Millyard District

A Vision for an Economically Resilient Millyard

Vision Statement

Create economic resiliency by fostering the development of a vibrant mixed-use district that is seamlessly integrated with Nashua's downtown and establish the Millyard as a hub of innovation through a central incubator and co-working space.

The history of the Millyard highlights Nashua's need to improve its economic resiliency. The Millyard was originally constructed to house the Nashua Manufacturing Company. When the company closed, it left behind unemployed workers and vacant buildings. Today, the Millyard has been repurposed to provide industrial and office space to a variety of businesses and even residential apartments. The district has even become a natural home for new start-up businesses due to low rents and flexible spaces. An economically resilient Nashua can be achieved by building on the current mixed-use nature of the Millyard by continuing to offer and environment that is supportive of new and diverse businesses, as well as new housing that facilitates a "live-work-play) environment.

Sustaining a mix of uses and businesses in the Millyard is a form of resiliency. Unlike the singular Nashua Manufacturing Company, a variety of businesses are less vulnerable, as a whole, to macroeconomic shifts. The entrepreneurism and start-ups that have gravitated toward to low rents and flexible spaces in the millyard are another important aspect of economic resilience. Not all startups succeed, but encouraging a new businesses to grow in the millyard will contribute to a diverse and sustainable set of maturing businesses that will help make Nashua economically resilient. The flexible mill space that has previously attracted these new businesses is also a contributor to resilience. The mills are able to accommodate a wide range of business types from light industrial to office and retail. This flexibility will allow the millyard to adapt to future economic shifts without becoming functionally obsolete.

As stakeholders and the City pursue improvements in the millyard, even the act of organizing and facilitating those conversations, possibly in the structure of a Business Improvement District, will help create resilience. If local stakeholders are actively engaged with one another, the millyard and the city can proactively address changes and concerns as they arise and ensure that the district is in the best position to succeed in the future.

In addition, the Millyard's proximity to downtown offers an opportunity to better integrate the district with amenities and activities on Main Street. Improving walking connections between downtown and the Millyard will allow these two, formerly distinct neighborhoods to support each other and improve Nashua's economic resilience.

The city and stakeholders can create an economically resilient and vibrant Millyard by pursuing the follow four proposals:

1. Utilize City Parcels as Catalytic Developments
2. Create Cohesive District Branding
3. Pursue Urban Design Improvements
4. Establish a Millyard Business Improvement District (BID)

Utilize City Parcels as Catalytic Developments

As part of our vision to create a vibrant mixed-use district and establish the Millyard as a hub of innovation, we propose the following strategies for developing the Nashua city-owned parcels in the Millyard:

-Prioritize affordable incubator/coworking space in a redeveloped NIMCO building

-Utilize remaining city-owned parcels for Mixed-use (residential and first floor retail) development

An affordable incubator/coworking space offers several benefits to the millyard and entrepreneurs the city aims to attract. Manufacturing entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs generally, need a place to access capital resources (e.g. 3D printers, materials, building technology, testing, cloud-based resources and computing power), which they may not be able to easily fund themselves due to lack of equity and inaccessible debt financing. Also, all entrepreneurs could benefit from place-based collaboration, networking, and interface with the city and region's multiple public and private resources. In addition, all entrepreneurs would benefit from centralized events and programs that would connect them not only with one another but also to sources of public and private support, such as information sessions, training, tradeshows, pitch nights, and competitions.

The vacant NIMCO should be redeveloped to create a central place for entrepreneurship – an "Incubator" for multiple businesses but with a focus on precision manufacturing, healthcare technology, and software. Despite the aforementioned focus, the Incubator must become an inclusive, accessible space for all types of entrepreneurs regardless of business sector, gender, age, income, etc. The Incubator would benefit from the involvement of local pro-business anchor institutions and organizations, including the City of Nashua, private firms (BAE, etc.), the hospital, local non-profits (CWE), and regional/state resources (e.g. SBDC). The Incubator must include programming, mentioned above, that connects entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs with each other and with resources in the city and region that provide advice, support, mentorship, and capital.

Partnerships:

1. BAE, other stakeholders to offer support and users
2. MIT "Media Lab" model for incubator. New ways to build on defense, engineering, software, healthcare assets / technical skills
Spur new creative integration and application of current capabilities
3. City leadership role to get private sector and state to partner/invest/support the center - possible UNH

Case Studies:

-Alpha Loft in Manchester, Portsmouth, NH
-Alternator in Burlington, VT
-Hannah Grimes Center in Keene, NH

The remaining city-owned parcels in the Millyard should be utilized for Mixed-use (residential and first floor retail) development. Several Nashua stakeholders mentioned that residential capacity in Nashua is at its limit. Additionally, there is little land available in Nashua for redevelopment. These factors limit Nashua's growth potential and necessitate the development of housing when possible. Residential units in the form of condominiums adjacent to retail space or apartment complexes above retail space help drive sales due to consumer proximity while simultaneously creating a desirable location to live due to the critical mass of shops in a central, convenient location. Additional co-benefits of residential and retail juxtaposition include engendering confidence in retail store owners who might be reluctant to open stores without a guaranteed consumer base, and increasing business survivability due to complementaries between adjacent retail services. Finally, ground floor retail provides a superior interface with the community and gives the buildings an active and lively presence on the street: adjoining retail stores and residential units facilitate cultural and economic interaction that is critical to creating a vibrant, revitalized Millyard.

Create Cohesive District Branding: "Live – Work - Play Outdoors!"

Brand Marketing Strategy

Nashua's Millyard District is a jewel waiting to be

uncovered. Cradled between two of Nashua's most recognizable natural elements, the Nashua River and Mine Falls Park, and just a half mile from the City's Downtown District, the Millyard has the potential to become a thriving mixed-use destination. Its historic industrial architecture set against the backdrop of the bucolic Nashua River and Mine Falls Park provides the perfect character for residential life, professional work, and outdoor social and physical activities. Therefore, we propose a brand marketing strategy centered around these three themes: Live – Work - Play Outdoors!

The 'live-work-play' model has increasingly been a strategy adopted across cities in the US and abroad to both attract new households and adapt to the demands of local residents. But to be more precise, the 'live-work-play' model should be called 'live-work-play-eat-shop' because these are the things that Millennials are looking for when searching for their next home. Although play-eat-shop are less about survival, they are now essential elements in choosing a new place to live. This new way of thinking has introduced a new phenomenon, called re-urbanization, which refers to the return of Millennials and empty-nesters back to downtown or "town-centers" seeking convenience and an all-in-one type of lifestyle.

We recommend that the Millyard District be a center for live and work, but reserve the elements of eat, shop and play for the Downtown area. This creates synergies between the two areas that allow for the re-imagining of two locales. The Millyard is perfectly positioned in the center of the city next to this wonderful green space, which is amazing context for outdoor activities and central gatherings while the Downtown offers lifestyle amenities that are easily accessible from the Millyard. As part of this brand marketing the Millyard could partner with event organizers like the Great American Downtown to attract the Millyard's next generation of residents through farmer's markets, city picnics, summer beer tastings, and so on. This would help solidify the connections and synergies between the two districts.

Implementation Strategy

The definition of a brand is a consistent and connected system that a community uses to communicate and promote itself to its various target markets, whether that be local residents needing to know what recreational programming exists, or a prospective business who may be looking at the community as a place to invest. A comprehensive marketing brand contains several elements including color palette, typography, iconography, and marketing message. Therefore, it is important to overlay the key marketing message with these elements to create a brand logo that is central to the branding strategy - all extensions depart from this central design. Below are two examples from Ware and Cape Cod.

Ware, MA

Somewhere Worth Seeing

CAPE COD

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

live, work, play, create!

Extension logos serve to provide cohesion among the various amenities that exist in the target area while maintaining similar color palette, typography, and iconography.

An important element emphasized by this proposal is the connection between the Downtown District and the Millyard District. This must be accomplished through design improvements that facilitate physical connections for vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic, however wayfinding signage will be a necessary component of developing the overall strategy for the Millyard, which will be posted throughout the major corridors and gateway nodes. This would be a shameful wasted opportunity if the marketing campaign did not capitalize on this valuable real estate. Therefore, we recommend that a targeted marketing strategy for the Millyard and Downtown connection be implemented through branding opportunities on wayfinding signage.

Of course, functionality is key as wayfinding signage shows visitors how to get from Point A to Point B, but this intersection of wayfinding and branding can introduce a unique personality as well as storytelling opportunities that contribute to deeper relationships between the place and its audiences. The following examples show how humor and color can create an inviting and fun atmosphere.

Pursue Urban Design Improvements

The current condition in Millyard is bounded by the lack of pedestrian system to allow people walk through the entire district and to other part of the city. To solve this problem, we propose to provide a holistic pedestrian system inside the district and create two nodes to connect Millyard from inside as well as to the bigger extent of the city. The physical renovation could happen as the middle phase for the overall Millyard proposal.

Establish two primary nodes in the Millyard

An urban node is to create a dense urban system for access, circulation, and transportation. It works as a multifunctional core to connect, serve, and circulate the district.

1) Gateway Node (between downtown and Millyard)

-Reconfigure the circle and vacant building between Walnut and Chestnut streets, putting two-way traffic on Walnut and W. Pearl St, opening up the remaining land for public space and development.

-Create a public space that serves as a gateway between Downtown and the Millyard Gateway node will later work as the main entrance

and the cover page for the Millyard district. Meanwhile, the node is an open space to help directing people entering Millyard to various destinations. (Signage needed)

2) Millyard Node (central connection point within the Millyard)

Create an intersection along the broad street parkway in-between Bagshaw's and Clock Tower Place that allows for pedestrians to easily cross between the two halves of the Millyard.

Emphasize pedestrian connections west to Mine Falls park, east to Downtown, North to the Nashua River, and south to the Tree Streets from this node. Works as a public space for people to meet, interact and redirect to other parts of the district and the city

Improve east-west connections through mill buildings with shared streets and better way-finding

-Renovate the streetscape on the Clocktower Pl., separate pedestrian lane from the parking lot.

-Rearrange the parking lot on Clocktower Pl. into a two-row back to back parking.

Improve east-west connections across Broad St. Parkway with better pedestrian crossing infrastructure

-In the Millyard node, add pedestrian box and limit the speed on the Broad St. Parkway.

-Besides creating the Millyard node, extend the pedestrian greenway from the Mine Park, along the bank to the riverfront, then lead the green pedestrian lane across Broad St. Parkway, to improve the accessibility on both side.

Establish a Millyard Business Improvement District (BID)

Purpose of a BID

Business Improvement Districts are a vital economic and social development tool that can be utilized by cities for a variety of activities. The typical services provided by BIDs include:

-Beautification and maintenance of outdoor areas,
-marketing and business/retail promotion through banners and advertising,
-Event production and tourism promotion, security and public safety enhancements,
-Communication through newsletters and social media and maintenance of registry of businesses, real estate firms and retail.

Potential Organizational Structure

The optimal structure for a Millyard district BID would be a 501 c3 Non-profit organization that works directly with City of Nashua. A board would be established to run the BID which would set the goals through feedback solicitation from all stakeholders: property owners, town leaders, local academic institutions, businesses, community organizations and citizens.

BID revenue would be collected through a surtax on Millyard properties and/or businesses. Supplemental income could be provided from event-based fundraising and donations.

Nashua Business Improvement District (BID)

BIDs in New Hampshire are known as Central Business Service Districts (CBSD). The State of New Hampshire has legislated that cities considering the establishment of a CBSD must set up a Services Advisory Committee. In 2009, Great American Downtown and Nashua created a Services Advisory Committee for a Downtown Nashua BID, yet no BID has been created or assessments collected.

However, the SAC determined that the BID assessment for any potential BID in Nashua in would not exceed $0.50 per $1,000 of property valuation. This is something that would likely need to

be modified for the Millyard as there is simply not enough property to make that surtax level yield enough income to be significant.

Millyard-specific Benefits

A BID for the Millyard could benefit the district immensely, specifically by fostering connections to Downtown through partnerships between the BID and organizations such as Great American Downtown, coordinating of city-wide events to include the Millyard, establishing and managing shared parking to unlock underutilized land, organizing capital improvements in the Millyard including improvement of pedestrian/bicycle ways, assisting small business assistance and coordinating sales promotions and events among businesses in the Millyard.

Case Study: InTown Manchester
(https://www.intownmanchester.com)

The BID tool has been utilized successfully in Manchester, NH. InTown Manchester is currently New Hampshire's first and only BID, which focuses on the maintenance and promotion of Downtown Manchester. Its main initiatives include: beautification and maintenance of outdoor areas, business marketing, event production (over 40 events per year), summer concert series, community farmers market, volunteer clean-ups and communication through various forms of media.

Implementation Strategy

The proposals discussed above are a combination of short term and long term initiatives. Implementation of this vision for the Millyard will take persistence on the part of stakeholders and the City for many years to come. A feasible first step if for the City to take the lead on engaging Millyard property owners, businesses and residents in preliminary conversations about forming a Business Improvement District, conducting an urban design/public realm improvement study, and developing the foundational elements of the Millyard's brand. These initial action items are achievable and should help foster support for more challenging proposals that require longer term commitments

Short Term (1 year)

-Create a Business Improvement District

-Preliminary branding conversation

-Millyard preliminary urban design study

-Incubator / city owned parcel feasibility study

-RFPs for residential/mixed-use development on city owned parcels

If a BID is successfully established, the City and stakeholders can pursue longer term initiatives with the BID in a leadership role with continued support from the broader community. Still, the City will need to take the lead in renovating the NIMCO building and setting up the entrepreneurship incubator. The BID should encourage property owners to share parking resources and open up underutilized land for infill development. The city should conduct a community planning effort to develop a plan for urban design and infrastructural improvements in the Millyard.

Medium Term (2-4 years)

-City pursues renovation of NIMCO building and establishment of the incubator

-Implement Millyard brand, wayfinding and sinage

-Through the BID, property owners discuss shared parking between property owners and opportunities to consolidate parking to free up new land for infill development

-Issue RFPs for urban design consultants and infrastructural improvements plan for the Millyard

-Continue to promote residential/mixed-use development on City owned parcels and the rede-

velopment of underutilized private buildings and land

Over the long term, the city and millyard stakeholders should look to implement the planning and design efforts undertaken to date. Implementation of urban design and infrastructural improvements are a key long term goal. Continual support for the incubator and ensuring that its operational and funding structures are sustainable will be key over the long term as well. Furthermore, redevelopment of city owned parcels and private buildings will be highly dependent on market conditions. The city and millyard stakeholders need to diligently pursue development and redevelopment opportunities when they arise.

Long Term (5+ years)

-Pursue state and federal grants to support urban design and infrastructural improvements

-Implement urban design and infrastructural improvements

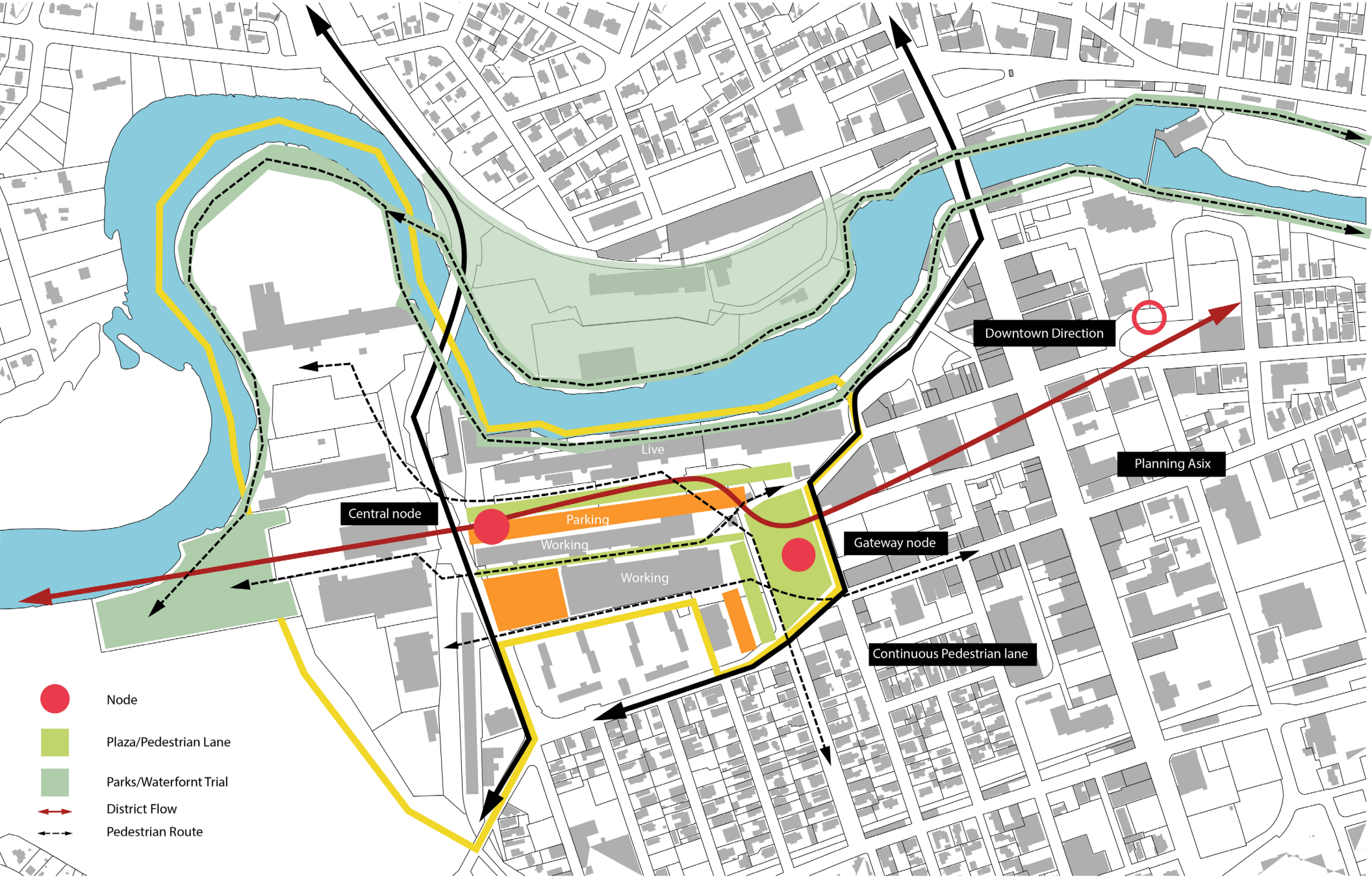
-Continue support for the incubator

-Continue to pursue infill residential/mixed-use development and redevelopment

-Maintain branding efforts

-Maintain BID and associated services

millyard Boundary
Traffic Route
Discontinuous Pedestrian Access
Discontinuous Pedestrian Access


Downtown Direction
Planning Asix
Live
Central node
Parking
Working
Working
Gateway node
Continuous Pedestrian lane
Node
Plaza/Pedestrian Lane
Parks/Waterfornt Trial
District Flow
Pedestrian Route