

II.B Open Space

Introduction

New Bedford is a city without a downtown “common” or green—a large open space that serves as a center of public life in the urban core. As more residential units have been inserted into the downtown, the call for such a common open space has intensified with the desire to see “more green”: additional passive recreational spaces for families, and places for open-air picnicking. These are spaces that could be shared with the office worker lunch crowd during the week and weekend tourists and festival-attendees. Also important in the assessment of open space is the perception of the City from a visitor perspective. How easily navigable is the core? Are open spaces understood to be an interconnected network, or green islands? What are the key assets of the existing open spaces, and how can they be amplified? And finally, are there opportunities to insert more open spaces into the downtown, to create the common that the City seems to need and want?

BELOW: The ten major open spaces within the study area. This graphic acts as a key for the open space inventory sheets in Appendix D (and shown in miniature on the following pages).

- # Municipal Ownership
- # Private Ownership



Open Space Inventory Sheets

In order to describe the state of the open space amenities in the downtown, this study identified ten key open spaces, five of which are municipally-controlled open spaces, and five of which are privately-controlled (but publicly-accessible). Summary sheets were compiled for each of these open spaces that qualify area, utilization, quality, problematic edges and suggest future improvements. With some notable exceptions, these open spaces can be characterized as too small for events; lacking seating; disconnected from one another; often just a forecourt to a building, not really a “park”. While these sheets will be useful to target future capital improvement projects, the issue of overall connectivity between these spaces could only be addressed by looking at the scale of the entire study area.

BELOW & FACING PAGE: Examples of the Open Space inventory sheets for all ten major public spaces within the study area. These sheets are included full-sized in Appendix D of this report.

Note: Examples only; full sized sheets are included in Appendix D

1 54th Regiment Plaza

Area: 8,400 sf / 0.19 acres approx.

Utilization: The 54th Regiment Plaza is extremely well-used, as it represents one of the only open / green spaces in the downtown. Its location, diagonally across from the National Park Visitor's Center, is one of its great assets. Adjacent Custom House Square is currently a 70-space municipal parking lot that is cleaned in the warmer months to become a venue for festivals, etc.

Quality: 54th Regiment Plaza pergola was recently refurbished and is in good condition. Pleasant, scenic fountain area in warm weather. Little seating, due to the raised planter bed.

Improvements: There is great interest in removing the parking program at Custom House Square to convert the adjacent 0.6 acres into a permanent open space.

Problematic Edges: Surface parking across William Street; vacant former Logo's site.






2 Tonnessen Park

Area: 6,500 sf / 0.15 acres approx.

Utilization: The eastern edge of the park / plaza is lined with benches that are well-used at lunchtime (see photo below). The park is well-used to capture waiting ferry riders as well.

Quality: It is a lighty handicapped (brick) park, which likely makes it fairly easy to maintain.

Improvements: The park is slated to be improved with the impending Rte 18 improvements.

Problematic Edges: A more handsome eastern backdrop to the park (currently a rough wood fence) is warranted; better edge at State Park.



View 1 of Tonnessen Park from MacArthur Drive



3 Coast Guard Park

Area: 17,096 sf / 0.39 acres approx.

Utilization: There is little seating here-it is largely a boardwalk. When we observed the park it was unused; perhaps during the summer weekends, with the return of the Emersion, it is better utilized.

Quality: The boardwalk and the glass/timber retainers could use updating.

Improvements: The park is slated to be improved with the impending Rte 18 improvements.

Problematic Edges: The MacArthur Drive edge doesn't currently allow for casual entry to the park. A more fluid / porous edge is recommended.



Views 1, 2, 3 of Coast Guard Park from MacArthur Drive
View 4 of Schooner Emersion from Coast Guard Park






4 Wings Court

Area: 19,333 sf / 0.44 acres approx.

Utilization: Generally well-used at lunchtime (benches, retaining walls and cafe seating all utilized for seating). There is a new deck on the western edge that will presumably be used for outdoor restaurant seating.

Quality: Generally well-landscaped. The paving surface is asphalt; the area would feel more pedestrian-friendly if the asphalt were replaced with unit pavers.

Improvements: Remove the concrete wall between the Court and the Logo's site. Improve the eastern edge behind the Acushnet Ave block. Increase outdoor restaurant seating opportunities.

Problematic Edges: The eastern edge behind the Acushnet Ave block.



Views 1, 2 of Wings Court from Union Street
View 3 of Wings Court from Purchase Street





Note: Examples only; full sized sheets are included in Appendix D

5 Library / City Hall Lawns

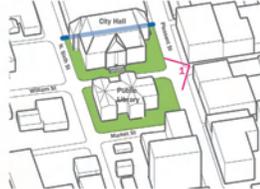
Area: 30,000 sf of both / 0.89 acres approx.

Utilization: Both the library and the adjacent City Hall green / civic spaces are well-used during the weekday lunchtime period. There is little to no formal seating, but the steps of each are used for informal seating.

Quality: Well-maintained and welcome green space in the heart of the City.

Improvements: Formal seating (benches), if added would be used.

Problematic Edges: Northern (back) edge of City Hall, against SITA Terminal.



View 1 of Library (left) and City Hall (right) from the corner of William and Pleasant Streets



6 Corson Building Grounds

Area: 5,608 sf / 0.13 acres approx.

Utilization: Appeared under-used during the work week. Likely well-used during the higher-volume tourist periods.

Quality: Extremely well-designed and maintained.

Improvements: None

Problematic Edges: None



View 1 of the Corson Grounds from the William / N. Second corner
View 2 of the Corson Grounds from the William / Berbet St end



7 Whaling Museum Plaza

Area: 4,700 sf / 0.11 acres approx.

Utilization: Primary seating / meeting area for visitors to the Whaling Museum. It is a handicapped plaza that discourages sitting.

Quality: Well-maintained handicapped expanse that successfully navigates the difficult grade change.

Improvements: Movable seating, seasonal planters.

Problematic Edges: None



View 1 of the Whaling Museum Plaza from the William Street / Johnny Cake Hill corner



8 Johnny Cake + Union

Area: 4,700 sf / 0.11 acres approx.

Utilization: There is one bench in the pocket park, but it is not frequently used. This is largely a short (nonresting) stop on the interpretive trail.

Quality: Nicely landscaped.

Improvements: While a nice visual amenity, this plot could be better utilized as an infill development site.

Problematic Edges: None.



View 3 of the pocket park from the Johnny Cake / Union Street corner



9 Seamen's Bethel Grounds

Area: 8,600 sf / 0.2 acres approx.

Utilization: This space is not actively used on a daily basis, but can be rented for functions.

Quality: Beautifully landscaped and maintained.

Improvements: Replace chainlink fencing at rear of garden with higher quality fencing. If Custom House Square becomes open space, perhaps a vertical connection (stairs) between this and the Square could be considered.

Problematic Edges: The back of this green space is situated above the St. Anne's Credit Union and Port Society parking lots. More substantial planting at this back edge would help to screen the asphalt expanse below.



View 1 of Seamen's Bethel grounds from the back
View 2 of Seamen's Bethel grounds from Johnny Cakes Hill



10 YMCA Grounds

Area: 23,230 sf / 0.53 acres approx.

Utilization: This green space is not used in either a passive or active manner; it is currently just a green forecourt to the YMCA.

Quality: The pathways at the end of Johnny Cake Hill are nicely landscaped; the grass is generally in good shape.

Improvements: Although the grass is a visual amenity, this space could be more actively engaged in the public realm by better responding to the view corridor coming down Johnny Cake Hill and perhaps adding seating.

Problematic Edges: The S. Second / Union Street corner and the Union Street edge where the blank face of the building is closest to the street. The landscaping could act as a more pleasant buffer to the blankness.



View 1 of YMCA grounds from Union / N Water Street corner
View 2 of YMCA grounds from Johnny Cakes Hill



Open Space Network

A conceptual itinerary was thus devised to test how a visitor to the City would move through the downtown and what locations, views, and spaces they would encounter. The hypothetical visitors arrive at the Elm Street Garage, walk to the NPS visitor center and the Whaling Museum, then walk to a waterfront restaurant before returning to their car via a leisurely route through the downtown core. This simple exercise identified key locations for immediate improvement, including:

- ▶ Introduction of more exuberant welcome signage at the Elm Street exit from Route 18 (currently in planning with the NPS)
- ▶ Removal of the Route 18 pedestrian overpass (which immediately signifies how difficult the passing is from the downtown to the waterfront), slated for demolition as part of Route 18 improvements
- ▶ Removal of the Front Street highway crash guard (which creates another physical barrier between the downtown and waterfront)
- ▶ More significant and welcoming landscaping, including seating and plantings, at the YMCA frontage to Union Street (especially at the end of the Johnny Cake Hill view corridor)
- ▶ Installation of a waterfront gateway at the end of Union Street or a supergraphic (large image or text) applied to the State Pier building
- ▶ Removal of the concrete dividing wall between Wings Court and the Lupo Block to allow for pedestrian connection to Custom House Square

BELOW: View looking south from soon-to-be-demolished Route 18 pedestrian overpass, showing the Front Street highway crash barrier to the right, State Pier to the left, and the potential waterfront gateway location in the distance.



In the conceptual itinerary it became clear that the existing open spaces originally identified could be understood and branded as a network. The key to realizing such a network is to unlock the potential connection between Wings Court and 54th Regiment Mass. Voluntary Infantry Plaza in the short term (by removing the concrete dividing wall between them and obtaining permission to traverse the Lupo Block), and transforming Custom House Square into a permanent open space in the long term.

Short Term Recommendations

- ▶ Install better welcome signage at the Elm Street exit from Route 18 (currently in planning with the NPS)
- ▶ Remove of Route 18 pedestrian overpass (slated for demolition as part of Route 18 improvements)
- ▶ Remove Front Street highway crash guard
- ▶ Remove concrete wall between Wings Court and the Lupo Block

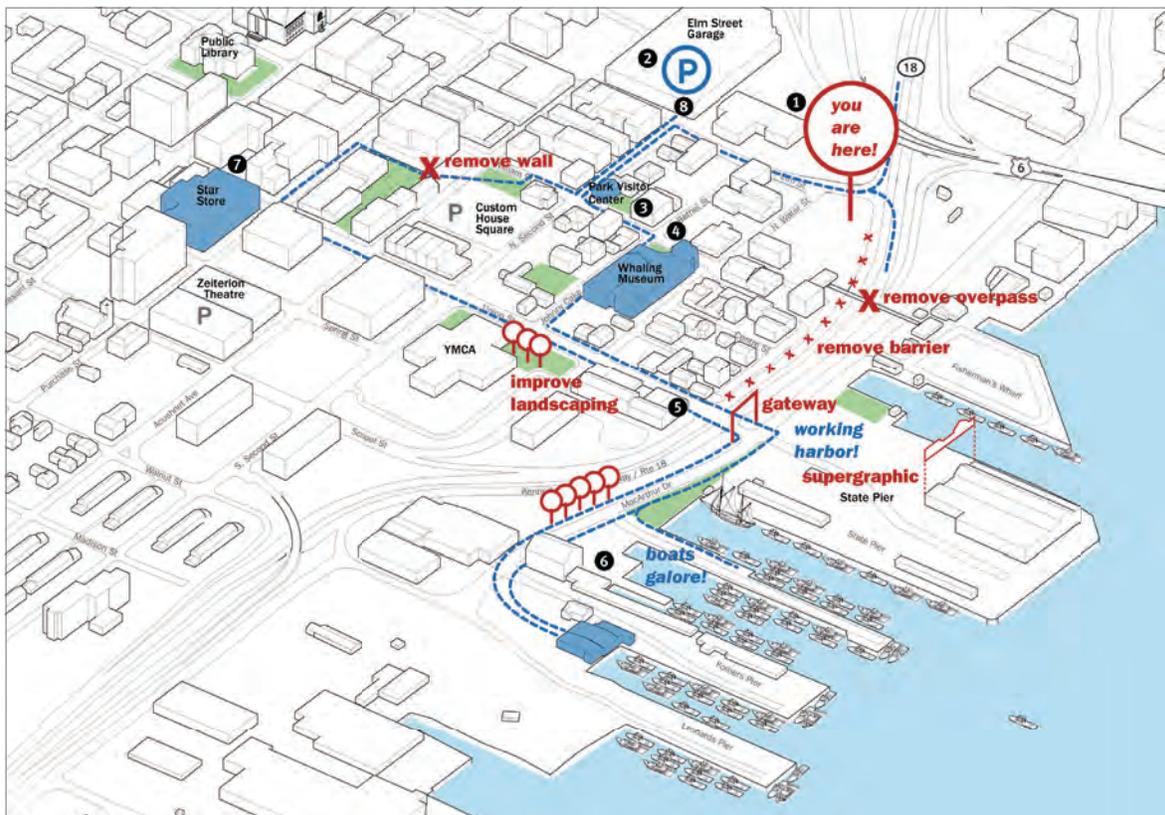
Medium Term Recommendation

- ▶ Install more welcoming landscaping at Johnny Cake Hill intersection with YMCA

Long Term Recommendation

- ▶ Install waterfront gateway or supergraphic on State Pier at end of Union Street

BELOW: Conceptual visitor itinerary through the downtown core. This graphic highlights the major moments of pause with numbers, and the recommended improvements in red.



Custom House Square / Wings Court / Lupo Block Synergies

When the Kerwin Parking Garage on the current Custom House Square lot was demolished in 1998, the ultimate intention was to reserve the area for a permanent open space. Unfortunately, now that the interim surface parking lot has been in place for eleven years, there is understandable resistance from certain sectors of the public to see those municipal spaces eliminated. The recommendation of this study is not to eliminate those spaces, but rather to decant these 66 surface lot spaces onto the north-south streets of the National Park, which currently hold only one-sided parking (see On-Street Parking Supply section for more specific details on this recommendation).

Once Custom House Square is emptied of parking, the space can be reconceived as a permanent open space. This open space is the subject of a Test Fit, detailed in the following section.

Short Term Recommendations

- ▶ Introduce two-sided parking on north-south streets within the National Park
- ▶ Remove surface parking use from Custom House Square to allow for permanent public space
- ▶ Remove concrete wall between Wings Court and Lupo Block

Medium Term:

- ▶ Design and construct permanent open space at Custom House Square
- ▶ Design and construct permanent open space connector on Lupo Block

FACING PAGE TOP: Existing conditions, showing the surface parking lot on Custom House Square, and the two-exit Wings Court without the Lupo Block connection.

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Proposed improvements considered the visitor itinerary shown on the previous page. This suggests that Wings Court, the Lupo Block and Custom House Square become a continuous open space pedestrian network.

