come, but where are the parents? (Antelope Day, First Mile/Minute train, Springfield, Festival of 3 Saints, Mara Jahn)

- Expand attendance at festivals to bring in more restaurants and other businesses
- Investigate potential performance center sites (four possible locations discussed: St. Anne's, Lawrence Recreation Center (old), 386 Essex St. Truell Bldg, Holy Rosary School (closed))
- Develop interpretive signage at historic locations on the canal; tie into walking tours
- Sponsor programs for children to take an active role in beautifying and revitalizing Lawrence by painting murals; create a passport program to motivate kids to come to events; plant flowers on road islands
- Use dramatic lighting on bridges and buildings
- Provide bigger and better outdoor open space, perhaps at the tip of the Island
- Restore old canal gates to highlight how the waterway functioned

### Mix of uses along the canal

- The canal ties everything together
- Encourage the development of uses that create jobs
- Other key uses include arts, cultural, educational, housing, and water-dependent recreation
- Water-related uses shine light on the asset: kayaking, boat rental kiosks, paddle boats, swan boats, a history boat, gondolas, and water festivals
- Incentive canal uses will attract people: consider a bridge of flowers, lanterns in the canal, fishing, and a tug of war over the canal
- Residents need to see the value of the canal; build community support and participation; establish a "Canal Day"
- Some key groups to involve include: neighborhood organizations; Lawrence Heritage Group; youth groups including Young Architects, and Teen Coalition; families and seniors
- Access improvements are needed
- Public safety is important
- Consider affordable housing
- Lowell is a good model of a mix of uses attractive to both residents and visitors
- Create a destination that is attractive to Lawrence residents and workers (including Lawrence General Hospital) with restaurants, and shops
- Investment in the Gateway project and the district will create jobs; important to make related work force investments
- Creation of a pedestrian friendly environment is important
- Create connections to the new train station
- Promote sustainable development
- Focus on areas of "first impressions" like the train station
- Preserve the bridges



### Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoon sessions, three groups of charrette participants created an annotated plan that outlined their vision for the district. Each of the groups presented their vision to all of the other participants at the end of the day. The visions contained many shared themes and elements as noted in the summaries below. These plans provided the basis for development of the vision plan.

#### Group 1

Group 1 focused on finding a mix of uses that would make the district work for people who live in Lawrence, and would make it a destination with open space assets and mixed-use activities. The group identified the need for a lively streetscape with outdoor cafes, calm traffic (while specifically acknowledging the need to accommodate truck traffic to maintain the existing light industrial uses - perhaps by designating truck routes that are off Canal Street), retail, residential, and arts uses, spilling out of the buildings onto the sidewalks and public spaces. The group also suggested identifying key buildings or parcels for redevelopment that would then spur other activities.

#### Group 2

Group 2 focused on the preservation of historic and natural elements and the addition of new amenities that would strengthen the community around the

Gateway/Canal area. To celebrate and protect the vital history, culture, and natural beauty of Lawrence, Group 2 suggested adding interpretive signage and dramatic lighting emphasizing historically significant mill buildings and towers. Community beautification projects would be undertaken by artists. Key buildings would be redeveloped to include multiple cultural uses such as the Robert Frost Poetry Center and new children's museum.

#### Group 3

Group 3 focused on creating a district that would attract people, and discussed a wide variety of uses such as a museum of archaeology, institutions of higher education (MassArt, Cambridge College), a hotel, a theater/performance arts space, a focus for Latino culture, many venues that serve food, an art museum, a poetry museum/performance venue, and housing. The group said the district should be a place that is attractive to everyone in the city - and that it should celebrate the 72 nationalities that make up Lawrence's diverse and rich history as a "world city." The group also noted that it is important to connect the Canal District with downtown (Essex Street) and that all the possible federal, state, and local economic tools should be used to fuel the rebirth of the area. Finally, this group said it was important to find a name for the district that captures its vitality and diversity.



# UrbanRiver Visions

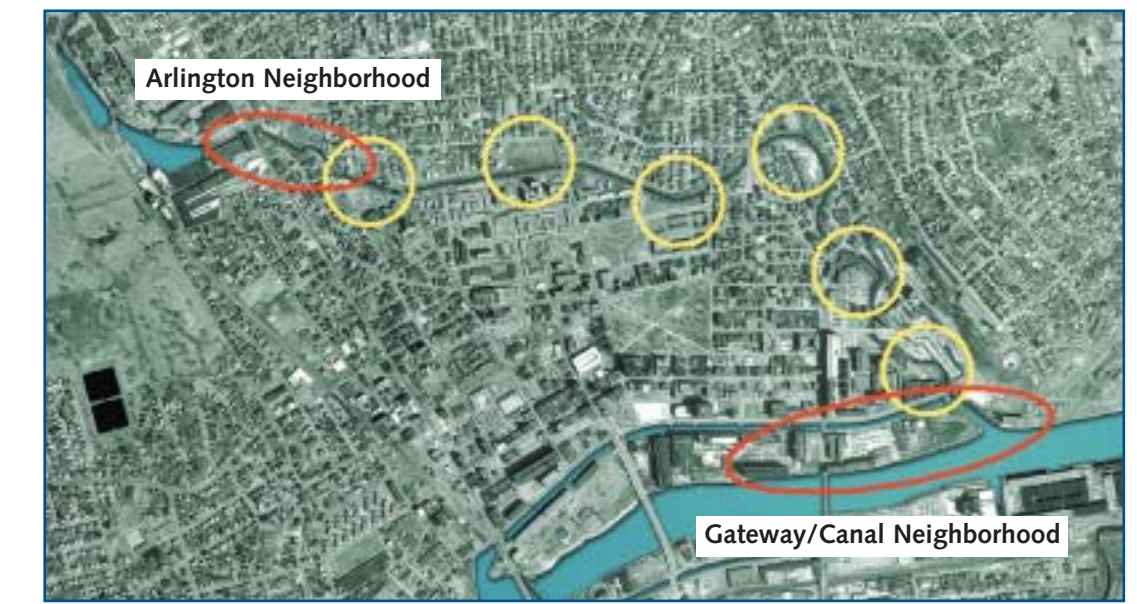


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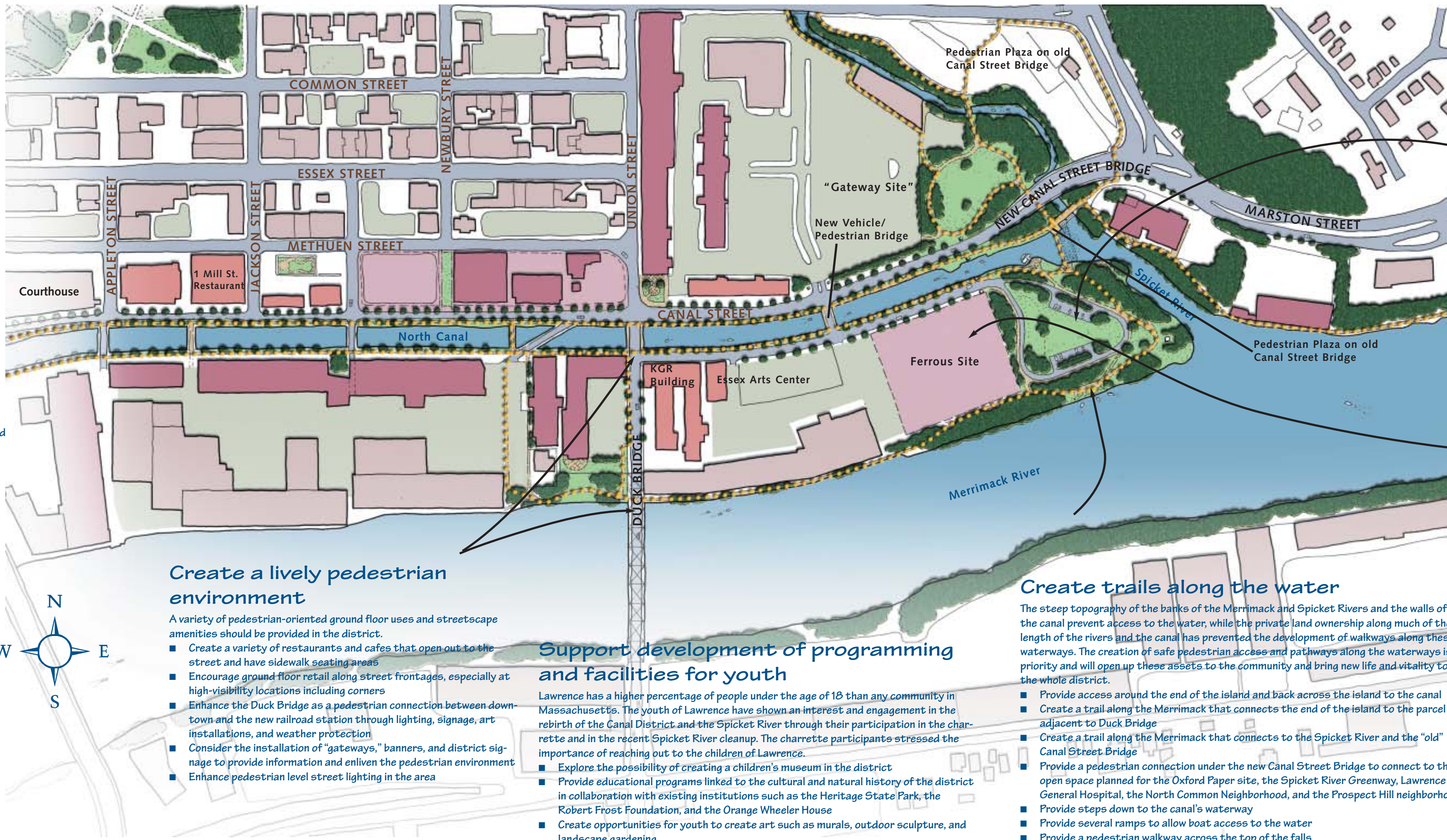
The Canal District can become a vibrant place for all the people of Lawrence by building on the beauty and heritage of the historic buildings, the canal, and its bridges. The buildings could incorporate a mix of retail and residential uses, meeting areas, cultural and artistic spaces, and office or light industrial uses that provide employment opportunities. The district could include open vistas, walkways, and parks along the banks of the canal and the Spicket and Merrimack Rivers. The urban environment could be celebrated with dramatic lighting and decorations along the bridges and canal that celebrate the stories of people and past events (Bread & Roses, immigrants). The Spicket River Greenway could be completed by implementing the projects that are already planned, and by capturing the opportunities in the Gateway area and the Arlington Neighborhood, which represent the two ends of the river in Lawrence.

# Lawrence Gateway/Canal Neighborhood: Vision for the Future

Building on the Reviviendo Gateway Initiative: The canal as the heart of a vibrant commercial, residential, and arts community



Two UrbanRiver Vision study areas along the Spicket River in Lawrence (shown in red) are part of a larger community initiative that is creating new and enhanced open spaces all along the river.



## Incorporate a wide variety of arts uses and activities in the district

A number of artists and arts institutions (including the Essex Art Center) have begun to make their homes in the district. Further development of these uses should be encouraged and promoted.

- Consider the reuse of mill buildings for artist housing and studios
- Provide city and non-profit support for continuation of an arts on the canal program
- Explore the possibility of incorporating additional arts institutions such as a visual arts museum, a poetry (Robert Frost Foundation) museum, a performing arts center, and a theater
- Enhance youth arts programming in the area
- Support existing community festivals and explore the addition of new festivals

## Improve vehicle access

Participants in the charrette expressed the need to ensure continued truck access to the existing commercial uses in the district. At the same time, there was an eagerness to make sure that the district has an attractive and safe pedestrian environment.

- Explore the development of a truck route that avoids most of Canal Street
- Fully implement the improvement to the Canal Street/Union Street intersection, including pedestrian improvements and the development of a handsome urban open space
- Continue to explore the creation of a new bridge across the canal near the "Ferrous" site

## Create a lively pedestrian environment

A variety of pedestrian-oriented ground floor uses and streetscape amenities should be provided in the district.

- Create a variety of restaurants and cafes that open out to the street and have sidewalk seating areas
- Encourage ground floor retail along street frontages, especially at high-visibility locations including corners
- Enhance the Duck Bridge as a pedestrian connection between downtown and the new railroad station through lighting, signage, art installations, and weather protection
- Consider the installation of "gateways," banners, and district signage to provide information and enliven the pedestrian environment
- Enhance pedestrian level street lighting in the area

## Support development of programming and facilities for youth

Lawrence has a higher percentage of people under the age of 18 than any community in Massachusetts. The youth of Lawrence have shown an interest and engagement in the rebirth of the Canal District and the Spicket River through their participation in the charrette and in the recent Spicket River cleanup. The charrette participants stressed the importance of reaching out to the children of Lawrence.

- Explore the possibility of creating a children's museum in the district
- Provide educational programs linked to the cultural and natural history of the district in collaboration with existing institutions such as the Heritage State Park, the Robert Frost Foundation, and the Orange Wheeler House
- Create opportunities for youth to create art such as murals, outdoor sculpture, and landscape gardening

## Create trails along the water

The steep topography of the banks of the Merrimack and Spicket Rivers and the walls of the canal prevent access to the water, while the private land ownership along much of the length of the rivers and the canal has prevented the development of walkways along these waterways. The creation of safe pedestrian access and pathways along the waterways is a priority and will open up these assets to the community and bring new life and vitality to the whole district.

- Provide access around the end of the island and back across the island to the canal
- Create a trail along the Merrimack that connects the end of the island to the parcel adjacent to Duck Bridge
- Create a trail along the Merrimack that connects to the Spicket River and the "old" Canal Street Bridge
- Provide a pedestrian connection under the new Canal Street Bridge to connect to the open space planned for the Oxford Paper site, the Spicket River Greenway, Lawrence General Hospital, the North Common Neighborhood, and the Prospect Hill neighborhood
- Provide steps down to the canal's waterway
- Provide several ramps to allow boat access to the water
- Provide a pedestrian walkway across the top of the falls

## Create a substantial new open space at the end of the island

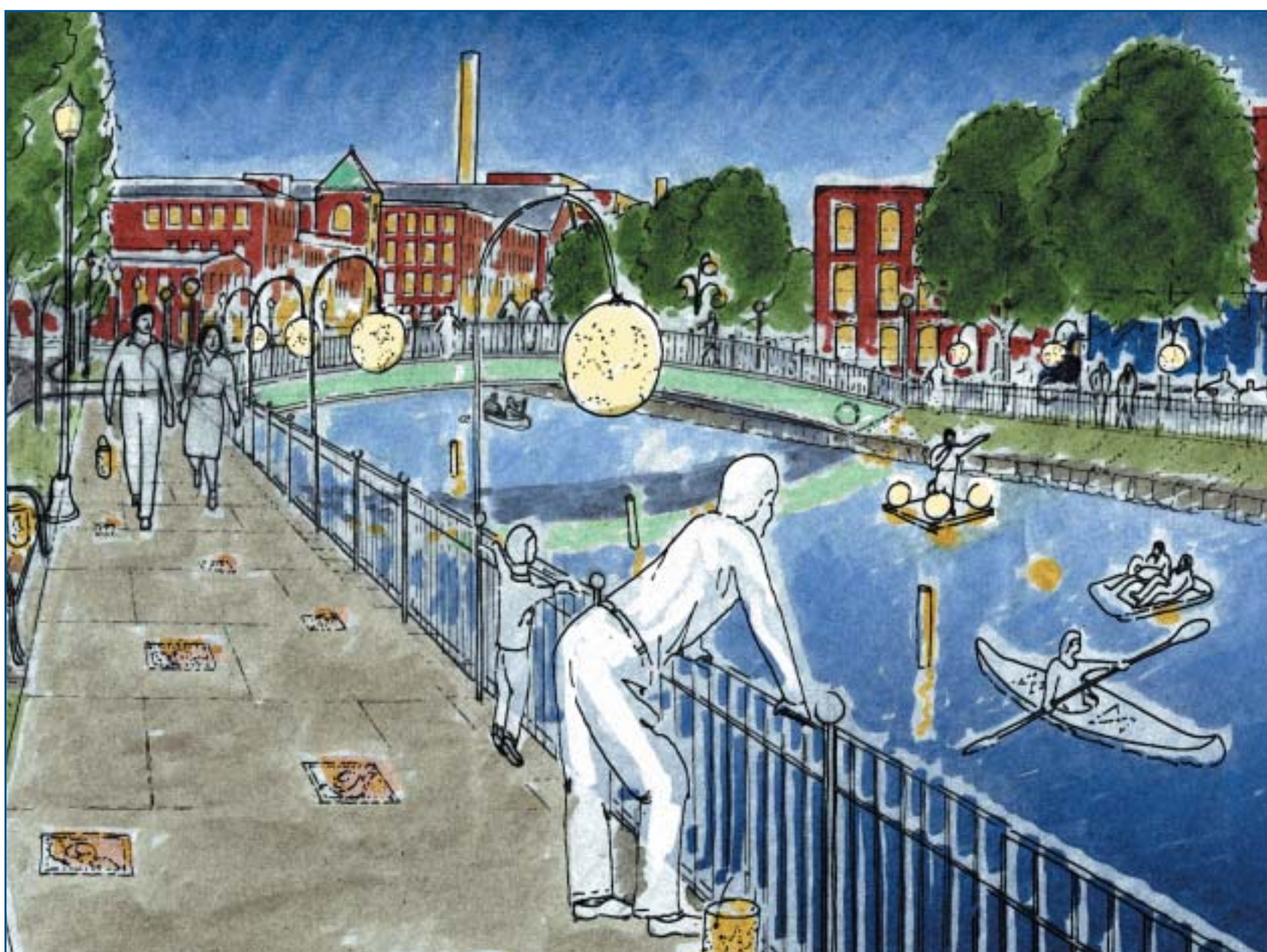
The end of the island has beautiful physical features including views of the falls, a grove of mature trees, a gently sloping bank, and a sense of spaciousness with water views in three directions. Once the Greater Lawrence Sanitary District implements its plan to address combined sewer overflow problems, the C50 facility on the site will no longer be needed, and the potential will exist to create a handsome open space. Key elements of a plan for this area could include:

- Design a park that takes advantage of views to and from the property and views of the falls
- Provide a path system that connects to and along the water
- Include interpretive material that describes the historic significance of the site
- Take advantage of the site's varied topography and mature stands of trees
- Consider the inclusion of an outdoor amphitheater in the park
- Consider facilities for active recreation such as a skate park or soccer field
- Work with the new owners of the Ferrous property to designate development and open space zones
- Provide access points and launch sites for small boats

## Redevelop the "Ferrous" site

This substantial piece of property is occupied by an obsolete industrial plant, which has no potential for reuse. The site is the largest parcel in downtown Lawrence that could be available for a major new development. The city could work with the new owners of the property to designate development and open space zones within the site. A number of desirable development possibilities were mentioned by charrette participants:

- Hotel and conference center
- Office use with ground floor retail
- Cultural uses such as an art museum or an archaeology museum
- Riverfront open space
- Housing



View of canal with a new pedestrian bridge. Creative lighting, water-related activities, and public art could contribute to creating a unique destination.

## Incorporate a mix of uses in the district's buildings as they are rehabilitated in the coming years

The Canal District contains architecturally interesting buildings that could house a wide variety of uses. Several of the buildings have been recently renovated, others are in the planning stages for reuse, others are occupied with a mix of commercial and industrial uses, and several are almost entirely vacant.

- Explore the reuse of buildings for housing including artists' housing, and market rate and affordable rental and condominium units
- Explore office uses that can make use of the flexibility of large, open floorplates and that are drawn to lower cost space
- Explore a variety of institutional uses including museums, performance venues, and colleges
- Consider a mix of uses within individual buildings, with particular attention to ground floor retail/restaurant use
- Identify key buildings, or portions of buildings, where publicly-accessible uses are most desirable and can benefit from water views



View of new Canal Street Bridge and Gateway site – prepared for the Gateway Task Force.

## Capture the potential of the Canal as the centerpiece of a vibrant urban district

The canal is a beautiful, historic urban waterway that has the potential to be the focal point of the rebirth of the district. Every participant in the charrette had ideas about the enhancement and use of this wonderful resource.

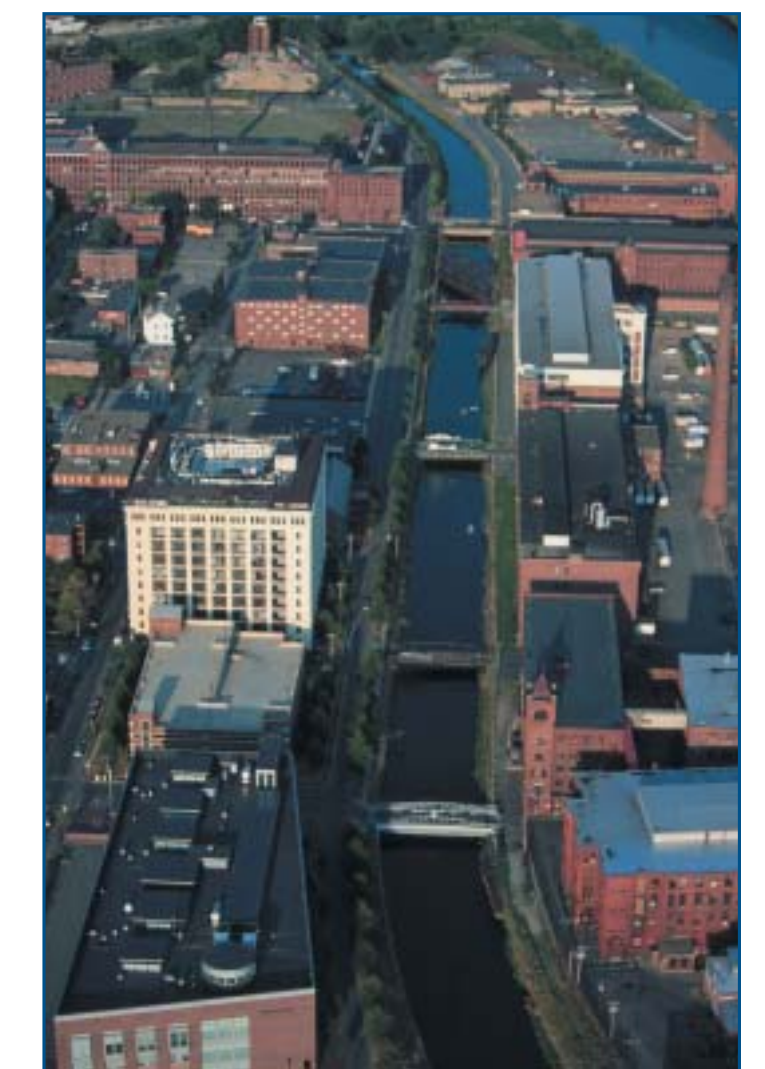
- Research canal ownership and liabilities to explore its potential transfer from private to public ownership
- Restore all of the bridges to accommodate pedestrians
- Restore the walls and banks of the canal to ensure its long term integrity and raise the water surface to its historic level to increase its visibility
- Provide a landscaped pedestrian walkway along the length of the southern bank of the canal
- Consider trolley service along the canal (and throughout the district) over the long term
- Add interpretive historic information along the canal
- Create a "Bridge of Roses" on one of the historic bridges
- Light the bridges (and the buildings and smokestacks) to create a dramatic night environment, visible from I-495 as well as from local streets
- Provide steps down to the canal's waterway
- Use the canal for kayaking, canoes, paddle boats, swan boats, a history boat, gondolas, and festivals
- Celebrate the canal with lanterns in the waterway, fishing, and a tug-of-war over the canal



Views of possible building reuse – courtesy of the Reviviendo Gateway Initiative.



Canal bridges contribute to the area's unique identity.



View of Canal District (Landslides).



View of the falls at the end of the canal seen from the water.

