

Fourth Draft

Urban Lab Fact Book: The North Main Street Corridor

New Commons

4/24/2006

This is a draft fact book for North Main Street. This one document contains the conditions, facts and projects, either underway or planned that address the whole area. It is a multidisciplinary fact book that assembles what is known from all the plans and from different people who don't always have the chance to communicate and share their plans.

Note: Everything in this emerging fact book is draft. The facts have to be checked and added to. The ideas at this time are just that: ideas and not defined agreements or priorities. Content is added to the Fact Book, as it becomes known.

I. What is the location?

The transportation corridor begins at the North Main Street at the Pawtucket line and goes to the core of downtown at Kennedy Plaza. The major location improvement emphasis is the portion of the street that begins at cemetery and ends at Pawtucket line.

II. What are the potential long-term goals for the location?

Frame the goals as benefits.

- More density – one of a handful of city locations that can handle more height and compactness for residential growth.
- Pilot location for the process of redesigning a suburban commercial/retail street to mixed use that can be used in other suburban areas in RI.
- Create the conditions to attract more developers.
- Possible site to pilot light rail.

III. What are the conditions – immediate and emerging – of the location?

What are the known facts about the location (that will serve as the foundation of the fact book – social, economic, ecological, community knowledge, cultural & built environment)?

- North Main Street is 72 feet wide (which is ample for creative use, light rail)
- Busiest bus line in the city (buses run every 11 minutes). People park on North Main and take the bus into the city.

- Route 1 is a state highway, thus State DOT will play a role in street changes and transit development.

Who lives there, works there, and who else relies on this place? Who has a stake in the place?

- Only a few people live on the street, but North Main immediately touches the dense, residential Summit Avenue neighborhood.
- Summit Avenue Neighborhood Association with 30-40 active people including a work group on North Main Street.
- Commercial activity is take out food, car repair, surface parking, offices,
- Active National Guard Armory.
- Other Stakeholders: Gordon Fox and property owners: Larry Kahn of Kahn, Litwin and Renza, and Jerry Erlick.
- Community concerned about ugliness, and the need for better pedestrian uses.

What are the constraints surrounding the site: physical, legal, financial, or political? What are the blocks and barriers of the location?

- Multiple property owners as there are no one or two owners owning a lot of property.
- Pressure to turn former RI Auditorium spot into a parking garage.
- Current C-4 zoning allows for mixed use, but its not encouraged.
- It's an auto-centered street.
- Remember, light rail would have to stop at the point North Main goes down hill, so it will be a challenge to make it work right to connect into downtown.

What must be researched?

- Residents report that the new traffic configuration works better. DOT has done a study to analyze the street even further?
- Is this lab a transportation or community development project? Or both?
- Who is paying taxes, who is not and how to change the equation?
- Street inventory – use and ownership. Who owns what? How to reassemble parcels for better development and protection?

What is in motion as an emerging condition that will impact the location?

- Emerging cohesive retail center near Pawtucket line with JAVA Scooter (coffee house & scooters).
- Survey of resident needs completed.
- URI Community Planning Department completed a design study in winter of 2005 that based the area on the proposed C-N2 zoning (from a C-4) and sorted the street into 3-4 segments.
- Pawtucket is heating up – this connection from Providence into Pawtucket is becoming important.

What plans or projects are on the drawing board as an emerging condition?

- Proposed CN-2 zoning would require design guidelines for the area.

IV. In the location, what are the potential solutions, opportunities, projects, or value-adds?

- Which way to solidify the catchment area of retail: up to Hope St (where it is now) or down to North Main, or both? If both, what distinguishes one kind of retail from the other?
- Draw a visual map like a “sausage plus cemetery” connecting Summit with other side of North main and focus on that area. Cemetery is used for walking and dog walking – could be more of a park.
- Wrap more housing around the back of the cemetery (recent research suggests people finding housing near a cemetery attractive to live near like green space).
- Affordable housing component, where?
- Reach out to developers with pre-plotted opportunities.
- More pedestrian-friendly along North Main and shopping centers. “The stores I have to drive to now on Route 6 in Seekonk I want to walk to, e.g., Pier 1, etc.”
- Mixed use.
- Connecting light rail back into Pawtucket: using trams are not just for travel, but they’re also about fostering culture.
- Create commercial intensity on Summit side of street.
- Create comparable density on Summit side, more density on other side.

V. To achieve the goals, what know-how, from which practitioners will be required? (Use multiple tiers to organize talent)

- Director of Policy for the city who is leading the Mayor’s 2020 transportation task force.
- DOT for understanding of conditions and opportunities on the street.
- RI Housing for compact development housing models.
- New urbanist transit oriented development person and trolley/light rail.

VI. Inside the labs at the Congress: what do we want new urbanists to help with the most?

For example develop a short list of the top issues of the location that new urbanists can be most helpful with. Produce a 3-to-4-page brief with a map for use at the lab.

1. Transportation corridor from Kennedy Plaza downtown to Pawtucket line – light rail, trams, hard wheel trolleys?

2. Streetscape improvements that would back up the hill into the Summit neighborhood? Take the A streets across North Main to make it more pedestrian friendly.
3. Integrate cars, pedestrians and commercial development with national small and mid-box development, e.g., Pier One on west side and neighborhood commercial on Summit side.
4. Overall density of more housing with mixed use, where?
5. Draw the location using C-N2 design guidelines?
6. Cemetery as amenity? Housing there too?

VII. What are the proposed study actions for the next 75 days?

1. Interview location-specific stakeholders to dig deeper into developing this fact book.
2. Answer basic research questions.
3. Assemble critical maps and images.