Red Bank Vision Plan

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BORD OF RED BANK

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Red Bank Vision Plan

Introduction

The continuing trend in American cities is to abandon downtown for the suburbs. This Vision Plan for Red Bank attempts to reverse this tendency through a continuing process of revitalization, expanding the downtown and proposing the development of new downtown residential areas. Surrounded by suburban communities, highways, office parks and malls, Red Bank centers the region. Born on a river with a diverse population, this unique town has maintained a turn of the century character given by the distinctive architecture of its buildings and houses, its tree-lined streets, churches, schools and libraries. However this character extends to the present in its restaurants, shops, galleries, live music performance and its expansive riverfront park.

Red Bank is old -- its quiet vitality is based on many generations of people and buildings that speak of earlier lives and earlier times. Red Bank is new -- the downtown revitalization process and the Count Basie Learning Center among many other projects affirm its future. Because the town is beautiful in many ways, its citizens love it. Because the town is also not too perfect or too finished, however, it offers ideal conditions for new ventures to begin and new dreams to materialize.

Red Bank has unique opportunities for a vital public life. Diverse neighborhoods, rich cultural activities and legions of volunteers reflect a town which includes its community at large and rejects exclusivity. Neighborhoods, cultural and riverfront destinations offer an unusual web of diversity that sustains a public life that is becoming rare in our times. Located on the South shore of the Navesink River, fifteen minutes from the Ocean, it occupies a privileged position with respect to both the northern New Jersey region and New York City metropolitan area. Some of the wealthiest residential communities in New Jersey, known as the Gold Coast, are within a five mile radius of Downtown Red Bank. And Red Bank is one hour away by train, car, and water from Manhattan, the global financial center. This makes this small 1.5 square mile town, with quaint streets and unique character a very special place.

The community of Red Bank, committed to the continuing revitalization and growth of the town has decided to embark into a planning effort in order to reassess its development goals and strategies. This Vision Plan, including a report on the Visioning Process is the product of the first phase of a Master Plan, which also includes the updating of the 1985 Master Plan, a Strategic Revitalization Plan and the revision of the existing Zoning Code. In updating and reassessing the 1985 Plan, which was developed in a period of unprecedented growth and development pressures, this planning process focuses on the opportunities implied by the new economic environment of the nineties.

The goal of the first stage of the Vision Plan is to provide a Portrait of Red Bank and a Vision for its future. The portrait focuses on the physical reality of Red Bank, on questions of image and perception, through the assessment of all the urban elements -- its streets, buildings and places -- and the relationships between them. The Vision Plan is an expression of possibilities for the future, which is based not only on the physical portrait, but also on an understanding of the economic and social grounds of the community.
The Visioning Process

The vision described here is the result of a public process that included three public meetings.

First Meeting
In the first meeting, the consultants presented an analysis of the structure and character of the town. Analytical drawings of Red Bank describing the actual and potential visual structure of the town and its specific aesthetic qualities were produced. The analysis and drawings played an important role during the Visioning Process as a communication tool in the public discussion about the form of the city and helped to develop preliminary views of the goals for the town. The results of this task were presented at the first town meeting. The residents responded to the analysis and goals, corrected some of the preliminary conclusions, and added new analytical concerns and goals.

Second Meeting
In the second meeting, the consultants presented their understanding of the analysis and goals incorporating the comments received in the first town meeting based on the assumption that a Vision Plan never starts from scratch. On the basis of the analytical drawings developed in the reading of the existing conditions in Red Bank, a network of Design and Development Opportunities was developed. These Design and Development Opportunities were organized in terms of seven general goals derived from the Community response to the first town meeting. These goals were presented and reviewed by the community in the second town meeting, stimulating a dialogue which provided a list of specific goals for the implementation of potential projects. In group sessions, the residents developed sets of proposals and reacted to the consultants' proposals and understanding.

Third Meeting
In the third town meeting, the consultants presented a summary of their general recommendations, their analyses, and their understanding of civic goals based on the results of the group sessions of the second town meeting. A list of potential projects was presented at the third town meeting and submitted to a vote. Finally, based on the results produced in the three town meetings, and throughout the Visioning Process, recommendations for the implementation of a variety of projects were proposed. The residents, again, responded with agreement, criticism, and suggestions, in addition to the "vote."

The process also included several working meetings with city, state, and county officials, during the sequence of public discussions. These meetings clarified the goals, and the capabilities of the governments involved for accomplishment of those goals.

The Goals
In general, it is the intention of the Vision Plan not to establish an "image" for the town seen as a still-life, but rather as a continuous process involving a dialogue between the borough and the community and a partnership between the borough and the business community where specific projects are proposed, developed, and implemented. The traditional linear sequence of the stages of planning being followed by the implementation and financing of specific projects is abandoned for a non-linear strategy where implementation and financing are considered from the beginning.

As a result, two overriding goals are established: The preservation of the Character of the town and the encouragement and upgrading of Commerce in town. (?)

Character
The residents of Red Bank enjoy their town because of the way it looks and feels. Therefore all planning and development steps must maintain and reinforce that character. In Red Bank, "character" means many things:

- The appearance of individual buildings.
- The location of buildings in relationship to each other, to the sidewalks, and to open spaces.
- What the different streets look like, and how they work.
- How the town relates to its rivers.
- What the public open spaces look like, and how they are used (including parks, walkways, and parking lots).

As part of the preservation of character, it is also important to encourage the growth of the population, since it is the neighbors and neighborhoods which are fundamental to the life of the town.
Commerce
The downtown area no longer carries its appropriate share of the municipal tax burden, so it is important that primary new development take place in that area. The nature and density of that development must also occur at a density and within certain configurations consistent with the character of Red Bank. This development will include a mix of uses, not only offices and retail, but also residential, hotels, entertainment, and culture.

Overview: A Summary of the Vision Plan
The proposals derived from the process where the Vision for Red Bank was developed affect two important areas in the town: the Downtown, and the various Neighborhoods. The relationship between them, and the differences in their uses, character, and density are at the heart of this Vision. Based on an analysis that was presented and agreed upon in the three public meetings, the Visioning Process led to an understanding of the physical structure of the town which can be described with four concepts: The River and other Edges, The Invisible Walls, The Void at the Center, and finally the Downtown and the Neighborhoods.

The River and other Edges:
Red Bank is distinctively bounded by its River and the towns to the south and east. As a result it has a clear identity, and the entrances into town can be dramatic gateways.

Invisible Walls:
The presence of a strong North-South traffic pattern, the location of the railroad tracks, and the broken pattern of the street grid tend to divide the town into several districts.

Void at the Center:
The open, low-density, industrial area of the center of the town is surrounded by dense neighborhood residential uses: Is this the best use of land in this apparently important location?

Downtown and the Neighborhoods:
The distinction in uses and densities between these areas must be made clear: what is the appropriate pattern of new development and renovation in the various residential areas? What are the desirable uses and their design characteristics in a more dense and mixed-use downtown?

Regulatory/Policy Actions:
The Improvements or Interventions are the primary results of all planning; the Regulations are one of the most important implementation methods. The proposals that result from the Visioning Process are both regulatory actions and physical improvement actions.

Three sets of policies have been recommended: revisions to the Zoning Code, which in many ways no longer support the goals of the community; a set of Design Guidelines for new buildings, most especially for the largest buildings in the downtown development; a set of design standards for the sidewalks, parking lots, and open spaces in downtown, for use by the Borough as well as by developer. These policy actions are not described here as part of the Vision Plan; the Physical Interventions are the substance of the plan and are therefore described in detail.

Physical Interventions
The Vision Plan's purpose is to establish a formal framework of moments based on the reading of the city plan and on the specific geographic, historical and cultural features of Red Bank as a guide to future urban planning and architectural point interventions in specific areas of the town. The term moments designates places with potential to generate development and design opportunities, derived from a formal analysis of the plan of the city and the available development sites. The Vision Planning process provides a menu of alternative design strategies and tactics that leaves room for the market forces to influence the final configuration of the projects. That menu consists of five elements, each of which includes a portrait (or an analysis) and a series of specific public Actions, which are described here with diagrams and sketches: the Neighborhoods, Special Places and Buildings, Edges and Gateways, Movement (both vehicular and pedestrian), and finally the Downtown.
Structure and Elements
As a result of the Red Bank Visioning Process a concept of the town's structure emerged, which is presented in this report. The structure of the town refers to the physical elements and the relationships between these elements that make Red Bank unique and different from all other towns. It is not just what we see, the basic elements that organize the physical configuration of the town such as the streets, residential neighborhoods, the downtown, the special buildings and places, its edges and gates but also the way these elements relate or do not relate to each other and the way in which these basic elements function.

Each of the elements of the town, its Residential Neighborhoods, its Special Places and Buildings, its Edges and Gateways, its Movement systems (streets, roads, pedestrian walkways, bicycle paths) and its Commercial District is presented, first through its portrait, second through a vision of its future and third, by projects that are proposed to realize this vision.

The portrait deals with how they look and how they work; the vision of the future deals with the questions of their transformation and growth while preserving their character, and finally the role of the projects is to materialize the vision.

Above left: East-West Invisible Walls are formed by shifts in axes and termination of North-South streets.
Above right: North-South Indivisible Walls are formed by shifts in axes and termination of East-West streets.
Below left: Invisible walls separate the East and West of Red Bank. An inaccessible center is also evident.
Below right: Resulting contiguous areas of Red Bank.
A. Residential Neighborhoods
A.1 A Portrait of the Neighborhoods

The different neighborhoods form a mosaic where the local identity is defined in a loose way by a variety of symbolic markers such as a church, a tree-lined street, the character of the houses, etc. A number of problems were described in the public meetings: a need to upgrade and supplement the housing stock and retail at the neighborhood level; a need to increase the residential population; an overall lack of public spaces offering playgrounds for children and teenagers; and various problems related to the intense traffic through some of the neighborhood streets; and with the schools.

In planning for future municipal services such as fire stations, police substation, recreational facilities, social service facilities, etc., it must be recognized that Red Bank is perceived by most residents as being made of many small neighborhoods and not only of the "East Side" and the "West Side." These neighborhoods are separated by "Invisible Walls" which occur when a number of parallel streets dead end at the same perpendicular street. This street is perceived as a barrier between two districts or neighborhoods. Two North-South streets, Broad Street and Shrewsbury Avenue perform the role of the invisible wall in Red Bank; therefore, these streets should be treated as connections between districts.

Left Above: Invisible walls that divide Red Bank Right Above: East and West Neighborhoods
Left Below: Character of Houses in Red Bank Right Below: Invisible walls that block the river
A.2 A Vision for the Neighborhoods

1. The existing character of the neighborhoods should, in general, be preserved: separate houses, front yards, front porches, tree-lined streets, houses set back from the street, outbuildings and garages.

2. Every possible step should be taken to reduce the sense of divisions between the east and west sides of town, including making Chestnut Street and West Bergen Place more comfortable for pedestrians and bicycles.

3. Traffic which use neighborhood streets should not disrupt neighborhood life: calm traffic by slowing it down and dispersing it. Provide and maintain street trees and other amenities to enhance neighborhood street environment.
4. Revise the zoning code to encourage the development of a compact neighborhood shopping area on Shrewsbury Avenue between Oakland and West Bergen Place.

5. Encourage the improvement of abandoned and deteriorated houses.

6. Create connections to the River at the west side of town. This has been referred to as the "sunset side" of town, and this suggested that the ends of various streets should be opened up to views of the river (and the sunsets) by creating docks for sitting, fishing, and tying up small boats.
7. Make the old River Street School a "Good Neighbor." The old River Street School is almost certain to attract a new user soon and to become a vital presence in the neighborhood. Every effort should be taken to ensure that parking and physical improvements be addressed in a way that contributes positively to the surrounding community.

8. Create an area of many uses which serves all neighborhoods and which is located at the open areas along the railroad tracks at the geographic center of town. This area can include, for instance, recreational open space, the town recycling center.

9. Provide additional recreation opportunities for the west side neighborhoods. New facilities can be developed in concert with the potential construction of new houses overlooking the river at the western end of Locust Avenue.
10. Identify residential adaptive reuse opportunities for under-utilized buildings in the neighborhood districts. One good condition is the Anderson Building at Monmouth Street and Bridge Avenue. Because of its proximity to the Rail Road station, conversion to residential use should be encouraged.
B. Special Places and Buildings
B.1 A Portrait of the Special Places and Buildings

The Special Places and Buildings are an essential ingredient in the definition of the character of Red Bank. They are not just material traces of Red Bank's history but also memorable visual marks that punctuate the town. The following list is not exhaustive and new places and buildings will be added as the town enters the 21st century:

- Broad Street
- The Professional Office area of Broad Street and Maple Avenue
- The Marina
- The Train Station
- The River
- The Galleria and Antiques Center
- Count Basie Theater
- Riverside Avenue
- The new Borough Hall
- Marine Park
- The Armory
- The Police Station
- And the Churches of Red Bank

Since Red Bank's character is partially defined by several memorable buildings, open spaces, and streets, special attention should be given to them. In encouraging new development, and in creating or maintaining public areas, the existing special places should be recognized and preserved, their immediate context should be appropriately enhanced, and in some cases, new special places and buildings can be created.

Top Left Corner to Bottom Right (across spread):

- Leighton Avenue
- River View
- Front Street
- The Train Station
- Oyster Point
- Count Basie Theater
- Molly Pitcher Inn Deck
- The Marina
- Broad Street
- Broad Street (South)

1. The historic Broad Street commercial area. This must be preserved as an active service and retail center.

2. The Professional Office area of Broad Street and Maple Avenue. Preserve the dignified character and landscape of these stately older homes by encouraging present day economic uses. This conveys a positive image of prosperity and stability that should be preserved and continued.

3. Marina Park is handsome but is not easily accessible and cannot be seen from the town. The completion of River-to-Broad will complement the park and enrich the experience of the town, river and park. (see #10 below.)
4. The Train Station Area. As the primary connection to New York, this building may be the single most important structure in Red Bank. NJT's proposals to rebuild it to meet ADA standards will have great impacts on its historic appearance, and eliminate an important east-west connection by the construction of an elevated platform across Oakland Street.

5. The River. Although Red Bank is bounded by a very beautiful river on two sides, and has a navigable and protected recreational boating port, the water is virtually invisible and inaccessible from Downtown and the neighborhoods. This is Red Bank's most extraordinary natural resource, and creating the recommended connections to it will positively affect the quality of life (and the property values) of the entire town.

6. The Galleria and Antiques Center is a newly emerging shopping area which in the new street landscaping and walkways could be a second anchor to Broad Street in the larger Downtown.
7. Count Basie Theater is already a renowned center for the performing arts. When seen as part of Monmouth Street and the "Music Band", it can be part of a cultural focus for the region. The building itself should be preserved and improved and the Monmouth Street should be revised to include wider sidewalks, trees, special lights and so on. Monmouth Street will become special in many ways: a center of culture; a connection between the shopping anchors of Broad Street and the Galleria; and a shopping focus itself due to its connection to Route 35.

8. Riverside Avenue can become a curving boulevard with residential buildings on each side that connects all the tourist facilities and Broad Street, and that has walkways down to the river, linking the hotels downtown to the river.

9. The new Borough Hall on Monmouth Street will be near the center of the larger Downtown. As a civic structure, it can serve as a symbol for the new and changing, and yet preserved Red Bank. The building must therefore look its part, in this civic context.
10. The completion of Broad-to-the-River will create a remarkable public space that will engage the river in a powerful way. This will provide an extraordinary venue for public events and will put Red Bank on the map as a river town and as a popular destination for visitors arriving by boat, train and automobile.

11. The Armory has enormous potential both as a Red Bank landmark and to accommodate a variety of civic functions. Possibilities include conference facilities and an exhibition hall.
C. Edges and Gateways
C.1 A portrait of the Edges and Gateways

The edges of a town are relevant for the definition of its identity, of the sense of entering a territory that we can identify. The Navesink River defines the West and North edges of the town while Newman Spring Road defines a southern boundary. The Gates of the town, or the points of entrance, do not present an appropriate image of the town to the visitor and therefore become a focus for the Visioning Process.

Cooper's Bridge over the Navesink River is the most heavily used Gateway into Red Bank. However, gas stations, liquor stores, vacant buildings, and parking lots make one's arrival inhospitable. The Route 35 entrance from the south is equally problematic. The combination of the railroad grade crossing, the split of Maple Avenue from Broad Street, and the intersection of the Newman Springs Road creates a navigational challenge to any driver and diminishes the sense of arrival in a good place. Again, better signage and clearer travel patterns are needed to make this a positive gateway into the town.

Red Bank presents another situation of "internal boundaries" of edges with an area located in its core, a "hollow center" occupied with train tracks and industrial buildings. This 'hole' in the center has a divisive effect on the structure of the town. The split affects the continuity of movement in the East West streets which the Visioning Process addresses as a need to establish fluid connections throughout the Town.

Above Left: Red Bank is fragmented by a lack of defined entrances.  
Below Left: Entrance to Red Bank by Train  
Above Right: Entrance to Red Bank by Car  
Below Right: Inaccessible center of Red Bank
C.2 A Vision for the Edges and Gateways

1. Red Bank is remarkably distinct from its neighboring communities because of the clarity of its boundaries, which include the River and Newman Springs Road. This distinction is an important aspect of living in Red Bank and the character of the town, so the edges should be reinforced, and the major entrances to town ("gateways") should become more prominent. When Route 35 is revised (see D., Movement, for details), the two major gateways at the north and south can be rebuilt. The existing entrances consist of confusing intersections, fast food stores, empty gas stations, and poor directional signage. Landscaped areas, clear movement routes, monuments, and clear signage must be created.

2. No clear access to Downtown from the Marina now exists. If boaters are to be encouraged to stop and shop or dine in Red Bank, Broad-to-the-River and the other walkways to town must be built. River-to-Broad will then be as much a Gateway to Red Bank as Route 35.

3. Front Street is the gateway from both the east and the west. In particular the entrance to town from Hubbard's bridge should be re-landscaped to be consistent with those proposed for Route 35.
4. In many ways, the view from the train is a "gateway", since it establishes the image of the town to the commuters. Currently the view is unkempt; the entire track edge should be re-landscaped to present a memorable and positive impression of Red Bank.
D. Movement Systems
D.1 The Movement Systems: A Portrait

**Broad Street** can be considered Red Bank's Main Street, with a concentration of healthy retail establishments, professional offices and services. The old converted houses in the professional section south of Harding Road convey a distinctive character that provides a memorable first impression to the visitor.

**Shrewsbury Avenue** has a potential similar role at a reduced neighborhood scale in the west side of town. However in its present condition, the signs of decay - empty lots and scattered vacant buildings - do not provide a positive image of Red Bank.

**Monmouth Street** is interesting in terms of its potential for future growth as an important connection between East and West. The first block west of Broad can be seen as an extension of Main Street. However, halfway toward the train station the street wall virtually disappears past the Count Basie Theater, an important cultural and symbolic landmark in Red Bank.

**Chestnut Street** and **West Bergen Place** are two East West streets that have the potential of becoming a link between the East and West parts of Town.

**Route 35** provides one of the most important means of access and of traversing the town. There are two important intersections that present a traffic problem as well as an opportunity to create Gates to Red Bank.

**The Railroad** is both a link to the region and to New York City and also a **divider** since the tracks split the town diagonally in two.

**Front Street** creates the end to Broad Street and is an important shopping street in its own right. It changes texture over length, providing diversity, although like any other Red Bank street, too many holes have been created through automobile orientated development.

**Riverside Avenue** at the Northern Gateway and the site of new, visitor orientated development including the Molly Pitcher Inn must be better linked to the older portions of Downtown.

*Above Left:* East/West Separation in Red Bank Caused by "Invisible Walls" character of Shrewsbury Avenue and Broad Street and by the Railroad  

*Above Right:* Through Traffic in Red Bank
D.2 A Vision for the Movement Systems

1. Planning for vehicular movement must respect the fact that Red Bank is a pedestrian town. The needs of walkers, bikers, and joggers (for all ages and levels of ambulatory abilities) must be of equal or higher priority to the needs of trucks and cars.

2. Route 35 through town must be clarified. This will provide opportunities for memorable gateways and intersections throughout its length. In addition, this will help reduce traffic in west wide residential streets and to encourage retail in the Monmouth Street Corridor.

3. Traffic on Shrewsbury Avenue must be calmed if it is to serve as a pedestrian oriented shopping area and a focus for the neighborhoods on the West side of the borough. This can be accomplished by reducing lane widths, increasing on-street parking, instituting "no through truck traffic" regulations, regulating traffic signal timing, and providing pedestrian cross-walks. Along other north-south streets on the West Side, traffic headed for Newman Springs Road must be reduced in speed and volume. On-Street parking and a four-way stop sign at the intersection of River Street and Leighton Avenue would help reduce use of these streets as "short cuts."
4. Four major east-west streets should be improved for pedestrian comfort: Riverside Avenue, Monmouth Street, Chestnut Street and West Bergen Place.
E. Downtown
E.1 A portrait of Downtown

Red Bank's commercial area is a major element in its economy, serving as Northern Monmouth county's regional trade center. While there has been some slow decline in retail, vigorous growth in service businesses and jobs accounts for the center's growth, rare among Downtown areas in small communities.

The blocks east of Maple Avenue contain the major concentration of shops and offices, the most compact development and the older buildings. This section also contains restaurants and entertainment and the sidewalks are lively day and night. The views to the Navesink River which could be an attractive feature are blocked by small buildings and large signs.

The portion west of Maple, though less compact, contains a number of important Downtown destinations—the train station, Count Basie theater, both hotels, the antique center and the Galleria specialty retail shops. The area also contains restaurants, an existing multi-family residential building and another approved for construction. Boating, hotels, restaurants, theaters, shopping and entertainment are the ingredients that will be applied in a strategy to further strengthen the Downtown economy through increased tourism.

*Above Left:* Existing Central Business District  
*Above Right:* The Count Basie Theater on Monmouth Street  
*Below Left:* Broad Street Retail  
*Below Right:* Inaccessibility to the River

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E.2 A Vision for Downtown

1. Enlarge the Vision of Downtown, to promote mid-rise, mixed use development, and to require development that is compact with buildings close to each other and located at or near the sidewalks. The intention is to confine the growth of the town to the Downtown area, and to have that growth inspired by the character and density of Broad Street. Change the zoning code.

2. Encourage new residential development and mixed uses North of Oakland Street within walking distance of the train station.

3. Encourage hotels, bed and breakfasts, and other vista accommodations between the train station and Broad Street as well as along the river.
4. Initiate an overall Sidewalk and Street improvement program to stabilize and increase real estate values, and encourage people to walk to new retail, hotels, restaurants, homes, thus unifying the Downtown area. Create guidelines for wider sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, street furniture, and landscaping, in order to unify the downtown area with an armature of 'like' and 'unlike' elements.

5. Encourage office development within walking distance of the shops and restaurants of the Broad Street area.

6. Reinforce Monmouth Street (by development and public improvements) as the focus of culture, and as the connector between the two retail centers at Broad Street and the Galleria. The Monmouth Street Corridor can thus be thought of as the "Music Band."
7. Construct River-to-Broad. Plans to create a new public space that will connect downtown to the river have received serious attention for over 100 years. In addition to supporting new and existing businesses; this will profoundly and forever transform the perception of Red Bank from "a town by a river" to a River Town.

8. Improve the sidewalks and develop a landscape, signage, and lighting scheme of Riverside Avenue to encourage walking by tourists.

9. Complete the River Walk, from Broad-to-the-River, around Oyster Point, and down to Monmouth Street; create a second major green space access to the River at Monmouth Street and Shrewsbury Avenue.
10. Establish an overall parking management and design plan. All parking lots should be similar to the White Street lot, which is surrounded by store entrances, is well landscaped, and has pedestrian walkways connecting to the adjacent shopping streets.

11. Finally, the historic shopping area and the professional office area of Broad Street must be preserved, in their character and in their uses.
Appendix I: List of Projects
1. Make River Street School a "good neighbor"
2. Locust Park and Locust Park Houses
3. Plan adaptive reuse for under utilized buildings in the train station area
4. Make the Train Station a gateway
5. Civic functions for the Armory
6. Borough Hall - New facility in a renovated building
7. Make Count Basie Theater a cultural focus
8. Design a gateway at Hubbards Bridge
9. Veteran's Park
10. Create River-to-Broad
12. Create a visual Gateway at the Mobil site
13. Create Signs (Welcome to Red Bank) at entrances to the city
14. Create a River Walk from Marina Park to proposed river access at the west end of Monmouth
15. Landscape at the Railroad Tracks

16. Slow traffic and reduce truck traffic on Shrewsbury
17. Design Guidelines for Downtown development
18. Design Parking Lots similar to White St. lot
19. Create walkways to the river from adjacent streets
20. Initiate Downtown Sidewalks Plan
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