

BARRE

Downtown Master Plan

Vision Book

July 2025



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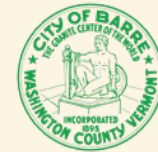
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Project Team



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City of Barre,
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Chittenden County
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Central Vermont Regional
Planning Commission

Introduction

Located just six miles southeast of Montpelier, the state capital of Vermont, the City of Barre is home to approximately 8,400 residents. Barre evolved from a modest agricultural town into a bustling urban center in the late 1800s, driven by the national demand for granite to support railroad expansion. Barre became known as the 'Granite Capital of the World.' Today, Downtown Barre has a historically rich Main Street characterized by granite facades, walkable sidewalks, and public art.

TPUDC's Barre Downtown Master Plan aims to equip the City with strategies to strengthen the vibrancy and resiliency of the Downtown area, particularly in light of the devastating reoccurring flood events the area has experienced. Drawing from the distinct character of Downtown Barre, the plan not only honors the area's identity but also integrates broader priorities and needs of its residents.

This book sets forth a vision to shape a legacy that honors Barre's past while embracing its potential. We see Downtown as full of opportunity to cultivate a resilient, inclusive, and vibrant community.



STUDY AREA

The Study Area encompasses U.S. Route 302 (North Main Street) and Summer Street between Maple Avenue/Vermont Route 62 and Elm Street with a southern boundary of Stevens Branch. The area is characterized by a mix of uses including restaurants, shops, civic and cultural uses, offices, different residential types, industrial uses and parking lots that together define Downtown Barre. The area is partially defined by Stevens Branch of the Winooski River, and surrounded by hills and rising terrain on nearly all sides. Due to the study area's proximity to Stevens Branch and the surrounding rising terrain, considerable flooding has occurred Downtown. Many streets leading into and out of Downtown ascend steep grades, and views from various points in the City offer glimpses of the rolling hills and forested slopes that define the Green Mountains region.

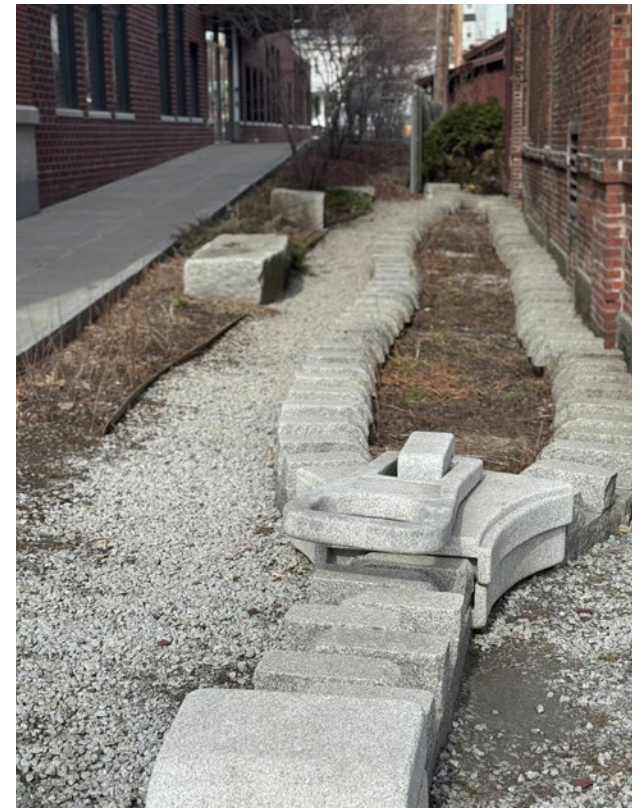
TPUDC's expert design team carefully analyzed the area's distinctive features, taking into account the topography, floodplain, and infill opportunities to create a Master Plan that will enhance community connections, highlight areas for new development and open spaces and enhance adaptability to natural disasters.



Study Area



Study Area Photos



Study Area Photos



CHARRETTE PROCESS

The City of Barre, Vermont and Town Planning and Urban Design Collaborative, LLC (TPUDC) hosted the City of Barre Downtown Master Plan Charrette, a 4-day public engagement and design workshop in the heart of Barre, in April 2025. The charrette offered the public an inclusive workshop experience where they were encouraged to collaborate with City Staff and TPUDC. The collective objective was to envision for the future of Downtown Barre that would stimulate economic growth and Downtown investment, increase placemaking opportunities, promote the use of public transit, improve circulation, address flooding concerns, and support infill development.

To kick off the Charrette, TPUDC hosted an Opening Presentation to introduce the project, Downtown study area, design principles, and precedent inspiration. Following the presentation, participants were asked to be planners for the night, helping to distill their visions for the future of Downtown Barre through identifying places they love, places of opportunity, and places that need some help. This interactive process provided a preliminary inventory and assessment of issues and opportunities based on the concerns and vision of the public and stakeholders who participated in the workshop.

On the subsequent day of the Charrette, topical meetings began, inviting community members, city staff and officials, and stakeholders to discuss their ideas and concerns on the topics of housing and redevelopment, stormwater and flooding, and transportation and streetscapes.

Throughout the week, anyone who wished to participate was welcome to drop in during Open Studio hours to provide comments, suggestions, or simply watch the team work. The Open Studio ran concurrently with the Topical Meetings and was part of the process where many deliverables were created.

During the charrette, the Team heard concerns from the community about flooding, traffic, and walkability, and the desire for meaningful open spaces, streetscape improvements, and additional housing options.

Culminating with a Closing Presentation, TPUDC presented the work that was completed. The Barre Downtown Master Plan was displayed, along with plan diagrams and precedent images. Following the presentation, the Team hosted a Q&A Session where the public was given the opportunity to provide feedback and ask any lingering questions.



Hands-On Citizen Workshop

For the Hands-On Citizen Workshop, participants were split into groups to mark up maps of the project site. They used sticker dots and markers to identify the following:

- Places they loved (green dots)
- Places of opportunity (blue dots)
- Places that need improvement (red dots)

Each group was then invited to present their maps to the audience, explaining their top five “big ideas” for Downtown Barre. TPUDC synthesized this information by grouping red, blue, and green dots on individual maps (as displayed on this page), along with one map including all dots, which helped the Team discover patterns and common issues that residents experience in Downtown. Notes from each map are summarized on the following page.



Places that are loved



Places of opportunity



Places that need improvement

Hands-On Citizen Workshop

What We Heard

- Flooding concerns
- Improve air quality
- Narrow roads and add brick crosswalks
- Add more outdoor seating
- Provide mixed-income housing
- Improve landscaping
- Add pocket parks and courtyards
- Activate the waterfront along Stevens Branch
- Enhance gateways into Downtown
- Re-envision the back entrances of stores on Merchants Row
- Provide additional parking with parking garage(s), but mask the garage(s) with liner buildings
- Incorporate a Rail Trail along existing railroad tracks
- Encourage more public art
- Redevelop underutilized/vacant parcels along north end of Downtown
- Close Church Street along City Hall Park and extend the park



All Workshop Dots Combined



Topical Meeting

Topical Meetings: Key Takeaways

Housing & Redevelopment

- Barre has a proud history and is home to a variety of cultural assets.
- The current housing stock in Barre is attracting young home buyers.
- Owner-occupancy could be increased by incentivizing homeownership and addressing absentee landlords.
- The City presents many adaptive reuse and development opportunities.
- Infill housing should intersect with existing utility resources.
- Lack of funding is a barrier to providing alternative housing solutions.
- There is a lack of medium-to-high-density residential product offered in Barre.
- There is a high percentage of homelessness in the City, presenting a need for permanent supportive housing with ongoing services for those who are unhoused in the community.



Topical Meetings: Key Takeaways

Stormwater & Flooding

- Flooding is part of the City's natural heritage.
- FEMA buyouts and resilient building practices are being utilized to mitigate the impacts of severe flood events.
- Regional collaboration is essential as upstream towns can affect Barre's floodplain.
- There is a Flood Study Model in progress that will determine ways to help alleviate flooding and debris.
- Layer small initiatives such as rain barrels, trees, and wetland landscaping to absorb water.
- Additional concerns include landslides, hillside erosion, and failing infrastructure.
- FEMA regulations are being enforced to reduce the effects of substantial flood events.



Transportation & Streetscapes

- Barre is heavily reliant on automobiles, which does not create a welcoming and walkable environment.
- Two major state routes run through Downtown, causing traffic congestion.
- Truck traffic disrupts the pedestrian experience.
- There is a lack of transit opportunities.
- The City should implement walkability improvements for crosswalks, paved roads Downtown, more seating areas, and general upkeep.
- Tactical urbanism could test short-term pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.
- There are opportunities for bicycle infrastructure in flatter areas of the City.



PLANNING & DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Based on the feedback gathered during the Charrette Process, TPUDC distilled that information into a list of planning and design principles to guide Downtown Barre's future. The goal is to create a walkable, vibrant, resilient and mixed-use Downtown Barre that serves as a welcoming destination for residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Central to this vision is the activation of the waterfront--transforming it into a lively public asset that connects the community to its natural surroundings while helping to address flooding issues. Streets and public spaces will prioritize pedestrians, enhancing accessibility, safety, and everyday experiences through thoughtful streetscape improvements, wayfinding, and human-scale design. Parking lots will be infilled with mixed-use buildings and a variety of housing options creating a more inviting environment for residents and visitors. In addition, the integration of sustainable stormwater strategies, such as green infrastructure, permeable pavement, and bio-retention areas, will help mitigate future flooding risks while improving environmental quality and resilience.

With this approach in mind, we are laying the foundation for a Downtown that not only reflects Barre's unique character and heritage, but also supports long-term adaptability, economic vitality, and environmental stewardship.



Planning & Design Principles

The following principles guided our planning and design framework for the Barre Downtown Master Plan:

- Sustainable Stormwater
- Public Realm Improvements
- Civic Space & Public Art
- Walkability & Mixed Use
- Housing Diversity
- Maker Spaces
- Waterfront Activation
- Multi-Modal Transportation



Outdoor Seating



Sustainable Stormwater



Mix of Uses



Waterfront Activation



Housing Diversity

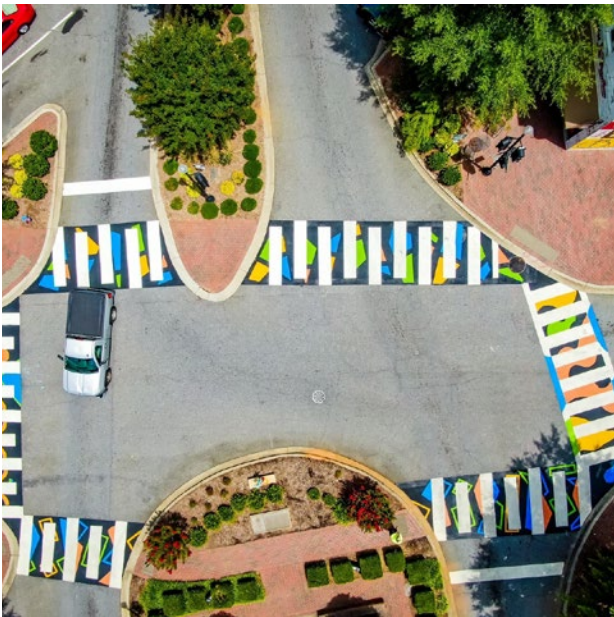


Public Realm Improvements

Precedent Images: Sustainable Stormwater



Precedent Images: Public Realm Improvements



Precedent Images: Civic Space + Public Art



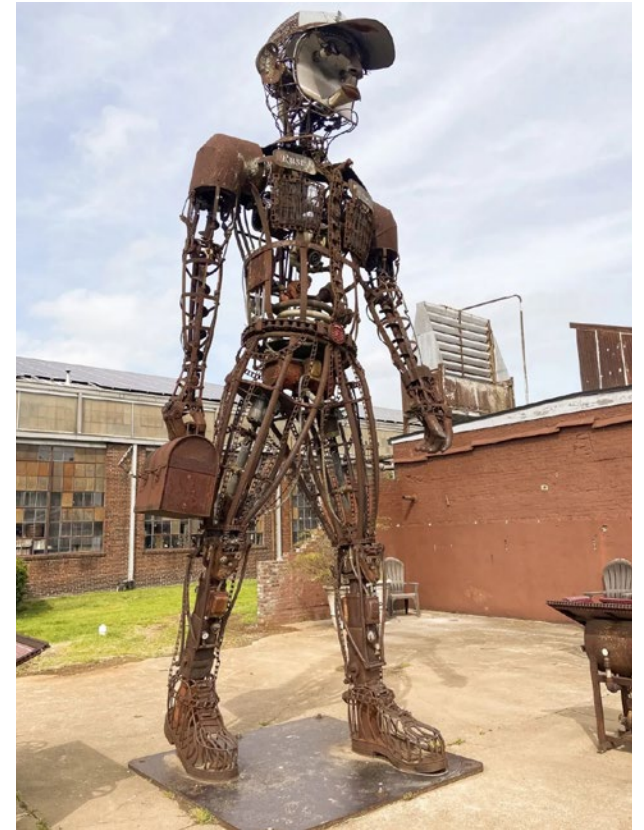
Precedent Images: Walkability + Mix of Uses



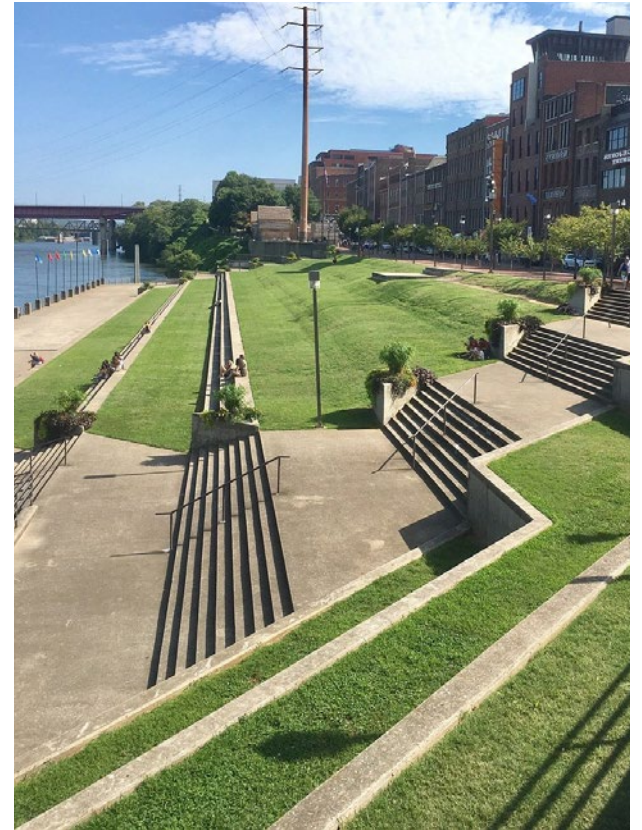
Precedent Images: Housing Diversity



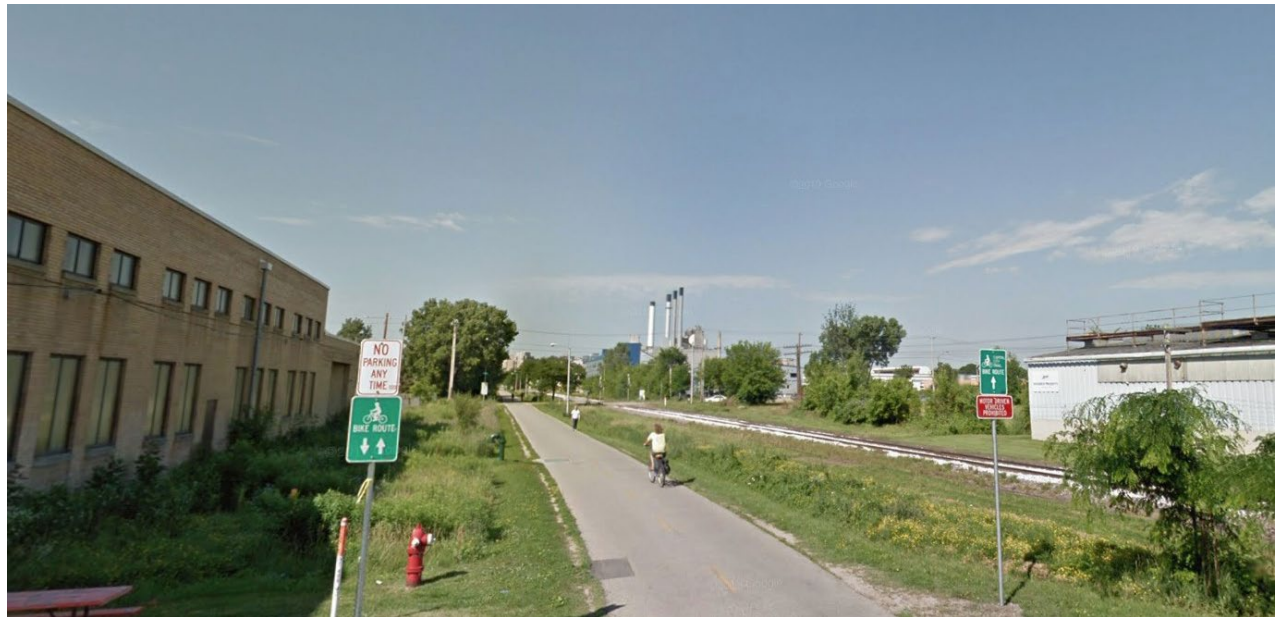
Precedent Images: Maker Spaces



Precedent Images: Waterfront Activation



Precedent Images: Multi-Modal



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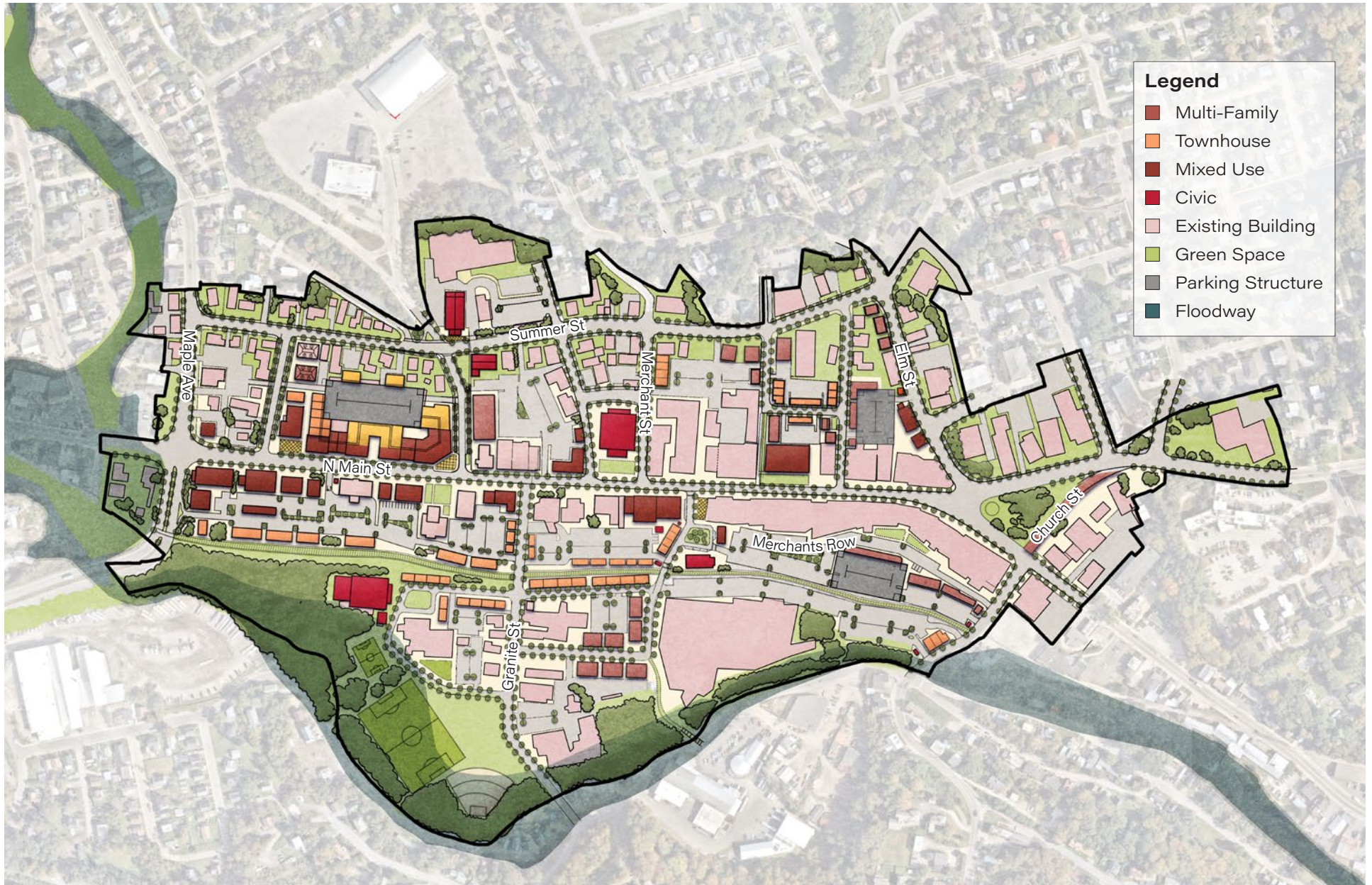
The Barre Downtown Master Plan envisions a dynamic, walkable district with a range of improvements that celebrate community life while supporting long-term resilience and economic growth. A new trail system along the existing railroad tracks enhances connectivity and promotes outdoor activity, while the incorporation of townhouses and multi-family buildings expand residential options in the Downtown core. Mixed-use buildings are strategically introduced to encourage active street life and support local businesses. At the site of the existing strip mall, the plan proposes larger-scale, dense development with facades articulated to resemble smaller individual buildings, minimizing visual monotony and maintaining a human scale.

Public gathering areas are thoughtfully integrated, with plazas and civic spaces anchoring key corners and a cleaned-up alley contributing to a more attractive and functional urban environment. The plan also reconfigures certain uses for improved aesthetics and efficiency, such as relocated gas pumps to the rear of the gas station on the south side of North Main Street where it meets Cottage Street, and reducing curb cuts to create safer and more continuous sidewalks. Additional parking is introduced through garages that are discreetly tucked behind buildings, creating a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

Along the waterfront, floodable ball fields provide recreational space while enhancing the City's flood resilience. Civic buildings are given greater prominence, and Depot Square is reimagined with mixed-use buildings, civic space, and pedestrian improvements to make it a vibrant community focal point. Finally, the plan supports economic innovation by incorporating incubator and maker-spaces, offering opportunities for small businesses and startups to flourish in the heart of Barre.



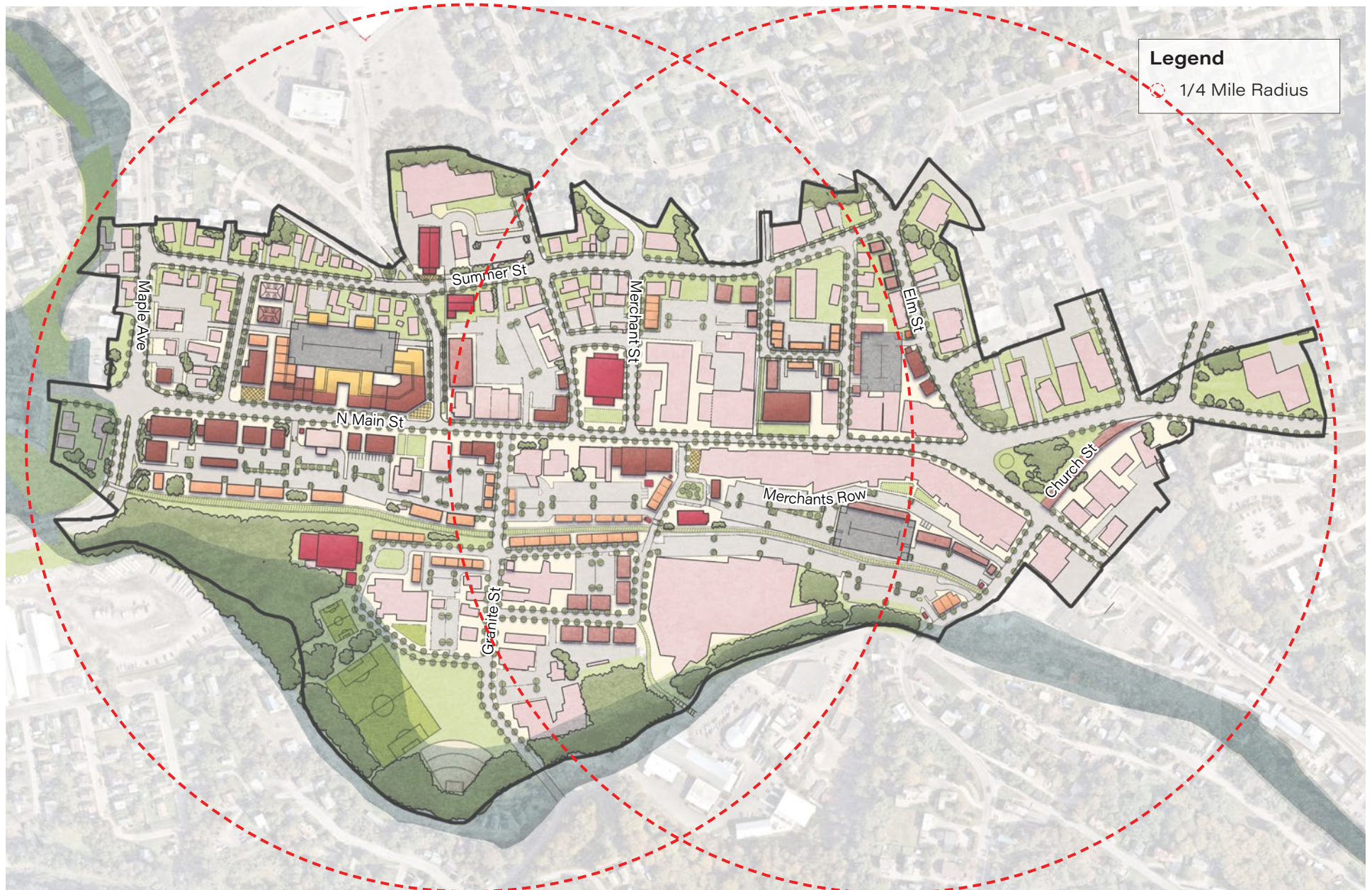
Illustrative Plan



Open Space Framework



Pedestrian Shed Diagram



Depot Square

Once a wide and car-dominated street, the Depot Square area of Downtown Barre has been thoughtfully transformed into a more welcoming place for pedestrians. The road was strategically narrowed, allowing for the creation of an active pedestrian plaza. This new space features outdoor seating that supports nearby restaurants, inviting people to linger and gather. A distinct change in pavement indicates that the area prioritizes foot traffic over vehicles, reinforcing its identity as a people-friendly environment. The addition of trees not only brings shade and comfort but also enhances the overall environmental quality. Overhead string lights add both character and a sense of vibrancy, especially in the evening, turning the once-overlooked corridor into a lively and inviting place for residents and visitors alike.



Mixed-Use Infill on Main Street

Along Main Street, what was an open parking lot has been transformed into a mixed-use building that engages directly with the street, reinforcing a lively and continuous streetscape. The building's facade is crafted at a human scale, fostering a sense of comfort and approachability for pedestrians. A parking structure is discreetly positioned behind the building, preserving the visual integrity of the street. Main Street has been significantly enhanced with bioswales, wider sidewalks, and new street trees, cultivating a walkable and sustainable atmosphere that aligns with the charm and character of Downtown. The roadway has been narrowed to calm traffic, and a protected bike lane has been introduced to support safe, multi-modal travel. At the corner, a new plaza serves as a welcoming gathering space for the community, creating a sense of place.



Downtown Barre Aerial

Downtown Barre's surface parking lots have been replaced with mixed-use buildings, establishing a continuous and active public realm. Parking has largely been consolidated into structures, allowing the land to be used more efficiently. New housing options have been introduced, offering more choices for residents and supporting a growing Downtown population. The rail corridor has been transformed with the addition of a multi-use trail, with buildings oriented toward it to provide visibility, connection, and a sense of safety for trail users. Open spaces and public plazas have been added to serve as gathering places for the community. Along Stevens Branch, new recreational areas provide both public access to the river and support for flood mitigation. These changes result in a more sustainable, resilient and vibrant Downtown Barre.





Downtown Master Plan



Downtown Master Plan