

An Analysis of Redevelopment Options for the Former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant Site



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Executive Summary

The former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant was in use from 1935 through 1976, at which time the town's sewage was redirected to a newer plant in Williamstown. Since that time, two of the plant's buildings and all of the sedimentation tanks have been removed and the site has been declared free of contamination. The site has been identified as excess city land, and the Mayor's Office of North Adams would like to sell the site for development purposes. Development possibilities have arisen in the past, but these all fell through, leaving the site bare and unused. Our clients wished for us to identify several development options for the site, as well as the varying costs and benefits of each of these options. In addition, another major focus of our project was to be the consideration of various access options for the site, given that the lack of legalized access to the site is one of the primary factors inhibiting development. Because the site has lain dormant for over 25 years, it is hoped that our involvement and our findings can help lead to the development of this prime piece of land.

In terms of access, one option would be to provide a new access road extending off of Ashton Ave. onto the property. This option would travel along the Hoosic Water Quality District's sewer easement and would require the construction of a bridge spanning the Hoosic River. Another option would be to build an access road to the site from Protection Ave. located to the east of the property. We will also examine the possibility of providing access to the site from Route 2 by building a bridge over the Hoosic River, as well as a short length of road extending from Rt. 2 to the Hoosic River, and then from the Hoosic River onto the site itself. Finally, we will examine the possibility of combining bike trail access with each of these different options, as well as the possibility of providing only non-vehicular access to the site in the form of a paved bike path. We have examined the costs associated with each of these options, as well as the various issues, such as environmental mitigation, which would have to be considered and addressed.

Finally, our examination of redevelopment options will fall into four main categories – Commercial Development, Industrial Development, Residential Development, and Recreational Development – and will be based on the application of five different criteria: public opinion in the form of both public surveys and individual interviews with community leaders, the physical constraints on the site, compatibility with other concurrent uses of the area (both on the site itself as well as the surrounding property and neighborhood), and the environmental impact that each development option might have the site.

Taken together, our findings are intended to provide the city of North Adams with the necessary information and, perhaps, inspiration, to begin considerations of how to redevelop this site. None of our suggestions should be seen as binding, as we are only outside consultants and cannot, of course, know what is best for the City of North Adams. We hope, however, that our work can be put to good use, and that it is helpful in stimulating a renewed interest in the present and future uses of this parcel of land.

Section 1: Physical Site Description

The site of the former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant (see Figures 1, 2 and 3) sits on approximately 10 acres of land within an Industrial-1 (I-1) zoning district. The surrounding Blackinton community, to the north of the site, is almost wholly residential. The project site is located north of Route 2 and south of Massachusetts Avenue. The nearest road to the east of this site is Protection Avenue, and the nearest road to the west is Ashton Avenue.



Figure 1: Aerial view of project site and the surrounding neighborhood. Project site is outlined in yellow. Photo from <http://terraservert.homeadvisor.msn.com/image.aspx?t=1&s=12&x=813&y=5911&z=18&w=1>, visited 4 December 2002.

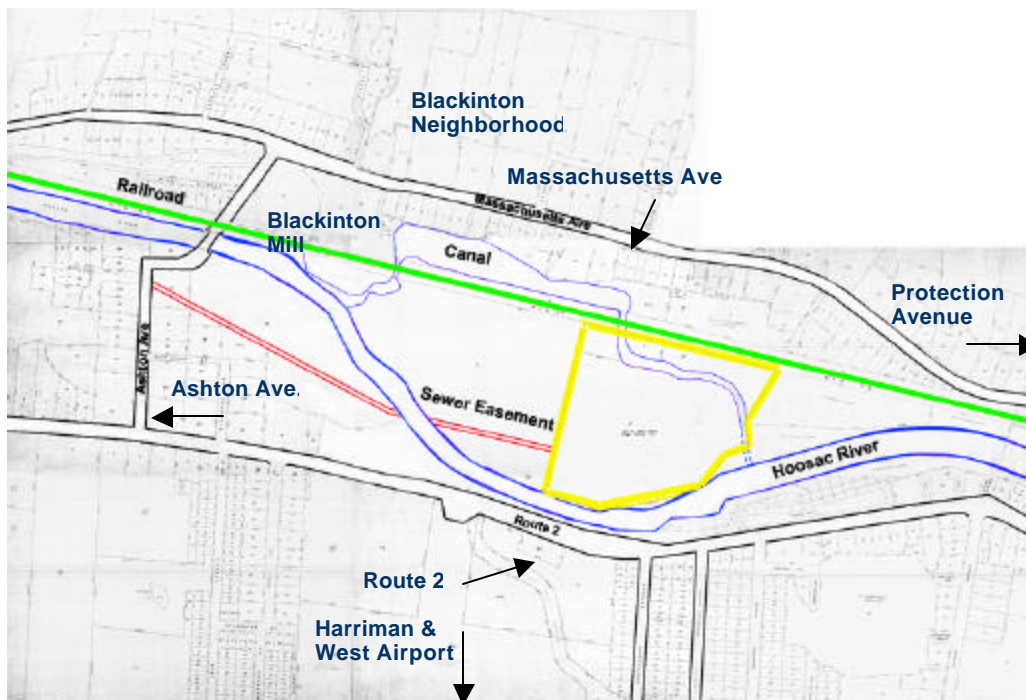
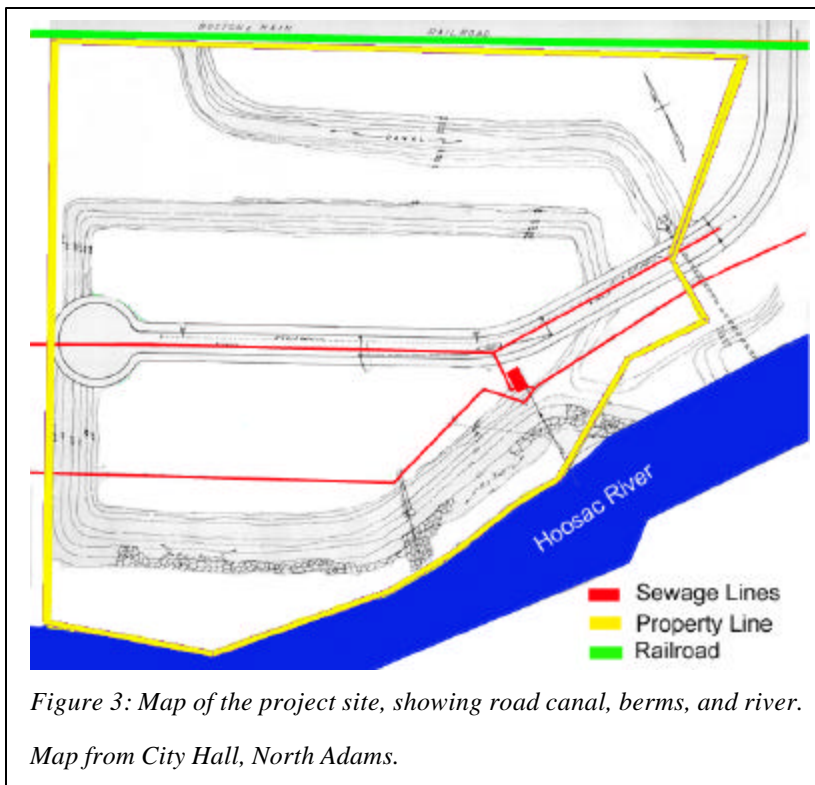


Figure 2: Parcel map of the site and surrounding area. Map from City Hall, North Adams.



The southern boundary of the lot is the edge of the Hoosic River, which parallels Route 2 and runs roughly east to west. The western edge of the property abuts a property owned by the CP Development Corporation, and a Hoosic Water Quality District sewer easement runs from our project site, through this adjacent property, and onward across the Hoosic River. The northern edge of the property lies along the railroad tracks owned by Guilford

Transportation Systems. Currently, the tracks are in use, with 8 freight trains passing the site per day. Bordering the Hoosic River on the southern boundary of the property is a berm which was built by the Army Corps of Engineers. To the north of this berm is the one remaining the structure on the property – the pump house – which forwards North Adams’ and Clarksburg’s sewage to Williamstown. To the west of the pump house a tract of land is used by the town for the discard of natural materials such as deadfall, leaves, and gravel. Crossing the railroad on the north-eastern corner of the property, and traveling southwest into the property, is a paved access road. The roadway ends at the cul-de-sac at the western boundary of the property. To the North of the roadway is a level stretch of lawn which rises into another berm. On the other side of this berm is another level tract of lawn which abuts a vegetated canal that runs predominately east-west in orientation. Some wooded areas lie along the Western edge of the property and extend beyond the property line. North of the property, beyond the railroad tracks, is a city owned playground. The City of North Adams also owns vacant and undeveloped land to the east of the site, and beyond the Hoosic River to the south.

Section 2: Site History

The site of the former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant is located in the middle of the Historic Blackinton district of North Adams – a neighborhood that begins at the Williamstown/North Adams border on Massachusetts Avenue and then stretches east for a few miles. In the 1700s, the present site of the Blackinton neighborhood was a separate township named Centerville – a title which remained until the 19th century, when it was renamed after the area's most distinguished citizen. In 1802, Sanford Blackinton and his family moved to Centerville, where the young Blackinton soon found himself in a number of jobs, including employment at a brickworks, a tenure as a firewood hauler, and then an apprentice at a mill in Williamstown. Blackinton soon established a small woolens mill in Centerville with two other partners – Joseph White, who later sold out his share of the business to Blackinton, and Rufus Wells, who married Blackinton's sister and was later killed in an accident at the mill (we have been assured that these two occurrences have no causal connection to one another). Sanford Blackinton was left as the sole owner of the Centerville mill, and he soon purchased two other mills in the area. The first industrial development of the site that is now known as the Blackinton Mill took place in the 1930s, and it was obviously expanded throughout the years.

Sanford Blackinton – as the first millionaire in North Adams and a veritable local celebrity – exerted almost total control over his employees' lives. It is reported that he used to leave a walking stick in the corner of all his factories in order remind his workers that, although he might not be present at that particular moment, he could return at any time to check in on his operations and, when he did, his employees had better be working. In order to further consolidate his control, Blackinton built houses for his workers; it is these homes that formed the nucleus of the current Blackinton neighborhood. He also built the nearby Archer School and ran a company store at which his employees could buy goods on credit. In this manner, Blackinton rendered his employees fully indebted to him: by providing their homes, education, and basic needs, Blackinton ensured that all who worked for him remained productive and loyal. The neighborhood also had its own police precinct and railroad depot (no other borough in North Adams had this latter distinguishing feature). If one looks at the Williamstown/North Adams city

line, it is clear that a piece of Blackinton stretches into eastern Williamstown. It has been suggested that Blackinton “swiped” a part of Williamstown in order to “consolidate his empire.”

Sometime around the end of the 19th century or beginning of the 20th century, the Barber Leather Company set up operations in the Blackinton Mill (the most recent incarnation of which was constructed in 1917, according to a carved stone set in the façade). The Blackinton Company went under amidst the economic turmoil of the 1930s, having reigned supreme over the area for about a century. Other businesses sprung up in or near the Blackinton Mill Complex, including the Wieden Tannery, which occupied the lot directly to the west of the mill (at the corner of Massachusetts and Ashton Avenues) (previous two-and-a-half paragraphs taken from a discussion with Paul Marino, Historian of North Adams, Personal Communication, 16 November 2002). Leather processing was clearly a major use of the neighborhood’s industrial infrastructure during and after the close of the Blackinton Company. Though this use was discontinued around the middle of the last century, its toxic legacy may remain in the soil at some locations. Directly across the railroad tracks from the mill, in the wooded area to the northwest of our project site (a parcel owned by the C.P. Development Corporation) is the former location of a dumping site for tannery waste. This site is currently awaiting the EPA’s decision as to inclusion on the National Priorities (Superfund) List (EPA, “Waste Site Cleanup and Reuse in New England,” at http://yosemite.epa.gov/r1/npl_pad.nsf/8b160ae5c647980585256bba0066f907/b22fd7cd45f6905185256b4200604f9b?OpenDocument, visited 14 December 2002). The



Figure 4: Wieden Tannery Fire, 25 November 1995. From <http://members.tripod.com/~Rick9368/index-51.html>, visited 14 December 2002.

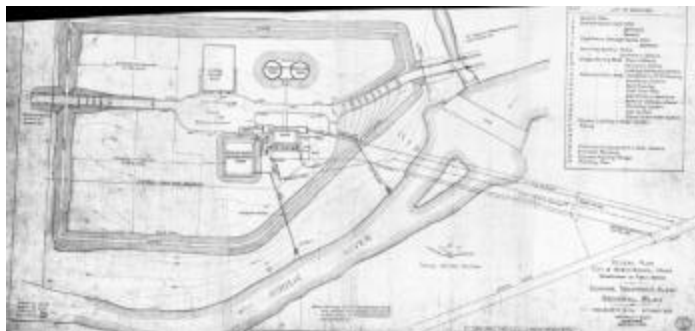
Wieden Tannery building itself remained standing up until a few years ago. This building, saturated over the years by inks and dyes and other leather curing chemicals, ignited on November 25, 1995 into a raging blaze – hot enough, Rick Moon remembers, to melt the gutters and the vinyl siding on his father’s

house across the street (Rick Moon, Personal Communication, 31 October 2002; figure 4).

Currently, the remaining structures of the Blackinton Mill are owned by Michael Meehan, a local businessman in North Adams. It is speculated that he will redevelop the old mill for residential use, as North Adams has recently decided to allow the creation of studio loft apartments within former mill buildings (Moon, 31 October 2002).

Our project site is currently owned by the City of North Adams, having attained the property from the Barber Leather Company in the mid-1920s. Though Barber never carried out any tanning processes on this site, they did build a canal to bring water from the Hoosic River through the parcel and to their manufacturing site. Probably for this reason, the dam/spillway in the Hoosic River just south of our site (where the canal would have drawn off river water) is marked as the “Barber Dam” on some maps. There appears, however, to have been a procedural mistake during the transfer of the land title. According to North Adams Building Inspector Vincent Lively, the land was ceded to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which in turn gave the parcel to the City of North Adams. The land transfer, however, was not properly recorded at the time, meaning that while North Adams is the legal owner of the site, there are some technical problems that must be remedied before the land can change hands once again. This issue could be solved if members of the City Hall legal department traced the paper trail back to the original land sale in the 1920s and fixed the land title (Vincent Lively, Personal Communication, 22 November 2002).

Once North Adams acquired the property, it began investigating the suitability of the property as the city’s sewage treatment plant (figure 5). “This plant was constructed in the early 1930’s and



was operable from September 16, 1935 to 1976” (David Abbott, Con-Test Water and Air Engineering, pg. 9). After thirty-six years in operation the plant was abandoned, and North Adams’s sewage was redirected to a new plant

*Figure5: Historical map of the former sewage treatment plant.
Map from City Hall, North Adams*

in Williamstown. The property was left inactive for fifteen years, during which time the buildings on the property deteriorated “due to lack of maintenance, and portions of the outdoor property became overgrown with field vegetation and shrubs” (Abbott, pg. 11). In 1991 the consulting firm Con-Test performed an environmental site assessment and made recommendations pertaining to the future use of the site. Two of the three buildings on the site were removed – the administration building and the storage shed – and only the pump house was left standing. The site was declared clean of chemical contamination.

Section 3: Past Projects

Since the decommissioning of the sewage treatment plant and the subsequent removal of the plant infrastructure in the early 1990s, two possibilities for redevelopment have arisen; ultimately, however, these amounted to nothing. In 1999 the Emeritus Corporation, a “publicly held company which owns and operates several assisted living facilities across the country” (Mark Randall, “City Council to discuss surplus property,” *North Adams Transcript*, 23 November 1999), expressed interest in developing the site. Emeritus sought to build an 80-unit facility, which Mayor Barrett called a “perfect fit” for the site because “it is an environmentally clean business and won’t disrupt the Blackinton neighborhood” (Randall, 23 November 1999). Eager for a buyer, the town was prepared to sell the site for a minimum of \$55,000; when the parcel went up for sale, however, no bid was entered (Randall, 23 November 1999; Mike Nuvallie and Laura Cece, Personal Communication, 18 October 2002). The main reason for the collapse of these negotiations was the issue of access – an issue that continues to plague the site. In 1999, as now, the only available access option was a small, hidden driveway off of Massachusetts Avenue that crosses the Boston-Maine railroad line before entering the site. Although only eight trains pass throughout the day, it was foreseen that access could conceivably be blocked in the event of a medical emergency at the assisted living center; waiting for a train to pass while responding to a heart attack or stroke, for example, could mean the difference between life or death when dealing with elderly people. The potential for such liability likely led Emeritus to abandon its plans (Mayor John Barrett III, Personal Communication, 22 October 2002; Rick Moon, Personal Communication, 31 October 2002).

In September 2002, NEES Communications, Inc. considered buying a 1.45 acre section of the land to build a fiber-optic relay station (Glenn Drohan, “N. Adams land sale collapses,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 28 September 2002). This development option would have resulted in a very low impact on the site and the nearby Blackinton neighborhood, as technicians would only be making periodic visits after the initial construction of the relay station. In anticipation of the deal additional telephone poles and lines were erected at the site, and these still remain at present (Rick Moon, Personal Communication, 31 October 2002). The negotiations became tied up in legal disputes, however, which Mayor Barrett attributed to stalling tactics on the part of the company. NEES raised “questions regarding the title to the land” although, according to the Mayor, “the city has proved it owns the land and even offered to guarantee the title” (Drohan, 28 September 2002). Stated Barrett, “these lawyers were so ridiculous it was incredible. They’re title insurance lawyers and they get paid about \$500 an hour, so they want to drag it out forever” (Drohan, 28 September 2002). In the end, Barrett wanted to come to some sort of agreement with NEES rather than wrangle with lawyers indefinitely or lose the deal completely; accordingly, the North Adams City Council voted to sell NEES a ¼-acre parcel on Massachusetts Avenue Extension for \$35,000 (Drohan, 28 September 2002; Rick Moon, Personal Communication, 31 October 2002).

Both of these failed attempts at using the site reflect the current problem that we face in proposing alternative uses for the parcel. Access continues to be a problem due to the railroad crossing, and the feasibility of other access options could well determine a large part of the site’s redevelopment potential. Mayor Barrett claimed that he had “been approached about the site before, but that it isn’t very suitable for most businesses” (Randall, 23 November 1999). Our challenge, then, in proposing possible outcomes for this currently abandoned parcel of land, is to determine what, if any, uses are in fact suitable for the site.

Section 4: Project Goals and Objectives

The primary project objective is to find the most beneficial and feasible development option for the site. Ideally, the City of North Adams would like to develop this land so that it can be put to an economically viable use - providing jobs and an increased tax base for North Adams (Nuvallie and Cece, Personal Communication, 18 October 2002). Determining which option for

redevelopment is the most beneficial, however, will depend largely on whose perspective we are considering. Our initial goal was to develop recommendations for the site through a



Figure 6: Photo of the site looking northwest towards the canal.

collaborative process involving community input. In this manner, we hoped to represent the needs and desires of the Blackinton community and the town of North Adams as a whole. One of our tasks, then, is to balance political and economic realities with community needs, and to derive a number of development strategies representative of these differing desires and perspectives.

Our October 22, 2002 meeting with Mayor John Barrett III, Michael Nuvalle, and Laura Cece allowed us to further clarify the scope of our actions and our eventual goals for this project. Though we had expected the Mayor to suggest that the site be used for commercial or light industrial development, he in fact encouraged us to “think outside of the box” and to “explore the whole gamut of possibilities for the site.” He stressed that for any development scenario on the former sewage treatment site, he “doesn’t even want the neighborhood to know it’s there.” After all, he claimed, “job creation can [also] come out of a livable community or neighborhood.” He suggested that if the site was, indeed, developed for commercial or industrial use, it should not involve “heavy truck traffic,” but should, instead, be a low-impact use such as an “internet access or data processing business.” In the end, however, we were given free rein to consider all possible alternatives based on their relative merits and suitability for the site. “If you come back to me and tell me that community gardens are the best fit for the site,” Barrett told us, “I’ll take that into consideration” (all quotes from Barrett, Personal Communication, 22 October 2002).

Consequently, our goals have not changed too significantly since the beginning of the project, but rather have been increasingly refined. At the center of the whole project is the city’s need to sell and develop this parcel of land – which has remained vacant for the last 25 years – in a

manner that fits the local community and benefits the city as a whole. In terms of our goal to include community needs, desires, and opinions in the formulation of development alternatives, the Mayor provided some valuable direction. He suggested that we conduct a directed survey of constituency groups and community leaders in various fields. In this way, he felt, we would get the best idea of what is needed in North Adams. He also seemed very interested in the possibility of working in coordination with the ongoing Bike Trail project, as the trail will eventually come through the sewage treatment plant site. Overall, we have been asked to take a somewhat expansive view when examining options, keeping in mind that expenditures now (even something as great as building a bridge across the Hoosic River) could be justified if they can be shown to provide reliable benefits into the future. Mayor Barrett cautioned, however, that any sale of the land cannot be for speculative purposes, and that it will instead have to be tied to a specific project proposal so that the City can retain some degree of control over any development that takes place on the site.

With these thoughts in mind, our clearest conception of the project goals is as follows: to analyze a wide variety of different options for access to the site; to factor these options into a list of development alternatives, ranked according to the degree that they meet community needs and according to their economic merits, costs, and feasibility; and to identify the opportunity for creative partnerships, such as working with the extension of the Aschuwillticook (Bike) Trail project, which will certainly pass through our project site (Rick Moon, Personal Communication, 31 October 2002). Finally, with each visit to this site it becomes increasingly apparent that this is a site of great beauty, nestled as it is among the Berkshire Mountains. As Rick Moon told us, this is a site that most people forget is even there (Personal Communication, 31 October 2002), and so it seems that a major goal should involve bringing people back to the site in order to appreciate and enjoy the beauty and serenity that it can provide.

Section 5: Evolution of Project Work

To begin, we decided that our analysis of potential development alternatives must first consider the different options by which this site may be accessed. A dedicated access route will necessarily be the limiting factor in any subsequent development, as the use of the site will

depend on the ease of access as well as the types of traffic (pedestrian, small automobiles, large trucks) that the access route will support. From the beginning of our work on this project, we considered using the existing access road off of Massachusetts Avenue, which crosses the railroad tracks. This, we were told, would involve talking to Guilford Transportation Systems, the owner of the railroad line, in order to determine how much, if any, track crossing would be allowed without the installation of a proper signal. Historically, Guilford has been inflexible as to granting public crossing rights at this site due to their potential liability in the case of accidents. The next option, then – again, only with the railroad company’s permission – would be to use the existing road but to signalize the crossing so as to provide an additional safety feature. Mike Nuwallie led us to believe that, according to 1989 research, a crossing signal should cost around \$600,000 (Nuwallie and Cece, Personal Communication, 18 October 2002). One of our initial goals was to get further information on exact costs from the railroad company, as well as a better idea of whether or not they would give way on the crossing issue. (As we will mention later, it turns out that the price for such a signal is actually much cheaper than anticipated). According to the mayor, the North Adams City Council granted the Mayor’s Office the permission to engage Guilford for this crossing right; as such, the option now hinges on the railroad’s whim and fancy. During the course of our project work, however, Guilford Transportation found itself in a row with the city of North Adams. Guilford had not paid taxes to the city of North Adams in over two years (Glenn Drohan, “Railroad’s unpaid tax bill irks N. Adams,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 31 October 2002), and, as such, were not in the good graces of the city. “ ‘I’ve always wanted to run a railroad,’ joked Barrett. ‘And it would make extending the Aschuwillticook Rail Trail into Williamstown a lot simpler’ ” (Drohan, 31 October 2002). Though Guilford has now paid its back taxes and city-company relations are back to their typical (if somewhat strained and frosty) dynamic, perhaps the negative publicity garnered from this issue could persuade them to make some concessions on the track crossing.

Another option that had been mentioned from the outset involved building a bridge from Route 2 over the Hoosic River and on to the site. Since this option would involve building a bridge off of a state highway, the costs were assumed to be quite high (in excess of \$10 million, according to Mike Nuwallie). As we found out, however, the price tag for such an option would be somewhat expensive, but nowhere near this suggested order of magnitude. It is possible as well that such a

project could be eligible for a grant from the state or federal government. Yet another initial task, then, was to find out what grants could apply to this situation and how feasible it would be to get one. In terms of access, we felt that it might also be possible for an access road to be built from Ashton Avenue (the first north-south road to the west of our project site). We had previously thought it could be possible to build a road off of Ashton Avenue, between the river and railroad crossing. After looking at parcel maps and visiting the site, we determined that this option was not feasible, as the sloping river bank leaves no room for a road to be constructed. By looking at parcel maps and diagrams of the sewer system, however, we discovered that there is an existing 20-foot easement for access to the sewer line that runs west from our site, under the Hoosic River, and then down to the current canoe launching site on Ashton Avenue. Because an easement already exists, we thought that building a road along it would be an easier undertaking, and could potentially allow us to avoid the rather unpleasant situation of dealing with eminent domain proceedings. It seems that the easement could conceivably be widened into a road without too much of an impact on abutting property owners, although more research must be done to determine if this is so. Such a road, however, would also involve building a bridge across a 239-foot span of river. After looking at a flood plain map, it seems that the entirety of the easement is also located within the 100 year flood plain, so the proposed road would have to be elevated above flood level and compensatory storage would have to be created somewhere upriver. Finally, towards the end of our project work, we began to entertain the notion of building an access road from Protection Avenue, the first north-south road to the west of our project site. Though this option would also run into floodplain issues, there was no need for the construction of a bridge, and we felt that this could make the option worthwhile. An in-depth analysis of the various access options is provided later on in this report.

We decided that once the different access options have been weighed, we would need to conduct a basic build-out analysis. As it currently stands, the site is not very contiguous, as it is divided up by flood control berms and a canal that runs from the northwest corner of the site down to the Hoosic River. The first step towards opening the site to construction, then, would be to remove any unnecessary berms (if possible). We would need to contact the Army Corps of Engineers in order to determine the permissibility of such action. We noted from the beginning as well that the on-site canal could further limit the buildable area of the site, especially if it turned out to be

a protected wetland and could not be altered. Mike Nuvallie told us that the canal was built to bring water into the tannery but was no longer necessary, and therefore might not count as a wetland (Nuvallie and Cece, Personal Communication, 18 October 2002). If the canal ended up being a classified wetland, however, and therefore could not be impacted, our redevelopment alternatives would have to take this further spatial limitation into account (the canal plus buffer zones on the north of the property plus the river and the 100-foot inner riparian zone on the southern end of the property would reduce buildable space on the lot to a rather narrow strip). A conversation with the North Adams Conservation Commission would be needed to clear up this issue. Finally, we know that the sewer pump house cannot be completely removed, but we thought it might be possible to reposition it in a place that would enlarge the buildable area of the land. A more complete analysis of buildable is included later in the report.

From the beginning, there were a few clear options for the redevelopment of this site: First, this land could be kept as is (the do-nothing option); second, the land could be used for one or two small factories (light industrial use); third, the site could be developed for commercial use; fourth, the site could be used for a residential community; and fifth, the site could be developed as a public recreational area. In order to determine the most appropriate development option for the site, we decided that we would need community opinion information from the surrounding neighborhoods and for North Adams as a whole, including individual preferences as to the nature of the redevelopment. Official opinions, we decided, especially from the mayor and from community leaders, would also play a large part in our alternatives analysis. Finally we would need to investigate the bike trail issue. The former sewage treatment plant site is a possible point of intersection for the proposed bike trail from North Adams to Williamstown. If the bike trail will go on this land, we reasoned, we would need to predict where and how the trail could interact with any development on this project site. An extensive analysis of these development options is included towards the end of this report.

Section 6: Community Profile

The community most immediately affected by the potential redevelopment of the former North Adams sewage treatment plant site is the Blackinton neighborhood. This neighborhood is situated just north of the project site, stretching east and west along Massachusetts Avenue, and

would likely have to contend with any increase in traffic flow, noise, or other disturbance generated by the site redevelopment. On the other hand, Blackinton residents would also be directly poised to benefit from the positive aspects of any proposed project – whether that means the creation of new jobs and the increase in tax revenue associated with a light industrial development or the addition of much-needed recreational space. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that residents of this neighborhood will have to be included in the planning of the site redevelopment. A fair approximation of a community profile can be gleaned from recent census data – not only for the entirety of North Adams, but also for the more specific census tract that includes the project site and the nearby, potentially impacted neighborhoods.

Through a comparison of U.S. Census data from various years, it becomes apparent that North Adams, Massachusetts has, of late, begun to experience a decline in population. Census 2000 results set the population of North Adams at 14,681 (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000), down from a 1998 figure of 15,496 (Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, *The Regional Plan for the Berkshires*, pg. I-12). With respect to the specific census tract in which our project site is located, population has declined from 3,563 in 1990 (1990 Census of Population and Housing) to 3,287 in 2000 (Census 2000). The racial and ethnic composition of this census tract closely reflects that of North Adams as a whole, as it is comprised of 94.4% white residents (compared to 95.0% in North Adams overall), 1.7% black residents (compared to 1.7% overall), 0.0% Native American residents (compared to 0.3% overall), 0.9% Asian residents (compared to 0.8% overall), 0.0% residents from Hawaii or other Pacific Islands (compared to 0.0% overall), and 1.6% residents whose ethnic origin is classified as “other” (compared to 0.8% overall; the “other race” category seems to refer to citizens of Hispanic background) (Census 2000). Within this census tract, ethnic and racial diversity has changed since 1990, as the number of black residents has dropped from 82 to 57 and the number of Native Americans has dropped from 6 to 0. The number of Asian residents, however, has increased from 11 to 31 over this time period, and the number of residents classified as “other race” (again, most likely those of Hispanic origin) has climbed from 5 to 51 (Census 1990 and 2000).

In terms of the age structure in North Adams, the population seems to be fairly distributed along a bell curve. The median age is 38, though roughly 4,000 residents are between the ages of 15

and 34 and over 3,500 residents are of retirement age (55+). About 2,700 residents are under the age of 15. In North Adams as a whole, females outnumber males by a large number – 7,887 to 6,794, and this disparity seems to exist at most age levels (data in this paragraph from Census 2000). We do not have current age distribution data for the census tract in which the project site is located.

As of 2000, there were 3,654 families in North Adams. Of these families, 1,678 contained children under 18 years old. The median family income was \$37,635 in 2000, and the per capita income for all North Adams residents was \$16,381 (Census 2000). For the purposes of comparison, the 1990 median family income for the census tract in which the project site is located was \$32,857 among 974 families (Census 1990). As of 1999, 493 families in North Adams were below the poverty line. Four hundred forty-seven (447) of these families had children younger than 18 and 242 had children below the age of five. In 260 of these families, no husband was present. In all, 2,531 North Adams residents (16.2% of the 1999 population) lived below the poverty line in 1999 (Census 2000). In terms of our specific census tract, 1990 figures show that 401 individuals (or 11.3%) in that tract lived below the poverty line (Census 1990). More recent data are not available.

Finally, we must look at the issue of employment. In 2000, the population of North Adams aged 16 years or older was 11,876. Of these, 7,150 were in the labor force and 4,726 were not. Of those in the labor force, 405 (or 3.4%) were unemployed (Census 2000). This figure contrasts greatly with the 1990 unemployment rate of 7.1% for the census tract in which our project site is located (Census 1990). Such a drop in unemployment, however, is indicative of the general trend in North Adams as a whole over the past decade. The revitalization of the city stemming from the redevelopment of the Sprague Electric site into Mass MoCA has provided new outlets for economic growth as well as the jobs that come with this growth. Despite this improvement in the economic outlook for North Adams, however, the city still considers “improv[ing] the economy through economic development initiatives (creat[ing] jobs)” as its top priority (North Adams Community Action Statement, 1996, under “Priority Community Needs”). Given this priority action, we expect that the economic necessities of North Adams will likely play a large role in our eventual suggestions as to the development of this site.

Section 7: Analysis of Access Options

7.1 Five Potential Access Routes

As discussed previously, the main difficulties in developing the project site are access issues. Having explored the site and discussed potential access options with the Mayor's Office, Rick Moon, and Leo Senecal of the North Adams Public Services office, we have come up with five potential options for access. These options are to either 1). Signalize the Guilford railroad crossing so that the current access to the site can become legal; 2). Build a road along the sewer easement from the Ashton Avenue canoe launch down to the Hoosic River, build a bridge spanning the Hoosic River, and continue the road along the sewer easement onto the western edge of the property; 3). Build a road off of Protection Avenue extending onto the eastern border of the property; 4). Build a bridge off of the state road (Rt. 2) over the Hoosic River, entering the property on the Southern edge; or 5). Create non-vehicular access to the site by building a paved bike path from either Ashton or Protection Avenue.

7.2 Town's Relationship With Guilford Railroad

There are several reasons to doubt the likelihood of Guilford allowing a signalized crossing over the railroad (figure 7). First, as encountered by the students who studied the feasibility of



Figure 7: Looking east towards Protection Ave.

creating the Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail, Guilford is very concerned about safety and liability issues. "The track is used by freight trains, which travel this section of rail approximately four times per day in each direction at a maximum speed of 40 miles per hour, though some temporary 10 and 25 mph restrictions exist due to unstable soil conditions" (Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail Feasibility Study, p. 29). As pertains to the redevelopment of

our project site, the town would have to negotiate a liability-release agreement with Guilford and may have to indemnify them from all future responsibility. Al Stegman, of the Massachusetts

State Highway Department said, "Guilford doesn't want anyone near the tracks - everyone is lawsuit crazy today" (Personal Communication, 15 November 2002). As Guilford writes in their company newsletter, "Access to Guilford Rail System's right-of-way must be authorized by either written agreement or an easement. Simply and emphatically, it is illegal to trespass on Guilford Rail System property" (From Guilford Xpress, http://www.guilfordrail.com/xpress/Vol6/GUILXPRESS_V6.pdf, visited 9 December 2002).

Second, the relationship between the city of North Adams and the Guilford Railroad company can be characterized as tense and strained to say the least, although recent developments do offer some hope that this may change in the future. The Berkshire Eagle recently ran an article discussing the fact that Guilford Railroad owed the town several years of back taxes which they (Guilford) refused to pay. However, when we spoke to the North Adams tax collector, Jennifer Ethier, to inquire about North Adams's bargaining position with the railroad, she informed us that Guilford Railroad had, in fact, finally made good on its outstanding debt. She also informed us that she had been pleasantly surprised by the people with whom she had been dealing at Guilford, and said that this may point to a mending of the city's relationship with the company. Our hope is that the town may be able to "suggest" to Guilford that permitting the railroad crossing would be a gesture of goodwill, allowing them to be seen as a better "corporate citizen." We called Guilford and spoke with the secretary to the Vice-President of Land Acquisitions. She said that Guilford has, in the past, granted permission to signalize crossings if the town is willing to put up the money for the signal itself. These instances have been limited to locations where a public road crosses the tracks, however; Guilford does not generally grant track crossing rights for private developments. This latter point is troublesome with regard to the nature of our site and the potential development options. Ideally, though, if Guilford was willing to grant this permission, the price tag could be easily covered. Research has revealed that past signalization projects tend to cost around \$100,000, and that "where municipal streets rather than state-maintained roads are affected, cities and towns are required to pay [only] 10% of the cost of installing grade-crossing warning devices" (North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Division – Safety Programs, "Crossing Signals and Signs," <http://www.bytrain.org/safety/xsignals.html>, visited 14 December 2002; Union Pacific, "About Grade Crossing Signals," <http://www.uprr.com/she/hrcf02.shtml>, visited 14 December 2002).

7.3. Gaining Access From Protection Ave.

Leo Senecal, head of the North Adams Public Services Office, stated with absolute assurance that there are only two access options for the site, "There is no more room to build roads there unless you build one over the sewer easement and cross the river with a bridge, or build a bridge from Rt. 2. It's too narrow to build a road off of Protection Ave." (Personal Communication, 16 November 2002). We have not been able to fully explore the possibilities of building a road from Protection Ave. to the site, but looking at maps and talking to the town engineer, Wally Konopka, it does appear that the space between the railroad and the river may be too narrow at certain points. Rick Moon believes that this is where the bike trail would enter the site, but building an 8-12' wide trail is obviously much easier than building a 32' wide road. From the Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail Feasibility Study, we know that

Just east of the AT bridge...a berm continues along the river to the Protection Ave. bridge....The railroad near the AT bridge is very close to both the river and the houses on Mass. Ave.... By Protection Ave., the railroad is further from the river and separated by a berm, which is open at the eastern end and tree-covered closer to Sherman Brook" (MMBTFS, May 2002).

However, we made some limited attempts using GIS software to measure the narrowest point between the railroad tracks and the Hoosic River and came up with an estimate of approximately 100'. This suggests that the land would, in fact, not be too narrow to construct a road from Protection Avenue. A more formal evaluation and site visit is needed, however. Given that the entire length of this road would lie in 100 year floodplain, environmental mitigation measures which would have to be undertaken. In addition, the road would have to be built up with compensatory floodplain being constructed downstream. While our knowledge of the necessary construction is limited, our research suggests that this option should not be dismissed.

7.4 Applicable Laws and Regulations:

7.4.1 Current Zoning and Possible Rezoning

The site is currently zoned industrial district 1. This falls under the North Adams Section 8 zoning regulations, in which three types of industrial zoning districts are described. In an I-1 District, any non-residential use is permitted with a special permit from the zoning board (other

than industrial uses, which are allowed by right). Some of the obvious uses which would be allowed on the site are those of

"8.1.2 The manufacturing, processing, printing, packaging, finishing or assembling of components or goods.... 8.1.7 Publishing, data processing and computer software manufacturing including associated offices and warehousing/distribution facilities.... 8.1.12 Research and development facilities... 8.1.14 Professional offices and business services" (North Adams Revised Zoning Ordinances, Sec. 8, 294.21-22).

In an I-2 District, certain of the I-1 uses are restricted, such as those of 8.1.9-11 covering the manufacturing and storage of goods such as alcohol, plastics, chemicals, cement and cement products, bricks, tile and terra cotta. In an I-P District similar uses are allowed including "8.3.8 Retail sales provided that (a) The products are manufactured on site; (b) It is not the primary retail outlet; and (c) Such sales are incidental to the primary use" (Ibid, 294.23). This industrial zoning does not really limit the kind of development that could take place on the property. If our development recommendations do not fit under current zoning regulations – for example recreational, residential, or commercial facilities – then the use could be approved by special permit or the property could be rezoned.

The Mayor's office, including Mayor Barrett and Mike Nuwallie, suggested rezoning is a definite possibility – the one drawback being that the process involves a time element of several months (Personal Communication, 22 October 2002). In order to rezone the property, the North Adams Planning Board would have to be petitioned through the Office of Community Development (an offshoot of the City Council). The Zoning Board of Appeals would have an input and say in the final outcome. In terms of any actual building that would occur on the site Vincent Lively, the North Adams Building Inspector, said that any structures would be designed to meet the standards of the Massachusetts State Building Code Six Edition (Personal Communication, 15 November 2002).

7.4.2 The Massachusetts Wetlands and Rivers Protection Acts

We walked the site with Paul Gigliotti of the North Adams Conservation Commission and also examined the North Adams 100 Year Floodplain map with City Engineer Wally Konopka and Building Inspector Vincent Lively. During the course of these conversations we discovered



Figure 8: Photo of the canal.

several important facts. Gigliotti confirmed that the canal on the northern edge of the site (figure 8), originally built to provide water to the Barber Leather Company, is in all likelihood a wetland. In addition, the entire length of the sewer easement – extending from the western edge of the property to Ashton Ave. – as well as the entire length of the city-owned property between the project site and Protection Ave, falls within the 100 Year Floodplain. This information has several important consequences.

In terms of the 100 Year Floodplain issue, Wally Konopka explained that in order to build a road to the site along the sewer easement, we would have to build up the elevation of the road and then replicate the lost flood water storage at a location downstream. When submitting the project for approval, the town engineers would determine and outline the location for this floodplain replication. Replication is just one of the environmental mitigation processes which would come into play when building a road from either Ashton or Protection Avenue.

The project site itself is subject to both the Wetlands Protection Act and the Rivers Protection Acts. The sewer easement would be subject only to the RPA. The WPA states that proposed activities which would:

require removing, filling, dredging, or altering the wetland area [are] subject to regulation under M.G.L. c. 131, 40 and requires the filing of a Notice of Intent.... Bank Alterations 50' or 10% (which ever is less) or land under water of 5000 square ft. or 10% (whichever is less) are not deemed significant. Replication of up to 5000 square ft. of bordering vegetated wetlands and land under water may be permitted (The Massachusetts Wetland and Rivers Protection Acts, 1972).

Any activity within the 100 ft. Buffer Zone (that is, the land 100 feet from the point where the bordering vegetated wetland ends) on either side of the wetland is also subject to regulation.

Paul Gigliotti suggested that the Conservation Commission has the power to be flexible in their allowance of certain projects according to "common sense" -- that is, whether it hurts the

environment or not and whether the community will be well served by the given development. In addition, he seemed to think that while the canal did fall under the buffer zone restrictions of a wetland, a good enough suggestion for development might persuade the Con-Com to be somewhat lenient in their prescriptions (given that the wetland did not comprise significant habitat for animal species found there and that the development did not drastically affect the overall environment). A formal delineation or habitat survey would have to be done before these determinations could be definitive.

Ultimately, wetlands issues will depend on the development proposal for the site. It seems likely that there is only so far that the Con-Com can go in terms of regulatory discretion and flexibility because all notices of intent have to be sent off to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) for approval. However, when we spoke to Laura Cece at the Mayor's Office (Personal Communication, 14 November 2002), she seemed to think that the final decision-making power does, in effect, actually lie in the hands of the North Adams Conservation Commission, and that they have much more of a say than the DEP – which primarily issues file numbers and suggestions for conditions that should be attached to any development activities. Our Professor, Sarah Gardner, pointed out that, "Some towns are more vigilant about enforcing state laws than others. I believe there's an appeal process, so any citizen can contest the decision of the Con Com; however I doubt it happens very often" (Personal Communication, 12 November 2002). It appears that there may be some room for flexibility in terms of regulations pertaining to the WPA, as long as any proposed project is widely beneficial. There is also the additional option of "regenerating" wetland elsewhere if the development proposal included filling some portion of the canal. We feel, however, that the canal should not be filled or altered if at all possible, as it is a defining feature of the site and should be seen as a feature to work with rather than an obstacle to development.

The Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail Feasibility Study summarized the sections of the Rivers Protection Act that are applicable to North Adams:

In rural areas, including North Adams, the Riverfront Area is 200 feet wide on either side of the river and is measured outward from the mean annual high water line of the river. The water subject to protection under the RPA is defined as any river or stream that is a naturally flowing body of water that

empties into any ocean, lake, or other river that flows throughout the year (MMBTFS, May 2002).

Since the Hoosic River (figure 9) clearly falls within these criteria, two main standards of the RPA must be applied to development within this area,

1) No permit shall be granted for work in the Riverfront Area that would result in a significant adverse impact on the Riverfront Area for the eight purposes (protection of public and private water supply, protection of ground water supply, flood control, storm damage prevention, prevention of pollution, protection of land containing shellfish, protection of fisheries, protection of wildlife habitat). 2) No permit shall be granted if there is a practicable and substantially equivalent economic alternative to the proposed project with less adverse impacts on the eight purposes. An alternative is practicable if it is available and capable of being done after taking into consideration: costs and whether such costs are reasonable or prohibitive to the owner; existing technology; and logistics in light of the overall project purposes (Massachusetts Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act, 1972).

We recognize that part of the project site may lie in the outer riparian zone (that is, 100-200 feet from the high water mark of the river), but flood control is precisely the reason that the Army Corps of Engineers built the berms on this site to begin with. Because of the presence of the berms, no “significant adverse impact” would likely affect the river, and so construction would likely be allowed on the site up to northern edge of the southernmost berm (Paul Gigliotti, Personal Communication, 12 November 2002).



Figure 9: Photo of the Hoosic River, just south of the Barber dam.

These WPA and RPA standards and regulations discussed above will have to be taken into consideration in terms of any development which will occur on the site or along the sewer easement.

7.4.3 Issues Pertaining to the Sewer Easement

In terms of creating a road over the sewer easement (figure 10) between the site and Ashton Avenue, Mayor Barrett does not think that it would be a problem if we opted to pave that route. However, there is some disagreement as to whether or not the town owns the easement. The easement was actually granted to the Hoosic Water Quality District (HWQD). According to the Mayor, "It's still our pipe line so we could figure it out." In terms



Figure 10: Photo of sewer easement.

of further ownership specificity, Laura Cece said it probably wouldn't be examined in detail until it came time to actually begin the project. (Personal Communication, 15 November 2002). Some of the questions the Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail Feasibility Study team asked regarding sewer easement issues were:

Would the HWQD be cooperative in allowing this project? Would the building of a bike path hinder sewer line maintenance by paving over areas that might need to be dug up? Or would the bike path actually make maintenance easier by facilitating access to the sewer line? The second area of concern centered on the legal aspects of using the easement, principally, whether or not the easement allows for uses other than activities related to the sewer. If not, then would property owners be willing to give a new easement? (MMBTFS, p. 16)

According the Lauren Steven, who is involved in the Aschuwillticook and Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail Project, gaining permission from the Hoosic Water Quality District should not a problem (Personal Communication, 16 November 2002). If this is true, the portion of the easement that we are examining as an access option may not present as many problems as those encountered by the Bike Trail Study, as the easement does not overlap the land of private property owners in what appear to be significant ways – for instance, by driveways or open lawn. This will, of course, have to be examined further.

7.4.4 Road and Bridge Construction Regulations

Leo Senecal provided us with some general facts about road and bridge construction. He suggested that before we even begin designing a project, we should pick out at least two potential routes to examine for feasibility. The next step is to take soil samples from both

locations to determine whether or not they can support the road and, more importantly, whether or not they can support the weight of a bridge. The type of road our access options would require a minimum width of 24'. In order to clear a wide enough route over the sewer easement from Ashton Ave., or along the city owned land from Protection Ave., some wooded area would have to be cleared, adding to the price of construction and also creates additional regulations which must be met. In terms of constructing the road itself, the most important regulatory aspect is storm drainage. This is governed by the Environmental Protection Agency. With the road located so close to the river, Mr. Senecal pointed out, there would have to be a good design strategy to meet the current runoff standards (all from Personal Communication, 15 November 2002).

We spoke to Al Stegman at the Massachusetts Highway Department, as well as Mass Highway Environmental Engineer Mark Moore about regulations that pertain to the potential construction of a road/bridge off of Ashton or Protection Ave., or a bridge off of Route 2. The building of a bridge appears to require jumping through a vast array of hoops. Mr. Stegman asked, "Are there any other options for access?" basically suggesting that if we could avoid the extensive regulations which go along with building a bridge, then we should (Personal Communication, 15 November 2002).

Mark Moore was able to give us some more specific information on regulations and standards. Mr. Moore said that bridge construction falls under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers, assuming that there is an impact to the water or adjacent wetlands. If there aren't direct impacts, the jurisdiction of the Army Corps would fall out, but we would still have to file a notice of intent under the Wetlands Protection Act if the impacts exceeded 5,000 sq ft or 100 cubic yards of fill or dredging (MDEP Chapter 91 Regulations). Army Corps jurisdiction is from ordinary high water or the annual flood level and any adjacent wetlands. We need to further determine whether the sewer easement west of the site and the city owned property east of the site merely fall within the 100 Year Floodplain or if they are, in fact within the annual high water level and, thus, subject to ACOE jurisdiction. Mark Moore said that in terms of the Conservation Commission and the DEP, if construction would not impact the bordering vegetated wetland, then the Conservation

Commission has the authority to issue the permit without the input of the DEP. As a new project, any infrastructure would have to be built in conformance with the DEP stormwater manual, compliance with which would be determined by the Conservation Commission. Another important aspect of the construction on the site would be that it cannot increase infiltration and stormwater quantity requirements offsite. Part of the construction would have to entail the creation of detention basins as well as other forms of stormwater runoff mitigation. Moore pointed out that, beyond pertinent construction regulations, we must also take into account all current mitigation standards.

In addition, Mr. Moore discussed some of the possible aspects of construction which would bring the project under MEPA regulations - the most pertinent being the cutting of more than five large trees (14" in diameter at breast height) (MEPA Regulations - 301 CMR 11). If this were the case, which seems likely along the sewer easement, we would have to file a form with the Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. This is basically just an opportunity for people to comment on the project. In terms of building a bridge spanning the Hoosic River the designers have to submit their proposal to the bridge section of the Massachusetts Highway Department. The bridge would have to be designed in accordance with the Massachusetts Highway Bridge Specifications and AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials). Both building codes entail similar requirements.

7.5 Outline of Costs - Road and Bridge Construction

7.5.1 Relevant Costs for Various Types of Construction

We went in and met with Tom Galvani of the Massachusetts State Highway Department and he gave us some construction cost figures in order to price out the various access options for the site. One of the most surprising figures he provided us with was a general cost of \$100,000 for a railroad crossing signal. In our discussions with the Mayor's Office we had thought this option would be much more expensive. We've researched this figure which Mr. Galvani provided and it does in fact appear to be correct. As you'll see, this prospective cost is substantially lower than the price tags associated with the other four options.

The type of road necessary to provide access to our site would require a width of 24'. On average this type of road costs \$750,000/mile to build. Construction of a vehicular bridge is estimated at \$200/ft². A paved bike trail with a 12' width is estimated at \$400,000/mile, and the construction of a non-vehicular bridge is estimated at \$125/ft². In addition, Mr. Galvani pointed out that most types of construction involve some type of environmental mitigation. Given that the access roads from either Ashton Ave. or Protection Ave. would have to be built within 100 year floodplain he said we should factor in an additional \$100-150,000/mile for environmental mitigation measures. Based on this number, we estimated the price of environmental mitigation measures associated with the construction of a bike path in either of these two locations to be \$75,000/mile. Given all of these figures, we estimated the construction costs associated with each of the five access options previously discussed.

7.5.2 Signalizing Railroad Crossing

In terms of creating a legalized railroad crossing, the cost of \$100,000 would obviously not be prohibitive. In several researched instances we found that towns have been able to provide 10% of this cost, with state and/or federal grants providing the remaining 90% (North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Division – Safety Programs, “Crossing Signals and Signs,” <http://www.bytrain.org/safety/xsignals.html>, visited 14 December 2002; Union Pacific, “About Grade Crossing Signals,” <http://www.uprr.com/she/hrcf02.shtml>, visited 14 December 2002). Obviously this access option would be the simplest and most convenient both in terms of the level of construction required and the construction costs.

7.5.3 Bridge from Route 2

Building a bridge and short access road to the site from Route 2 would require a 140' span of bridge across the Hoosic River, as well as an estimated 250' of roadway extending from Rt. 2 to the Hoosic River, and from the river onto the site itself. Given these numbers we estimated the total construction cost of this option to be \$707,500. In speaking with Tom Galvani and in looking at site maps and the layout of surrounding land we recognized that there are several possible locations for where this bridge could cross the Hoosic River. Ideally the road and bridge would be located directly across from the roads on the opposite side of Rt. 2 – Chantilly Avenue

or Hawthorne Avenue (figure 11a and b). Tom Galvani said that this roadway would not require a signal, because signals are only installed in locations of substantial traffic flow.



Figure 11a: View across Rt. 2 of Hawthorne Ave.



Figure 11b: View across Rt. 2 of Chantilly Ave.

7.5.4 Access Road and Bridge from Ashton Avenue

Building an access road from Ashton Ave. onto the site, as well as a bridge diagonally spanning the Hoosic River, would create several additional factors which would have to be considered.

The required roadway would be approximately 1,555', while the bridge would be approximately 250' in length. As you can see in the image below,



Figure 12: The sewer line easement passes rather close to a few neighbors' properties.

there is a sewer easement which runs from the site itself all the way to Ashton Ave., passing beneath the Hoosic River. This sewer easement was granted to the Hoosic Water Quality District (HWQD) and is already cleared in order to provide them access to the sewer line. This access option would involve building a roadway directly over the sewer line itself. However, the entire length of this sewer line lies in 100 year flood plain. Given this fact we had to factor environmental mitigation into our cost estimate for this option. Putting all of these numbers

together we came up with an estimated construction cost of \$1,465,057. In addition to the high price tag associated with this access option, the HWQD sewer easement passes through several neighboring properties and would thus create a road in several people's backyards (see figure 12). Of primary concern would be Alan and Brenda Moore's property located directly off of Ashton Ave. The sewer line travels directly through their property, passing just to the south of their house. One thought is that the road could begin at the canoe launch already built off of Ashton Ave., thus avoiding the Moore's property altogether.

7.5.5 Access Road from Protection Avenue

In terms of vehicular access the final option we considered was building an access road onto the site from Protection Avenue. This is an attractive option because the city already owns all of the land between the railroad tracks and the Hoosic River, extending from the site to Protection Ave. itself. In addition, this option would not require the construction of a bridge, which constitutes a large portion of the construction costs for both the Rt. 2 and Ashton Ave. options. This access road would create the most protracted form of access to the site, with a total length of 2400'. The entire length of the roadway would also be within 100 year floodplain and would therefore require additional environmental mitigation costs. Given these facts the total estimated construction cost of this option is \$409,090. In terms of cost this access option is a close second to the cost of providing a railroad crossing, and is substantially cheaper than the other two options discussed. However, additional considerations must be made.

7.5.6 Incorporating the Bike Trail into Road and Bridge Construction

Finally, we considered the possibility of combining the Aschuwillticook bike path extension with the vehicular access options just discussed, or possibly creating only non-vehicular access to the site in the form of the bike trail. First, we analyzed how much the price of each access option would increase if widened each of them to include the bike path. If the Rt. 2 roadway and bridge were widened to include the bike path this estimated construction cost would rise to \$1,062,450. This would mean widening both the roadway and the bridge by 12' to allow a bike right-of-way. If the Ashton Ave. roadway and bridge were similarly widened the estimated construction cost of

this option would rise to \$2,182,859. If the Protection Ave. roadway was widened 12' as well this construction cost would total \$590,909.

Having looked at these numbers, we then considered the cost of providing only non-vehicular access to the site from either Ashton Ave. or Protection Ave. Having talked to several members of the Berkshire Bike Path Council, including Lauren Stevens, the former director of HRWA, we know that the most likely route for the bike path to enter the site is actually from Protection Ave. The cost of building a non-vehicular bike path and bridge from Ashton Ave. would total \$514,891, while the cost of building just a paved bike path from Protection Ave. would total \$215,909. These cost estimates include the possible environmental mitigation associated with building a paved bike path in 100 year flood plain.

Finally, Tom Galvani and Mark Moore, of the Massachusetts State Highway Department, pointed out to us that any bridge or road construction onto this site will constitute a, “permitting nightmare.” As you saw in the regulatory section of the paper, this scale of construction would fall under the jurisdiction of several different departments, creating an extensive permitting process.

7.6 Outcome of Access Options Analysis

Looking at a breakdown of the vehicular access option costs the railroad crossing signal is by far the cheapest option, and also requires the least invasive level of construction. A close second is the cost of building an access road from Protection Ave. However, if negotiating with Guilford did not work, and if the land between the site and Protection Ave. did turn out to be too narrow at certain points for a road to be built there, the next option would be to create access to the site from Rt. 2. Due to the extremely high price tag of the Ashton Ave. access option, as well as the issues concerning the sewer easement, in terms of the ability to turn HWQD sewer line access into a paved road, and building a road in several peoples' backyards, this option appears to be the least feasible and attractive of the four vehicular options. Of course providing only bike access to the site is relatively inexpensive, but several issues would have to be considered if this access option was chosen – including necessary off-site parking, and whether or not people would have

the impetus to visit a site they may have to walk as far as half a mile to reach. In addition, there is the question of whether or not the lack of site visibility would further decrease their desire to visit the property.

Section 8: Opportunities for Funding

The majority of the information we have at this point concerning possible funding sources comes from Rhonda Serre, an Economic Development Specialist working with Congressman John Olver (D-MA, 1st District). Ms. Serre has been deeply involved in the planning of the Mahican-Mohawk Bike Trail extension and is quite knowledgeable about existing grants at the federal level that might benefit both the bike trail project and our own. A major source of funding for the bike trail project – and one that could, with some work, also aid the redevelopment of the sewage treatment plant site – is the Transportation Equity Act of 2004. This act, she said, “provides six to eight years of substantial grants for projects that don’t normally get money through the formula grant process. Money allocated to the state will be further administered by Mass Highway, but will go above and beyond the Big Dig, which is taking up most of the federal transportation formula grant money coming into Massachusetts at present” (Rhonda Serre, paraphrase of Personal Communication, 14 November 2002).

The “T-Bill,” as it is called, is very loosely defined, and many of the specifics of the 2004 grant cycle (namely, how much money is available and what types of projects will be funded) have yet to be completely worked out. It is important to point out, however, that “T-Money” is only available for “transportation projects.” The crux of our project, of course, is gaining access to the sewage treatment plant site, and this “access” issue may very well be outside the definition of a fundable “transportation” project. In order to get around this, Ms. Serre suggested trying to work cooperatively with the Bike Trail planners – in other words, to “piggyback” on to the Bike Trail project in order to gain funding. For this to take place, we would have to present a case where the sewage treatment plant site serves as a major “hub” for the Bike Trail – a place where services such as bike rental and repair, dining, restrooms, parking, etc. are provided for trail users. In this case, it is conceivable that our development of access to the site could be seen as part of a larger transportation project and, therefore, eligible for funding. Follow-up work is necessary with

regard to this angle, but it was made clear that money *will* be coming to the Bike Trail project through this act. Congressman Olver sits on the Transportation Subcommittee in Congress, and is therefore allocated designated funds for his constituency. Since the Bike Trail is one of his pet projects, significant funding should come forth.

Another major possibility for funding comes through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, which offers the Public Works Economic Development Grant. Mike Nuvalle reports that the city has used this fund “extensively in the past” (Mike Nuvalle, Personal Communication, 12 November 2002). According to the EOTC’s website, “The PWED Program was established to fund the design and construction of roads, roadways, and any other transportation related projects deemed necessary for economic development by the Secretary of Transportation upon the petition of an appropriate local executive governmental body.” Eligible projects include the “design, construction, reconstruction of existing and/or newly located public access roads, streets and bridges, curbing, sidewalks, lighting systems, traffic control and service facilities, drainage systems and culverts associated with a municipal economic development effort which seeks to: retain, establish, expand, revitalize industrial or commercial plants or facilities.” Though aid is unavailable for “sewer systems,” this stipulation should probably not get in the way of our project, as the sewage treatment plant that was at our site has been decommissioned and any future use will not involve sewage treatment. (All information from EOTC-PWED website). In regard to the Public Works Economic Development Grant, we also spoke with Ross Dindio, the administrator and highway director for region one of the Highway Department about applicable grants for the project. According to Mr. Dindio, a community or a private entity though a community would apply for this grant in order to receive money for infrastructure (including roads) for development that will produce an economic benefit for the community. The grants are given on a competitive basis, and although it probably would not be given for a park, the new community center in Great Barrington did receive a PWED for their project. Therefore, even if the project does not produce direct economic benefits for the community such as office space or an industry, it can still receive money from this program. This would be an excellent grant opportunity for dealing with the access problem of the site, but a definite project must be in place before the grant can be received.

Again at the federal level, the Economic Development Administration (through the Department of Commerce) may be able to help fund our project. According to their mission statement,

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) was established under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3121), as amended, to generate jobs, help retain existing jobs, and stimulate industrial and commercial growth in economically-distressed areas of the United States. EDA assistance is available to rural and urban areas of the Nation experiencing high unemployment, low income, or other severe economic distress.

In fulfilling its mission, EDA is guided by the basic principle that distressed communities must be empowered to develop and implement their own economic development and revitalization strategies. Based on these locally- and regionally-developed priorities, EDA works in partnership with state and local governments, regional economic development districts, public and private nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes. EDA helps distressed communities address problems associated with long-term economic distress, as well as sudden and severe economic dislocations including recovering from the economic impacts of natural disasters, the closure of military installations and other Federal facilities, changing trade patterns, and the depletion of natural resources (DOC-EDA website).

Considering the North Adams certainly fits the description of an “urban area experiencing high unemployment, low income, or other severe economic distress,” our project may well be eligible for funding under this program.

During the conversation with Ms. Serre, a hodge-podge of various other funding opportunities came up. The US Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Agency sponsors a “Rural Community Development Initiative,” which provides grants of \$50,000 to \$1 million for “projects in the areas of housing, community facilities, and community and economic development in rural areas” (USDA-Rural Development). Ms. Serre also suggested that the USDA has a “Quality of Life” grant program, as well as grants for conservation issues through the new (hotly disputed) Farm Bill, though we have not yet been able to verify these. The National Park Service may also be able to provide grants for conservation or “Greenway” projects, though the small size of our site might render it irrelevant in the eyes of the Park Service (Serre, Personal Communication, 14 November 2002). Finally, we should not rule out the possibility of funding from the private sector. Most specifically, there is an outfit called The Foundation Center, with a local office in Springfield. This organization serves as a clearinghouse for a variety of private-sector grant programs, and could prove useful (Serre, 14 November 2002). Overall, however, our client Mike Nuvallie informed us that finding funding for a given

project is the job of the Mayor's Office; we have only to suggest proper redevelopment options for the site and discuss the feasibility of these options.

Section 9: Introduction to Criteria for Alternatives Analysis

9.1 Community Survey

In order to assess public opinion we created a two page community survey entitled, "What does North Adams need?" (Appendix A). The survey asked respondents to rate on a scale of one (no need) to three (some need) to five (a great need) what they thought the need was for different types of development in North Adams. The survey included four categories (Recreation, Community, Commercial/Light Industrial Development, and Residential Development) and subcategories with examples of these types of development. We then asked an open-ended question, "Given a 10 acre parcel of undeveloped land located within the City of North Adams, what would you most wish to see developed there?" Finally we asked three demographic questions to ensure we surveyed a variety of respondents. Because of time limitations, we used the method of convenience sampling by standing outside of the Big Y at the intersection of Holden Street and Route 2 and giving the survey to those willing to take it. In about 2 hours, we administered a total of 36 surveys from. Although our sample size is so low that we have to be careful about making definite conclusions from the data, it still gives us some idea of public opinion in North Adams. The complete survey data can be found in Appendix B.

Our demographic data reveals that the majority of those taking the survey were between the ages

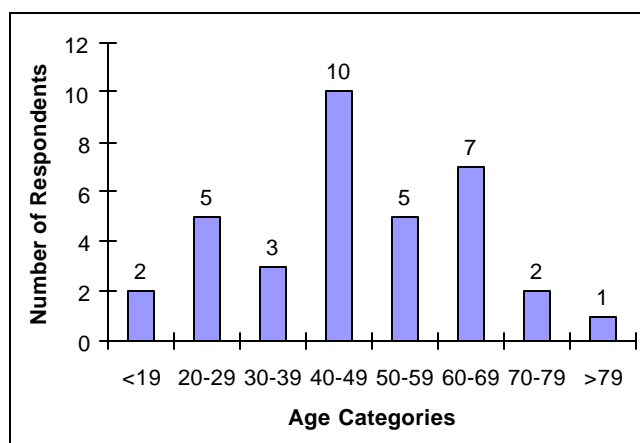


Figure 13: Number of respondents in each age categories

of 40 and 49, but we had respondents in every age group (figure 13). This data mirrors the 2000 census data in which most people fell into the 35-44 year old age group. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents had school aged children and 63% did not. As expected, the majority of the respondents were residents of North Adams (66%), but we did have some respondents from

Clarksburg (17%) and other surrounding towns (17%) such as Adams, Stamford, and Pittsfield.

In our analysis of the survey data, we created frequency histograms showing how many respondents choose 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 for each development option. We combined different options in order to group or data into the 4 different development options we analyzed.

First we combined all the results from the recreation and community options in order to assess the demand for recreational development in North Adams (Figure 14). The options from the survey included a public park/large playground, an outdoor pool, indoor recreation facilities, an amusement center, sports fields, an outdoor skating rink, a paved bike, skate and walking path, community gardens, a nature center, an outdoor theater, and a senior center. The graph shows fairly evenly distributed results, although there is a tendency towards a great need over no need. In order to assess the demand for commercial development we combined the results from the retail and office space options. As figure 15 shows, most respondents saw a great need for commercial development. The results from the industrial options (figure 16) show most respondents thought there was some to a great need for industrial development. Finally, the residential options we asked respondents to rate included an assisted living facility or retirement homes, rental units, and low-income housing. Figure 17 shows that there was a clear tendency towards a great need for residential development.

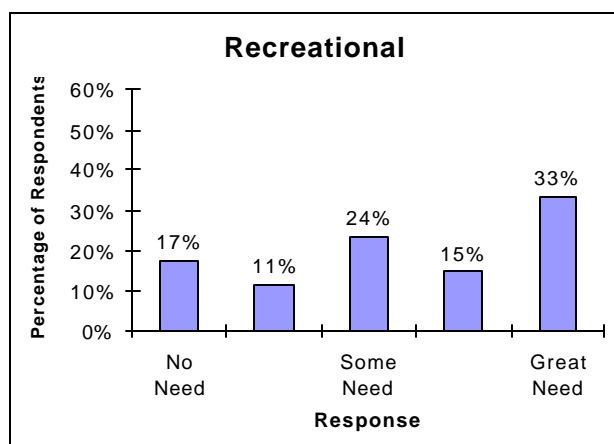


Figure 14: Percentage of respondents who saw no need to a great need for recreational development

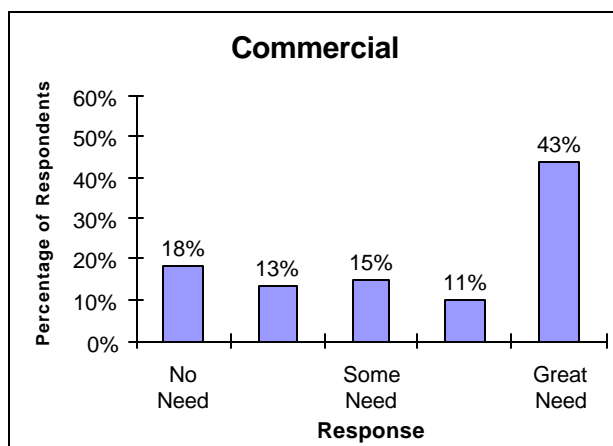


Figure 15: Percentage of respondents who saw no need to a great need for commercial development

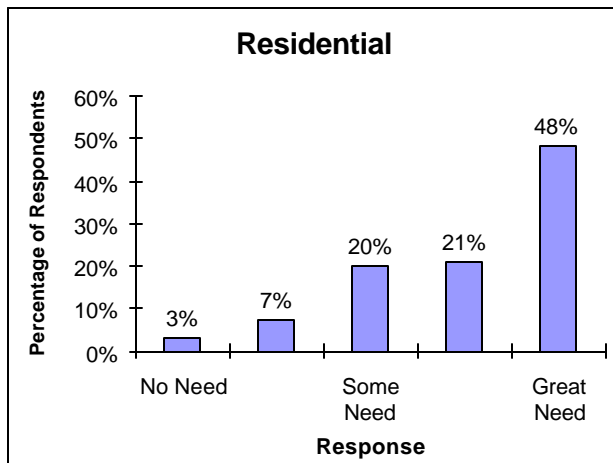


Figure 16: Percentage of respondents who saw no need to a great need for industrial development.

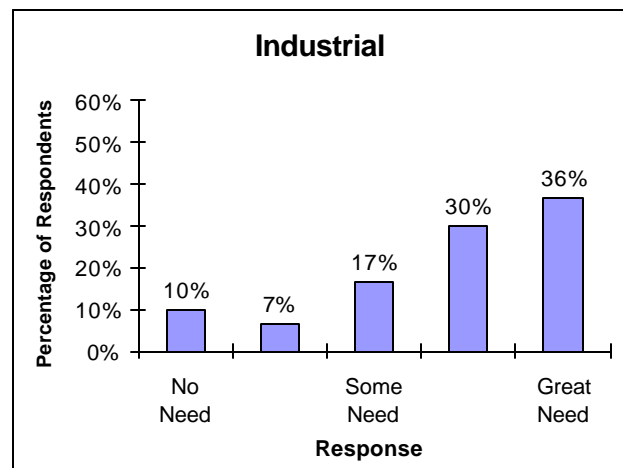


Figure 17: Percentage of respondents who saw no need to a great need for residential development.

When comparing all forms of development, respondents saw the greatest need for residential and industrial development. Most respondents also saw a great need for commercial development. Finally, while some respondents saw a great need for recreational development, not was many did as for the other options.

When asked the open-ended questions (figure 18), in contrast to the results of the first part of the survey, the majority of respondents listed some type of recreational development. For example, one respondents who rated all the recreational options either a 1, 2, or 3, listed recreation when

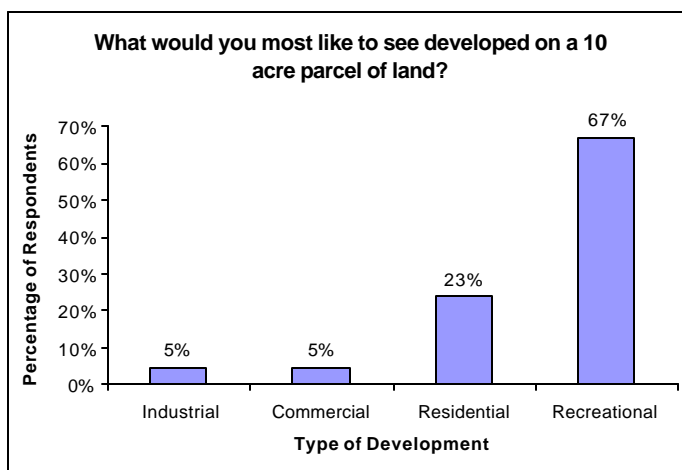


Figure 18: Percentage of respondents who listed each type of development when asked the open-ended question.

asked the open-ended question. Some examples of answers to the open-ended question include, “teen activity center”, “rec facilities for all ages”, “park”, “anything for children to have a positive recreational experience,” and “community use.”

We used this data from the open-ended question for our alternatives analysis because we felt respondents were being more honest since they weren't forced to make a particular choice. The results from the first part of the survey seemed to reflect city-wide needs and most respondents saw a great need in all areas. But when asked about a particular *undeveloped* plot of land, there was a clear desire to use it for recreational activities.

9.2 Interviews with Community Leaders

While we did a public citizen survey, our survey sample was very limited, so we decided collect additional information through individual interviews. We spoke with community leaders in order to gain additional insights on perceived development needs within the community. We tried to speak to community leaders representing a wide variety of perspectives. We interviewed community leaders within the fields of tourism, education, recreation, and city government, as well as neighborhood association members. Through these interviews we sought to gather information similar to the open ended question we asked on the public survey: "Given a ten acre parcel of undeveloped land in North Adams what would you like to see developed there and why?" We also gave them more specific information about the site itself and the extent of our project thus far. In general these interviews pointed towards recreation as the main form of desired development within the community, particularly given the realities of our site. Several people also pointed to the possibility of working in combination with the Aschuwillticook Bike Trail extension, and in particular the idea of combining recreational activity and commercial development on the site. Others saw a need for industrial/commercial development in the community in order to provide economic stimulus through jobs and an increased tax base.

In the field of tourism we spoke to Ray Smith (4 December 2002) at the Berkshire Visitors Bureau, and Ron Bunt (9 December 2002) at the Mayor's Office of Travel and Tourism. Ray Smith actually grew up in the Blackinton Neighborhood in North Adams. He and his friends frequently spent time on the site and he therefore had an intimate knowledge of its layout. He pointed out that the canoe ramp off of Ashton Ave., which provides access to the Hoosic River, might tie in well with development on this site. In terms of the site itself he thought that a park or recreational area for kids would be an interesting angle, particularly if it were tied in with the Aschuwillticook bike trail extension. He said a goal of the Berkshire Visitor's Bureau, "is to

make the Berkshires children friendly." In addition, he pointed out that, "more activities for children bodes well in terms of visitors coming up with a plethora of things to do. They'll have that experience to build upon so maybe they'll come back when they're older." He mentioned the scarcity of undeveloped land in North Adams, as well as the entire Berkshire region, and said that, "having just over ten acres of undeveloped land that is rough that you can forge ahead with is almost unheard of in any part of the Berkshire area." Mr. Smith had heard about the idea of putting an extended care facility on the site, but he didn't think that, "something like that would be as beneficial." In addition he gave us several statistics about prime tourist activities when visiting the Berkshires. "Once a visitor goes to a destination, recreational activity ranks number 2 or 3 on their list of things to do after shopping, and for families recreation usually falls within the first or second activity slot." Finally, he pointed out that one of the major selling points for this property could be the opportunity to create a partnership with the bike trail coalition. Ron Bunt at the Mayor's Office of Travel and Tourism mentioned that many tourists come to the area to enjoy Mass MoCA and the Clark Art Institute, but that families are often looking for activities for their children.

In the field of education we spoke to Marie Kelly-Whitney (4 December 2002), the Principle of Conte Middle School. She sees after school as the biggest risk time for middle school and high school kids and she said that there are, "never enough playing fields, basketball courts, never enough facilities to house all the activities that kids are doing in the community." One example she gave was the fact that their gym is used from 4 - 9 pm every single night by the girls basketball league. While they support the league's activities, it would be nice to have another facility available for use during after-school hours. She pointed out that while there are several fields and playgrounds in the community, because of the, "enormous number of kids playing sports there are never enough practice fields, never enough spaces for them to develop their skills." She thought that the site itself might be a great place to house another sports area, particularly soccer or baseball fields, or general recreation of some sort. She also recognized the fact that the site is currently, "limited in terms of providing access."

In the field of recreation we spoke to the Executive Director of the YMCA, Randy Kinnas (5 December 2002). He said that, "a lot of resources should be for kids...there's really no place for

them to go." One idea he had was building a skate park on the site. While Ray Smith of the Berkshire Visitors Bureau had offered some concerns about this idea, specifically the potential for graffiti and possibly reducing the aesthetic appeal of the site, Randy Kinnas said that, "the point is to have something they take ownership in so they won't do that...the kids who are probably doing the graffiti are the ones who are bored out of their minds with nothing to do. If they have it they will value it more and hopefully take care of it." He pointed to the recent rise in popularity of activities like skateboarding, rollerblading, and BMX biking. Since the city does not want the kids doing those activities on the street he thought this might provide a prime location for that type of recreation. In addition, he noted that, "everything is centrally located in North Adams," so providing basketball hoops, tennis courts, or a community park in Blackinton neighborhood might be a nice idea in terms of expanding recreational opportunities.

In terms of members of the city government we spoke to Mayor John Barrett, Building Inspector Vincent Lively, and city council members Gail Cariddi and Chair Alan Marden. Mayor Barrett was concerned with the need for economic revitalization in North Adams, and would ideally like to create jobs and increase the tax base of the town (22 October 2002). However, he pointed out that this type of stimulus does not come about only through job creation, but also by providing livable communities. Vincent Lively spoke about the limited amount of developable area for industrial development in North Adams (22 October 2002). He said that he's constantly being approached by people and companies interested in creating or expanding facilities, but that there's rarely a suitable location. He thought that if access could be created to the site it would be a prime location for light industrial development given the level of demand in the community.

Gail Cariddi (5 December 2002) is not only a member of the city council, but she's also involved in creating the Aschuwillticook Bike Trail extension, which would probably extend through our site, either on the Northern edge of the site as a rails-with-trails project, or actually traveling down onto the site along the outer berms. She said that, "logically the extension of the Aschuwillticook Trail through the site would be good." In terms of the actual type of development she would prefer to see take place on the site, she said, "some kind of economic development that would add jobs to the local economy." Ultimately, she hopes that whatever type of development takes place will mesh with the bike path. In addition, she gave several

reasons why residential development on the site did not appeal to her. Specifically she said, "the problem with housing is that there would be traffic over the tracks at all hours, but a business would have limited hours, and therefore wouldn't have as great of an impact on the railroad." This mirrors information we received from Guilford Railroad Systems. They said that they prefer not to grant crossing rights to private facilities that need to cross the tracks in order to reach their final destination. Activities that critically increase traffic flow over the tracks at all hours of the day are less likely to be granted legal permission from the company.

When we spoke to the Chair of the City Council, Alan Marden (8 December 2002), he said that he, "falls on the side of trying to protect [the property] for industrial or commercial development." However, he recognized that this is a difficult site for any kind of industrial development because of location and topography. He said that he prefers maintaining the site for this type of development primarily because, "North Adams just has so little industrial land that's ready to go, and this in a sense is. It's owned correctly, has utilities, and some limited access." He said he hoped that the issues of gaining crossing rights from Guilford would not be, "insurmountable." Finally, he pointed out that recreational activity as an alternative usage of the site is an attractive option, and he feels that if the town had, "a lot of other choices or land it would be a different ballgame," in terms of the type of development he would recommend.

We also spoke to Kathy Keeser (5 December 2002) of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and Rick Moon, the head of the Blackinton Neighborhood Association. They both mentioned several community meetings which have already taken place where members of the neighborhood have discussed what they would like to see done with the site. Both said that the neighborhood leans in the direction of recreational development. Kathy Keeser said, "they worry about traffic, what kind of business would come in, how it would impact the land." Meanwhile she said some type of light industrial development or an environmentally friendly business would of course provide economic benefit to the community. She said that, "with the idea of the bike trail in mind...you could always have a small business, sport shop or concession stand that would work in combination with that." She pointed out that while there is already a field and playground in the Blackinton neighborhood, both are "underused," particularly the playground because it's so old. She said that, "it couldn't hurt to have an updated playground in that area."

There aren't too many families right in Blackinton, but further up Rt. 2 towards North Adams there are a lot of kids that it would probably draw." She also pointed out the seasonal nature of recreation, but seemed to think there were several options that might produce year-round usage of the site.

9.3 Physical Constraints on the Site (Buildable Area)

The third criteria we used to analyze of redevelopment options were the physical constraints on the site and how they would limit the buildable area. The flood control berms (figure 19), which dissect the site in multiple locations, were built by the Army Corp of Engineers in order to protect the sewage treatment plant from flooding.



Figure 19: Photo of Northern berm

Completed Army Corp projects are generally turned over to cities for management, and according to Leo Senecal at the North Adams Office of Public Works, everything on the site serves a purpose and cannot be moved. While we initially thought that the northern most berm on the Massachusetts Ave side of the pump house could be removed, we learned that this berm protects the pump house from the extensive drainage onto the site off of Massachusetts Ave. And as Mr. Senecal pointed out, flooding the pump house could potentially lead to an overflow of sewage in the Hoosic River and therefore could not be risked (Leo Senecal, Personal Communication, 25 November 2002).



Figure 20: Picture of the canal.

The canal (figure 20) also dissects the site and because of the regulations of the Wetlands Protection Act, building in this area cannot have any adverse effects on the wetland. Since building in this area would be extremely difficult if not impossible, depending on the decisions of the Conservation Commission, we did not include the buffer zones of the canal when estimating the buildable area.

Because the Hoosic River (figure 21) borders the southern edge of the site, the regulations of the Rivers Protection Act will place limitations on any building that might occur in the 200 foot river front area. Because the presence of the flood control measures may reduce the applicability of the Rivers Protection Act, we calculated the buildable area north of the flood control berm.



Figure 21: Picture of the Hoosic River downstream of the Barber Dam



Figure 22: Photo of the sewage pump house

Since the sewage pump house (figure 22) on the site is still used, Hoosic Water Quality District must maintain vehicular access to it. Therefore unless alternative access was created, the existing road could not be depraved between

Massachusetts Ave. and the pump house (figure 23). The buildable area is further limited by the presence of two sewer lines that run through the site. One sewer line runs underneath the road from the pump house towards the cul-de-sac and another runs just north of the southern-most berm.



Figure 23: Photo of the road from Mass Ave.

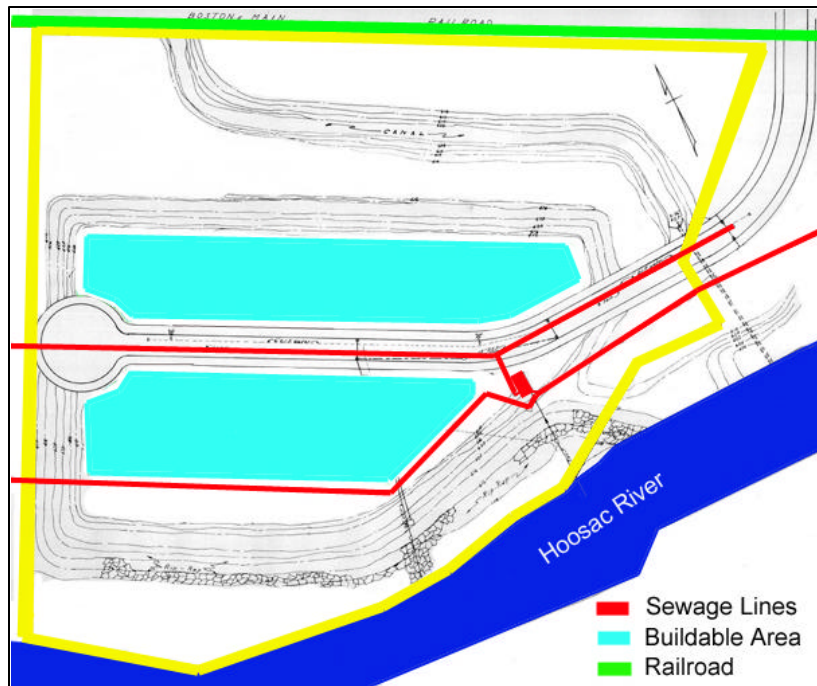


Figure 24: Map of the site showing the buildable area as constrained by the berms, canal, river, road, sewage lines, and sewage pump house.

buildable area is split into two small sections of 1.6 acres north of the road and 1.4 acres south of the road and north of the southern sewer lines. There is also a fair amount of wooded land and debris (the city currently dumps yard waste on the site) on the site that would have to be cleared before any building could occur. Figure 24 shows the map with the buildable area in turquoise and figure 25 shows an aerial photo of the site with the buildable area highlighted.

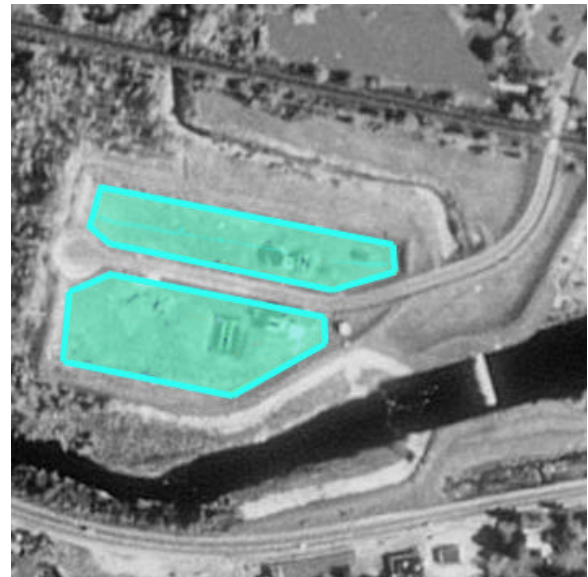


Figure 25: Aerial photo of site with buildable area highlighted in turquoise.
(<http://terraserwer.homeadvisor.msn.com/image.aspx?t=1&s=12&x=813&y=5911&z=18&w=1>)

So taking into account all these limitations already existent on the land, we estimated the total buildable area. The site itself is 10 acres, but because of the berms, canal, river, road, and sewer lines, the buildable area is significantly reduced. Since permanent structures cannot be built on top of sewer lines due to the need for access, the

9.4 Compatibility with Other Uses

The fourth criterion we used to analyze our redevelopment options was their compatibility with other uses of the site and of the surrounding land. Because the site is located in a neighborhood, an increase in noise and traffic would be an undesirable impact of development. Since the bike trail will either run through or on the edge of our site, it would be beneficial for both uses to work together. The existing access to water and sewer lines would make any building project



much simpler. And finally, there is the possibility of working with the former Wieden Tannery site, which is located on Ashton Ave near our site. This is a brownfields site that will eventually be owned by the city. It could possibly be developed into a parking lot for our site, although access to the site itself would still be needed.

Figure 26: Picture of the Wieden Tanner site situated in front of the Blackinton Mill.

9.5 Environmental Impact

The final criterion we used was the possible environmental impact that each type of development might have. The site is quite beautiful and is surrounded by both a river and a wetland. Since it is unusual to have such a beautiful, undeveloped piece of property in the middle of North Adams, it would be a shame to adversely impact the natural assets of the land.

Section 10: Alternatives Analysis

10.1 Introduction

Having discussed a variety of background information regarding the former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant site, we are prepared to begin an initial analysis of the various development options that we believe could take place on this parcel. As suggested by the layout of the public opinion survey we administered, four categories of potential future use seem feasible: commercial, industrial, residential, and recreational. The difficulty we face, of course, is

in deciding which one of these options represents the most appropriate use for this 10 acre parcel of land in the middle of North Adams. In an attempt to evaluate the relative assets and liabilities of each redevelopment scheme, we have devised an assessment method that judges each option with regard to five criteria: public opinion – survey data (based on responses to our open-ended survey question, “Given a 10 acre parcel of land in North Adams, what would you like to see developed?”); public opinion – interviews (based on the information we derived through talking to various figures in the community, especially those we considered “community leaders”); physical constraints on the site (that is, the manner in which features on the site such as the wetland, river, berms, road, and pump house could affect a given development option); compatibility with other uses (that is, the manner in which a given development option could interact with pre-existing aspects of the surrounding neighborhood or even future developments such as the Aschuwillticook rail-trail extension); and environmental impact (the effect that a given development option could have on the site’s natural resources, ecological functioning and aesthetics). All of these criteria (four development options * five evaluation categories = 20 overall criteria) were judged on a scale of one to five, where a score of one indicates that a given criterion has “low feasibility,” a score of three indicates that a criterion is neutral, and a score of 5 indicates that a criterion has “high feasibility.”

We should mention at the outset that these ratings are inherently subjective; that is, although we have tried to provide an accurate assessment of each criterion based on our research, interviews, and site visits, we freely admit that our lack of specialization in these areas of evaluation allows for the possibility that our ratings are not the same as those that others might make. Perhaps a more sophisticated method in the future would involve asking a variety of individuals from various professions and realms of expertise to rate these criteria by our scale. In this manner, we could obtain a more realistic and reliable evaluation averaged across a number of backgrounds and a variety of experiences. Furthermore, our analysis does not purport to break down the various categories of development into specific examples (that is, “residential development” has not been assessed for all possible residential options, nor has “recreational development” been assessed for all possible recreational uses). We feel, however, that as “outside consultants,” our role is not to suggest what particular sort of development *we* think would best serve the residents of North Adams, but to determine the most feasible type of development so that community

members can then take the project further. All in all, we feel that our alternatives analysis serves to “get the ball rolling” with regard to the consideration of redevelopment options on this site, and that it helps point to the most natural direction for future development.

10.2 Commercial Development

10.2.1 Public Opinion – Surveys

As reported earlier in our public survey response data, a mere five percent of respondents listed commercial development when asked to indicate the sort of development they’d like to see take place on a 10 acre parcel of land in the city of North Adams. When speaking with respondents, we found that a considerable number thought that there was already too much commercial development in the city. This perception certainly coincides with the fact that a significant amount of commercial space in the city center is currently vacant. The main issue with regard to commercial development, it would seem (judging from conversations with residents as well as our own observations), is finding a way to fill these vacancies with tenants, rather than building additional commercial developments that might end up going unused. Taking all of this into consideration, we give this criterion a feasibility rating of 2.

10.2.2 Public Opinion – Interviews

In speaking with various individuals from the city of North Adams, we found that few respondents explicitly mentioned further commercial development as a great need for the city. It was clear, however, that many respondents – notably Mayor Barrett, members of the Mayor’s Office of Travel and Tourism, and members of the City Council – liked the idea of a development option that could create jobs, increase the city’s tax base, and thereby help spur economic revitalization. Such a desire is reflected as well in the August, 1996 Community Action Statement of the City of North Adams, where the number one priority of the community action strategy was to “improve the economy through economic development (create jobs)” (1996 Community Action Statement, Community Action Strategy, pg. Action-1). We must be realistic, of course, in noting that no single development – especially on a small parcel such as ours – will single-handedly provide economic revitalization for North Adams. The size of any commercial establishment – and therefore the number of jobs created by such an establishment – would necessarily be limited. Nevertheless, since economic stimulus for North Adams has been

consistently noted as a great need, we must acknowledge the fact that a commercial development on this site would likely have some positive impact overall. As such, we have given this criterion a feasibility rating of 4.

10.2.3 Physical Constraints on the Site

As we noted earlier, the physical layout of the site – as well as the regulatory restrictions on development imposed by the Wetlands Protection Act and Rivers Protection Act – greatly constrains the amount of buildable area. Because of the location of the road, the berms, the pump house, the sewer lines for which access must be maintained, and the resource protection areas, we feel that the greatest amount of area which can be built upon without causing adverse impact to the site is about three acres (see Figure 24). Again, this area is divided up into one 1.5 acre strip of land on both the north and south sides of the existing road. Any commercial development, of course, would require the construction of one or more buildings. In addition, adequate parking for customers and employees would be necessary, decreasing the amount of space that could be used for a building or buildings. While three acres is by no means a small space, we must wonder about the realistic size of any business that would use this site as well as the realistic number of patrons it could hope to attract. The overarching question, then, is “would any commercial development on this site be large enough and successful enough to justify the costs of obtaining/constructing access to the site and then building on the site?” Since we cannot answer this question conclusively and feel that the answer could equally be “yes” or “no,” we have given this criterion a feasibility rating of 3.

10.2.4 Compatibility with Other Uses

As the former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant site sits in the middle of historic Blackinton, any commercial development on the land would instantly create a mixed-use neighborhood. While this is inherently neither good nor bad, it does raise the question of whether a commercial use fits within a predominantly residential area. There is no reason why it should not, of course, but this is nevertheless an issue that must be taken up and decided upon by Blackinton residents themselves. One issue that may be cause for complaint is the fact that a commercial development on the site would likely increase traffic congestion on surrounding roads (Massachusetts Avenue, Ashton Avenue, Protection Avenue, and/or Route 2, depending on

the chosen access route). However, any development at all would likely increase traffic flow to the site, and is therefore an inescapable component of site re-use. At some point in the future, it may be necessary to engage the services of a traffic consultant to determine the extent such a potential impact. Despite this potential downside, a commercial development on this site could well give Blackinton residents closer and more convenient access to certain goods and services than they currently have. Depending on the type of commercial development on the site, neighbors could potentially benefit from not having to commute to the city center for certain errands. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, it is possible the Aschuwillticook rail-trail extension from North Adams to Williamstown could pass near or through this site, raising the possibility for the development of some sort of commercial service(s) that would benefit users of the bike trail. This option will be examined in more depth later, but for now, we have given this criterion an overall feasibility rating of 4.

10.2.5 Environmental Impact

The environmental impact of any commercial development would, of course, depend on the specific type of development that took place on the site (e.g. a concession stand versus a grocery store). It seems, however, that any foreseeable commercial development would have a limited impact on the site's environmental characteristics. Having already limited the potential building area due to the restrictions of the Wetlands Protection Act and the Rivers Protection Act (as well as the fact that the construction potentials of the areas of the site to which these regulations apply are also negatively impacted by the proximity of the flood control berms), we acknowledge that any construction should take place outside of the resource protection areas. Obviously, any construction anywhere on the site should follow standard operating procedure with regard to erosion and sedimentation controls. Furthermore, any proposed plan would have to ensure proper drainage and that there would be no increase in the amount of stormwater runoff from the site. If these mitigation steps are taken during construction and use of the site – and there is little reason to expect otherwise – there should be little or no environmental impact on the site one way or another; therefore, we have given this criterion a feasibility option of 3.

10.2.6 Summary of Feasibility for the Commercial Development Option

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, the overall feasibility of the commercial development option works out as follows:

	Public Opinion - Surveys	Public Opinion - Interviews	Physical Constraints on the Site	Compatibility with Other Uses	Environmental Impact	Overall Feasibility
Commercial Development	2	4	3	4	3	3.2

This score indicates that the commercial development option for this site is slightly more feasible and favorable than neutral.

10.3 Light Industrial Development

10.3.1 Public Opinion – Surveys

As with commercial development, only five percent of respondents surveyed replied that they would like to see an unused 10 acre parcel land in North Adams developed for industrial use. Given that respondents were allowed to choose any possible use at all for the survey's hypothetical site, we believe that this low response rate may well reflect a general lack of desire among North Adams residents for industrial development in the city. As such, we have given the industrial development option a feasibility rating of 2.

10.3.2 Public Opinion – Interviews

In contrast to the survey results, interviews with city officials and community leaders suggest that there may well be some need for further industrial development in North Adams. The city is, of course, steeped in a rich history of industrial activity (such as Sprague Electric and Arnold Printworks, to name a few), and as if to illustrate this, a number of old mills – in various states of use or disuse – serve to define the character of North Adams. Throughout the last decade North Adams has been stretching the boundaries of its historical role, as evidenced by the construction of Mass MoCA and the resultant growth of the city's importance for both artists and art lovers alike. It is not too hard to imagine, however, that a great many North Adams residents are still used to the North Adams of old, and therefore wouldn't be adverse to the return of some of the industrial activity that defined the city until the 1980s. After all, there is no reason why the two

uses could not coexist. Alan Marden, Chairman of the North Adams City Council, told us that, “based on the limited inventory of the town, [he] would like to see [the project site] protected for commercial or industrial use” (Alan Marden, Personal Communication, 8 December 2002). Since industrial activity was the lynchpin of North Adams’ economy for most of the century, it is natural that industrial development would be looked upon as a natural candidate for creating employment opportunities, increasing the city’s tax base, and perhaps even spurring some degree of economic revitalization. As with commercial development, we do not suggest that a single industrial development on a small parcel of land would have a great impact upon the economy of North Adams. Nevertheless, it could well be a step in the right direction, and should be recognized as such. For these reasons, we have given this criterion a feasibility rating of 4.

10.3.3 Physical Constraints on the Site

As with all development options for this site, the industrial development option runs into the problem of limited buildable area. As we noted with regard to commercial development, 3 acres is still a fair amount of space and need not rule out the possibility of constructing buildings on the site. In the case of industrial development, however, we feel that it is reasonable to believe that the use would call for a larger building than any other development option (due to the necessity of housing machinery, materials, inventory, etc). According to the North Adams Zoning Bylaws, two of the three industrial districts require 40,000 ft² lot areas, or about an acre per building (Appendix Zoning Ordinance From the Code of the City of North Adams, §8, pg. 294.23) significantly higher than the required lot size for commercial buildings. In addition, any industrial use would require a number of employees and, therefore, adequate parking. This could also serve to reduce the available space for any building that would be constructed. Once again, we must ask the question, “would any industrial development on this site be large enough and successful enough to justify the costs of obtaining/constructing access to the site and then building on the site?” Given the requirements of scale that face any industrial development, we feel that the answer is “no,” and therefore give this criterion a feasibility rating of 2.

10.3.4 Compatibility with Other Uses

Thinking of the types of activities generally connoted by the term “industrial,” it seems reasonable to suspect that industrial development option would be the most incongruous with the

surrounding residential neighborhood. The industrial option presents the greatest opportunity for noise or for the passage of large vehicles on to and off of the site – both of these issues that would likely disturb Blackinton residents. Having said this, we should reiterate Mayor Barrett’s commitment to non-invasive development on the site, and should realize that any industrial development would be “light” and could perhaps even go unnoticed due to the secluded nature of the site. It seems, however, that industrial use would provide less of an opportunity for the interaction with or the involvement of the surrounding community – an option that is more likely to exist with commercial development. In addition, industrial activity provides relatively little opportunity for some sort of affiliation with the proposed bike trail, and would not likely serve as an inducement for bike trail users. Taking these issues into account, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 2.

10.3.5 Environmental Impact

It is possible that we, as students of environmental studies, betray a degree of anti-industrial bias, but it seems reasonable to assume that industrial development provides the most opportunity for pollution or other adverse environmental impacts on this site. It is highly unlikely (and probably impossible), given the Mayor’s commitment to non-invasive development, that any sort of highly polluting activity or one that used hazardous materials would be located on this site. This said, industrial activities traditionally involve resource-intensive fabrication processes and therefore result in greater amounts of waste than other development alternatives. Naturally, any construction on or use of this site would have to adhere to certain environmental standards and mitigation steps as mentioned in the previous section. But because of the potential for high rates of waste generation and the increased likelihood of generally negative environmental impacts, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 2.

10.3.6 Summary of Feasibility for the Industrial Development Option

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, the overall feasibility of the industrial development option works out as follows:

	Public Opinion - Surveys	Public Opinion - Interviews	Physical Constraints on the Site	Compatibility with Other Uses	Environmental Impact	Overall Feasibility
Industrial Development	2	4	2	2	2	2.4

This score indicates that the industrial development option for this site is slightly less feasible and favorable than neutral.

10.4 Residential Development

10.4.1 Public Opinion – Surveys

In contrast to both commercial and industrial development, 23% of survey respondents stated that they would like to see some sort of residential development on an unused 10 acre parcel of land in North Adams. We should note that this perception of a significant need for housing seems a bit curious in light of recent data, which revealed that, in 2000, there were 750 vacant housing units out of a total of 7100 in the city. There appears to be a somewhat significant disconnect between the average North Adams resident’s perception of the housing situation in the city and the reality of the matter. Noting the clear desire on the part of our survey respondents for some sort of residential development in the city, however, we gave this criterion a feasibility score of 3.

10.4.2 Public Opinion – Interviews

In speaking with North Adams community leaders, few respondents mentioned a need for residential development – perhaps because our interviewees may have been in better positions to know about the reality of the city’s housing situation than the average North Adams resident. In addition to this apparent lack of perceived need, some pointed out the difficulty of placing a residential development on this site – perhaps remembering the difficulty that another residential development option, an assisted living center, had with the lack of adequate access. As Gail Cariddi told us, “The problem with housing [at this site] is that there would be traffic over the tracks at all hours...” (Gail Cariddi, Personal Communication, 5 December 2002). Based on an apparent lack of interest in the housing option on the part of our interviewees, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 1.

10.4.3 Physical Constraints on the Site

Again, as with commercial and industrial development, the limited buildable area on the site presents some difficulties with regard to the residential development option. There is, however, more leeway in the construction of houses, as the buildings themselves are smaller and can therefore be strategically placed to maximize the usable area. We attempted to make some rough calculations as to the number of houses that could, potentially, be placed on the site. If a hypothetical housing development were to be built on the site and were to be given the densest possible zoning, a direct calculation of total lot size divided by the required lot size for each unit (7,200 ft² in the R-3 zone) results in about 18 possible units (N. Adams Zoning Code, §5, pg. 294.11). Allowing for the requisite side lot and frontage regulations, as well as the possibility that another road would have to be built within the site in order to provide residents with adequate access, our best estimate is that anywhere from 10 to 14 single family units could be built. Of course, the most likely form of residential development on this site would be a multifamily or townhouse complex. We cannot be sure that this would significantly increase the number of people who could live in such a development, as we are told that “dwellings for more than 2 families [require] special permit from the planning board. The minimum lot area for such dwellings shall be in accordance with the applicable minimum lot area per dwelling unit” (N. Adams Zoning Code, §5, pg. 294.9). As with the previous two development options, we must ask the question, “would any residential development on this site be large enough and successful enough to justify the costs of obtaining/constructing access to the site and then building on the site?” A residential development is certainly a possibility, and has been suggested in the past, but we believe that such a development is less likely to be the best option in terms of the number of people it could potentially benefit; accordingly, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 2.

10.4.4 Compatibility with Other Uses

As our project site is located within a residential district, it seems obvious that a residential development option would be a natural fit. There are a few issues, however, that should be considered. The first is that the surrounding Blackinton neighborhood is a historic district with a great deal of community spirit and pride. It is conceivable that some residents might be wary of the notion of a new housing development, which could bring in strangers with no previous connection to the community. This is not at all meant to ascribe a spirit of exclusivity or

snobbery to the residents of Blackinton, but to suggest that they – as would any tightly-knit community – might be hesitant towards a development option that could potentially change a neighborhood dynamic that has existed for a long time. This, of course, is not within our ability to judge, and must be further explored with local residents. We do not think that it would be a large issue, but we feel that we should suggest the possibility of such a reaction. In terms of the potential homeowners, the access issue could present a bit of a problem. If the railroad crossing option were to be chosen (as it is the cheapest and most direct way on to the site), residents' access to their own homes could be dictated – or at least held up – by the passing trains. Granted, only eight trains pass per day, but we can't imagine that too many people would enjoy waiting for 4 minutes for a train to pass just so they could get to work in the morning. Of course, it is not even certain that the railroad crossing would be the chosen access route; in fact, it seems that Guilford Transportation is more unlikely to grant crossing privileges for private use than for public use. As such, it is not appropriate for us to factor heavily the problems of this access route into our consideration of this criterion. Finally, we should also note that the potential for the bike path to pass through the site could be seen by residents as either a liability or an asset. Certainly, there seems to be overwhelming support in favor of bike paths throughout the region; but it is also possible that residents would not want their privacy invaded by passing bikers. Taking into account the possibility of these problems coming to light, as well as the fact that North Adams residents as a whole would receive little direct benefit from a new housing development (given the current excess housing supply), we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 3.

10.4.5 Environmental Impact

Given the existence of standard procedures such as erosion, sedimentation, and stormwater control, we do not believe that much, if any, adverse environmental impact would take place as a result of the construction of a residential development on this site. Furthermore, since the project site already has water and sewer lines running underneath it, any houses that were built could be plugged into the sewage and water mains rather than use septic systems and wells. The absence of the need for septic tanks and leach fields – especially this close to a river and a wetland – certainly decreases the potential of adverse environmental impact. Considering all of this, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 3.

10.4.6 Summary of Feasibility of the Residential Development Option

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, the overall feasibility of the residential development option works out as follows:

	Public Opinion - Surveys	Public Opinion - Interviews	Physical Constraints on the Site	Compatibility with Other Uses	Environmental Impact	Overall Feasibility
Residential Development	3	1	2	3	3	2.4

This score indicates that the residential development option for this site is slightly less feasible and favorable than neutral.

10.5 Recreational Development

10.5.1 Public Opinion – Surveys

In terms of public opinion, the recreational development option received the highest survey rating; 67% of respondents indicated that they would like to see some form of recreational activities on an unused 10 acre parcel of land in North Adams. We should note that “recreational development” can refer to any number of activities, from a park to playing fields to skateboard ramps to a senior center. Since the scope of the project was to get an idea of the best possible direction for the redevelopment of the site – not to pin down the exact use – we acknowledge that “recreation” comprises a broad and non-specific category. The overwhelming response rate calling for some sort of recreational development, however, led us to give this criterion a feasibility rating of 5.

10.5.2 Public Opinion – Interviews

Almost every person we interviewed mentioned a lack of recreational space in North Adams, especially for the city’s youth. As it was described to us, the demand for such space far outweighs the city’s supply: stated Marie Kelly-Whitney, Principal of the Conte Middle School, “after school is the biggest risk time for middle school kids. There are never enough playing fields or basketball courts...never enough facilities to house all of the activities that kids are doing in the community” (Marie Kelly-Whitney, Personal Communication, 4 December 2002). Echoing this sentiment, Randy Kinnas, the Executive Director of the North Adams YMCA, said

that “a lot of resources should be for the kids.... There’s really no place for them to go” (Randy Kinnas, Personal Communication, 4 December 2002). In addition to these statements of a clear need in the community, Ray Smith of the Berkshire Visitors Bureau claimed that recreational development was ideal because “one of our goals is to make the Berkshires children-friendly” (Ray Smith, Personal Communication, 4 December 2002). Considering these rather strong opinions in favor of recreational development, as well as many others we received, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 5.

10.5.3 Physical Constraints on the Site

Unlike the previous three development options, which required one or more buildings on the site, a recreational development need not have any at all, and would therefore not be greatly impacted by the limited amount of buildable space on the parcel. Without the necessary construction component, it is more likely that a recreational use could make full use of the open space offered by the site. The Wetlands and Rivers Protection Acts forbid any activity that will have adverse impact on the protected resource area surrounding a river or wetland, but they do not preclude all use. Since recreational development could conceivably be carried out with relatively minimal invasiveness to the site (depending on the specific nature of the activity, of course), the usable area for recreation could be much greater than the 3 acres available for construction. The strip of grass directly to the north and south of the canal, for instance, could easily be used for nature walking trails or the like. Of course, the presence of the berms could serve as a hindrance to any sort of playing field that requires a large expanse of contiguous, flat land. But it seems as if a recreational development would also be poised to take advantage of the berms for some sort of incidental recreational use rather than treat them as a stumbling block to development. All in all, it appears that a recreational use could very well take full advantage of the space this site has to offer. In addition to this, a recreational area of some sort need not have parking on-site, as would be necessary in the case of a commercial, industrial, or residential development. Taking these points together, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 4.

10.5.4 Compatibility with Other Uses

A recreational use of any sort would be immediately beneficial not only to the nearby residents of the Blackinton neighborhood, but to all of North Adams as well. Something along the lines of

playing fields or a public park would have great utility for all, as opposed to commercial, industrial, or residential developments, which would directly benefit only a limited number of people. Such development would also mesh well with the Ashwillticook rail-trail extension, whether it came near or through the project site. Since the trail would stretch from the North Adams city center to our site and beyond, it would make it possible for people – children especially – to walk or ride to the site without having to commute along the busy Route 2 or Massachusetts Avenue. This is certainly a large point in favor of recreational development, as the overlap of these two projects (the site redevelopment and the bike trail) could not only provide youth activities for the city, but could also provide a safe, direct, and independent means for these users to access the site. Finally, the potential presence of the bike trail on this site seems to be a perfect fit with recreational development. What better than to mix two or more types of recreational activities? For all of these reasons, we gave this criterion a feasibility rating of 5.

10.5.5 Environmental Impact

The environmental impact of a recreational development would obviously depend on the nature of the development; that is, an indoor recreation center will obviously have a greater impact than a park or playing fields. We believe that the most likely candidate for recreational development is an outdoor use, as it would be the cheapest and quickest option that still serves a clear community need. Therefore, we think that such a residential development would have less adverse environmental impact than any of the other options. Of course, there is always the issue of fertilizer and pesticides for playing fields, especially in such close proximity to the river and a wetland. But it is certainly possible that alternative products could be used; that is, adverse environmental impact need not be inherent in a recreational use. Moreover, the fact that a recreational development would likely preserve (and benefit from) open space, preserving the considerable aesthetic value of the site, led us to believe that this development alternative would, in fact, provide positive environmental impact for the site. This criterion received a feasibility rating of 4.

10.5.6 Summary of Feasibility of the Recreational Development Option

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, the overall feasibility of the recreational development option works out as follows:

	Public Opinion - Surveys	Public Opinion - Interviews	Physical Constraints on the Site	Compatibility with Other Uses	Environmental Impact	Overall Feasibility
Industrial Development	5	5	4	5	4	4.6

This score indicates that the recreational development option for this site is extremely feasible and favorable.

10.6 Overall Summary of Redevelopment Options

For the purpose of side-by-side comparison, the following table provides the rankings of each redevelopment option:

	Public Opinion - Surveys	Public Opinion - Interviews	Physical Constraints on the Site	Compatibility with Other Uses	Environmental Impact	Overall Feasibility
Commercial Development	2	4	3	4	3	3.2
Industrial Development	2	4	2	2	2	2.4
Residential Development	3	1	2	3	3	2.4
Industrial Development	5	5	4	5	4	4.6

As we mentioned earlier, of course, these ratings are by no means set in stone and should not be thought of as definitive. Rather, they reflect what we see as a necessary first step in the potential redevelopment of the former North Adams Sewage Treatment Plant site. Though we recognize that these ratings are susceptible to bias and subjectivity and encourage any and all to question them and provide more accurate ratings, we nevertheless feel that they represent the natural direction for a redevelopment project at this site.

In terms of average feasibility score, recreational development comes out on top and seems to be extremely favorable as an option for the re-use of this site. Commercial development, as well, rates as more favorable than neutral, and therefore should not be ignored. Both industrial and residential uses rate as less favorable than neutral, indicating that they should not be the primary choice of redevelopment options. This is not to say that these latter two options are unfeasible; as we hope to have shown through an extensive alternatives analysis, each option has its assets and

liabilities, and each option could well end up putting this site to beneficial use. However, a decision will ultimately have to be made regarding the proper use for this site, and we believe that we have shown, through our analysis, that a recreational use should be the first consideration if and when it comes time to take action with regard to this site.

Section 11: Summary of Findings

11.1 Summary and Discussion of Access Options

We attempted to carry out a relatively simple cost analysis of the various access options that could potentially work for the project site. Using construction costs quoted to us by various officials at Mass Highway, as well as North Adams Public Works, we developed a list of baseline costs for different projects. Obviously, the prices that we provide in this paper are low-end figures, as there was no way for us to account for the incidental costs entailed in road- and bridge-building projects. To this end, the numbers quoted in this paper report should be seen as “ballpark” or reference-range numbers that provide a general estimate of costs as well as the relative differences in cost between the various options.

This caveat aside, it appears that the cheapest access option would involve installing an active signal at the existing railroad crossing off of Massachusetts Avenue. Before this could happen, of course, a crossing easement would have to be granted by Guilford Transportation. This may be easier said than done, according to various reports of Guilford’s dealings with North Adams. Nonetheless, we feel that an effort should be made to obtain the crossing rights and the rights to build a signal at the entrance to the project site. This access route would be simple, direct, and would – according to a number of sources – be very affordable, whether or not the city could obtain some sort of matching funds grant from the state or federal government. It is possible, of course, that this option does not work out – either because Guilford manages to hold out or because the crossing is not deemed important enough for a state or federal agency to provide the matching grant. Even if the crossing is approved for signalization, of course, it should be kept in mind that the access route would result in an increased amount of traffic over the railroad tracks. And while a proper signal would make the crossing much safer than it currently is, every car that crosses the tracks is one more possibility for an accident. So while this access option is certainly

cheaper than the rest, it is not necessarily better. We are not willing, within the scope of this project, to undertake the rather morbid cost-benefit analysis that would involve valuing the city's potential liability for injury or death at this crossing against the value of saving money on this access option.

Rather, we will note that the second-cheapest option, the road from Protection Avenue, is eminently feasible and only marginally more expensive than the railroad crossing option (\$400,000 versus \$100,000 may not be a significant difference if a grant can be found to cover the bulk of the costs). As we have shown, this option does not involve the expensive process of building a bridge over the Hoosic River and does not impinge on anyone's property. As such, a road would be built south of the railroad tracks, between the tracks and the river. Given this siting, even the neighbors north of the railroad tracks would probably not be adversely affected by the potential road. We have noted, however, that this option would require extensive environmental remediation in order to build the road up out of the 100-year floodplain, as well as the difficult and expensive task of replicating compensatory flood storage downstream. Furthermore, some sort of species inventory would have to be carried out in order to determine if the habitat of any endangered or threatened species would be adversely affected by the construction of a road through that area. All things considered, however, we feel that the Protection Avenue access option could be extremely feasible and effective, and should therefore be considered strongly when the time comes to make a decision.

Should neither of the previous two options work out, the bridge from Route 2 is the next best choice. Due the expense, the regulatory hurdles that would need to be cleared, and the unforeseen problems that would likely occur, however, this option should not be selected unless no other access is available or unless the city can find a clear and compelling reason to build such an access road to the site. The Ashton Avenue access option is highly unfavorable, as it is quite expensive, requires a great deal of environmental remediation, and presents the added hurdle of a potential taking of private property for the purpose of building the road. Even if no eminent domain proceedings need take place and the road could be routed through the canoe launch parking lot, the hypothetical road could very well present a nuisance to abutting landowners. As with all other aspects of the study, we must ask if the redevelopment of this site

is important enough to risk local unrest for the purposes of providing access. To this end, we feel that the first three access options should be seriously entertained; if only the Ashton Avenue option remains, however, we suggest that it may simply not be worth going through the expense and neighborhood ill will of building an access road for a relatively isolated and spatially restricted site such as the parcel in question.

11.2 Summary and Discussion of Redevelopment Options

As we explained in considerable depth, we believe that the most feasible option for redevelopment involves some sort of recreational activity or activities. And clearly, the exact nature of these activities must be decided upon by residents of North Adams rather than three “independent consultants.” Based on our ratings, however, we believe that it would be foolish to rule out the option of commercial development on this site. As a matter of fact, the apparent feasibility of such a development on the site brings about the interesting possibility of a mixed-use development in which recreational and commercial activities coexist. The best possible scenario in which this could take place, we believe, involves the proposed bike trail. Whether bike trail comes through the project site or just passes by along the northern boundary, the redevelopment of the parcel could be intimately tied to the development of the bike trail. As we have mentioned, a recreational use would certainly work in conjunction with the recreational nature of the bike trail; in addition, a commercial development could well be geared toward the needs of bike trail users. There is no reason to think, then, that the two uses could not take place at the same time. Certainly, it is not too difficult to envision a bike path that passes through a large complex of public playing fields and a public park, and such a development could also be home to some small businesses such as a bike rental shop, a bike repair shop, a café or small restaurant, etc. Stated Kathy Keeser of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, “with the idea of a bike trail in mind, you could always have a small business, sports shop, or concession stand that could work in combination” (Kathy Keeser, Personal Communication, 5 December 2002).

Furthermore, it was suggested that the project site could serve as a hub or key access point for the bike trail. Since the project site is located between Williamstown and the North Adams city center, it could provide a critical on/off point for users or just a nice place to rest during a walk,

run, or bike ride. The possibility of the former sewage treatment plant site playing a large role in the bike trail project also raises the possibility of attracting more funding. By “piggybacking” on to the bike trail project, the site redevelopment could perhaps gain greater visibility and, therefore, funding. It is also possible that the two projects could work in conjunction and either share funding or obtain joint funding (the previous paragraph from a discussion with Rhonda Serre, Personal Communication, 14 November 2002).

Finally, Mike Nuvalle (Personal Communication, 12 December 2002) has also pointed out that any mixed-use development could also capitalize upon the nearby Appalachian Trail crossing (about 100 yards to the east, down the tracks). Just as the site could provide bike trail users with certain relevant goods and services, the site could also (or additionally) provide Appalachian Trail hikers with a place to stop, eat, stock up on supplies, or even perhaps stay the night. If there were a location near the trail where hikers could buy provisions or rest at a small hostel – and, even better, one that was in a location of great beauty – trail users could perhaps be induced to stop in North Adams rather than push on to the lodge atop Mt. Greylock. There is every reason to think that recreational and commercial development could complement and mutually benefit one another and the entire community. Therefore, we strongly suggest that such an option be entertained and researched.

Section 12: Future Actions

Having presented our analysis of the various development options surrounding the site, as well as some suggestions based upon these analyses, we have highlighted a short list of tasks that should be undertaken soon in order to capitalize upon the momentum we hope this report has provided. First of all, we believe that the Mayor’s Office should contact Guilford Transportation in order to negotiate the possibility of a railroad crossing. This should be done to begin fleshing out potential access options for the site, but also because Guilford and North Adams may be at a rare moment of détente. After the recent issue concerning Guilford’s protracted non-payment and then eventual payment of property tax to North Adams, it seems that now might be the moment to broach the topic of a crossing. According to Jennifer Ethier, Tax Collector for the City of North Adams, relations between the two parties have warmed a bit and some sort of settlement might be reached (Personal Communication, 15 November 2002). Perhaps this would require a

figure such as the Mayor himself pointing out Guilford's spotty record and suggesting that a goodwill gesture might serve to increase the company's standing as a "corporate citizen." Certainly, such an approach is worth a try.

Secondly, we believe that some sort of committee should be formed to oversee the redevelopment of this parcel. It makes sense that such a committee would be comprised primarily of Blackinton residents, although representation from throughout the city would be ideal. This committee would begin their own inquiry into possible redevelopment options for the site – using this report as a guide, if they agree with it, or setting off on their own and reaching independent conclusions. Such a committee would be better able to take the pulse of the community that we have been, and could perhaps take the additional step of determining not only what general category of development best fits the site, but also what specific kind of activity best makes use of all that the site has to offer.

Finally, such a committee should work in conjunction with the Berkshire Bike Coalition in order to discuss the co-evolution of the two projects. Each project could reinforce the other, and it is important that there is cooperation at every step of the way. Combined action could help to get more people interested in the projects than might have been the case otherwise, and the two causes could also work together to find funding sources that one or the other would not have been able to find or to benefit from alone. It does not seem farfetched to suggest that the two projects proceed jointly, and we would imagine that there would be little opposition to such a notion.

In the end, we must remember that the chief goal of our project was to determine some possible use for this site, which has lain dormant for the past 25 years. As we discovered through our research and our site visits, this piece of property can be truly spectacular, nestled as it is in a valley between mountain ranges – centrally located and yet seemingly removed from the world. As Rick Moon told us, "most people forget that this site is even here, even though it's basically in their back yards" (Personal Communication, 31 October 2002). And so it would seem that the primary goal is getting people on to the site to realize that it is, in fact, a place worth remembering. As Ray Smith said, "having just over 10 acres of land that is rough that you can

forge ahead with is almost unheard of in any part of the Berkshire area” (Personal Communication, 5 December 2002). Taking this into consideration, we believe that the time has come to bring this parcel of land back into the public consciousness – but to do so in a way that maintains the beauty of the site and provides a benefit to as many people as possible. We hope that this report has provided the inspiration and the necessary information for such an outcome to take place.

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