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**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Mayor Jorge O. Elorza | City of Providence

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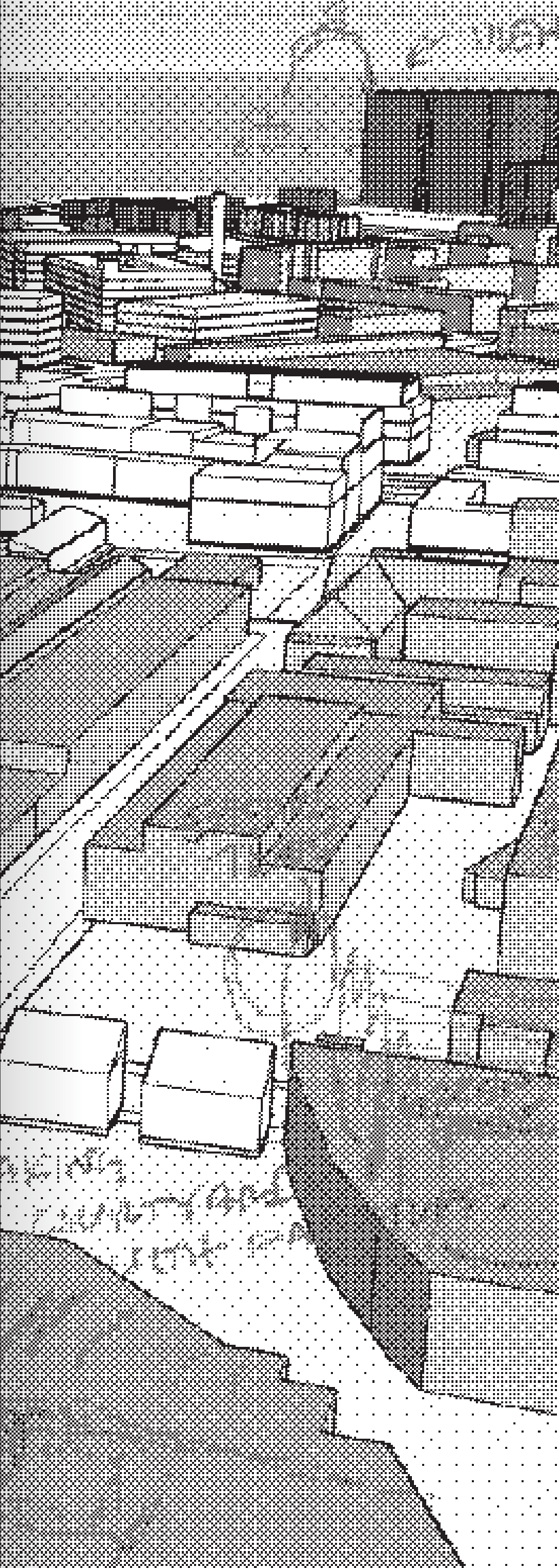
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There are many passionate people living, working, and thinking about how to enhance the Moonasquatucket Corridor; this Plan would not be as informed and sincere as it is without their involvement and the gracious volunteering of their time and talents.

People create great places, not reports, and this important fact has informed the planning process as well as the writing and design of this document.



Artwork by Quinn Corey

# LETTER FROM THE MAYOR AND DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

After a year of engaging hundreds of residents and stakeholders throughout the City's Olneyville, Valley, and Smith Hill neighborhoods, we are truly excited to present the Woonasquatucket Vision Plan—a plan for the future of the Woonasquatucket River Corridor. Stretching from Olneyville to Downtown along the length of the Woonasquatucket River, this corridor presents an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth. Guiding that growth in a thoughtful and environmentally- and socially-responsible way is essential to ensuring that our neighborhoods and the diverse community of people who live and work in Providence continue to thrive.

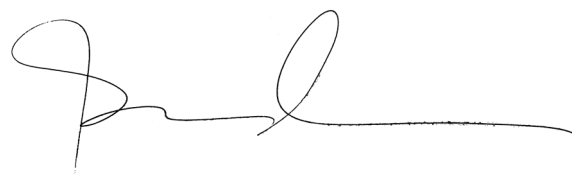
What we heard from the community over the course of the past year—during our community picnic at a local church in Olneyville, our week-long public workshop at WaterFire Arts Center on Valley Street, dozens of community events like the Olneyville Fall Festival and Valley Arts District Open Studio, and our unveiling of the draft plan during a public meeting at the Wurks—created the framework of this Plan. The community priorities that we heard from you are clear: improve sustainability and resiliency; support and grow the existing economic cluster around arts, food, and makers; preserve and create affordable space; improve access and connectivity; and enhance and maintain public spaces and the Woonasquatucket River.

Together, with partners including the Environmental Protection Agency, State of Rhode Island, and Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, we have already begun to advance many of the impressive ideas generated by the community during this planning process. This coming summer, engineering will begin on a six-million dollar enhancement of the Woonasquatucket Greenway between Eagle Street and Downtown. Engineering has also begun on improvements to make Dean Street safer for people walking and riding bicycles, and in 2019, construction will be underway to make San Souci Drive behind Olneyville Square into a welcoming gateway to the Woonasquatucket Greenway. Over the next three years, thanks to a Brownfields Assessment Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the City will spend \$300,000 to assess environmental liabilities and existing infrastructure issues on contaminated industrial sites to eliminate cost uncertainty and promote development. Public and private investments in projects like Gotham Greens, Farm Fresh RI's Food Hub, and an expansion at the Steel Yard are actively moving forward in the Corridor while the City works to establish a tax increment financing district to fund additional improvements called for in the Vision Plan.

We're thinking big about the role of the Woonasquatucket River; as it is converted from a forgotten relic to a source of energy that connects Fox Point to Olneyville and drives our Urban Innovation Strategy. We look forward to continuing to think big with you, the community, as we advance these projects and advocate and secure resources to fulfill our collective vision for this important area of our City.



Mayor Jorge O. Elorza



Bonnie Nickerson, AICP  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Thank you to local artists David Allyn, Quinn Corey, Maggie J Siegel, Amanda Soule, and Sam White for creating and contributing such fine original art to this plan that reflects the spirit of the Woonasquatucket River neighborhoods and people.*



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I'M JUST TRYIN TO HAVE MY DUNKIN'

CHAPTER 1

# PROJECT BACK- GROUND



Artwork by Sam White

# ABOUT THE WOONASQUATUCKET CORRIDOR: WHY PLAN NOW?

With over 560 acres of land area, the Woonasquatucket Corridor spans three Providence neighborhoods — Olneyville, Valley, and Smith Hill — from Paragon Mills in Olneyville Square along the Woonasquatucket River to Providence Place Mall in Downtown. With funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the City of Providence worked closely with community partners to plan for the future of this important area over the course of one year. The Vision Plan will be used to guide and prioritize cleanup of former industrial sites and the many investments planned and underway in the Woonasquatucket Corridor, determine other public needed investments, and advocate and secure resources for implementation.

Providence’s Woonasquatucket Corridor has a rich history as a center of industry, dating back to the 19th century. Following World War II, advancements in industrial technology and transportation reduced industrial reliance on the power and transportation that the River once provided. As a result, many sites once occupied by industrial giants were left vacant and abandoned. This history also managed to leave something else behind that did not become strongly apparent until the end of the 20th century: environmental contamination. Over a century of continuous heavy manufacturing use contaminated soil and the Woonasquatucket River with semivolatile organic compounds (SVOCs), free-phase hydrolic/lubricating oil, fuel oil, and dozens of other chemicals. The financial liability of contamination, which is expensive to remediate and return to other uses, became painfully clear by the 1970s when the EPA created the Superfund program to deal with severely polluted sites all over the country. Vacant sites that are expected to have contamination but did not rise to the severe levels of Superfund sites — what we now refer to as “brownfield” properties — were hampered from redevelopment and locked in a state of underuse or abandonment.

The high cost of cleanup and redevelopment combined with an immense industrial downturn in the northeast after World War II created large concentrated swathes of brownfields in many cities, and Providence’s Woonasquatucket Corridor was not spared. Encouraging brownfield clean-up and redevelopment was the primary motivator of EPA’s Area-Wide Planning program and is central to the economic and environmental health of the Woonasquatucket Corridor.



*A view looking down Harris Avenue toward the intersection with Atwells and the corner of the GE Baseworks Site*

Accordingly, remediation and reuse of brownfields within the Woonasquatucket Corridor is one of the top implementation goals of this plan. This plan also identifies a number of related community goals and actions that will be prioritized and executed by the City and its partners.

#### **THE EPA AREA-WIDE PLANNING GRANT**

The Vision Plan is funded by an FY17 Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (AWP) Grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Under the AWP program, the EPA funds activities culminate in an area-wide plan for brownfields assessment, cleanup, and subsequent reuse. Grant-funded activities must be directed to one or more catalyst, high priority brownfield sites located within a specific project area, such as a neighborhood, downtown, business or arts district, or local commercial or industrial corridor. Each recipient that receives a grant under this funding opportunity must develop an area-wide plan for brownfields within the selected project area and include in that plan specific implementation strategies for assessing, cleaning up, and reusing brownfields and related project area revitalization strategies.

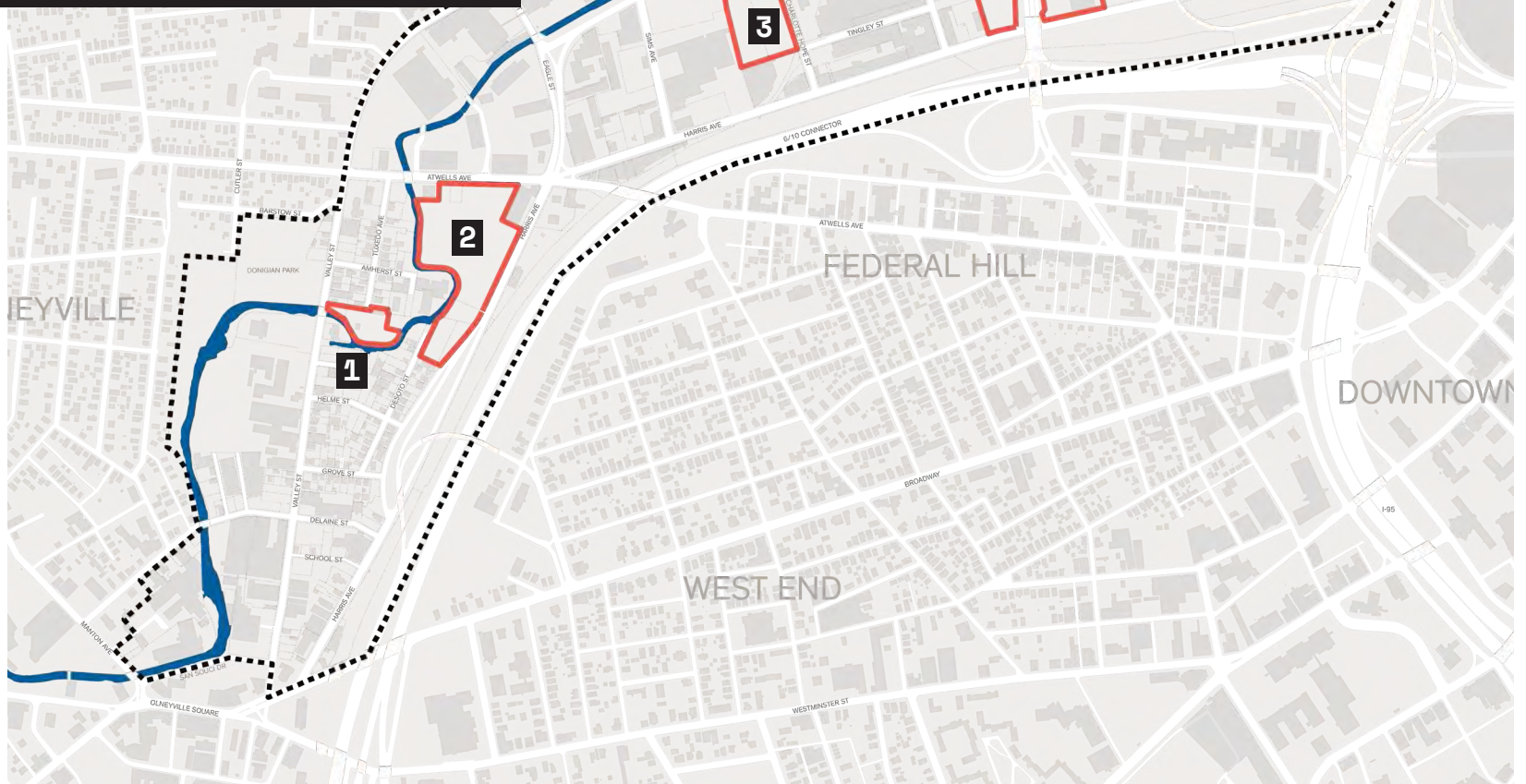


*Nicholson File Parking lot looking north*



## CATALYTIC SITES

- 1 Natareno Salvage Site
- 2 General Electric Baseworks
- 3 PRA / Umicore Site
- 4 Narragansett Bay Commission Site
- 5 Providence Journal West Site
- 6 Providence Journal East Site



*The properties shown on this plan are the catalytic sites included in the City of Providence's Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (AWP) Grant, selected because of their potential for redevelopment or enhancement, presence of contaminated soils, and potential for catalyzing positive improvements within the Woonasquicket Corridor.*

## **1.1.1 A GUIDING DOCUMENT**

Long term community planning is akin to outlining a very complex cross-country road trip; the destination may be very clear from the start but without a good roadmap to guide you, it is easy to become lost. This Vision Plan is a guiding document that identifies long term goals, opportunities, and constraints for the Woonasquatucket Corridor and effectively functions as the roadmap for this metaphorical journey.

This plan dovetails with other plans, including the 6-10 Connector Reconstruction Plan, the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Extension Plan, and the Carbon Neutrality Plan to be released in late 2018.

## **1.1.2 A UNIFIED COMMUNITY VISION**

At the outset of the vision planning process in 2017, major changes were already on the horizon for the Woonasquatucket Corridor. Several catalytic brownfield sites began to attract serious interest from the private sector, while numerous large public investments that will transform the landscape of the Woonasquatucket Corridor— including the 6-10 Connector reconstruction and Woonasquatucket River Greenway Extension— were announced. In the midst of these changes, those who live and work in and around the Woonasquatucket Corridor struggle with ongoing concerns about displacement of vulnerable populations, including low-income residents and artists. These factors resulted in the need for significant community input, which this Plan transfers directly toward implementation strategies that will drive cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites in the Corridor. Bringing together people who have a stake in the future of the Corridor was, and will continue to be, critical to establishing a common idea of the future and a path forward for the Woonasquatucket Corridor.

How do we enhance, promote, and grow the Corridor without essentially changing the character that is here today? How do we make the River the focal point and celebrate it as the unifying asset that it is throughout the entire Woonasquatucket River Corridor? How do we improve access throughout this district as well as to the surrounding neighborhoods? As the community searched for answers to these questions over the course of creating this plan, there were a number of insights that came from these discussions that challenged the planning team to look for innovative solutions. We must thank the community again for putting in the time, effort, and creativity that helped to bring these ideas into reality.

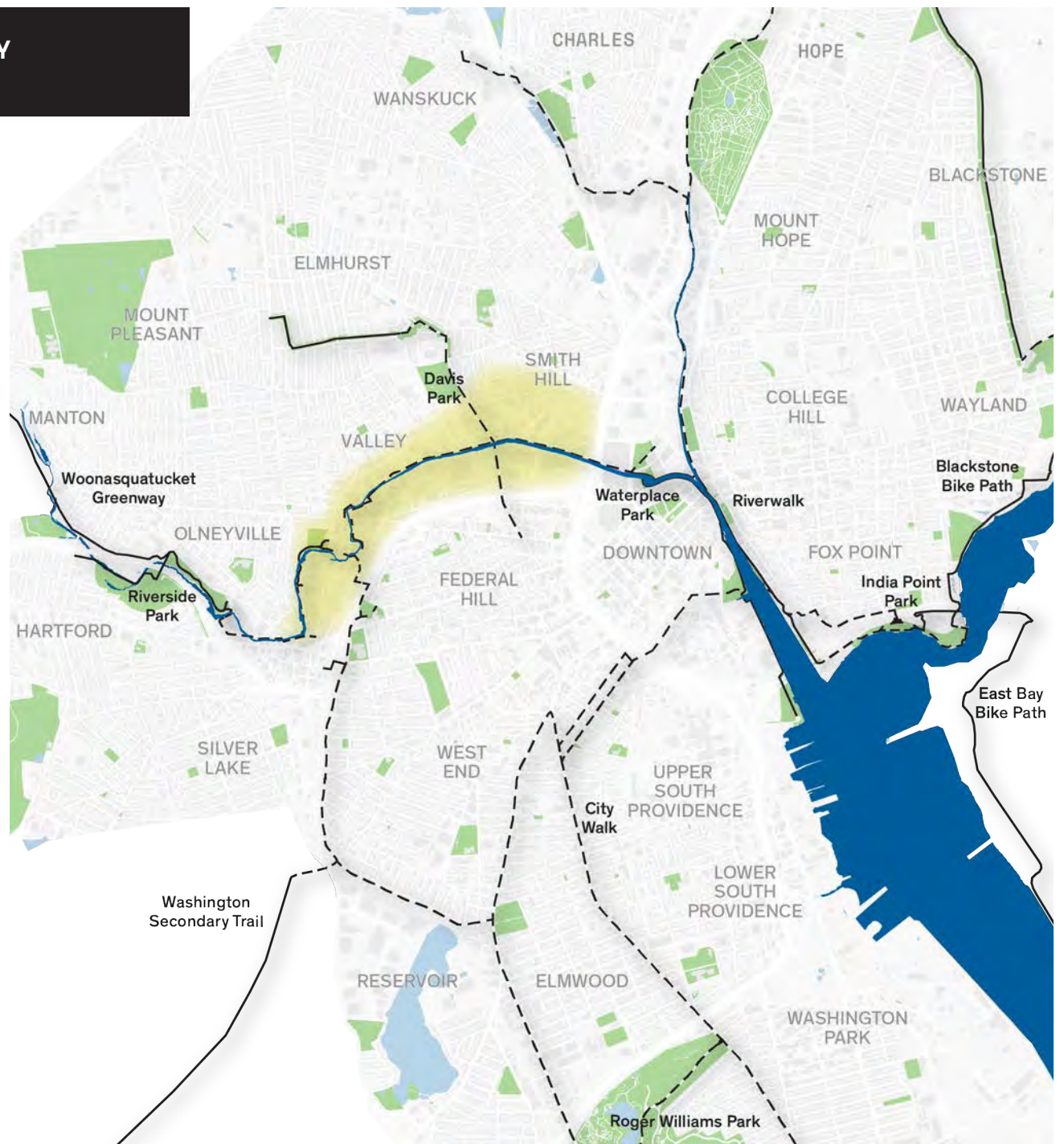
## **1.1.3 HOW THE PLAN WILL BE USED**

This Vision Plan proposes clear action items for each community priority identified during the public process. These action items will serve as a road map for future investments and policies relating to the Woonasquatucket Corridor.

The Plan also includes sample pro-formas and building toolkits developed during the planning workshop. These are included as a resource that can be used by the City, developers, and the public to make the right kind of development easier and less risky to complete. Economic studies performed on each of the catalyst sites (sites that have been determined to be high priorities for redevelopment in line with the goals of this Plan) will help provide developers with additional assurances that the kinds of project's desired by the community are feasible in local market conditions. Referencing the Vision Plan will help the City guide projects to adhere to community priorities and move through the development process more quickly. It will also help developers by articulating clearly what types of projects are supported by the community and the City.

The State of Rhode Island and City of Providence both have economic development initiatives aiming to bring jobs to the Woonasquatucket Corridor. This Vision Plan will complement both efforts by illustrating a comprehensive vision and establishing multiple paths forward for investment in the area.

For the City of Providence, having a widely-supported, strategic plan to point to will also strengthen future grant applications to implement this Plan.



*One of the most exciting concepts to emerge from this visioning process is the idea of highlighting the Woonasquattuck and Providence rivers as a unifying feature that ties together multiple points throughout Providence — from India Point Park and Waterplace Park to Riverside Park in Olneyville — and integrating a trail along the rivers into a citywide “Providence Urban Trail Network” that connects into City Walk and other initiatives, ultimately connecting all Providence neighborhoods into a unified trail system. This unified urban trail will enhance, promote, and grow the Corridor while building upon what already exists, make the River the focal point and celebrate it as the unifying asset that it is throughout the entire Woonasquattuck River Corridor, and improve access throughout the Corridor and surrounding neighborhoods.*

# ABOUT THE CO-PLANNING PROCESS

## **1.2.1 MEETING THE COMMUNITY WHERE IT IS**

Throughout the course of this planning process, the City maximized opportunities for community engagement and input that leveraged the wisdom of people who live and work in the community. Including voices of those most impacted by decisions was a critical part of this planning process and will help ensure that this Vision Plan is an effective tool in the end. The foundation of this approach involved meeting the community where it is, which involved attending many standing meetings and community events. The Planning Team brought a mobile engagement kit to each of these events and conducted outreach in the field in both English and Spanish. Attending events like these was a critical method for reaching people in the comfort of their own cultural spaces and reaching people who face barriers to attending traditional public meetings.

When it was necessary to call a meeting, careful attention was paid to choose venues and times of day and week that were accessible to the community. A church, an artist collaborative, and an arts center were among the venues chosen for the Vision Plan's public events. All were located in the Woonasquatucket Corridor. When food and entertainment were provided, they were sourced within the Corridor as well. For example, a local artist who participated in planning process DJ'ed the Open House and a local restaurant supplied food for the Visioning Picnic. During the Planning Workshop, the Planning Team set up a field office in the Corridor for five days and invited the public to drop-in anytime between 10AM and 8PM to see work in progress, offer feedback, or simply meet Planning Team members.

The Woonasquatucket Vision Plan was created using this intensive approach to community led planning, ultimately drawing in hundreds of participants. By approaching the community at the outset, a genuine working relationship developed between city leadership and local stakeholders. This sincere community input resulted in an overall vision and set of community priorities that are rooted in the dynamic community that helped create this Plan.

## **1.2.2 COMMUNITY CONNECTORS**

To facilitate the outreach process for the Woonasquatucket Vision Plan, a group of local community leaders was assembled, beginning in July 2017, to help design the process and communicate information to the public. These "Community Connectors" were each selected based on their connections to various local groups or populations.

Artists and makers, residents, landowners and developers, local and state officials, and other stakeholders from the Olneyville, Valley, and Smith Hill neighborhoods participated as Community Connectors. As credible community leaders, they were instrumental in building the community's trust in the process and getting folks to turn out to events. They also provided invaluable input and feedback to the work products generated under the Vision Plan.

Interviews were also held with stakeholders to understand the unique perspectives of those with strong economic ties to the neighborhood.

## **1.2.3 VISIONING PICNIC**

As an introductory event, a visioning picnic was held to kick off the project with a strong public presence and set a welcoming tone with the community. Complementary picnic style food was provided by a local restaurant. Participants were shown a brief presentation outlining the project, which was followed by interactive visioning exercises that were structured to extract ideas from the community and form the basis of the Vision Plan.

Attendees were asked to identify areas where they would like to see change and areas they would like to remain unchanged in the future. People indicated these preferences with red and green stickers placed on an oversized map of the Woonasquatucket Corridor, clearly showing collective preferences and targeting certain areas for greater planning attention. This crowdsourcing map helped the planning team focus on high priority issues and ensure that later design work corresponded to the resulting heat map of the neighborhood. The activity also helped push participants to talk to one another, breaking the ice, and making the next activities, which required collaboration, easier.

The next round of activities required everyone to break up into groups and complete two more collaborative exercises. The first of these, the "visioning map", asked each table to draw their ideas for the future of the neighborhood on a neighborhood map and then present them back to everyone. The second activity, the "visioning worksheet", asked each group to come up with at least three "big ideas" that they would like to see identified in the Vision Plan, and then asked them to brainstorm incremental steps needed to achieve those goals. Each table was asked to present their work back to the full room of attendees.

Each activity was designed to help inform the flagship event: the intensive, multi-day Planning Workshop.

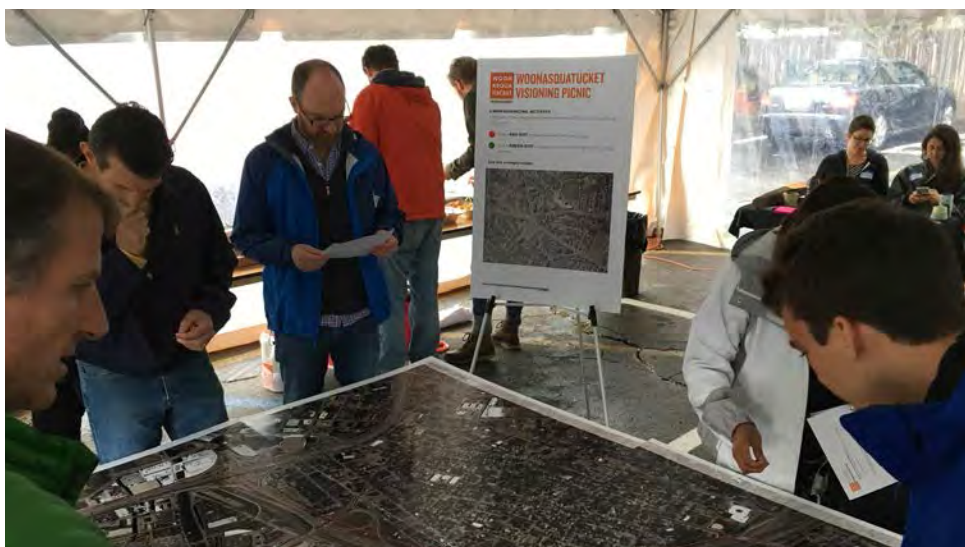


(above) City staff attend the Olneyville Fall Festival to gather ideas for the future of the Woonasquatucket Corridor.



(left) The Community Connectors meeting brought together key stakeholders within the Woonasquatucket Corridor to begin setting the tone and engagement plan for the project.

(below) The Visioning Picnic launched the public engagement effort and provided a centrally located forum to gather community input.



## 1.2.5 PLANNING WORKSHOP

The Planning Workshop was the centerpiece of the public planning process. Spanning five days in November, the Workshop was where many planning and design decisions were made with the help of the public.

This multi-tiered, intensive event included a temporary design office, or studio, set up in the WaterFire Arts Center conveniently located within the Woonasquatucket Corridor. This space served as the location for all activities surrounding the Workshop, including focus groups, full public presentations, and informal conversations. The studio included both meeting space and design workstations for the full planning team. This co-location allowed the planning team to benefit from overhearing conversations with community members, presentations, and focus group meetings, without having them stop work to participate. Similarly, anyone could strike up a conversation and ask questions of the designers, providing real time feedback and making the planning process as transparent and approachable as possible.

The Workshop agenda was designed in response to information generated at the Visioning Picnic and stakeholder interviews over the previous several months.

The first day was comprised of an evening public meeting, which included a presentation and mapping exercise focused on six catalyst brownfield sites located within the Woonasquatucket Corridor. Attendees moved in randomly assigned groups from station to station and rapidly assembled a large bank of big design ideas for each site. A visual preference exercise, which included a printed collection of curated images, was provided to participants. People put red and green dots to indicate general like or dislike, as well as specific comments, to further explain local design preference, desired building uses, and other aspirations for the neighborhood. The visual preference images remained up throughout the rest of the workshop to gather additional input from anyone who walked into the studio.

Beginning on the second day of the Workshop, an intensive series of focus group meetings were held in the studio, while the consulting team began to work. Focus group meetings were held on a variety of topics including mobility, open space and sustainability, neighborhood and family life, artists and makers, the food economy, and brownfields. Each session was open to the public and included city and state officials as well as at least one expert on each topic. The studio remained open for the next two nights, allowing the public to come and go according to their own schedule, facilitating additional one-on-one opportunities for interaction with the design team.

Thursday's major event was a mid-workshop review. This evening public meeting presented an opportunity for the public to view draft work completed up until that point and provide feedback on what they were seeing. All work was presented gallery style on large boards; participants were invited to comment using provided sticky notes as well as through direct discussions with the design team.

The closing event for the Workshop, a public meeting held on a Saturday afternoon, featured an address by Mayor Jorge Elorza, a summary presentation of the work completed so far, and a pop-up gallery presenting all of the process plans, drawings, and analysis completed during the workshop. After a long, productive week of work and public input, a framework for the Vision Plan was largely in place.



*The opening evening of the Planning Workshop generated a significant volume of ideas that launched the planning work.*

*A mid-week pin-up and review provided an opportunity for the community to help refine plans and big ideas.*



# 1.2

## 1.2.6 PLAN OPEN HOUSE

The Plan Open House, held on February 28, 2018, was the public's first opportunity to interact with a full draft report and provide feedback on design and policy ideas and action steps. A gallery style event was organized, featuring live music, to create a festive, community-oriented event to encourage the public to attend. The meeting provided a forum to revisit the work from November and once again give feedback on the work in progress. The Plan Open House itself and the month-long public comment period that followed were the last steps in the community engagement process.

*At the Plan Open House the community was able to see and comment on draft plans and big ideas that were incorporated into the Plan.*



# THE WOONASQUATUCKET HISTORY AND FUTURE

## 1.3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER

In the pre-Colonial period, the Algonquin Nation controlled the 15.8 mile long Woonasquatucket River. As a convenient route to the coast, the Woonasquatucket became a trading route of importance to the Algonquin Nation's coastal tribes including the Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Massachuset.

"Woonasquatucket" is an Narragansett word, whose meaning is debated. The City of Providence consulted the Narragansett Tribal Council, which interpreted the word to mean "the place before the bend in the river." This interpretation was based on the following translations:

Woonki = crook or bend

Asqua = before

Tuck = river

Et = the place of/where

Another interpretation that the writers frequently encountered was "where the salt water ends" or "where the river meets the sea," most likely referring to the Woonasquatucket's pre-industrial condition as a tidal estuary. The ocean's influence on the River can be seen throughout the Woonasquatucket Corridor with a pronounced change in water level as tides rise and fall in Narragansett Bay.

After Roger Williams settled Rhode Island in 1636, small rural villages took advantage of the River's swift current and narrow width to make the construction of small grist and shingle mills convenient. It was this quality as a fast and narrow river that would cement the Woonasquatucket forever in Rhode Island's industrial history.

After the construction of Slater Mill in Pawtucket in 1790, the nation's first successful water-driven textile mill, Rhode Island found itself at the forefront of American industrial technology. Within a decade, water-driven mills developed at a rapid pace along the Woonasquatucket, replacing the small mills from the prior century, but built along the River for the very same reasons. Even as the significance of water-power access began to wane, the industrial densities within the area only continued to increase. Throughout the 19th century, new steam driven mill buildings, deploying the next wave of Rhode Island industrial hardware, the Corliss Engine, were being built across Providence and along the Woonasquatucket.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Providence boasted an impressive array of some of the nation's largest manufacturers, including Brown and Sharpe, US Rubber, and the American Locomotive Works who produced an immense number of different products, including jewelry, flatware, rubber, textiles, steam engines, and locomotives. It is the legacy of this industrial activity that remains central to the Woonasquatucket River of today.

*Historic images of the Woonasquatucket Corridor capture the spirit of this critical jobs center within the region.*



## 1.3



### 1.3.2 THE CORRIDOR TODAY

Walking along the Woonasquatucket River today, one is confronted immediately by the 19th century industrial building fabric, with long stretches of brick buildings still intact. Despite the strong presence of the area's heritage, many changes over the past decades have altered the face of the Woonasquatucket Corridor.

In 2001, the redevelopment of Eagle Square, what was then known as Fort Thunder, began. This project was a contention flash point in the modern evolution of the neighborhood. The loss of Fort Thunder, the construction of the shopping center, and redevelopment of the associated mill buildings that now define Eagle Square did help to organize many artists and activities in the neighborhood, which resulted in the redevelopment of Monohasset Mill, the Steel Yard, the Plant, and others. Several of these projects that took a more caring and authentic approach to their program, design, and execution are now award winning examples of brownfield redevelopment.

On the eastern edge of the study area, the neighborhood has historically met the State House area and downtown with a series of complex transportation infrastructure systems. Whether the Cove Basin from the mid-1800s or the elevated railroad tracks that traversed the area up until 1986, this portion of the Woonasquatucket Corridor has always had a poor connection with the State House and destinations Downtown. This situation was not substantially improved when the

“What do you love about the District? The sound of machines and the quiet.”



*View of pop-up gardens and trellis in Eagle Square.*



(above) Nicholson File studios  
 (left) Industrial and maker space within the PRA / Umicore site  
 (right) View down Valley Street looking south

Providence Place Mall was developed and opened in 1999. In 2013, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation began construction on the replacement of 1,290 feet of the Interstate 95 Viaduct that was originally constructed in 1964. The replacement of this critical piece of regional transportation infrastructure will be completed in 2018 at a total cost of approximately \$208,000,000. Even with this RIDOT project nearing completion, efforts are still needed to improve the pedestrian and bike connection under the Viaduct and through the Mall to Downtown.

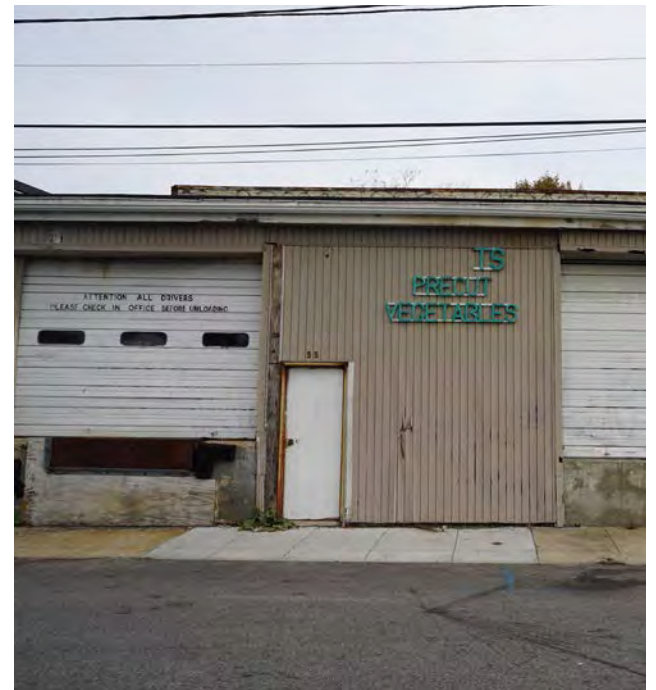
Along the south-eastern edge of the Woonasquatucket Corridor, plans for the replacement of the 6/10 interchange were finalized in 2016. This \$400 million project will address critical upgrades to this aging highway infrastructure while including several important enhancements for surrounding neighborhoods, including more than one mile of new bike paths/multi-use trails, two new bicycle/pedestrian connections from the Woonasquatucket Corridor to the West End and Federal Hill, a Route 10 North to Route 6 West connection (which will alleviate traffic through Olneyville Square), and the creation of several new acres of former highway land for redevelopment.

The River itself, the most unifying feature across an incredibly varied area, continues to move between lofty factory buildings and nature. While the River has been modified, straightened, and embanked over time, disrupting the natural distribution of water throughout the historical floodplain, recent efforts have been made to restore the River. Over the past decade, the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council has begun to reestablish some segments of re-naturalized greenway, with more work needed to prepare the Woonasquatucket Corridor for future climate realities.

# 1.3



Photo by Brown Sharpe



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#### 6-10 CONNECTOR RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

In January 2018, RIDOT announced the beginning of a \$410M reconstruction of the 6-10 Connector, a state highway that separates the Woonasquatucket Corridor from the adjacent Federal Hill neighborhood. In addition to reconstructing nine bridge structures, five of which are structurally deficient, the project also includes: construction of the “missing move” to allow Route 10 North traffic to access Route 6 West without traveling through Olneyville Square; a one-mile extension of the Washington Secondary Bike Path between Union Avenue and Tobey Street; two new pedestrian and bicycle bridges over the highway and railroad tracks at Dike Street and Tobey Street; a complete redesign of the Tobey Street bridge to allow two-way neighborhood-to-neighborhood vehicular travel; a complete redesign of Broadway and Westminster Streets as they cross over the highway to make them pedestrian-friendly gateways between Federal Hill and Olneyville; and the creation of more than four acres of former highway right-of-way for development.

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#### WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER GREENWAY EXTENSION PROJECT

In Spring 2018, the City of Providence and Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council will begin design and engineering work on a \$6M project to enhance a one-mile section of the Greenway between Downtown and Eagle Street by creating a separated off-road bicycle and pedestrian path, a series of pocket parks and kayak launches, and green infrastructure along the Woonasquatucket River between Eagle and Park Streets. Construction on the project is expected to be completed by 2022.

### 1.3.3 CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE WOONASQUATUCKET OF TOMORROW

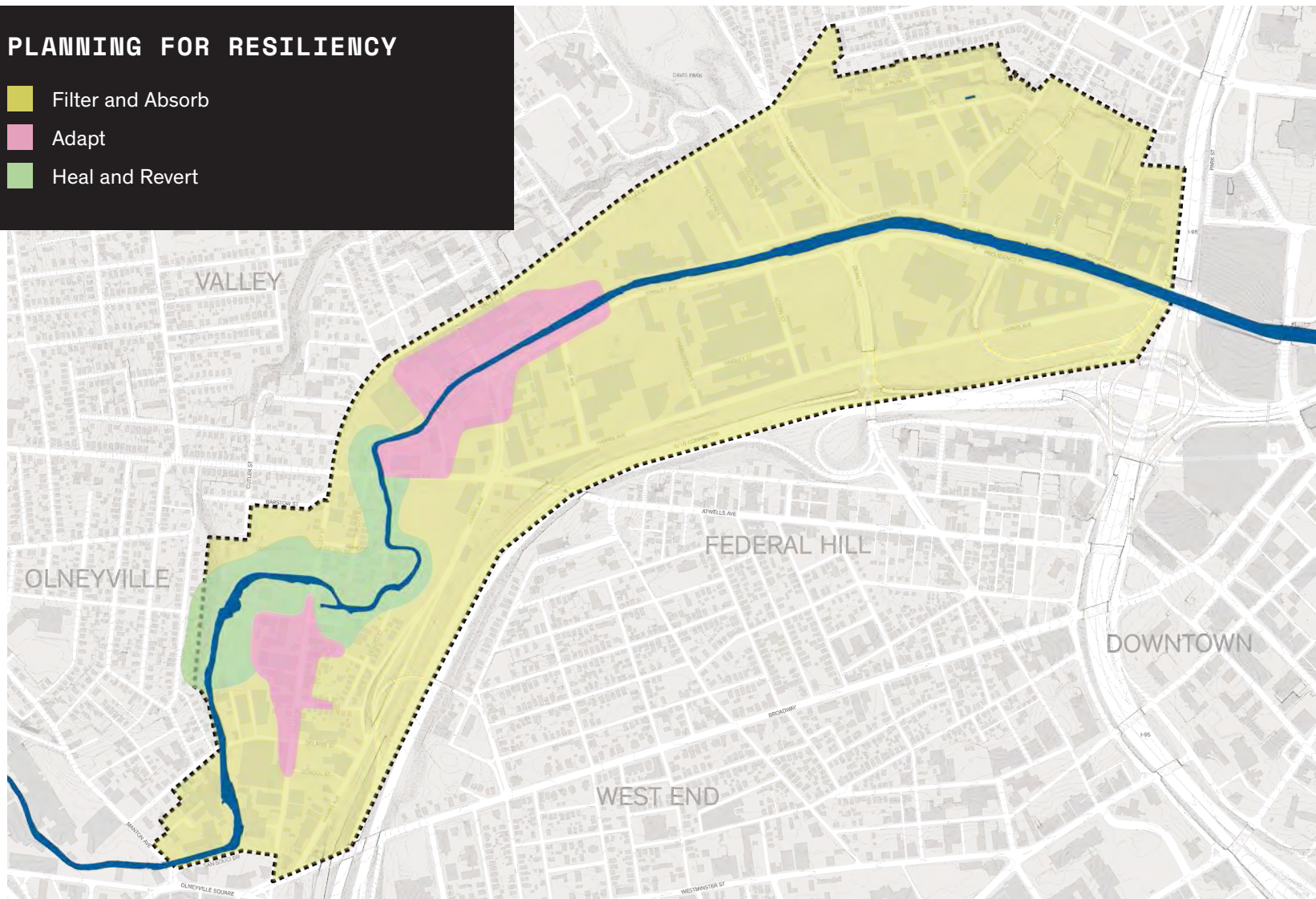
What does the future of the area look like and how does this affect the neighborhoods that surround it? That question is the central motivating question at the heart of all planning processes; but for the Woonasquatucket River, the question is a bit more complicated. Climate change presents a set of converging realities that complicate our vision of the future as we know it. Issues related to changes in sea level over the next 50 or 100 years are magnified along a tidal river system. Providence is unique in its ability to close and open the hurricane barrier located at the the entrance to the bay. Although this infrastructure may mitigate fluctuations in the short term by closing the gates at high tide, if warming continues at current rates it is possible that barrier system might need to be permanently closed to prevent flooding even at low tide.

Climate change is also anticipated to affect the amount of water handled by the entire Woonasquatucket River Watershed, should there be an increase in the frequency and volume of precipitation-related flooding events in vulnerable parts of the Watershed. The flood of 2010 provided a preview of what may come. As the world warms, large flooding events will likely occur more often. Floods that were considered likely once every 100 years may be as likely every 50 years by the time we get to 2100. Complicating this situation further is the reality that the lowest lying and most flood prone parts of the Woonasquatucket also happen to be some of the most contaminated brownfield sites in the area. Any situation that brings floodwaters into contact with uncapped contaminants can exacerbate cleanup efforts by spreading industrial pollution over a wide area and cause a public health crisis as waters recede.

*This plan articulates a strategy for managing stormwater in the face of climate change. In the areas shown in green, on-site and street-level strategies for managing storm-water locally can help minimize impacts on the river. Areas shown in blue flood occasionally and need to adapt through changes in the elevation of buildings and roadways as opportunities arise for rebuilding. The orange area is prone to increased flooding and should be the focus of stormwater infrastructure improvements.*

#### PLANNING FOR RESILIENCY

- Filter and Absorb
- Adapt
- Heal and Revert



# 1.1

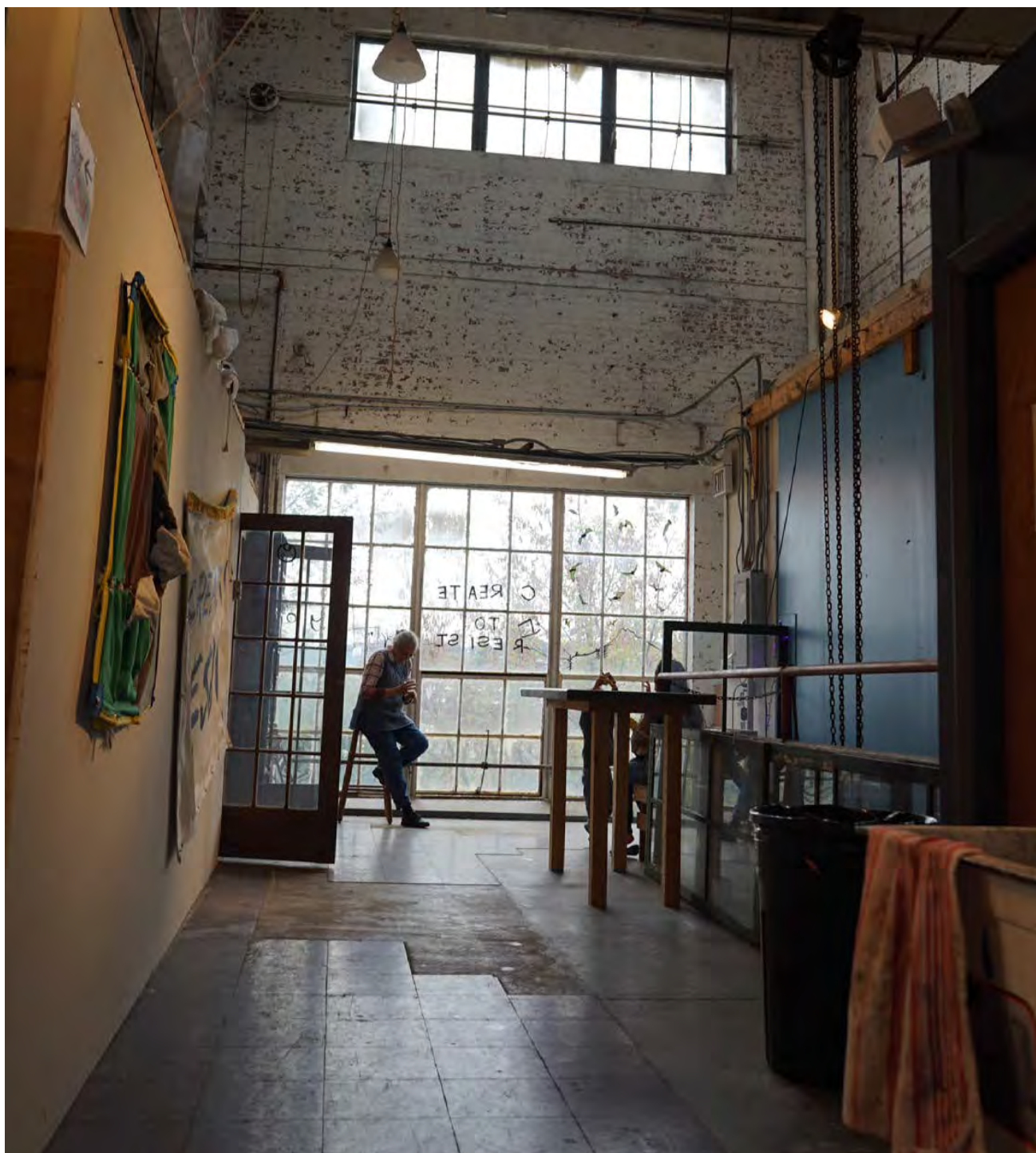


*Photo by Birchwood  
Design Group*

# THE FABRICATION AND FOOD ECONOMY

## 1.4.1 A SHARED HERITAGE

One of the most surprising experiences when exploring the Woonasquatucket Corridor is the creative world hidden behind the large industrial facades of the district. A unique mix of creative activities and businesses still thrive on the availability of affordable, raw, and programmable space present in large supply in the Corridor. Communities of artists, small light industrial businesses, and the food service sector depend on the existence of these spaces. The fragile economies that sustain the continued existence of these inhabitants are continuously threatened by shifts in the market and, in some cases, lack of tenant control over the future of the buildings they inhabit.



*Nicholson File artist studios  
attract artists and  
lovers of art.*

## 1.4.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The current coexistence of artists and light industrial fabricators within the Woonasquatucket Corridor can be attributed to a crisis of industrial vacancy. Starting in the 1970s, a large inventory of unoccupied space and modest rents began incubating new businesses and artistic endeavors that were price-sensitive, experimental, and loud. Unhindered by neighbors and able to produce noise any time of day or night, these large, inexpensive spaces allowed a number of now famous art collectives to form. By the 1990s Providence, and the Woonasquatucket Corridor in particular, was host to one of the most dynamic underground art and music communities on the East Coast.

Interestingly, it was a shared traumatic experience that also showed both groups how vulnerable their situation could be in the face of larger economic forces outside of their control. Fort Thunder -- one of the most successful and famous Providence art and music collectives of this time period -- formed in 1995 and was comprised of industrial space on the second floor of the former Valley Worsted Mill complex, also known as Eagle Square. Confronted with an improving real estate market through much of the 1990s the owner of this iconic site, FELDCO, decided to evict all tenants and demolish the building starting in December of 2001. Ironically, the redevelopment of the site as a suburban style shopping plaza did not perform as anticipated. Both of Eagle Square's anchor businesses had to be re-tenanted soon after completion.

This planning effort, in many ways, is an opportunity to make more intentional decisions about how to manage the real estate market and minimize effects of speculative investments that fail to protect the long-term value of the community and city as a whole.

The food service industry also has a long history within the Woonasquatucket Corridor, having been well established by the late 1920s. Food-oriented space of that time period centered on warehousing and distribution of produce brought in by rail, and stored in a number of refrigerated warehouse buildings in the northeast portion of the Corridor. It was however, the very same disruptive market conditions post World War II that transformed the food service sector into what we see in the Corridor today. When a majority of food distribution moved to trucking, Providence's extensive rail-based warehousing system was unable to effectively compete. The resulting relocation of most large distributors to the suburbs left warehouse sites vacant, but some companies found their clientele and business better suited to serving a more niche market within this central location. The companies that remain in the Corridor today have focused largely on providing services required by many of the small restaurants and corner stores throughout Providence. Being centrally located within the city, these companies were able to provide services more tailored to the needs of Providence's extensive Hispanic, Portuguese, and East Asian immigrant communities. Renewed interest in local food production and a desire by the public to directly access and interact with the producers of their food have bolstered this business, with increasing interest in the food sector as a priority for the Corridor.

*The Woonasquatucket Corridor is defined by industrial buildings that provide affordable space for creatives and industrial users.*



### 1.4.3 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

There has been a sea change in the way people look at their food, with a marked increase in the public's desire to be closer to the production and preparation of the food they eat. This change has led to two exciting new projects within the Woonasquatucket Corridor that both demonstrate the resilience of the foodservice industry in Providence: Farm Fresh RI's new campus and Gotham Greens hydroponic greenhouse.

Farm Fresh Rhode Island plans to build a new combination distribution facility/ farmers market on Kinsley Avenue near the center of the study area. The 79,000-square foot building will provide centralized food processing space and distribution services to local farmers and prepared food vendors who sell products at Farm Fresh Rhode Island's network of local farmers' markets. On weekends, the facility will open to the public as a large farmers market in its own right, drawing thousands of visitors a week to the center of the Woonasquatucket Corridor.

The second facility, a 94,000-square foot hydroponic greenhouse by Gotham Greens, is planned for land formerly occupied by the General Electric Baseworks factory near the corner of Atwells and Harris avenues. Gotham Greens has successfully implemented the concept of large-scale industrial hydroponics, providing market greens, at its facility in the center of Brooklyn. The Providence location will bring year-round urban agriculture, at a scale never before seen in Rhode Island, to a highly visible location within the Woonasquatucket Corridor.

*View east at fruit warehousing buildings on the Narraganset Bay Commission site.*





# A VISION FOR TOMORROW

The Vision Plan for the Woonasquatucket Corridor is articulated in the pages of this plan and also within the illustrative plan shown on the following pages. This graphic summary of many of the physical elements of the plan helps to show how the hopes of the neighborhood can take shape. It also provides policy and regulatory direction for the City. This plan is not a guaranteed outcome, but rather a graphic illustration that shows one possible scenario and visually articulates a set of goals.

More detailed information on elements of this plan can be found in Chapter 2, Community Priorities and Implementation and more detailed plans for critical opportunity sites can be found in Chapter 3, Redevelopment of Catalytic Sites.



*View east up Atwells Avenue at the intersection with Harris Avenue and Eagle Street.*



# 1.5



- 1 New Holden Street Bridge
- 2 Harris Ave / Providence Place Intersection Redesign and New Park
- 3 Infill Development
- 4 New Leland Street Bridge
- 5 Infill Development & Structured Parking
- 6 New Park
- 7 Dean Street Redesign
- 8 Extension of Tingley Street
- 9 Industrial / Maker Development & Shared Parking
- 10 Woonasquatucket Greenway Promenade
- 11 Mixed-use Redevelopment
- 12 New Street
- 13 Fabrication Building Redevelopment
- 14 Extension of Davis Park as "Green Street" on Rathbone
- 15 Expansion of Market Buildings
- 16 Improve Existing Bridge for Pedestrians and Bicyclists
- 17 Extension of Charlotte Hope Street & New Pocket Park
- 18 Flexible Yard for Parking, Work Activities, Events, and Markets
- 19 New Pedestrian & Bicycle Bridge to Federal Hill
- 20 Relocated 6/10 Off Ramp
- 21 New Sims Avenue Bridge to Access Shared Parking
- 22 New Pocket Park and redesign of Eagle Street and Eagle / Kinsley Intersection
- 23 Redesign of Eagle / Atwells / Harris Intersection
- 24 Repair street wall along Valley Street with new infill
- 25 Gotham Greens with Liner Building on Atwells
- 26 New Spur of Woonasquatucket Greenway Path
- 27 New Flood Plain Park
- 28 New Bridge Connecting DeSoto Street and Addison Place
- 29 New Flood Plain Park and Spur of Greenway
- 30 Repair Street Wall along Valley with New Infill Development
- 31 Extension of Amherst Street & New Homes
- 32 New Development as part of Phase II of 6/10 Connector Redesign
- 33 Extension of West Exchange Street
- 34 Improvement of Spruce Street
- 35 New Bridge from San Souci Drive to Paragon Mills

*The Woonasquatucket Vision Plan involved a unique process that ensured strong participation from a diverse range of residents, artists, makers, business owners, developers, and city leaders to ensure the priorities, strategies, and actions included in this Plan are in line with the interests of the community.*