

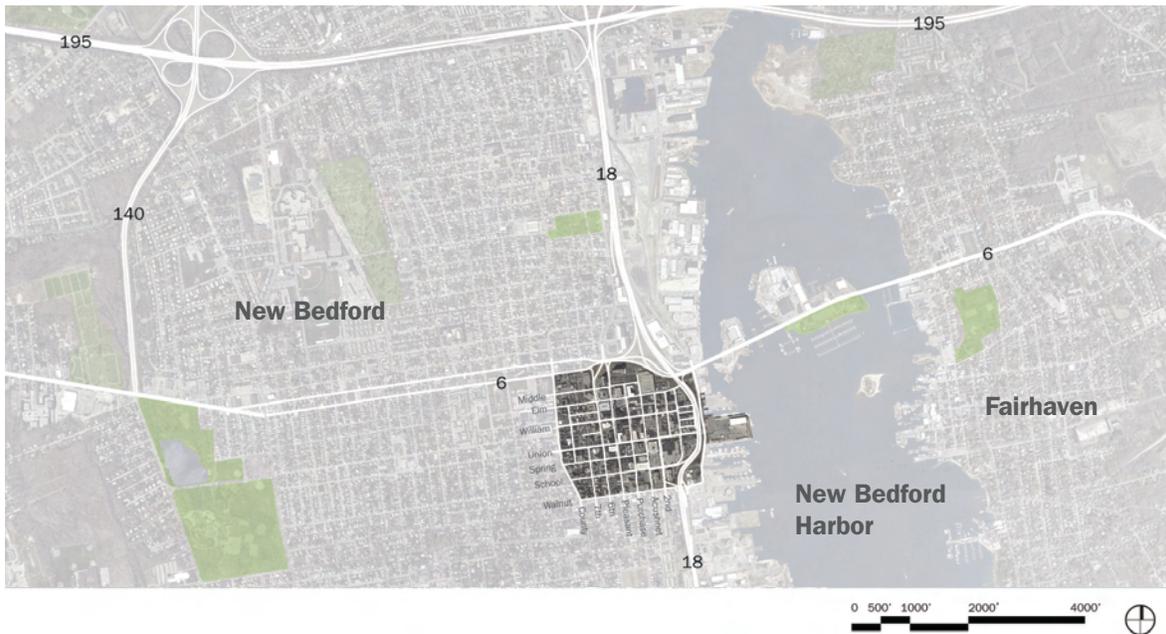
# **Part I**

## **Introduction**

# I.A Goals of the Study

The goal of the Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study is to provide a roadmap for the continued revitalization of downtown New Bedford, strengthening its employment base and generating increased housing demand both in the downtown and in its nearby residential neighborhoods. Downtown New Bedford is an extraordinary asset—an urban jewel whose rediscovery over the past several years has begun to draw redevelopment and refurbishment activity not only to the core of the city, but to the surrounding waterfront and residential neighborhoods. The study identifies specific opportunities in the downtown that can bolster the type of public and private development that will augment the positive trends already in motion, tapping into the creative cluster economy and the established educational institutions that can support additional residential and retail activity. In order to test the viability of additional development downtown, the team enlisted public input to select targeted underutilized infill sites. Hypothetical development scenarios were designed for these sites, to suggest how both building and public realm improvement on these key sites could benefit the entire study area. In addition, a series of broader public realm improvements are proposed that will enhance the existing character of the downtown, improve pedestrian connections between the National Park district and the commercial/retail district, and will add value to existing properties within the study area. These public improvements, together with the targeted redevelopment scenarios build upon the success of the past dozen years and generate synergies with the existing retail housing and commercial uses in the downtown. Rather than provide a comprehensive and exhaustive blueprint for redevelopment, the study recommends targeted projects and initiatives as the primary means to create downtown job opportunities in commercial office, retail, cultural and educational uses. Within this realistic market-driven and visually rich downtown framework, the City may be able to generate the deepest impact given available financial and human resources for the next five to ten years.

*BELOW: The focus area for the Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study shown in city-wide context. Source: Bing maps.*



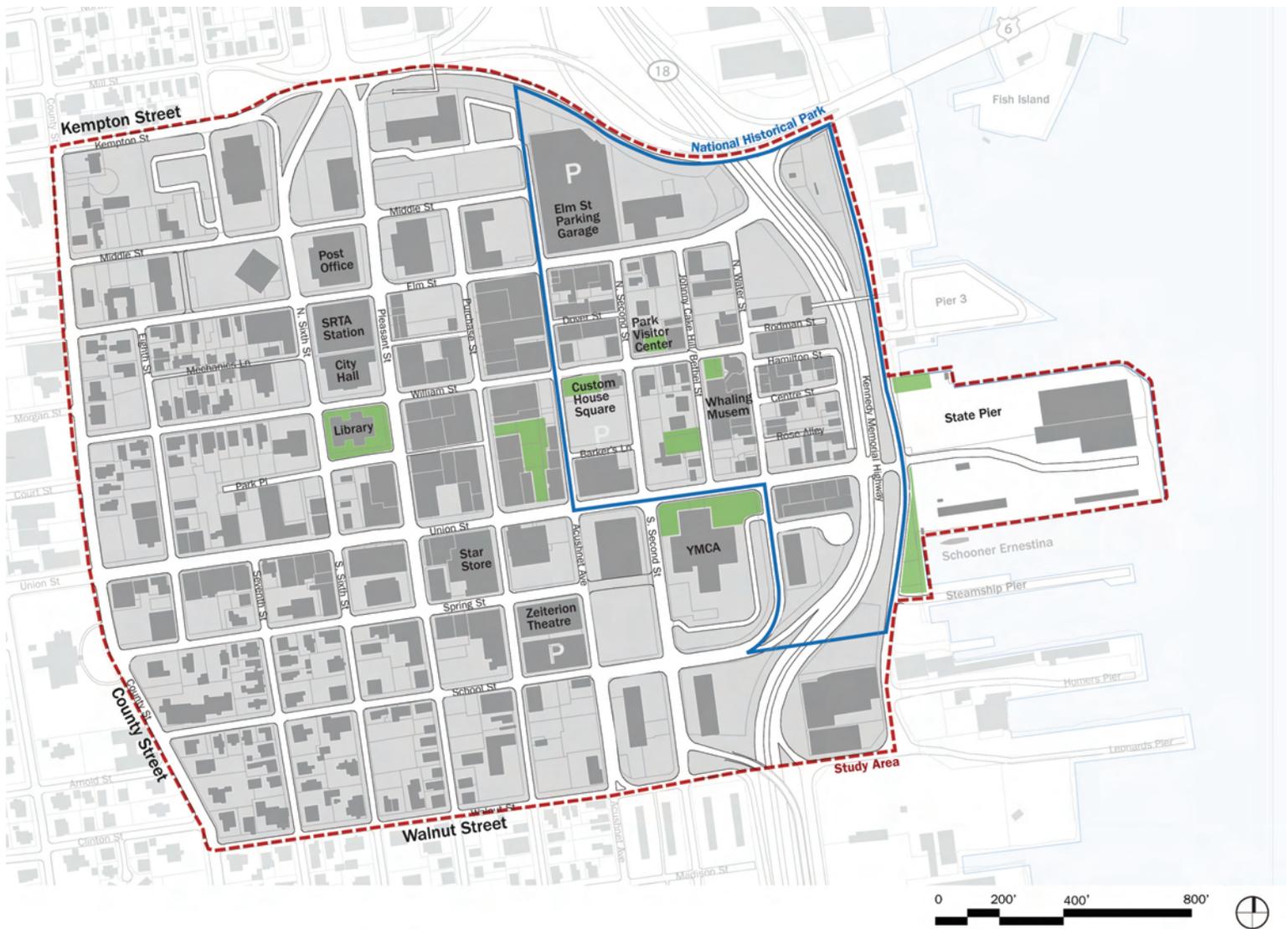
# I.B Study Area

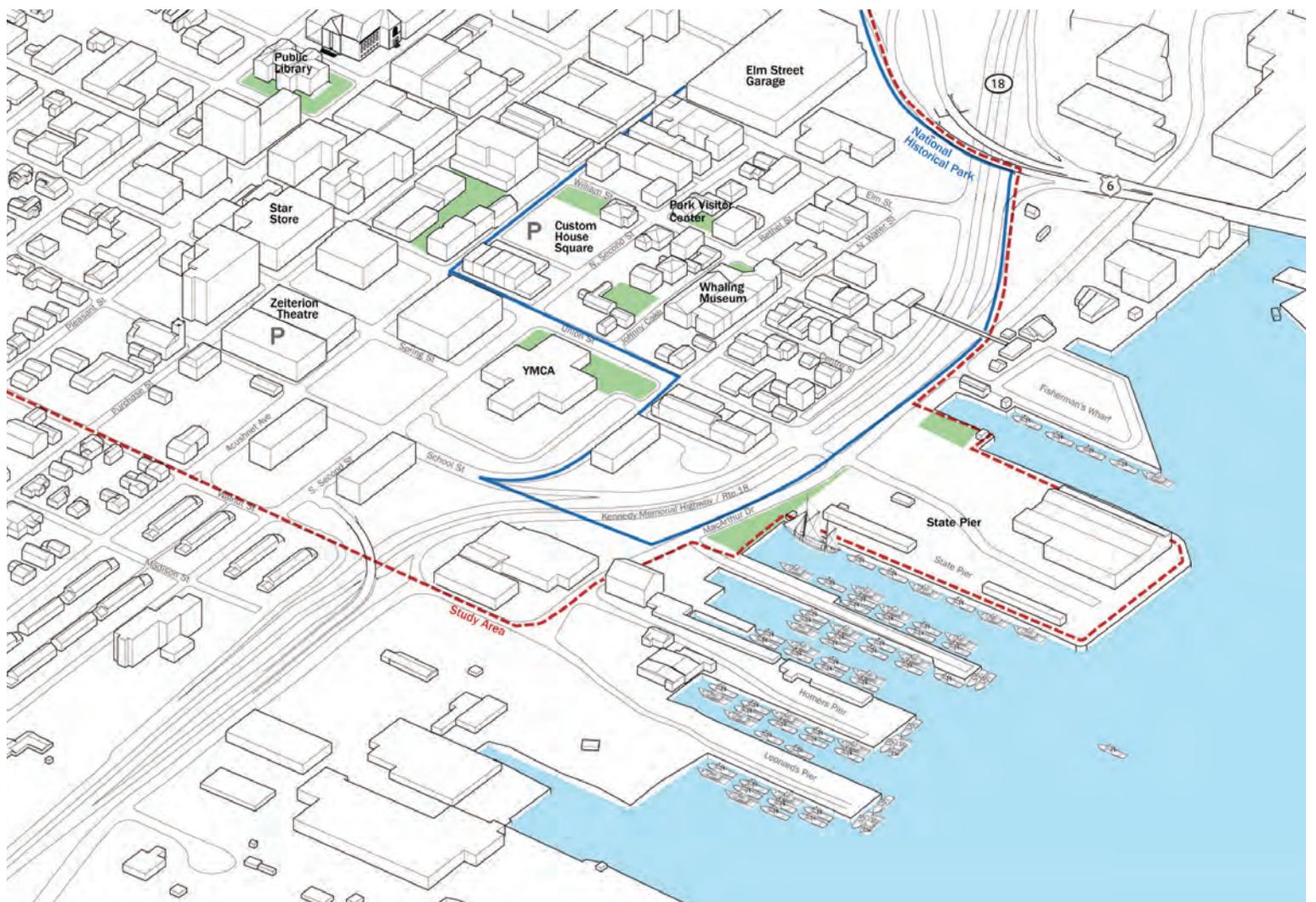
The specific area chosen for this study constitutes the core of New Bedford's downtown. It is bounded on the east by Route 18; on the south by Walnut Street; on the west by County Street; and on the north by Kempton Street. The extreme north and south edges of the study area are peppered with surface parking lots and large buildings that sit well back from street edges. Much of this is the legacy of 1960's / 70's Urban Renewal projects.

Within the study area is the amazing asset of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, established in by Congress 1996 (outlined in blue). This area has a distinct historical character that has positively affected the overall vitality of the downtown. To the east, across Route 18, lies the heart of New Bedford's waterfront—State Pier—which serves freighters, cruise ships and ferries to Martha's Vineyard and Cuttyhunk. To the west of the National Park is the city's government, office and downtown retail district, characterized by high quality late 19th and early 20th century buildings.

*BELOW: The study area for the Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study shown by the red dashed line. New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is outlined in blue.*

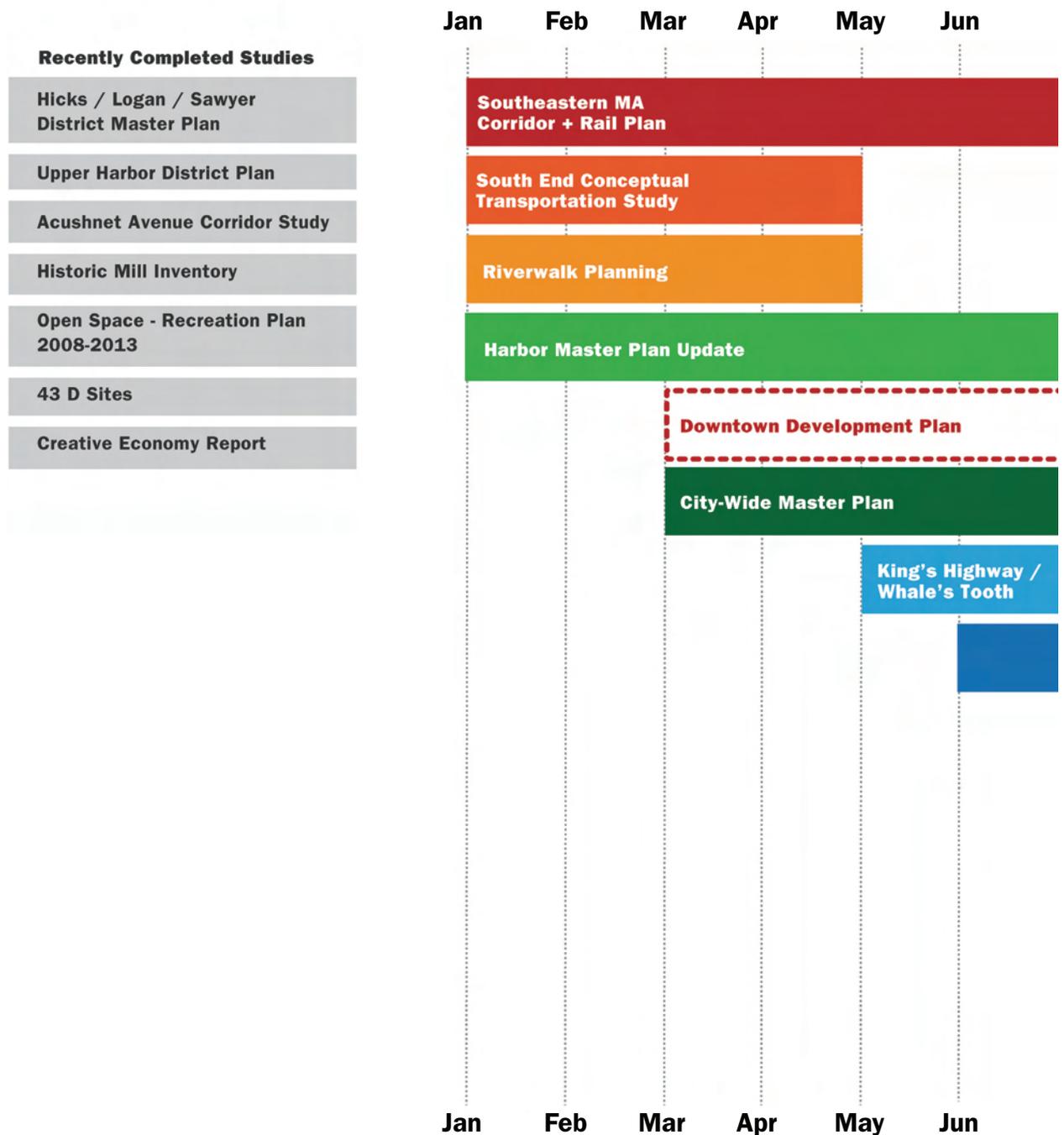
*FACING PAGE: Bird's eye model of study area, looking northwest. The presence of the working waterfront is an asset of the downtown that could be better amplified.*





# I.C Schedule

In order to build consensus and guide future development, the City of New Bedford and its state partners have undertaken a number of recent planning studies, some of which will soon materialize into capital projects. The City, working in partnership with NBEDC, MassDevelopment and DHCD undertook this Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study during the spring and summer of 2009, at a time when the City-wide Master Plan was in process, the updated Harbor Master Plan was being completed, and numerous other initiatives were underway. The schedule below locates this study among these other initiatives.



# 2009

Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec



**Projects to come**



Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

# I.D Methodology

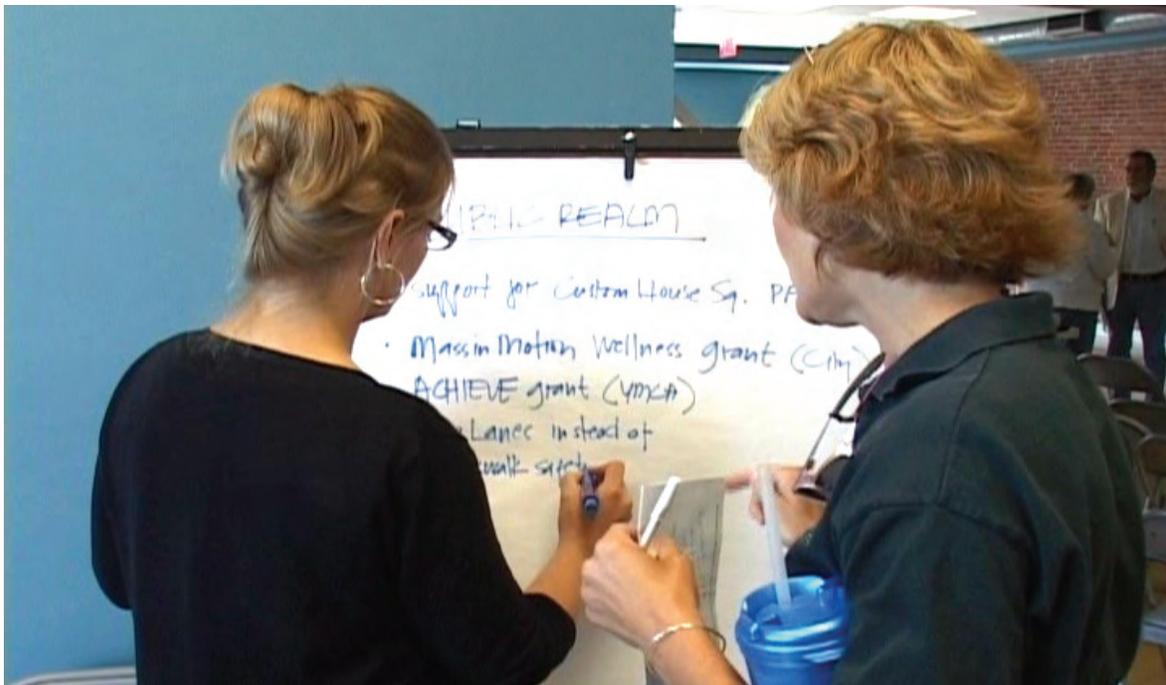
The methodology for the study was based partly on the success of recent initiatives by the City and the New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC) to increase quantity and improve the quality and mix of ground floor retail uses in the downtown area. Since 2007, 36 new retail establishments have opened or expanded based on a keen on-the-ground understanding of the demographics, pedestrian patterns, and unmet needs of area. The framework for the 2007 retail strategy emerged as a result of the local knowledge of public officials, their partners in the NBEDC, and a market analysis completed by FXM, an economic development consultant.

The Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study team, which also includes FXM, adopted a similar on-the-ground approach to planning by carefully documenting the existing conditions with photographs, map overlays, and a comprehensive property assessment. By cross-referencing this database, patterns began to emerge that suggested where new uses and populations could enhance on-going redevelopment successes.

Given the specificity of available development opportunities and the need for new development to enhance the existing architectural character of the downtown, our approach included testing specific building proposals on a few selected sites. That way, the team could make a precise assessment of the capacity of potential development sites for a variety of desired uses. The study includes parking recommendations, targeted suggestions for the expansion of a formalized streetscape design (including sidewalk, street trees and street lighting), recommendations for amplifying existing open spaces and even a proposal for a new open space in the downtown

*FACING PAGE: Four of the Test Fit Scenarios in their "before" (above) and "after" (below) states. A detailed three-dimensional model helped the consultant team understand the urban design implications of the conceptual buildings proposed.*

*BELOW: Utile's project manager receives feedback and input from an attendee of the second public meeting. Source: New Bedford Cable Access.*

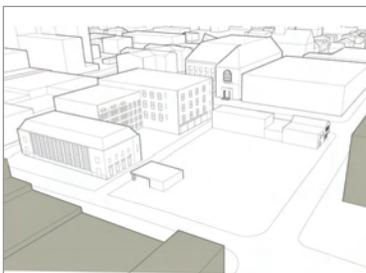




Keystone Site



Purchase Street North

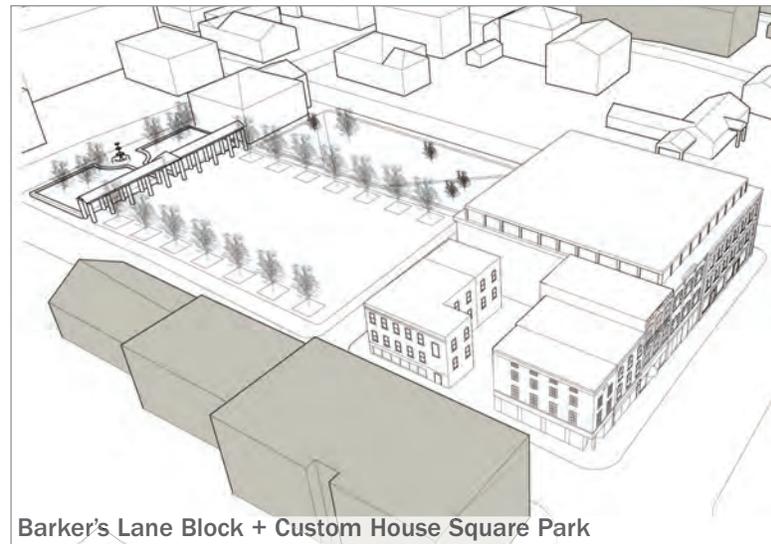


849 Purchase Street

core. These initiatives will complement the recommended development scenarios and build on the existing assets of the downtown. For example, the proposed conversion of the Custom House Square surface parking lot into a permanent open space is the center-piece of the proposal, given the role of the site as the hinge between the National Park district and the center of retail and newer residential activity in the downtown.

Targeted development/redevelopment sites were selected by first identifying all of the potential development sites within the study area with Task Force Members. Priority sites were chosen based on the assessment of existing conditions and feedback from Task Force meetings and three public meetings. The uses proposed for the selected development sites were determined during informal discussions with the consultant team, client group, and Task Force members. To collect and compare possible uses, a matrix of programmatic possibilities was created, leaving no options off the table for the primary discussions. To match program type with underdeveloped parcel, a number of factors were considered, including the interest of educational institutions in expanding their programs downtown, the ability to leverage successful existing uses, and the relatively weak state of the regional and national private sector real estate market. In addition, the raw dimensional constraints of some of the parcels limited their use to residential rather than commercial or institutional functions on the upper floors.

The development scenarios are designed with enough architectural specificity to understand their impact on the overall cityscape. Through an iterative design process that studied new building proposals within a digital 3-dimensional model of the study area, decisions were made about the appropriate heights and configurations for each of the development proposals. These contextually appropriate buildings were then used to generate quantitative information about the available ground level space for retail and realistic development capacities on the upper floors.



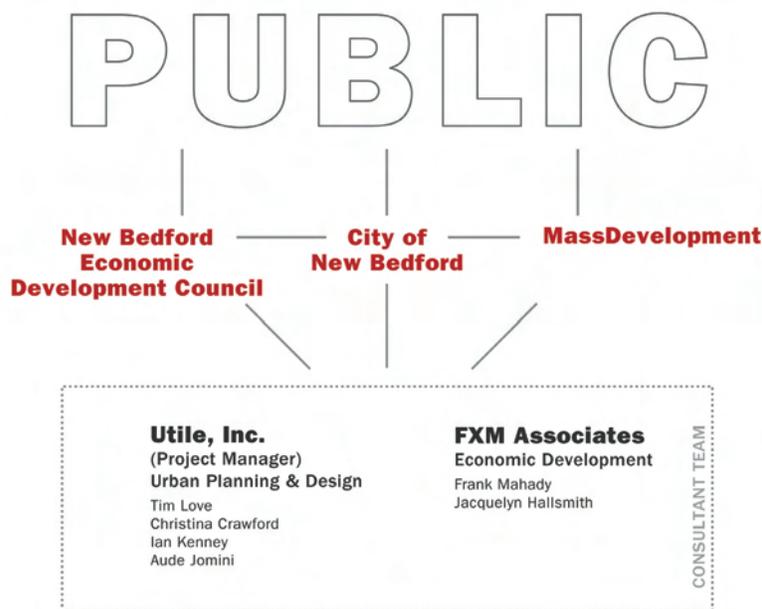
Barker's Lane Block + Custom House Square Park

# I.E Participation

## Funding, Participants, and Communication Approach

The study was jointly funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency (MassDevelopment). The client team was led by the Planning Department of the City of New Bedford and included New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC) and MassDevelopment as active participants of the process. Utile, Inc., a Boston-based urban planning and architecture firm, was the lead consultant. FXM Associates, Utile's sub-consultant, provided economic development and market analysis support.

To achieve a detailed and comprehensive plan that would gain the support of a diverse group of stakeholders, a process was devised to balance professional expertise with the deep-seated knowledge of long-term residents and business owners. The City and NBEDC invited key downtown stakeholders to join a Task Force for the project. This Task Force was invited to all client meetings where planning concepts and strategies were presented and discussed. In addition, three open public meetings were held to present status reports on the planning process and elicit feedback. At each public meeting, interactive break-out sessions were held to allow for more direct connections between the professional client and consultant teams and interested citizens. These sessions provided invaluable insights about many of the finer-grain social, cultural, and political issues raised by the development scenarios and public realm enhancement recommendations.



*LEFT: Organizational chart for the Downtown New Bedford Revitalization and Redevelopment Study.*



*RIGHT: Informal break-out stations were set up and staffed by the client and consultant team after the formal presentation at both early public meetings. These discussions provided important public feedback at crucial decision points in the study. Source: New Bedford Cable Access.*

