

Concept Plan for the Battleship Cove Station Area

Transit Oriented Development and the
Land Use and Community Development Opportunities for the Future

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Overview

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is undertaking a major transportation initiative to extend commuter rail service to the South Coast region of the state. The planned alignment includes a station in Fall River at Battleship Cove, along the central waterfront and near the downtown. A new rail station in this area of the city can have significant positive benefits for the land and uses adjacent to and near the station.

This summary accompanies a Concept Plan that has been prepared to consider the prospective redevelopment and revitalization of the Battleship Cove district. The Concept Plan considers both short term opportunities and longer term changes that could occur with the advent of commuter rail service. The goal of this effort is to promote coordinated land planning, infrastructure design and development initiatives for the community.

Process

This planning initiative has been undertaken by a coalition of agencies and entities. Preparation of the Concept Plan has been led and managed by the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD). The process has actively engaged the City of Fall River, including its agencies and elected officials. State participants have included the South Coast Rail project, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED). The Cecil Group, a planning and design firm, assisted in the preparation of this Concept Plan.

The process included an open meeting, discussions with area stakeholders and a public workshop in which participants provided ideas and discussed options for the future. A draft version of this Concept Plan was then presented at a follow-up public meeting. Based on the comments and through the participation of the entities and agencies, the final Concept Plan has been prepared for future consideration and use.

Context for Planning

South Coast Rail Project

The Battleship Cove commuter rail station has been proposed as part of the State's South Coast Rail project. The initial concepts for the station location and the potential characteristics associated with rail service have been included in various studies and reports, including the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the project. The site currently envisioned for the Battleship Cove station is along the existing rail alignment near the "Gates of the City", east of Water Street. A separate station has also been planned near Davol Street, north of Battleship Cove. A commuter parking lot has been planned for the Davol Street Station. The Battleship Cove Station, on the other hand, is intended to be primarily oriented towards patrons that will walk to and from

the rail stop, with destinations including the activities and attractions along the waterfront, the nearby neighborhoods, and the downtown.

Transit Oriented Development

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is generally considered to be uses and developments that have enhanced value because they are within a reasonable walking distance of a commuter rail station. As a rule of thumb, transit patrons will walk to and from stations for a distance of up to about ½ mile. From a station at Battleship Cove, patrons could reasonably reach much of downtown Fall River, the adjacent Columbia Street neighborhood and other residential districts, the riverfront destinations and open space amenities. The planning concepts developed through this study have indicated primary pedestrian links that can be improved to reach into this broad area of influence.

Concepts for redevelopment focused on the land and uses within a specific planning area that encompass a mix of uses and blocks that are clustered around the proposed rail station. The goal is to consider the changes that could occur based on the increased transit access. This area generally included the waterfront from Almond Street on the south to the Heritage State Park on the north, William Street on the south, Milliken Boulevard on the east and Central Street on the north.

Roadway and Circulation Improvements

Part of the reason for this focus is the relationship between potential revitalization of the area and the re-organization of the street and roadway network that is being designed for this area by MassDOT, through the Accelerated Bridge Program. The current engineering design concepts have been included in the planning for the future of this area, and are shown on the Concept Plan. The improvements will dramatically increase vehicle accessibility to the focus area, creating a series of intersections and a New Street that connects Water Street, Davol Street (Route 79), and the I-195 ramps.

Economic Context

The focus area requires economic revitalization. This portion of the Fall River waterfront has a range of vital businesses and institutions, including a cluster of tourism destinations and open space amenities and commercial and light industrial businesses. It includes a substantial stock of single family and multi-family housing. However, much of the industrial land and buildings along portions of the waterfront are now vacant or underutilized. The market for water-dependent, industrial uses is highly unpredictable for locations like these, and development or use is typically associated with specialized “niche” businesses and operations.

The advent of commuter rail connections to the Battleship Cove Area is likely to have several beneficial economic implications for certain uses.

- Housing demand is likely to increase, as residents are connected to the regional rail network and job opportunities through transit.
- Patrons for tourism destinations and special events can avoid traffic and parking problems, arriving at Battleship Cove by rail.
- Employees of local businesses can “walk to work” rather than drive, providing a location advantage for some enterprises relative to other locations.

Vision Statement

The Battleship Cove Concept Plan depicts a focal district of the City of Fall River that will be developed over time in response to enhanced access opportunities from the new rail station and roadway improvements resulting in community benefits in connectivity to the waterfront, new economic and housing development and the well-known attractions of the area.

Strategic Recommendations and Anticipated Benefits

The following statements highlight the primary components of the Concept Plan and summarize the anticipated benefits for the Battleship Cove area and surrounding neighborhoods.

Redevelopment Concepts

Tourism and Destinations

Battleship Cove is an existing center of multiple attractions and destinations that draw residents and visitors to Fall River's waterfront. The attractions include the Battleship Cove, Fall River Heritage State Park, Marine Museum, Gates of the City, Carousel, Narrows Center for the Arts, and the Old Colony and Fall River Railroad Museum.

- *Build upon strengths of existing attractions:*
The multiple attractions that exist in the district provide a reliable and effective anchor for activity. The existing attractions should be strengthened through attractive, clear and well-defined routes between them with coordinated and complementary hours of operation that provide a source of vitality for the district.
- *Create clear connections between points of access and attractions:*
Each attraction will benefit from enhanced connectivity and access through the new rail station and roadway improvements. Signage from primary road access routes and the rail station to the various attractions will reinforce these advantages of access. Convenient, attractive and clearly marked shared parking areas and walkways could also enhance access to destinations.

Industrial and Water Dependent Uses

Battleship Cove is an active industrial deepwater port and access to the waterfront bulkhead for industrial and water dependent uses is an important source of economic activity and employment in Fall River.

- *Maintain and strengthen the industrial waterfront:*
The potential new activities in the area with the rail station should be balanced with dedicated waterfront and water-dependent industrial uses to ensure a prudent use of the deep port waterway. District improvements and potential development should maintain industrial rail spurs and roadway access. Route 79/I-195 roadway improvements should enhance access to the industrial sites creating more opportunities for employment. As an employment center, the

industrial areas will also benefit from an improved district with additional amenities.

Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Battleship Cove is a mixed-use district that efficiently uses the historic and flexible mill buildings to combine retail, commercial, residential and gallery space. A vibrant mix of uses creates activity in the district throughout the day and evening.

- *Retain flexibility for future changes:*
The new rail station will bring a new market for residential and mixed-use development. Land use and zoning should remain flexible to accommodate changes in the marketplace and to provide the most opportunity for future benefits from increased access and connectivity.
- *Encourage infill development:*
Infill development in the vacant lots between the attractions and mill buildings could improve the district as an active and walkable environment for visitors and residents and provide an opportunity for development near the rail station.
- *Preserve and activate mill buildings:*
The continued preservation and reuse of the historic mill buildings are at the core of the character of this waterfront district. The mill buildings are an attractive and flexible resource for the area and should continue to be an active and vital component in this mixed-use district.
- *Strengthen frontages and uses on Water Street:*
Water Street is the heart of Battleship Cove and provides the strongest connection across the waterfront area. Building frontages and active ground floor uses should be encouraged along Water Street to reinforce it as an active and important street in the waterfront area.

Housing and Residential Quality of Life

Battleship Cove is bounded by several strong neighborhoods and is an important resource in the quality of life of Fall River residents as a recreational, open space and waterfront amenity near the center of the city.

- *Improve area walkability and pedestrian connections:*
The new Battleship Cove rail station will bring with it an increase in pedestrian activity to the area. The pedestrian connections between surrounding residential neighborhoods to the rail station are of particular importance because these residents are the target beneficiaries of the rail access.
- *Enhance access to the waterfront:*
Walking routes and pedestrian connections to the waterfront from the rail station, downtown, and surrounding neighborhoods should all be enhanced as pedestrian environments to connect a larger population to

this important recreational environment. Improved connections north of Central Street are needed as well.

- *Integrate special features and elements into the environment:* Landscape features that highlight the district's heritage should be incorporated like placing a ship propeller at the entrance of the rail station. Highlighting and celebrating the Quequechan and Taunton Rivers would bring forward additional narratives of the natural history of the area. Additionally, functional elements, like detention ponds associated with roadway improvements, should be integrated into the landscape as features and contribute to the quality of the environment.

Pedestrian Environment and Connections

The importance of Battleship Cove as a strong pedestrian environment is currently highlighted by the need to create connections between destinations and attractions and recreational opportunities for residents and tourists in an active district near the waterfront. In the future, pedestrian connections will also be important to ensure access to the rail station, which is designed to be primarily accessed on foot by residents in the adjacent neighborhoods.

- *Connect pedestrian access and experience:* Battleship Cove should capitalize on an increase in walking population by improving streetscape and pedestrian environments for all visitors to the waterfront. Of particular importance are pedestrian connections along the Columbia Street, Central Street, and Anawan/Pocasset Street corridors. A coordinated and unified signage and wayfinding system could enhance pedestrian use and provide a unifying component to the district.
- *Enhance Water Street as a pedestrian corridor:* Water Street is the central pedestrian connection across the district and should be improved to provide a safe and comfortable pedestrian environment between attractions and uses. Pedestrian improvements may include enhanced landscape, street trees, lighting, pedestrian crossings and sidewalks. Improvements should include a defined walkway extending the city's boardwalk southerly to the City Gates.

Circulation and Parking

Battleship Cove is a center of attractions and destinations within the region and accommodates a large population of visitors and residents who require adequate accommodations for vehicular circulation and parking in the district.

- *Capitalize on proposed roadway and connectivity improvements:* Battleship Cove improvements should be coordinated with and implemented to optimize the impact of the roadway and circulation improvements associated with Route 79/I-195. Ensure that the design of New Street complements the design of the commuter rail station. Vehicular and pedestrian connections to the district will be dramatically improved.

- *Improve and expand parking as needed to accommodate development:* Battleship Cove benefits from a shared resource of parking that serves much of the district, near Heritage State Park. Developing new shared parking where the salt sheds are located today will be needed to accommodate new development and greater demand in the district.
- *Provide a SRTA bus connection between Battleship Cove and the bus terminal in downtown:* Improving the access and connections between Battleship Cove and the downtown will make the area more accessible and attractive to residents and visitors alike. Over the long term, coordination of SRTA routes and schedules with the commuter rail service will be needed.

Implementation Matrix

To achieve the positive changes envisioned within the Concept Plan for the Battleship Cove Area, a series of public and private initiatives and actions will be required. Some of the actions can and should occur prior to the advent of commuter rail service. These are considered as “short term” actions, and described in the matrix below. However, the new station and rail service will significantly change the transportation and economic dynamics for some uses; some of the actions should occur in concert with the South Coast Rail extension, and have been labeled as “long term” actions.

A key recommendation includes the establishment of a working group to continue the momentum into implementation. This group should include area businesses, property owners, residents, and city officials.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Observations</i>
Development: Tourism and Destinations		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and improve wayfinding and signage for attractions. • Expand shared parking facilities at a central location. • Improve and re-organize rail museum. • Strengthen pedestrian connections. • Expand shared marketing and branding of area, promotions and complementary hours of operation, special events. • Improve and activate portions of the State Pier in concert with area destinations. 	The areas along Water Street and Central Street can be reconfigured and improved to create a more attractive pedestrian environment, create expanded parking (perhaps a small parking structure), and consolidate and organize the rail museum site to complement the entire area. Portions of the State Pier might be improved to complement the tourism-related uses and destinations, to the degree consistent with the water-dependent commercial uses at the pier.
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand special marketing programs for rail patrons. • Promote additional special events and additional destination venues for the district. • Place ship propeller at commuter rail station. 	Rail service to Battleship Cove can provide an opportunity for extended or more frequent visits by rail patrons, particularly if there are enhanced venues and additional events.

Development: Industrial and Water Dependent Uses		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek funds for site remediation and site preparation of available sites. • Promote active use of the bulkhead and pier facilities. • Promote tenancy and redevelopment of waterfront properties. • Participate in statewide marketing and information initiatives. • Maintain access and routing for traffic during roadway construction. 	<p>The City and State may seek grants or assemble resources to assist in site clearance and any remediation that might be appropriate to provide land and facilities that could be rapidly permitted and redeveloped, making the waterfront industrial areas more attractive to potential users. This could include special zoning measures to accelerate permitting.</p>
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve the bulkhead and adjacent areas for potential water-dependent uses. • Preserve convenient access for truck and rail service to that land. • Maintain deep water docking capacity (dredging, etc.). • Provide for complementary use plans with the State Pier facility. 	<p>The long term competitive advantages of this waterfront location will be linked to the maintenance of deep water berthing and adequate bulkhead access areas to serve ships. A shared strategy for both the State Pier and the nearby private parcels should be investigated to accomplish the best balance of waterside and landside facilities and access. Dock and channel depths need to be maintained over the long term.</p>
Mixed Use Development		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for enhanced zoning flexibility and design standards and Site Plan Review to ensure compatibility of new development with existing uses. • Set height limits between 4 to 6 stories, allowing greater heights by Special Permit for providing public benefits such as shared parking or waterfront access. • Allow live/work and other mixed uses in the district. • Promote improved connectivity and enhanced parking. • Undertake streetscape improvements. • Maintain access, parking and routing for traffic during roadway construction. • Focus streetscape, bicycle and pedestrian enhancements along the four corridors connecting the waterfront and the downtown (Columbia, New Street, Anawan Street, and Central Street). 	<p>Mixed use development that incorporates housing, commercial, retail, entertainment or any number of other uses have been attracted to former mill districts throughout New England. The City should provide a flexible and favorable regulatory environment suited to its vision for the areas around the rail station. Improvements to the pedestrian environment will enhance the area for mixed use development.</p>

Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve historic mill buildings • Seek site preparation funding for mixed use sites. • Expand shared parking facilities using District Improvement Financing. • Enhance the area's amenities and historic interest through projects such as improving and highlighting the Quequechan River corridor and the wild and scenic Taunton River as they pass through the area. 	The City and State could help prepare the way for mixed-use redevelopment through appropriate site preparation and remediation, in advance of specific development proposals. Potential methods for expanding parking are further discussed below.
Housing and Residential Quality of Life		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the designs for roadway and circulation improvements create pedestrian friendly connections, crossing and streetscapes that link the Columbia Street neighborhood and the downtown to the waterfront. Include bike lanes and facilities wherever feasible. • Improve the pedestrian environment within the neighborhoods. • Focus neighborhood revitalization to strengthen connections to downtown through the Columbia Street neighborhood. 	The final design phase for the roadway and access improvements in this area should be reviewed and completed with a particular emphasis on creating a high quality pedestrian environment and multiple connections to and from the future rail station and the residential areas that are nearby. Because future transit will further enhance demand in these districts, the City should continue to focus neighborhood and district stabilization and improvement programs within them.
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand amenities within the districts. • Market Fall River as a residential community. • Examine the potential for pedestrian bridges and links from the neighborhoods north of Central Street to the waterfront and Heritage State Park 	When these districts are connected to the region with commuter rail, the City and State should help implement the smart growth potential by marketing the convenient, desirable, neighborhoods and housing opportunities.
Pedestrian Environment and Connections		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the high quality pedestrian environment and streetscape as part of the roadway and circulation improvements. • Seek funding and implement additional streetscape improvements, including street trees, with priorities along Water, 	The workshop process identified several corridors where passageways between buildings and streets might be created within the former mill district to create multiple connections between existing and future uses, including the commuter rail station. Leveraging the roadway and access

	<p>Eagle and Canal Street.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore making Canal Street pedestrian connection to New Street • Acquire pedestrian corridors or easements to increase the number and location of pedestrian links. 	<p>project to enhance the pedestrian environment is an important strategy for the future of this area.</p>
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend streetscape, bicycle and pedestrian environment within the entire area associated with Transit Oriented Development 	<p>The State and the City should prioritize streetscape and pedestrian improvements to those areas that are directly serving the rail station.</p>
Circulation and Parking		
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the design and construction of the roadway, intersection and access improvements planned for the area. • Complete ongoing parking needs analyses as development occurs over time. • Evaluate SRTA routes and service to provide connections between the bus terminal and Battleship Cove. 	<p>Enhanced public and shared parking will be a critical component of expanding the quantity and quality of the tourism and cultural destinations in the area.</p>
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional private and/or public parking lots and structures in strategic locations, such as along the Central Street corridor. • Coordinate SRTA bus or shuttle service to the commuter rail station when rail service commences. 	<p>Over the long term, adequate supplies of parking must be provided to support the mix of uses and the ongoing redevelopment of the area. The City should consider using District Improvement Financing to fund appropriate facilities in locations that are compatible with the urban design and visual quality of the area.</p>