



Possible Dreams 2014

About 110 community residents—including many who have moved here recently—gathered at café tables on January 27, to identify steps that could be taken in the coming year in order to move the community to the “next level.” Attendees were welcomed by Mayor James Fiorentini, a regular participant in Possible Dreams conversations, whose innovative zoning proposals and other development strategies have paved the way for much of the city’s recent progress.

As ideas emerged through the evening, table participants selected items they deemed both “important” and “doable,” to share with the total group. Leading off the report-out session was City Councilor William Ryan, who suggested a volunteer fair showcasing a wide range of local organizations and opportunities, promoted in mailings of tax and water bills. Next, Ronald Trombley of the Greater Haverhill Foundation spoke to the need for a “Harbor Plan” to connect Haverhill’s heritage as an inland port with the city’s emerging plans for riverfront revitalization.

Participants offered ideas for stimulating interest from private investors in riverfront and downtown development projects, and for promoting Haverhill attractions overall. Ideas included a public “call to developers”; maps or QR codes on downtown parking kiosks to highlight sites to visit; advertising on commuter rail and the Downeaster train service; a discount program for cultural attractions, like Worcester’s WOO Card; interpretive material placed alongside historical monuments and markers; and a digital billboard on route 495, displaying both commercial advertising images and information about Haverhill facilities, events, and attractions.

Residents also called for increased effort to recruit high-tech manufacturers to Haverhill, and for heightened focus in the schools on so-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The presence of UMass Lowell in the city was seen as a major resource for such a STEM emphasis, and student internships were suggested as strategy for bridging the gap between school and employment. Further work is needed, participants said, on the condition and reputation of Haverhill public schools if the city is to retain young residents and attract high-tech companies to locate here.

Neighborhood conditions received considerable attention from participants, including the need for a Neighborhood Watch in Lafayette Square, ongoing attention to Portland Street Playground after this year’s renovation, and the possibility of a City “neighborhood services” officer to connect with residents and help to organize neighborhood associations.

Ideas that Tables Reported Out as “Important and Doable”

VOLUNTEER FAIR with all the organizations exhibiting.

- Use tax/water bill mailings to publicize
- Possibly connect to a “volunteer clearing house”
- Possibly connect to a community service requirement at the high school(s)

“HARBOR PLAN” for the Merrimack River in Haverhill

- Build on Haverhill’s heritage as an inland harbor
 - Include a commercial dock



- Include strategies to “get the message out” and bring developers to come look at opportunities created by recent zoning
 - Issue a “Call to Developers”
 - Look into group called New England Development, investors like those behind the “Common Man” developments in New Hampshire.
 - Model after Lowell’s Hamilton Canal District
 - Possible role for the Chamber in inviting developers
 - Promoting the idea
 - Advertise on commuter rail and Downeaster
 - Digital billboard on 495 (eight scrolling panels, one always focused on Haverhill opportunities and activities)
 - Promotion of opportunities ties in with long-term discussions about our community’s overall capacity for marketing/promotion of a coherent identity.)

ATTRACT YOUNG-PEOPLE (twenty-somethings) to downtown and harbor developments

- Some “hot gondola guys” (reference to WaterFire installation and events in Providence)
- We’d need a different name for the installation/event, like Fire on the Water
- Noted Mayor Fiorentini’s longtime interest in bringing something like this to Haverhill
- Contact artist Barnaby Evans (<http://waterfire.org/about/barnaby-evans-artist/>)

S.T.E.M. INITIATIVES

- Science, technology, engineering, math
- Incentives for high-tech manufacturers to come here
- Incorporate schools at all levels, superintendents
- Link kids with tech and tech companies, internships
 - Access 21 currently has a grant-funded internship program—could it be included in school budget?
- Build on new connection with UMass Lowell
- Will bring economic development/creativity
- Needs a Steering Committee

BATHROOMS

- For homeless at GAR Park—“They are citizens, too.”
- Bathroom facilities needed at Winnekenni

HISTORIC PRESERVATION and promotion of Haverhill’s historical assets

- Two 17th-century burial grounds—haven’t documented who’s buried there—Dustins, Sam Adams’ grandfather (and his slave)
- Comment about road race and the 12 historical plaques/monuments along the way—add explanatory information at those sites—possibly with QR codes for smart phone access
- Create program to produce historic signs for houses—goal of 100 per year



- Haverhill Historical Commission—meets first Wednesdays—knowledgeable people, good place to take ideas
 - Working now on a next stage in shoe-worker memorial (beyond new plaque at parking garage)
- Essex Heritage has a grant program going right now—proposals due February 17—with \$1500 grants. (www.essexheritage.org) Rocks Village leaders won one of these grants a previous year.
 - Idea of giving task to a grant-writing class as a project

IMPROVE SCHOOLS (AND THEIR IMAGE) so we can retain younger people when they have families

- Promote our positive graduates and positive programs
- Improve the appearance of older schools
- Relates to S.T.E.M. conversation (above)—build strength there

COMMUNITY GARDENS DOWNTOWN

- Downtown kids have never gardened
- Already one garden on Water Street
- Tattersall Farm has current initiative to connect urban neighborhoods to gardening at their site

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH IN LAFAYETTE SQUARE

- Just started on in Mt. Washington—could learn from them
- Police Department and Haverhill Anti-Violence Coalition can be helpful

PROMOTE PRIDE IN LOCAL EVENTS

- Request that city's digital (rolling) billboards be used for more events

DOG PARK

- Perhaps in the area behind Building 19

SANTA PARADE

- Turn left onto Merrimack Street
- End at Washington Square to light up the tree

UNUSED CITY ASSETS LIKE OLD SCHOOLS

- Current exploration of Arts Center at Cogswell (on South Main Street)

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES OFFICER

- Created by Mayor and Council to help neighborhoods access programs/services, help create neighborhood associations

COMMUNITY DISCOUNT CARD

- Museums and cultural attractions
- Look at Worcester's WOO Card



<http://www.worcestermass.org/arts-culture-entertainment/woo-card>

MORE DOWNTOWN SIGNAGE

- At railroad station, maps around town that show people where things are
- Put maps and/or QR codes on parking kiosks

CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT IN PORTLAND STREET

- After the build, keeping it a positive place
- Team Haverhill will remain involved to encourage relevant groups/agencies to offer programs or services on that site

“HAVERHILL MATTERS”—journalism initiative

- Ties in to need for local stories and information

MORE PERFORMANCES AT GAR PARK

- Make it user-friendly

TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAM

- Attract young teachers to make a (3 year) commitment to live and teach in Haverhill
- Help struggling schools to bring up performance level, and bring young people to live and work in Haverhill.

General Impressions from 2014 Possible Dreams Tabletop Notes:

Promote and Improve the City/Downtown – Just about every table specified the need for promotion and improvement of the city in general or the downtown in particular. Specific areas of focus were:

- Better promotion of city and events (via website, electronic signs, email newsletter, Downeaster ads, local celebrities, and events like Stroll, Santa Parade, Restaurant week or city-wide flea market) – Most of these ideas were considered doable in 2014
- Beautify and improve downtown (via cleanups, planting, murals, signage and creation of pedestrian area) – A number of people specifically mentioned GAR park, including several mentions of restrooms
- Stimulate new business and retail (via economic assistance, investors, call to developers, promotion)

Increase and Promote Arts, Culture and History in the City – Over half the tables mentioned this. Primary ideas include:

- Promote arts, culture and history (via discount cards, historical signs and trail, and film/arts events)
- Create spaces to support the arts (such as screening room, artist studios/lofts, community art center, and a cultural district) – Half a dozen tables mentioned the need for a performing arts center, though this was considered challenging to achieve



Natural Resource Preservation and Promotion – Over half the tables mentioned this. Primary ideas include:

- Promote natural resources (via local meals, farm-to-table, pond-to-pond concert, school programs, maps)
- More community gardens (including one in a downtown location such as GAR or Columbus park)
- Expand and improve parks and recreational facilities (via space preservation efforts, fix bathrooms, possible exercise stations, fields)

Increase/Improve Access and Use of the River – Close to half the tables mentioned this. Primary ideas include:

- Access for recreation (fishing, boating, offer gondola rides, walking on new/improved boardwalks) and creation of boating house/program

Support/Unite Neighborhoods and Organizations throughout the City – Close to half the tables mentioned this. Primary ideas include:

- Find ways to bring together various/diverse neighborhoods (forums, neighborhood services department at City hall) – Half a dozen tables mentioned the need to bring neighborhoods together
- Connect volunteers and community/non-profit groups (via central list and/or council, volunteer events, encouraging HS students to volunteer)

Improve Schools – At least a third of the tables mentioned the need for improvement of the schools. Ideas mentioned most included:

- Teacher residency program
- Have Haverhill High internships to teach job skills

Increase Public Safety – At least a third of the tables mentioned the need to decrease crime or improve safety. Many tables didn't give specific strategies but a few ideas were:

- Neighborhood watches and investment (especially Portland Street and Mount Washington areas)
- Improve police/foot patrols

Make City Friendly to Diverse Constituents (families, kids, teens) – About a quarter of the tables mentioned the need for making the city friendly to families and youth. Ideas mentioned the most included:

- More teen activities (including jobs) and spaces (such as a teen center) – This was biggest focus in this area
- More family and youth events (concerts, picnics or movies in the park, etc.)

Support S.T.E.M. Initiatives (capability for kids and adults) – Two or three tables mentioned S.T.E.M., and one or two others mentioned the related theme of high tech job creation.