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ENVI 302: Environmental Planning and Analysis Workshop  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Site Descriptions	
B&L Corner.....	6
Old Town Garage.....	8
Applicability of the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act.....	10
Early History of Sites.....	11
Relevant Policies	
Parking Regulations.....	12
Town and College Policies.....	14
Development options for B&L Corner.....	21
Development options for Old Town Garage.....	24
Development	
Considerations.....	27
Survey of Spring Street Merchants.....	42
Specific Recommendations.....	45
Conclusions.....	46
Appendix: Building a Pathways System.....	47
References.....	56

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## **Introduction**

Williamstown's Master Planning Committee is still in the early stages of its work of describing what it wants Williamstown to look like in the future, but this group has already made clear its concern for the development of what it termed the "town center." This town center has historically consisted of Spring Street and Water Street. Two nearly abandoned lots on these streets, the first owned by Williams College and the other by the town itself, present the most immediate opportunities to enhance a town center that continues to play its key historical role today. This report examines the development possibilities for the recently closed B&L gas station on the corner of Spring St. and Latham St. and the former Old Town Garage site on Water Street across from the Green River Linear Park. In determining which development option or options would best enhance the town center, two goals are paramount – finding a "keystone" use for the B&L corner and using the Old Town Garage site to spark a commercial rejuvenation on Water Street.

Town Manager Peter Fohlin has been one of many to express his hope of seeing a building (or non-building) on the B&L corner that will draw people down to the end of Spring Street (personal interview, October 2000). The importance of this standard hinges on the uncertain future of other sites in the area. Specifically, the relative need for a keystone use on the B&L corner depends upon the potential to build such a use somewhere else at the end of Spring Street. Additionally, the town center may be moving or expanding in the near future to include sections of Latham Street, which would add significance to any major draw on the corner of Spring and Latham.

The Old Town Garage site, zoned as part of the relatively unrestricted Village Business district, is a rarity on Water Street. Since development on this site is possible on a scale greater than most other areas nearby, the Old Town Garage site presents a unique opportunity to draw more shoppers to Water St. and the businesses both already there and potentially coming in the future.

The development of sites can enhance the Town Center together as well as separately. This report's appendix analyzes the possibilities for building an off-street pedestrian and (perhaps bicycle) pathway between the two sites, linking not just these two sites but all of Spring St and Water St.

While the effects development of these sites will have on the town center constitute a primary concern of this report, the sites also present opportunities to meet a broad range of other demands and needs. Some of these are exclusively College concerns, some are limited to the town, and still others are shared. All of these considerations will help determine the benefits and drawbacks of development options on the sites.

• *Faculty housing shortage (College)*

According to the College's Director of Housing Tom McEvoy, Williams has experienced a shortage of faculty housing in recent years, and expects the situation to worsen as the market for housing continues to grow tighter (personal communication, December 2000).

• *Demand for office space in the town center (Town)*

The types of small businesses that continue to populate Water St. can provide the town with a range of jobs and an increase in tax revenue.

• *Parking shortage (shared)*

Both Spring Street and Water Street have significantly less parking available than the zoning bylaw prescribes (report to the Planning Board, 1995). The demand for parking is enough to sustain low ongoing rumblings about a parking garage as a possible solution (Master Plan Committee meeting, September 2000).

• *Lack of a central park in the town center (shared)*

Though the aforementioned Green River Linear Park and Field Park, in front of the town library, are both nearby, the town center lacks an easily accessible central park.

• *Need for a new police station (Town)*

The Williamstown Police Department currently operates out of three rooms in the Town Hall. The department lacks both office space and a sufficient "sallyport" (yard for impounded or otherwise retained vehicles). As a virtually undeveloped town-owned site,

the Old Town Garage site presents an obvious option for the site of a new station (Arthur Parker, Chief of Police, personal communication, December 2000).

• *Upgrading athletics facilities (College)*

Towne Field House, which borders the B&L corner, houses the Track & Field Team's indoor track, which does not meet regulation standards (Pete Farwell, track coach, personal communication, December 2000). In addition to deficiencies with the track, the building itself is too small to accommodate the uses of multiple teams that use the facility as a practice area in the early spring.

• *Building the local tax base (Town)*

While new businesses should generate jobs and tax revenue for the town, both a municipal use on the Old Town Garage site and an educational use on the B&L corner would exempt these sites from municipal taxes and remove them from the town tax rolls.

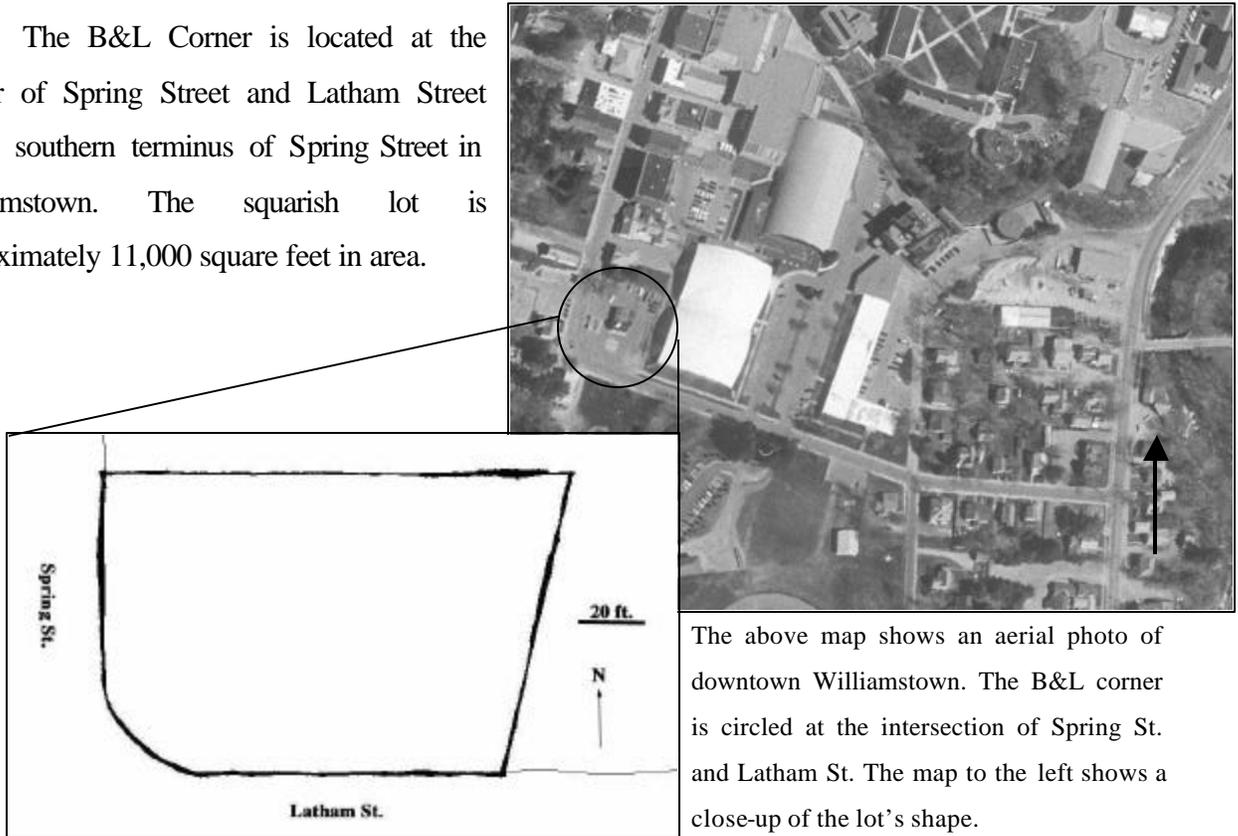
• *Improving Town/College relations (shared)*

While it is difficult to measure the value or status of relations between Williamstown and Williams College, the battle over the location of the Theater and Dance Complex undeniably strained relations between the two parties. The B&L corner site in particular presents an opportunity to either rebuild burnt bridges or burn remaining ones (Helen Ouellette, personal interview, October, 2000)

## Site Descriptions

### B&L Corner

The B&L Corner is located at the corner of Spring Street and Latham Street at the southern terminus of Spring Street in Williamstown. The squarish lot is approximately 11,000 square feet in area.



The above map shows an aerial photo of downtown Williamstown. The B&L corner is circled at the intersection of Spring St. and Latham St. The map to the left shows a close-up of the lot's shape.

The lot is located in Williamstown's Village Business District, as defined in the Williamstown Zoning Bylaw. Surrounding the B&L corner are a variety of uses. Being in the Village Business District, there are many retail and commercial businesses near the property. Additionally, above many of the retail buildings are offices and apartments. Directly to the north of the property is an office building that serves a local law firm and the Williamstown Theater Festival. The corner is also adjacent to property owned by Williams College. To the east of the lot is the College's Towne Field House, which houses an indoor track. Finally, south of the property, across Spring Street, lies the Meade Block, where Robin's Restaurant operated most recently. East of the Meade Block lies open space that is not developable because of boundaries established under the Massachusetts Rivers and Wetlands Protection Act.

All that currently remains on the site is a gutted service station building that housed the B&L operation. The petroleum storage tanks that were used with the gas station were torn out after the business left.

## B&L Corner Photos



Left: This shot was taken from in front of Library Antiques on Spring Street looking south. The Meade Block is straight ahead with the B&L corner, here blocked by buildings, to its left. The American Legion is to the right.

Right: This is a photo from the southern terminus of Spring Street looking to the north during the fall's extensive construction. On the right side of the photo is the B&L corner.



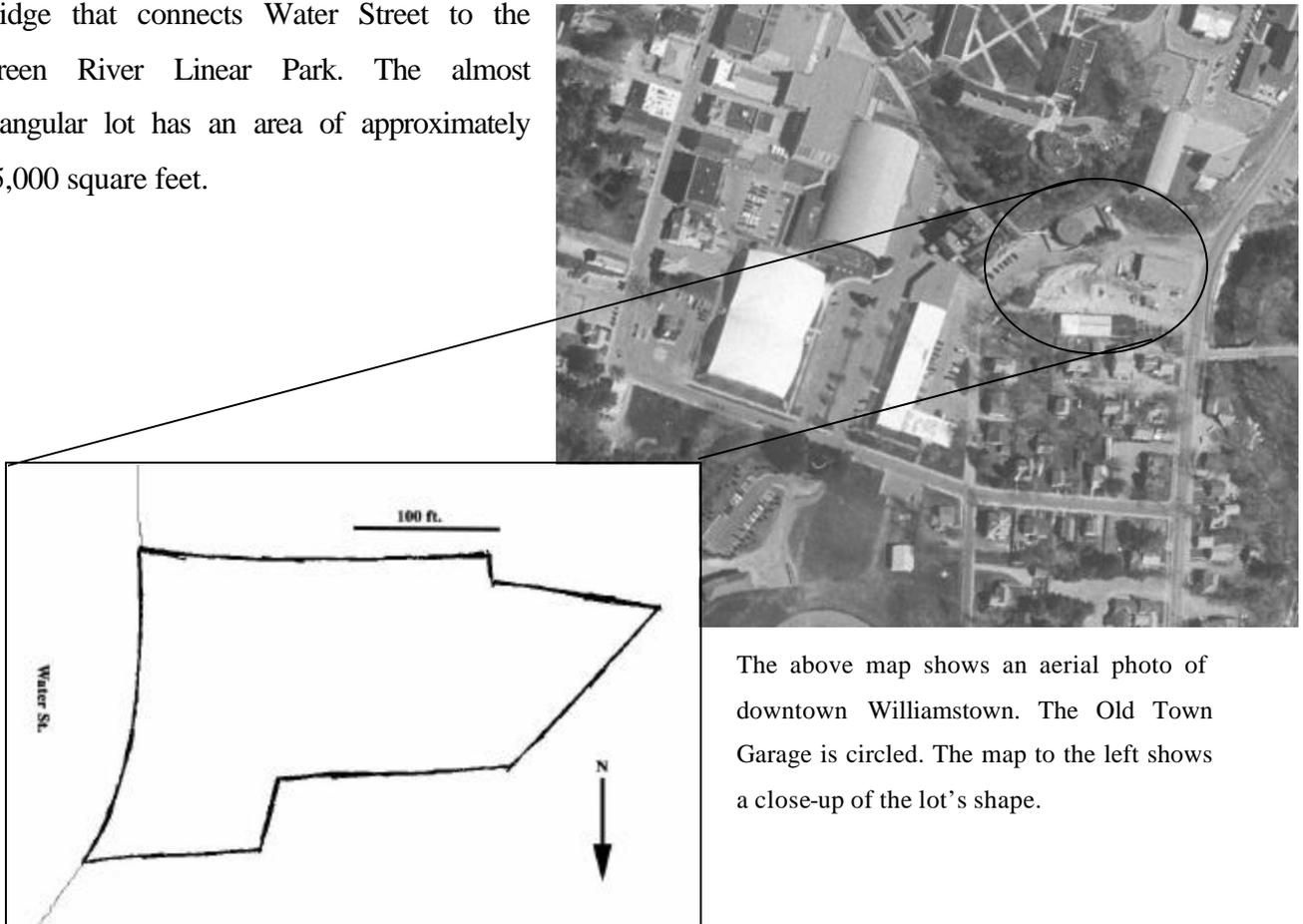
Left: This is a shot taken of the B&L corner from the west side of Spring Street. The building is the service station built in 1952 and abandoned over the summer of 2000. The College's Towne Field House is in the back.

Right: This photo was taken from back of the B&L corner lot looking east across Spring Street. The Meade Block is on the left, with the Travel Store across the street.



## Old Town Garage

The Old Town Garage site is located on the west side of Water Street, just north of the bridge that connects Water Street to the Green River Linear Park. The almost triangular lot has an area of approximately 45,000 square feet.



The above map shows an aerial photo of downtown Williamstown. The Old Town Garage is circled. The map to the left shows a close-up of the lot's shape.

Just like the B&L corner, the Old Town Garage is zoned as Village Business District land under the Williamstown Zoning Bylaw. This places it in the middle of a string of businesses up and down Water Street to the north and south. Also near the lot are college-owned lands, including the Buildings and Grounds complex and heating plant to the west and southwest and the Spencer Art Studio to the north. Also nearby is the Williamstown Fire Department, east across Water Street. Finally, across Water Street and down a steep slope lies the Green River. Past the river lies the Green River Linear Park.

There are several existing structures on the Old Town Garage site, but only one of them is substantial. The substantial building is the main garage building which fronts onto Water Street. The other two buildings are a few salt and sand sheds at the back of the lot and a truck garage that runs along the south side of the lot.

## Old Town Garage Photos



Left: This is an aerial shot taken of the back of the Old Town Garage site. The picture was taken from the stairway behind the faculty art studios attached to the college heating plant. The white building on the right is the site's truck garage.

Right: This picture was shot from Water Street facing west toward the Old Town Garage. On the right is the main garage building, while to the left in the background is the college heating plant.



Left: This picture was also taken from Water Street looking west toward the lot. The white building on the left is the truck garage, while the wooden buildings in the center are the salt and sand sheds.

Left: This was shot from the east side of Water Street near the entrance to the Green River Linear Park. This is what the Old Town Garage site looks like from the highway.



## **Applicability of the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act**

Both of the sites that we are exploring are located reasonably close to significant bodies of water: the B&L corner lies close to Christmas Brook and has been rumored to have run-off from a spring under the American Legion building running under it and the Old Town Garage is just across the highway from the Green River. In this case, it is necessary to examine the applicability of the Massachusetts Wetlands and Rivers protection act to see if it will have any impact on development at these sites.

In the case of the B&L corner, though the site is close to Christmas Brook, it is not located in a riparian zone or a buffer zone for wetlands. It is a grandfathered property inside what otherwise might be a non-conforming use, and it is protected from regulation by Latham and Spring Streets which pass between the brook and the corner. The biggest chance for applicability seemed to be the possibility of run-off from a spring located beneath the American legion being carried in a covered culvert under the corner. This would have demanded any development on the site to file a notice of intent before development could begin. However, in speaking with a representative from the American Legion, the supervisor for the Spring Street reconstruction project and the head plumber at Williams College Buildings and Grounds, there is no indication that such an outflow pipe carrying a protected resource exists. In that case, the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act should have no effect on development on the B&L corner.

As for the Water Street site, the lot is not located in a buffer zone either, as there is no protected area along the shoreline of the river. The only possible place for application of the act is for water that often collects in the basement of the main garage near the front of the property. Since there is a culvert that takes this outflow off of the lot and into the Green River, the water itself is considered a protected resource. To ensure its protection, the town or whoever eventually develops the site will have to file a notice of intent with the Williamstown Conservation Commission outlining steps as to how it will protect the water resource.

## Early History of Sites

At the moment, these sites may appear simply as unused, abandon lots, but the history of these properties is rich and integral to the history of the town itself. The history of Spring Street dates back to around 1800, when the street was no more than a footpath used by students and townspeople to retrieve water from two springs down by Christmas Brook. It was not until 1847 that the street was opened up to construction. In “The Story of a Street” in the 1949-50 Eph Williams Handbook, it said that “Williamstown’s future market street was in 1847 a quiet lane in a country town, devoid of the business houses which were, in fact, infrequent even around the corner on Main Street.” That all changed, however, when a Williamstown businessman, S.V.R. Hoxsey, owned the property along the sides of the street and made several lots available for construction. The lots filled with businesses, and the area became the town’s center of commerce. Spring Street continued to develop in the early 1900’s, attracting businesses suitable for a college town. Though the uses changed over the years, the street’s character remains much the same today, with a double row of street-level retail businesses with office space and apartments primarily located on second and third floors.

The B&L corner site was home to residential development during much of Spring Street’s history. The first non-residential use identified there was, in fact, a service station in the 1930’s. Though ownership changed, this use continued through the summer of 2000, when Art Lafave closed his B&L Mobil station. The building that currently resides on the site was built in 1952 by the Gulf Oil Company.

The history of Water Street and the Old Town Garage is somewhat similar to that of Spring Street and the B&L corner, with mixed residential and commercial development and a longstanding use that recently ended. Except where it connected with Main Street, Water Street had limited development until around 1900. Among the businesses were a blacksmith shop located south of the Old Town Garage site, a lumberyard to the north and a few mills on the Green River further south. The Old Town Garage site, however, was residential until 1906, when a flood of the Green River washed out the road and the houses on the front of the Old Town Garage site. The site was later used as a salvage shop, and in 1959 Williamstown developed it as the Water Street Garage. It remained as the town municipal garage until a few years ago, when the garage was moved from the town center. The site has most recently been used as a

contractor's yard by Maximillian for the Water Street bridge project and by Roads Construction for the Spring Street construction project.

## **Relevant Policies**

Policies that will affect what re-use projects will be possible at the B&L corner and the Old Town Garage are policies that will restrict the size and use of buildings that would be built on these two lots. In Williamstown, the most formal of these policies is the Williamstown Zoning By-Law, which explicitly defines building dimension requirements as well as parking requirements for development in the different zoning districts in town. In addition to the policies contained in this explicit written document, the town and the college both hold certain unwritten policies that will also impact the nature of development in the town center.

## **Parking requirements (and other relevant sections of the Williamstown Zoning Bylaw)**

The Williamstown zoning bylaw, Chapter 70 of "The code of the town of Williamstown," established multiple zoning districts throughout town. Both the OTG site and the B&L corner are located in the centralized Village Business district, which "is intended to accommodate a broad mixture of uses in a compact pedestrian-oriented environment." (§70-2.2) In order to enable a range of uses, the bylaw places relatively restrictions upon Village Business lots in terms of both uses and dimensions of buildings. For purposes of this project, building a park on either site would require a special permit from the Planning Board. While the bylaw prohibits ground floor residences, apartments above another use are allowable by a similar permit from the Planning Board. (§70-3.3a) The only other relevant use regulation in the district is the prohibition of the two most recent uses of these sites -- service stations and garages. (§70-3.3b)

The Village Business district imposes even fewer dimensional restrictions. These include minimal five-foot side and rear setbacks, but no coverage restrictions (§70-4.3). Buildings in the Village Business district can be as high as forty feet, or roughly three stories, and most buildings on Spring Street are this high. (§70-4.1a). Lastly, as these two sites are both located on corners

(the OTG lot is on Water Street and Heating Plant Drive), a corner visibility requirement of 25 feet along both sides applies in order to guard against traffic collisions (§70-4.2c). Colleges, as educational institutions, can qualify for exemptions to certain dimensional regulations (not including height), but such a process is probably unnecessary with so few restrictions.

The main application of the zoning bylaw on each of these sites will be its parking requirements for various uses. So as to avoid the common problem of private business owners not accounting for their own parking needs and the trying to saddle the town with them, the bylaw specifies the number of parking spaces (at 300 square feet each) for which each use must account (§70-6.1).

**REQUIRED PARKING SPACES FOR VILLAGE BUSINESS USES**

<b>Use</b>	<b>Required parking spaces</b>
Apartments	1 per bedroom up to 3 bedrooms per unit
Places of public assembly	set by the Planning Board
Restaurants	1.5 per 4 seats, plus 1 per every 2 employees
Offices	1 per 250 sq. ft. of floor area
Retail	1 per 250 sq. ft. of building floor area, plus 1 per every two employees

In 1995, these requirements called for a total of 819 spaces accessible along Spring Street, but only 320 existed. Similar requirements for other commercial districts meant that Water Street needed 342 spaces, a goal of which it fell 50 short. Some businesses deal with this parking crunch by sharing spaces at different times of day with other businesses. To many business-owners, the large Old Town Garage site presents a logical place for public parking (whether a lot or garage) to alleviate the shortage. That same year, the zoning bylaw was amended at the town meeting in order to enforce these requirements more stringently. Under the current law, the only way a building on Spring St. can avoid having to meet its entire quota with on-site parking (instead of counting adjacent public parking spaces under §70-6.1c) is if “virtually all of the use's parking needs would be created after 6:00 P.M.” (§70-1.4f)

In light of this amendment and College Vice President of Administration Helen Ouellette’s statement that the new use of the B&L corner will be “self-contained” in terms of

parking (personal interview, October 2000), the above requirements will dictate the allowable building size for any given use or combinations of uses. This holds particularly true on the smaller B&L corner site.

### **Town and College Policies**

Town and College policies that will affect the development of the two-town sites project are not only plans for either lot in particular but also plans which will impact the downtown area in general. With respect to town policies and plans, the most directly relevant is the 1998 report of the *Committee on the Re-Use of the Old Town Garage Site on Water Street*, but plans which affect the nature of traffic flow on Spring St. and the town tax base will also impact the nature of development at these two sites.

The Williamstown Planning Board formed the *Committee on the Re-Use of the Old Town Garage Site on Water Street* in April of 1996. The responsibility of the committee was to answer the following question:

*Assuming the town garage was to move to another site, what would be the best re-use of the current site?*

In addressing this question, the main options the committee considered were commercial development and a new town police station. The police station option developed out of the town's need for an improved police station as the current facility is too small and cramped. The garage site has the advantage of a central location, which is close to both fire and ambulance facilities. This use would also provide space for additional public parking, which is in shortage on both Spring and Water Streets. While the need for a police station was and continues to be substantial, the committee felt that a municipal use of the site would cost the town tax revenue, which would place the town under financial stress. Additionally, the activities of the committee included an appraisal of the site, which found that the highest value of the land would be realized if the lot was converted to a vacant parcel to be used for business.

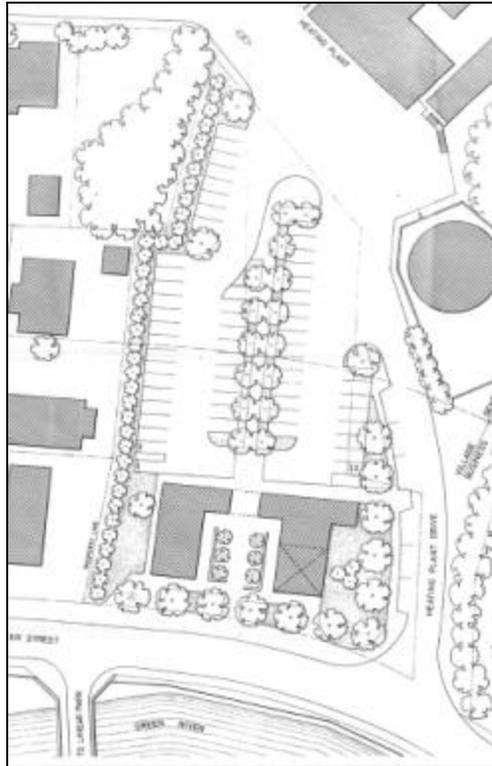
The recommendations of this committee came as a report submitted on March 2, 1998. The committee recommended that the site be used for commercial purposes with the condition that at least 25 municipal parking spaces are provided in addition to parking to accommodate the

uses developed on the site. The committee hired Bartels Architecture and Landscape Design to develop a re-use and utilization study that would show how adequate parking and mixed

commercial space could be provided on the site in a manner that is in keeping with the character and quality of Water St. The plan developed by Bartels shows a 2-story commercial building, which is composed of two separate building volumes with a second floor connection (Figure 1), thus only one elevator is required to make the building accessible. The building scale and massing are in keeping with the character of nearby residential buildings. The gross floor area is 9500 sq. ft. for commercial use with 4600 sq. ft. for retail use on the first floor and 4900 sq. ft. on the second floor for office use.

The Bartels analysis shows that commercial and parking uses can be accommodated on this site in a way that respects the scale and character of the existing street. The feeling of the committee was that business uses at this site would draw more people to Water Street and thus improve the business climate there while also adding to the town's tax base. They also felt that the addition of a small public open space, that can be seen in figure 1, would encourage people to linger on the street and that a busy streetscape at this location would connect the upper and lower Water Street areas. While a commercial use would enhance the downtown area, the committee felt that a police station would accentuate the separation along the street that is already imposed by geography and the existing pattern of development.

**Figure 1: Re-Use of Old Town Garage Site (Bartels Architecture and Landscape Design, 1998).**



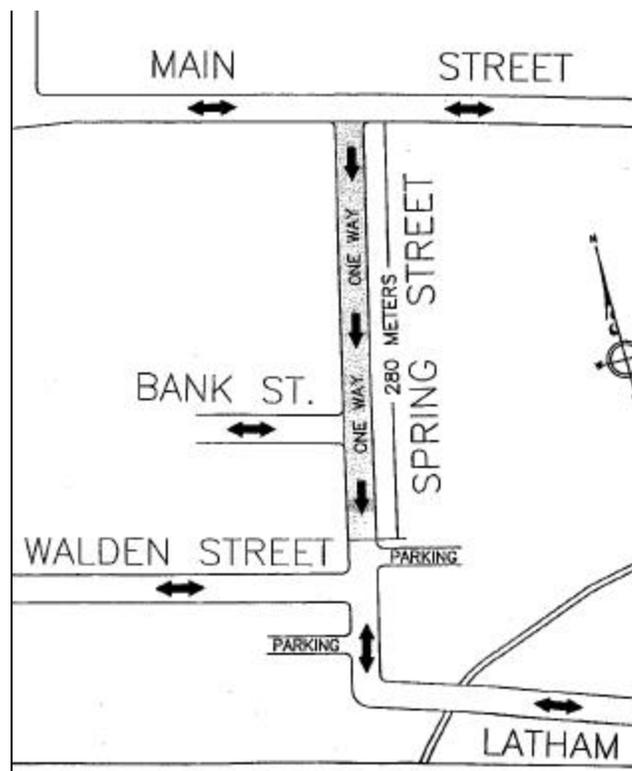
Since these recommendations were made, nothing has happened on the Old Town Garage site with respect to commercial development or implementation of this plan. Because progress has been stagnant, it seems appropriate at this point in time to re-evaluate plans for future development of this lot to be sure that the recommendations made in 1998 are still be the best option. In considering alternative uses of this site, the committee's report will play a significant role in that it clearly defines the town's opinion with respect to the use of this piece of land. Additionally, because the town is the owner of this particular parcel of land, the opinion of the municipal government will have significant control over what will and will not happen on this site.

While the town's specific intentions for the Old Town Garage site will seriously affect our recommendations for the future use of this site, the town's decisions about the nature of traffic flow on Spring St. will impact what happens on both the Water St. and Spring St. sites. At the Town Meeting in May 2000, the decision was made to convert Spring St. a one-way street with traffic moving from North to South. The one-way flow of traffic was intended to ease the vehicular congestion that would result from construction on the street during the following year

as belowground water and sewer systems were renovated and restored. The current situation has only been approved for one year, and if Spring St. is to remain one-way permanently, another decision will have to be made at the 2001 Town Meeting.

If Spring St. were to remain one way, traffic patterns would look like those depicted in figure 2. This sort of traffic pattern would increase the number of people that drive down Spring St. and then around the corner onto Latham and Water Streets. This increased visibility would make it easier to incorporate Water St., and the Old Town Garage site in particular, into the town center. This sort of traffic pattern also stresses the importance of putting a use on the B&L corner that will attract people down the street. If Spring St. returns to two-way traffic, a focus would be maintained on Spring St. as the center of town. This focus would make it important for the use on the Old Town Garage site to be able to stand on its own and not depend necessarily on traffic coming off of Spring St.

**Figure 2: One-Way Spring Street (Williamstown Board of Selectmen, 2000)**



Just as the town's decision about traffic on Spring St. could have implications for both the Old Town Garage and the B&L corner site, the town's plan for its municipal tax revenue also

will influence what uses the town would like to see in both locations. Generally, one could say that the town would like to limit the development of tax-exempt uses in the town center. As was discussed earlier with the plan for the re-use of the Old Town Garage, one of the reasons the committee decided against a police station at this site was the loss of taxes it would create. Similarly, the town would not like to see tax-exempt educational uses at either site. For this reason, there is essentially no possibility that the town will sell the Old Town Garage property to the college, and it is likely that the town would support ideas that maintained B&L corner as a taxable property as well.

With respect to college policies that will impact the nature of the two-town sites project, relevant policies will include: plans for B&L corner itself as well as plans for Towne Field House, Buildings and Grounds and the Meade Block. Policies that will affect the rents paid for college owned commercial properties on Spring St. will also have implications for the viability of different uses on the B&L corner.

Because the college still does not own the B&L corner site, the administration has no official plan for how they intend to use the site. Helen Ouellette, the vice-president of administration, has said that she would like to see B&L corner used as a site to draw people down to the end of Spring St. Based on comments from Ouellette, it seems possible to assert that the B&L corner will not be developed as a purely college building, but rather will serve as an interface with the rest of the town.

Current difficulties with the Towne Field House (figure 3) arise from the fact that the existing building is too small to accommodate its multiple uses. According to Peter Farwell, the Head Track Coach, the indoor track is smaller than regulation 200-meter tracks, and so is 9 laps to a mile instead of 8. Additionally, championship meets must be held on six lane tracks, while the Williams track has only four lanes. Further, the pole-vault and long jump have runways which conflict with the track, and the weight throw area is dangerous because all teams and spectators must be on the infield because there is no outside-the-track area for seating. Additional conflicts arise when other spring teams must practice inside the track during track & field practices. There is also very limited storage space, and the climbing wall is expanding adding another element of space restriction. Despite obvious problems with the current facility, Helen Ouellette has said that the college has no current plans to expand the building.

Specifically, she has said that expansion onto the B&L site would be prohibited by the footpath between the field house and the corner that serves as an essential right of way.

**Figure 3: Herbert S. Towne Field House ([http://www.williams.edu/admin-depts/bg/field\\_house.html](http://www.williams.edu/admin-depts/bg/field_house.html))**



The possibility of moving the buildings and grounds facility (figure 4) to a less central location has also been discussed among Williams administrators, although at this time there is no specific plan for this move. Relocation of this facility would certainly allow for athletic facility expansion to the east, alleviating the need to expand west onto the B&L corner.

**Figure 4: Buildings & Grounds Service Building ([http://www.williams.edu/admin-depts/bg/service\\_building.html](http://www.williams.edu/admin-depts/bg/service_building.html))**



The Meade Block is another college owned property at the south end of Spring St. whose future use will have implications for the two-town sites project. During negotiations while the new Williams Theater and Dance Center was going to be built on the South end of the street, the American Legion agreed to sell their property to the College with the condition that the College build them a new and improved building. The College has guaranteed that the Meade Block lot will be the site of the new American Legion. Peter Fohlin, the Town Manager, has commented that there needs to be a “keystone” use at the end of Spring St.

“The site needs to beckon to people. When they look down the street, it needs to call to them. I want everybody on Spring Street who faces that direction to wonder what it is, want to go there, and find it open when they do.”

-Peter Fohlin, Town Manager, October 30, 2000

Because the American Legion would not qualify as a “keystone” use this need will essentially be transferred to the B&L site across the street.

The final College policy that will affect the development of the two-town sites project will be the nature of the college’s rent structure for its commercial properties on Spring St. The College is currently offering much lower commercial rents than other commercial landlords in town. From an interview with Timothy Reisler from buildings and Grounds, it seems that the college is offering an average commercial rent on Spring St. of about \$9.50 per sq. ft. per year, a price that often includes taxes and utilities. Rents from other landlords on the street range from \$15 - \$20 per sq. ft. per year and do not include either taxes or utilities. The lower rents seem to be an indication that the College feels an obligation to the community to maintain a good mix of business operating in town. The price to rent space in any new buildings will have serious implications for what types of businesses move into the space, so whether or not the College will extend this reduced rent policy to a new building could have serious implications for the viability of different uses at this site.

## Development Options for B&L Corner

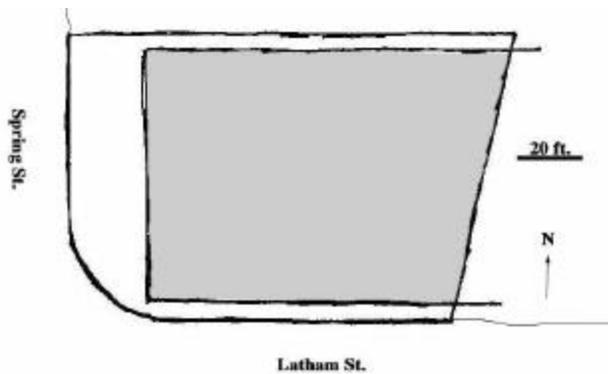
In deciding what should be developed on the B&L corner, we looked at options that had been previously suggested and those that we believed might be beneficial uses. Below is a list of the uses that we considered as viable for the lot:

- Continue prior use: service station.
- Commercial/retail space.
- Parking lot/garage.
- Extension of field house.
- Fitness center.
- Restaurant space.
- Office/professional space.

Right away, we are able to rule out the ideas of a service station and a parking lot/ garage. The service station use had been a non-conforming use in the Village Business district, which had been allowed because the use existed prior to the establishment of the Williamstown Zoning By-Law and designated zoning districts. After the below-ground gas tanks had been removed when B&L Mobil went out of business, it was no longer possible to reinstate this non-conforming use, and so developing a new service station on the lot would not have been possible under the town's zoning laws. Initially we had considered a parking structure of some sort as a measure to alleviate parking congestion that would result from the development of the new Williams College Performing Arts center on the southwest corner of Spring St., but as President Shapiro's October decision not to build this new facility in this location, we no longer felt that such a drastic measure was necessary to accommodate parking in town.

After eliminating these two options, we then discussed each of the remaining options and refined our list into four distinct possibilities that we thought would be best for the sites and represent a variety of interests. We prepared a list of choices and then assigned advantageous and disadvantageous attributes for each possibility. The four choices we came up with were the following: an extension of the College's Towne Field House; a three-story retail building; a three-story mixed use building with retail, office space and apartments; and a park with open

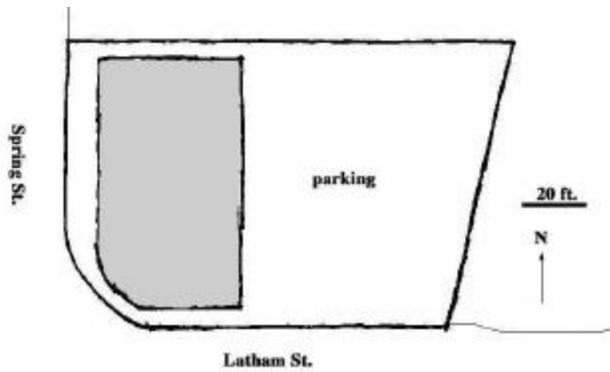
space. Below are figures of each of the options and the rationale we used to select each of the options as viable choices.



**Option 1: Field House.**

As Williams will likely own the lot and it is close to the College's existing athletic facilities, this development is a strong option to keep athletics centralized. Some in town have said that additional athletic space is needed. The extension would cover 11,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of the lot and include no on-site parking.

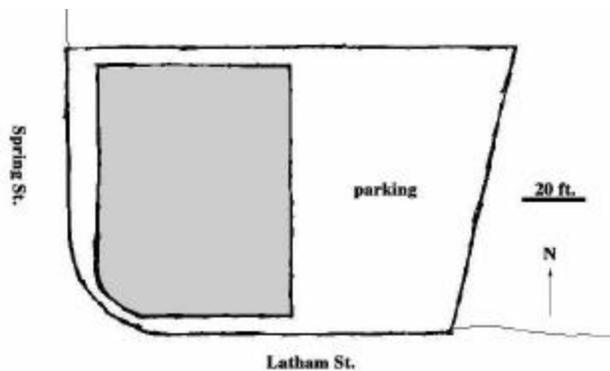
<b><i>Lot Size</i></b>	11,000 sq. ft. on the corner of Spring St. and Latham St.
<b><i>Building Size</i></b>	10,000 sq. ft. footprint (80 ft. by 125 ft.), equal in height to current Towne Field House.
<b><i>Building Use</i></b>	Extension of Towne Field House.
<b><i>Parking</i></b>	No on-site parking.



**Option 2: Three-story retail.**

Many believe that the town needs more retail space for services the downtown lacks. A large building dedicated to retail could fill this void, bringing in a ‘keystone’ use business. The new 40-ft. tall building would have three floors of retail space that could serve one store or be divided among a few. The building would have a 3,700 ft<sup>2</sup> footprint and have self-contained parking.

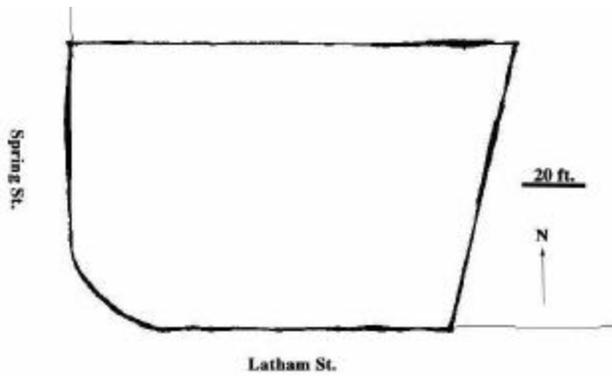
<b>Lot Size</b>	11,000 sq. ft. on the corner of Spring St. and Latham St.
<b>Building Size</b>	3,700 sq. ft. footprint (80 ft by 46 ft.) 40 ft. tall, 3-story building equal in height to Spring St. buildings.
<b>Building Use</b>	3 floors of retail space (11,000 sq. ft.)
<b>Parking</b>	On-site parking to accommodate all employees and customers.



**Option 3: Three-story mixed use.**

Again, this building could address some of the community’s needs for retail and office space, and offer the College a few faculty apartments. The first floor would be retail space, the second offices and the third three apartments. The extension would have a 4,700 ft<sup>2</sup> footprint and be 40 feet tall. It would also have self-contained parking.

<b>Lot Size</b>	11,000 sq. ft. on the corner of Spring St. and Latham St.
<b>Building Size</b>	4,700 sq. ft. footprint (80 ft. by 60 ft.), 40 ft. tall, 3-story building equal in height to Spring St. buildings.
<b>Building Use</b>	1 floor retail space (4,700 sq. ft.) 1 floor office space (4,700 sq. ft.) 1 floor apartments (3 x 1,500 sq. ft.)
<b>Parking</b>	On-sit parking to accommodate all residents, employees, office users, and customers.



**Option 4: Park.**  
 As there are few undeveloped areas in downtown Williamstown, a park at the end of the street could be an attractive option. This area would be a space where people in the community and tourists could gather and relax or have a picnic. The site would be undeveloped and have no parking on it.

<b>Lot Size</b>	<i>11,000 sq. ft. on the corner of Spring St. and Latham St.</i>
<b>Building Size</b>	No building.
<b>Building Use</b>	No building.
<b>Parking</b>	No parking.

**Development Options for the Old Town Garage**

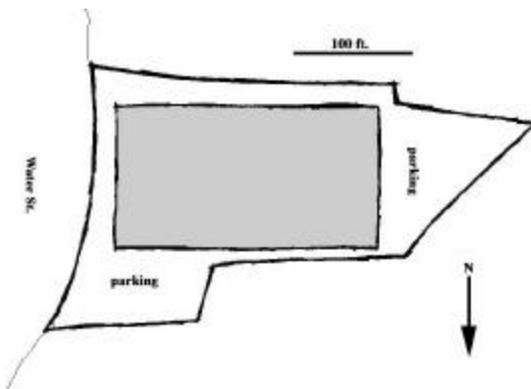
In deciding what should be developed on the Old Town Garage, again, we looked at options that had been previously suggested and those that we believed might be best serve the area. Below is a list of the uses that we considered as viable for the lot:

- Parking lot/garage.
- Commercial/retail space.
- Park: extension of Green River Linear Park.
- Office/professional space.
- Restaurant space.

Initially we were able to rule out the option of restaurant space because there are already four well-established and successful restaurants operating nearby on Water St.

We then discussed each of the remaining options and refined our list into four distinct possibilities that we thought would be best for the sites and represent a variety of interests. Again, hoped to create a list of the best development options for the site for which we could

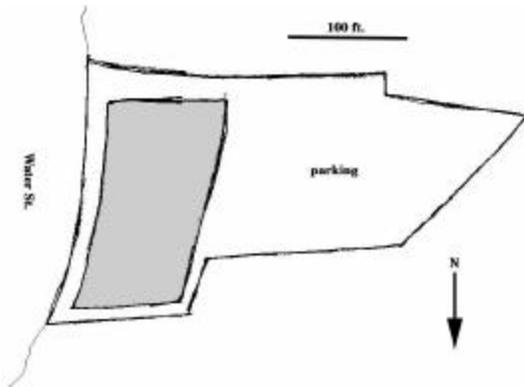
assign advantageous and disadvantageous attributes. The four choices we came up with were the following: a new police station for the Town of Williamstown; a two-story retail building; a two-story mixed use building with retail on the first floor and office space on the second; and a park with open space that could somehow be connected to the Green River Linear Park located east across Water Street. Below are figures of each of the options and the rationale we used to select each of the options as viable choices.



**Option 1: Police Station.**

Some in town have said that the current police station on North Street is too small and that the town needs a new facility. As there are few open lots left owned by the town, this site is a possible candidate. The new station would be two or three stories high, cover 26,400 ft<sup>2</sup> of the lot and have self-contained parking.

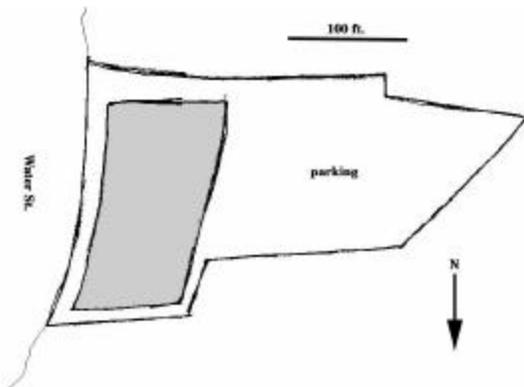
<b>Lot size</b>	45,000 sq. ft. on Water St.
<b>Building size</b>	26,400 sq. ft. footprint (120 ft. by 220 ft.); 2 or 3 stories.
<b>Building use</b>	Police Station
<b>Parking</b>	On-site parking to accommodate use of station.



**Option 2: Two-story retail.**

As the lot is in the Village Business District, retail development would be a recommended option. In this site, it could connect development at the north and south ends of Water Street. The two-story building would have a 19,000 ft<sup>2</sup> footprint, have self-contained parking and offer an additional 25 public parking spaces.

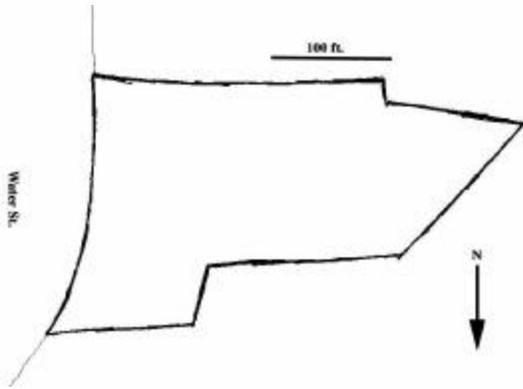
<b>Lot size</b>	45,000 sq. ft. on Water St.
<b>Building size</b>	19,000 sq. ft. footprint (200 ft. by 95 ft.), 2-story building similar in height to other Water St. buildings.
<b>Building use</b>	2 floors of retail (38,000 sq. ft.)
<b>Parking</b>	On-site parking to accommodate all employees and customers as well as 25 public parking spaces.



**Option 3: Two-story mixed use.**

Just like the all-retail building, a mixed use building on the lot could provide benefits that many in town are asking for and help link businesses at the ends of Water Street. The building would have a 19,000 ft<sup>2</sup> footprint, have self-contained parking and offer an additional 25 public parking spaces.

<b>Lot size</b>	45,000 sq. ft. on Water St.
<b>Building size</b>	19,000 sq. ft. footprint (200 ft. by 95 ft.), 2-story building similar in height to other Water St. buildings.
<b>Building use</b>	1 floor of retail (19,000 sq. ft.) 1 floor of office (19,000 sq. ft.)
<b>Parking</b>	On-site parking to accommodate all employees and customers as well as 25 public parking spaces.



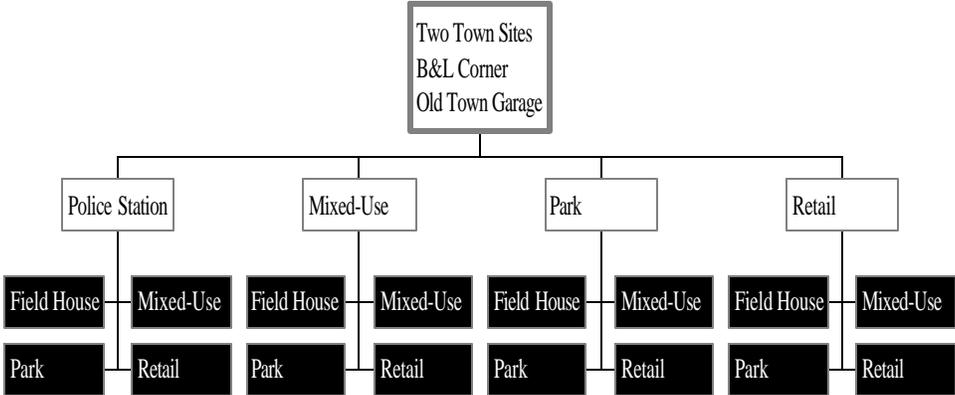
**Option 4: Park.**  
 With the Green River Linear Park located across Water Street, the Old Town Garage site could be used to create a more expansive park. It would provide green space in the downtown area and offer community members and tourists a nice place to relax and hold events. The site would be undeveloped and have no parking on it.

<b>Lot size</b>	45,000 sq. ft. on Water St.
<b>Building size</b>	No building.
<b>Building use</b>	No building.
<b>Parking</b>	No parking.

**Development Considerations**

Given four development possibilities for the Old Town Garage site and four development possibilities for the B&L corner site, when we consider development as a combined project we begin with sixteen discrete possibilities.

**Flow Chart 1: Sixteen Possible Development Combinations.**



In the flow chart above, the white boxes display the possibilities for the Old Town Garage Site and the black boxes display the possibilities for the B&L corner site that could be combined with

each use at the Water St. site. We will continue to use this flow chart to help evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each site.

The first option we choose to rule out at either site is the idea of building a police station on the Old Town Garage site. Figure 5 shows what a police station might look like on this site.

**Figure 5: Footprint of Police Station at Old Town Garage Site.**



Table 1 shows the advantages and disadvantages we considered for this option.

**Table 1: Considerations for Police Station at Old Town Garage.**

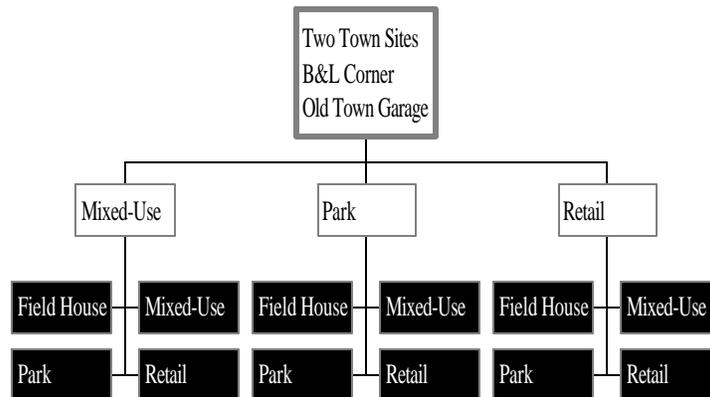
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses need for municipal buildings.</li> <li>• Central building would reduce sprawl.</li> <li>• Coordinates police, fire, and ambulance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-commercial waste of limited space in Village Business district.</li> <li>• Disrupt Village Business districts on Water St.</li> <li>• Remove lot from town tax roles.</li> </ul>

The argument for this idea is based around the fact that the town needs a new police station and putting it here seems like a good idea because it is a central location.

The main argument against this idea is the fact that a police station use would not achieve the goals that we defined for the two-town sites project, which were to rejuvenate and redefine the Williamstown’s center. Because the area in town that is reserved for Village Business is relatively small, putting a non-commercial use on a lot in this district would serve to confine the district even further; therefore, this use would limit the commercial growth of the town center. Another consideration is that Water St. already has two small areas of commercial development on either side of the Old Town Garage property. Putting a large and imposing building like a police station between these two areas would limit community interaction instead of promoting it, and so it seems that a police station use would actually be detrimental to the goal of this project and therefore would not be the best use of the Old Town Garage site.

When we choose to no longer consider the police station idea because it doesn’t address the goals we were looking for, we are left with 12 development combinations as can be seen in the following flow chart.

**Flow Chart 2: Twelve Possible Development Combinations.**



The next option we choose to rule out is the field house because it has some similar problems that the police station had with respect to not achieving the goals of the project. Figure 6 shows what an extension of the Towne Field House might look like on the B&L corner.

**Figure 6: Footprint of field house at B&L corner site.**



The advantages and disadvantages for this option can be seen in table 2.

**Table 2: Considerations for field house at B&L corner.**

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain centralized athletic facilities.</li> <li>• Address problems with the track.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a “keystone” use.</li> <li>• Town-gown relations at bottom of Spring St.</li> <li>• Non-commercial waste of limited space in Village Business district.</li> <li>• Remove lot from town tax roles.</li> </ul>

The main argument for this idea is that it addresses the college’s need for expanded athletic facilities, and using the B&L corner site for this use would maintain some centralization of athletic facilities in general.

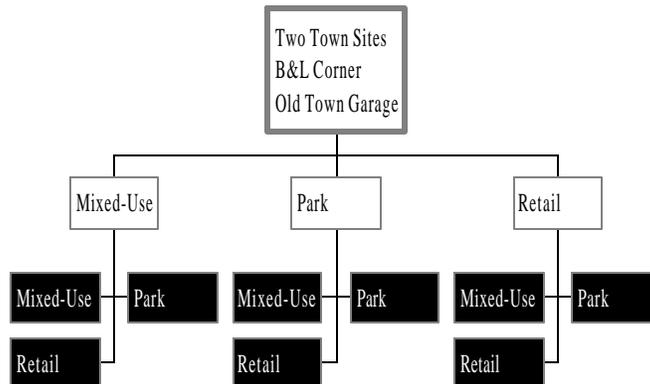
Similar to the logic we followed for the police station, we decided to rule out the field house because it does not achieve the goals of the two-town sites project as we defined them. A field house would certainly not qualify as a “keystone” use and would place additional strain on

town-gown relations, which have already been extensively strained as a result of the Performing Arts Center proposal. Putting an educational use on this site would not promote community interaction or help to define a commercial town center because this use would not be open to the entire community and would not play a role in developing or supporting commercial business; therefore, we do not think this development option meets the goals defined for this project and, consequently, would not be the best use of the B&L site.

Another point to consider is that there are probably much better alternatives for expanding the field house. As can be seen in figure 6, the size of the B&L corner lot would only allow for expansion along a portion of the current length of the field house. It is not clear that expansion in this way would solve the current deficiencies in the track or would allow enough room for the additional space that is required. It seems that expansion to the east where the entire length of the building could be extended or simply construction of a larger field house in an entirely different location would better serve the Athletic Department and students of the College.

After ruling out the police station and field house, we are left with nine possible combinations as shown in the flow chart below.

**Flow Chart 3: Nine Possible Development Combinations.**



The next option we are able to eliminate is an all retail building on the Old Town Garage site. Figure 7 shows what a retail building on this lot might look like from above.

**Figure 7: Footprint of retail building on Old Town Garage site.**



Table 3 displays the advantages and disadvantages related with this possibility.

**Table3: Considerations for retail building at the Old Town Garage.**

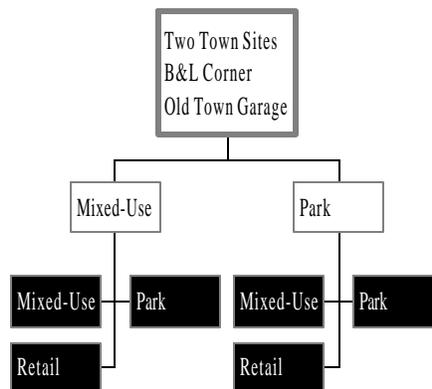
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejuvenate Water St.</li> <li>• Directly serves the purpose of the Village Business district.</li> <li>• Contribute to local tax base.</li> <li>• Could create low/medium wage jobs in town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to a large business.</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor retail may have limited success.</li> <li>• Doesn't address demand for office space.</li> <li>• Competition with existing commercial businesses.</li> <li>• Distance from town center with no pedestrian access.</li> </ul>

The argument for this option is that a retail use at the Old Town Garage would address our defined goals for the two-town sites project. Putting a large retail business on this lot on Water St. would help promote a community atmosphere and define the town center by providing a public place for social interaction as well as by providing additional jobs in the center of town.

The argument against this idea is essentially that it is not clear that such a large retail business would be successful and that reserving this entire lot for retail space would leave no room to address other demands such as office space. Our decision against this idea is different than our decisions against the police station and the field house. Where those two options didn't achieve the goal of rejuvenating the town center, this option potentially would. Ultimately, the decision against this option comes from a more pragmatic argument rather than ideological argument. While it is clear that there is demand for commercial space in town, it is not clear that a business exists that would be likely to fill this space or would be able to maintain success of upper level floors. We would not like to recommend a use that could potentially achieve only limited success, so it seems that an all retail building would not be the best use of the Old Town Garage site.

After ruling out the police station, the field house, and all retail at the Old Town Garage site, we are left with 6 development combinations as shown in the following flow chart.

**Flow Chart 4: Six Possible Development Combinations.**



The next option we are able to exclude is a park at B&L corner. Figure 8 shows how large a park on this lot would be able to be.

**Figure 8: Footprint of park on B&L corner.**



Table 4 lists the advantages and disadvantages of this option.

**Table 4: Considerations for a park at B&L Corner.**

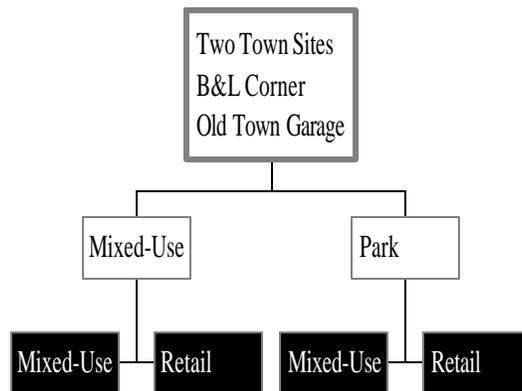
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased space for recreation.</li> <li>• Aesthetic value.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More open space at bottom of Spring St. could be redundant.</li> <li>• Non-commercial waste of limited space in Village Business district.</li> <li>• Remove lot from town tax roles.</li> </ul>

The arguments for this use are centered around the town’s need for an improved town green and the benefits that would come from having such an area open to the public. The current town green is essentially a traffic circle as it occupies the area at the corner of Rt. 2 and Rt. 7 and lies between the Williams Inn and the David and Joyce Milne Public Library. The current green is ineffective because it is difficult to access, being surrounded by busy roadways on all sides, and is some distance from the town center. We believe that an open space in the center of town that was open to the public could promote community interaction and attract people to the center thereby supporting local businesses.

The main argument against this idea is that a similar open green space may already exist and an additional one may not be needed. The current lawn/green space adjacent to the Meade Block building is owned by the College and recently was recognized by the Williamstown Conservation Commission to be protected under the Massachusetts Rivers and Wetlands Protection Act. The land lies in a buffer zone of the Christmas Brook, which runs northeast along the eastern edge of this land. This designation as being within the buffer zone of the Brook means that nothing can be done on this land that would in any way alter the Brook itself; consequently, this land will remain undeveloped and green. If the College were to allow or promote community use of this area, it would serve the same purpose as park on the B&L corner, which is directly across the street. We assume that the protected designation of the land adjacent to the Meade Block will eventually lead to park-like uses of this site, and, therefore, we do not believe that the development of a park directly across the street from this site would be the best use of the B&L corner lot.

After dismissing the police station, field house, all retail at the Old Town Garage, and park at B&L corner ideas, we are left with 4 development combinations as shown in the flow chart below.

**Flow Chart 5: Four Possible Development Combinations.**



The next option we dismiss is the idea of a park on the Old Town Garage site. Figure 9 shows what that size and shape of a park on this lot would be.

**Figure 9: Footprint of park on Old Town Garage site.**



Table 5 shows the advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of the Water St. site as a park.

**Table 5: Considerations for a park at the Old Town Garage.**

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased space for recreation.</li> <li>• Aesthetic value.</li> <li>• Possible connection to Green River Linear Park.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjacent to state highway.</li> <li>• A well-developed park exists nearby.</li> <li>• Non-commercial waste of limited space in Village Business district.</li> <li>• Remove lot from town tax roles.</li> <li>• Doesn't address the need for public parking.</li> </ul>

The argument for a park on the Old Town Garage site is similar to that for the park on the B&L corner site, except this location has the added benefit of its proximity to the Green River Linear Park. This well-established park is directly across Water St. from the Old Town Garage, and so it seemed pretty easy to simply extend the uses at this park across the street. By extending an

already popular and well-used park to an area that is physically closer to the town center, we thought that open space on this location could have beneficial affects on the town atmosphere and community interaction and could also promote the commercial nature of the town center by increasing pedestrian traffic in the vicinity of many local businesses.

The argument against this park centers around the ease at which a new park might be connected to the existing park and the need for new open space on the street given a large pre-existing park. While the Old Town Garage does lie directly across the street from the Green River Linear Park, a busy state highway, Water St./ Rt. 43, does run between the two sites. No crosswalk or other pedestrian access exists at this location along the street, so crossing the street from the Old Town Garage to the Linear Park would be dangerous, not to mention illegal. In order to accommodate this difficulty, a crosswalk and perhaps a traffic light would need to be installed to ensure safe pedestrian crossing, measures which would be costly and probably have the affect of impeding the movement of traffic along the street.

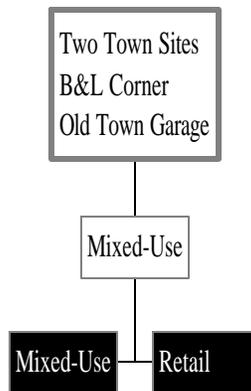
Because a safe connection between the linear park and a new park on Water St. would be somewhat costly and have negative affects on traffic movement, it would need to be clear that appropriate demand existed to support additional recreational space in the area before we could recommend this option with confidence. From circumstantial evidence through use of the Linear Park, it doesn't seem that such excess demand exists that would require the construction of a new park. While the park does get substantial use, use is never so high that the park feels crowded or over used. Ultimately, it seems that the Green River Linear Park suits the size of demand for recreational uses in the area, and so an extension of this park onto the Old Town Garage site would not be the best use of this site.

Another significant drawback of this use that is unrelated to the need for open space in town is that this use would not address the significant expressed demand for parking on both Water St. and Spring St. In the other three options we have included municipal parking spaces as part of the design description, but because a parking lot would conflict directly with the use of the lot as a park, we have not included public parking spaces as part of this option. By sustaining a parking shortage in town, it seems possible that this use of the Old Town Garage could have indirect detrimental affects on community interaction and the commercial success of the town center. By sustaining or increasing the difficulty associated with accessing the town center, this use could possibly deter people from frequenting the town center at all. If the town center is a

difficult place to get to, people will not come. A use that would not assist in alleviating the parking crunch would not help to rejuvenate and redefine the town center, so again a park would not be the next use of the Old Town Garage site.

After eliminating the police station, field house, all retail on Water St., park on Spring St., and park at the Old Town Garage options, the only remaining option for the Old Town Garage is a mixed-use building. We will discuss the benefits of this use later in the report. With respect to development combinations, we are left with two options as can be seen on the flow chart below.

**Flow Chart 6: Two Possible Development Combinations.**



The last option we are going to eliminate is the idea of an all retail building on the B&L corner. Figure 10 shows what this type of building might look like on this site.

**Figure 10: Footprint of retail building at B&L corner.**



Table 6 shows the advantages and disadvantages we considered for this option.

**Table 6: Considerations for retail building at B&L corner.**

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Keystone” use.</li> <li>• Directly serves purpose of Village Business district.</li> <li>• Contribute to local tax base.</li> <li>• Could create low/medium wage jobs in town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to a large business.</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor retail may have limited success.</li> <li>• Doesn’t address demand for faculty housing.</li> <li>• Competition with existing commercial space.</li> </ul>

The argument for this option is that it would achieve the goals we defined for the two-town sites project. Putting a large retail business on the B&L corner would draw people down the street thereby allowing the site to function as a “keystone” use and also supporting the commercial character of the town center. Having a public use on the corner would promote community interaction consequently helping to rejuvenate the town center, while providing retail space in the center of town would limit the demand for commercial sprawl at the edges of town and

provide definition for the town center. This use would also address concerns that have been raised by the Planning Board and the Master Plan Committee such as the need to maintain taxable uses in the town center and the need to create low and medium wage employment in the town in general.

The argument against this idea is similar to the argument against an all retail building on the Water St. site, and that is essentially it is not clear that demand for such a large retail business exists or that the retail on the upper level floors would be successful. Reserving the use of this entire site for retail would also make it impossible to address the college's need for additional faculty housing. An additional consideration is that the parking requirements associated with retail use would force this building to be smaller than it might be if it were used for more diverse uses. Ultimately, it does not seem that an exclusive retail would be the best use of this site because it restricts the use of the building, so that it could only accommodate a single large business, and physically restricts the size of the building.

As three possibilities have now been ruled out for each site, we are left with only one option for each site and one combined development possibility.

**Flow chart 7: One Possible Development Combination.**

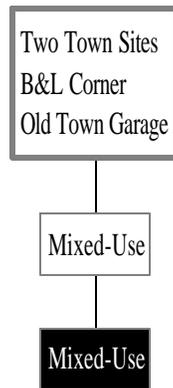


Figure 11 shows what these buildings might look like on both sites.

**Figure 11: Footprint of mixed-use buildings at both sites.**



Table 7 shows the advantages and disadvantages we considered for the Old Town Garage site.

**Table 7: Consideration for mixed-use at the Old Town Garage**

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantage</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejuvenate Water St.</li> <li>• Fits character of the street.</li> <li>• Directly serves purpose of the Village Business district.</li> <li>• Contribute to local tax base.</li> <li>• Addresses demand for office space in town.</li> <li>• Scale of building appropriate for size of demand for use.</li> <li>• Could create low/medium wage jobs in town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Might not attract a new business, instead just relocate a pre-existing business.</li> <li>• Conflict between commercial use and nearby residents might exist.</li> <li>• Might not be enough demand for commercial space on Water St.</li> </ul>

Table 8 lists the advantages and disadvantages we considered for putting a mixed-use building at the B&L corner.

**Table 8: Considerations for mixed-use at B&L corner.**

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Keystone” use.</li> <li>• Directly serves purpose of the Village Business district.</li> <li>• Contribute to local tax base.</li> <li>• Addresses demand for faculty housing.</li> <li>• Scale of building appropriate for size of demand for use.</li> <li>• Could create low/medium wage jobs in town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Might not attract a new business, instead just relocate a pre-existing business.</li> <li>• Conflict between commercial use and residents might exist.</li> </ul>

After considering the four options for each site, we conclude that the best development choice for each site would be to develop them both as mixed-use buildings. Both of these uses would help to rejuvenate their respective streets as well as redefine the town center in general. By providing retail, office, and housing space, the two sites would create places for community interaction as well as ameliorate certain deficiencies that exist in town currently.

### **Survey of Spring Street Merchants**

In order to get a sense of what those in Williamstown thought of the development at the two town sites, we designed a survey to get opinions on each of the sites. The original intent was to survey townspeople, college students, tourists and merchants on Spring Street. And though we did collect information from the first three groups, we believed that the most important and

relevant information came from the last group. We didn't believe we had a large enough sample of townspeople, students or tourists to make any general claims about their opinions. With the merchants, however, we surveyed a large enough group that we believe we can make substantive claims about their beliefs. The reason that these opinions are relevant is that we believe the merchants of Spring Street know the area best and know the preferences of those who shop, work and live on the street.

The format for the survey was first to ask the merchants what type of development they would like to see at each of the two sites. This open-ended question yielded many results, with some participants naming specific businesses they would like to see to others merely giving preferred uses. We then proceeded to ask each of the participants to rank each of the four options we had come up with for each site. For the B&L corner, these uses were field house, retail building, mixed-use building and park, while for the Old Town Garage, these uses were police station, retail building, mixed-use building and park. The respondents were asked to rank all four of the options, with one being the best development option and four being the worst. Table 9 shows the results of the survey.

**Table 9: Survey Results**

<b>B&amp;L corner average responses</b>	<b>Old Town Garage Average Responses</b>
Mixed use = 1.54	Mixed use = 1.69
Retail = 2.54	Retail = 2.31
Park = 2.54	Police station = 2.92
Field House = 3.38	Park = 3.08

(1=Most Preferred, 4=Least Preferred)

In conducting this survey, we were able to obtain a sense of how current Spring St. merchants would like to see the street change. Below are some opinions that different merchants provided about what they thought should be done with the B&L corner.

"We don't need that space open right downtown. We need something that will bring people to Spring Street."

"Parking is the big issue - that site must have some parking or at the least be self-contained."

"Good planning says to put retail on both sides of the street to make it work. We need more on both sides. We need to address the needs that the downtown community has. We're lacking many basic services and should be attracting those here."

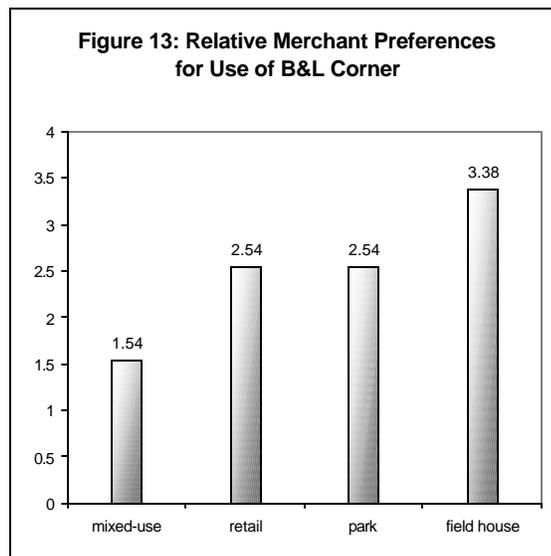
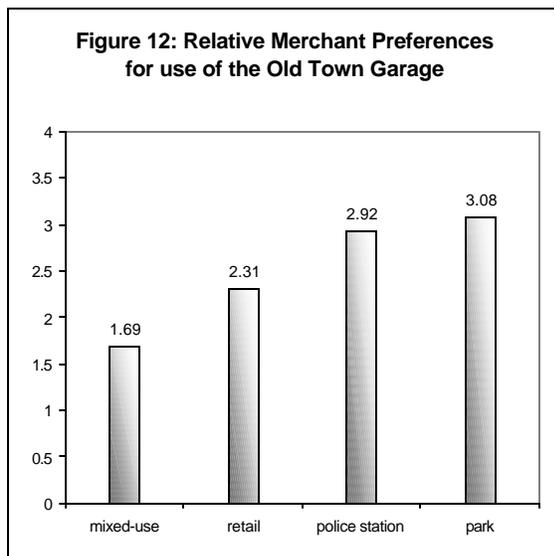
The merchants also expressed opinions about the future use of the Old Town Garage.

"There's not much use of the park that's right by there right now. A business would actually bring people over to the site."

"We need commercial space to build a connection between the businesses on the north and south ends of the street."

"We have to get that mixture of uses, that's what works."

Figures 12 and 13 help to illustrate the relative popularity of each development option at each site.



In both cases, the mixed-use building was clearly the preferred option, which supports the arguments we made earlier for excluding the other possibilities at each of the sites.

Ultimately, by considering the demands for different uses in town as well as by interviewing local merchants, we came to the same conclusion that mixed-use buildings on both the B&L corner and Old Town Garage lots would best achieve the goals of rejuvenating and redefining the town center.

### **Specific Recommendations**

Figures 14 and 15 are meant to give a rough sense of what mixed-use buildings on the two sites might look like.



Figure 14: mixed use building at Old Town Garage



Figure 15: mixed-use building at B&L corner.

After conducting our public opinion survey, we realized that it might be necessary to make a more specific suggestion for the mixed-use building on the B&L corner than we had originally included in our set of four development possibilities for this site. In speaking with students, town residents, and local merchants, it became clear that significant desire existed for a business that would operate at later hours than most businesses on Spring St. currently do. Most businesses on Spring St. close in the early evening, leaving the street essentially dead for the extent of the night except for two bars and a fast-food sandwich store. The sentiment was often expressed that there was little to do in town after 6 o'clock in the evening, and we thought the redevelopment of B&L corner could be used to alleviate this dissatisfaction.

We would like to recommend that a two story mixed-use building be built on the site of the Old Town Garage on Water St. and a three story mixed-use building be built on the B&L corner site on Spring St. The Water St. building should provide space for retail on the first floor and office space on the second floor, while the Spring St. building should be appropriate for the

use of a diner, coffee shop, or some similar establishment with hours that extend into the night on the first two floors and apartments, most likely to be used by College faculty, on the third floor. The Water St. site should also provide enough parking to accommodate all of the use it generates as well as space for at least 25 additional public parking spaces, and the Spring St. site should be entirely self-contained with respect to parking.

## **Conclusions**

The B&L corner lot and the Old Town Garage lot are two central properties in Williamstown's center, which will be redeveloped in the not too recent future. Because the two sites are so close together and so central to the town, we chose to consider the redevelopment of both sites as one unified development project. Because the properties will be owned by different bodies, the College and the Town, it is legitimate to question the ease at which collaboration will actually occur, but because development at these two site will most likely happen simultaneously it is important to recognize how they will impact each other and the town center in general.

This is what we have done in the Two-Town sites project. We have evaluated how the two sites in question will not only impact each other but how they will be impacted upon by other spaces in and uses of the town center. Williamstown's center has historical significance as a place of community interaction and commercial activity, and we have identified uses for each of the two sites that will extend these historical characteristics into the future. In order for the town center to function as the center of a community, people need to have a reason to go there and be able to get there easily. Through the recommendations we have made in this report, we hope that the redevelopment of the Old Town Garage site on Water St. and the B&L corner site on Spring St. will help to redefine Williamstown's center.

## **Appendix: Building a pathways system**

The Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission's 1984 report, "2003: A Study of Williamstown over the next 20 years," explicitly recommend that the town should, among other goals:

- 1) "Create a pedestrian walkway between Spring and Water Streets past the new college gymnasium and art buildings."
- 2) "Develop a bikeways system."

For the last decade and a half, these goals have been left by the wayside, consistently given lower priority than other construction projects. Both ideas have continued to pop up in public discourse (Anita Barker, personal interview, September 2000), and the reasons for implementing them are stronger today than ever before.

The prospect of development for the OTG and B&L corner has revived discussion of a path running between the two sites, as it is currently possible to walk between them without setting foot on a street. Our project gave us an opportunity to examine this idea, and try to incorporate it with the goal of developing a bikeways system. Helen Ouellette has made it clear that the College has no intention of building a path between two abandoned lots that are being used as contractor's yards (personal interview, Oct. 2000). We support the logic of that position, but we also looked beyond the hypothetical B&L-OTG route to think about a larger pathway system that would accomplish.

### **Reasons for a path**

The College and Town can implement parts of these systems without waiting to develop the two sites. The sooner the better, for many of the strongest reasons to build a pathways system are immediate, and do not depend on the development of either site.

#### *1) Improve access to and from each site*

The obvious reason to build a connecting path between the sites is to connect the sites themselves. Thinking of the B&L site as a keystone or gateway to Spring Street justifies doing this. Local merchants and planners have debated the possibility of using new parking on the

OTG site as a “park and walk,” where shoppers could park their cars and walk to the B&L corner and other points along Spring Street. A more likely source of foot traffic between the two sites are pedestrians on Spring Street walking to a developing Water Street to continue shopping. If the use of the OTG hopes to vitalize business on Water Street by drawing customers there, it should cater in part to customers on Spring Street, who are already in the immediate vicinity.

## *2) Increase accessibility of Spring Street businesses during construction or roadwork*

Spring Street has seen a rash of construction and roadwork over the last two years. An aggressive and collective advertising effort has mitigated most of the disruption that retailers feared the continuing construction would incur, according to Michelle and Ken Gietz, owners of Where Did You Get That and founders of the Merchant Task Force. But, Michelle says, the effects have finally caught up to local businesses, and prospects for this holiday-shopping season are glum. As roadwork continues and construction on the B&L corner looms large over the next three years, the situation will not improve on its own. Michelle is confident that an off-street pedestrian pathways system will improve business to a certain extent. And though no off-street path north of Latham Street will solve the current problems of crossing Spring Street, but it will create a more pleasant atmosphere, which both encourages people to come to Spring Street and to buy more once they do come.

## **3) Alleviate parking shortage**

This report and others have focused a lot of attention on the parking shortage afflicting the town center. Attempts to solve this problem involve increasing supply by building more parking spaces, as suggested in this report. Reducing demand should also be an option. This does not mean reducing the number of customers that come downtown, as some might fear, but reducing the number of cars that come. Transferring traffic from driving to other forms of transportations – such as walking and bicycling – is the best way to achieve this reduction. And the first step in this shift is building an infrastructure (including things like pathways, parking and traffic planning) for these non-automobile modes of transportation. This infrastructure alone will not effect a huge change in transportation habits -- it needs to be combined with aggressive advertising and effective signage – but without this infrastructure, a large increase in the use of alternative transportation is nearly impossible.

#### *4) Re-cycle bikes off of Spring Street*

With Spring Street likely to remain one-way southward to the parking lot, the current question for would-be bicyclists will remain: How do you get back? Currently, assuming no construction equipment blocks the road, a bicyclist who has ridden down (the B&L corner site being at the bottom) Spring Street is faced with a choice between the least of multiple evils when trying to go back up it. The options consist of: 1) following traffic down either Latham or Walden Streets and circling around an extra half mile; 2) illegally and dangerously riding on the road against the one-way traffic or on the sidewalk amongst the pedestrian traffic; or 3) slowly and inconveniently walking your bike on the sidewalk. Clearly, the situation calls for a fourth option, if not a fifth and sixth.

### **Tools of a pathway system**

The ideal pathway system would meet these four goals with maximum efficiency of and minimal conflict between all the different modes of travel that might come downtown (i.e. pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers and parked cars). To accomplish this, many different types of pathways can be helpful. These include:

- *Sidewalks*  
In addition to their obvious use, sidewalks can also sometimes provide accessible alternative routes to save pathways from costly construction otherwise required by the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board, although this is politically controversial, as some say this abdicates a certain civic responsibility (Eric Beattie, Personal Communication, November 2000).
- *Off-street pedestrian paths*  
The existing connection between the two sites is an example of this kind of path, and it is the kind most people have considered for our site. Their benefits include low costs of construction and grading.

- *Off-street bike paths*

These function much like off-street pedestrian paths, but they require a more even surface. Also, their high speeds of travel can cause problems where the path crosses or merges with car or pedestrian traffic flow.

- *Contra-flow bike lanes*

**These on-street bike lanes are the safest direct way for bicyclists to travel against traffic on a one-way street. According to Diane Bishop, bicycle coordinator for the city of Eugene, Ore., contra-flow lanes work best on streets with few cross streets in areas (like downtowns and universities) where there are lots of pedestrians. Spring Street, especially eastern side of the street where the contra-flow lane would be, meets all criteria. On streets with parallel parking on both sides, as Spring Street, these lanes pass between the parking spaces on the driver's left and the sidewalk. Figure A.1 shows exactly this kind of bike lane in Eugene, Ore.**

**Figure A.1: Contra-flow bike lane in Eugene, Ore.**



Photo courtesy of Diane Bishop

**Bishop recommends against having parking on this side of the street, because hiding the bike flows can confuse**

**motorists and ultimately make the situation more dangerous. Either way, contra-flow bike lanes are unexpected and require signage and other publicity to function safely and properly.**

- *Mixed-use (a.k.a. bike/ped) paths*  
Many paths combine bicycle and pedestrian traffic. This incurs the additional costs of paving and grading that are not entirely necessary for just pedestrian paths, but saves over building separate paths for each use. A well-placed path can improve convenience for bicyclists, but threaten the comfort and safety of pedestrians, who now have to contend to with faster, heavier traffic. Some designs attempt to minimize this conflict. Traditionally, these paths use a dotted line in the middle to separate uses. A more radical but uncommon design idea places a bike lane in the center with pedestrian shoulders on either side (Klay Lund, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition member. Personal Communication, November 2000).
- *Bicycle roundabouts*  
Essentially tiny rotaries, bicycle roundabouts are a “traffic calming” tool used to slow automobiles enough to allow left-turning bicycles to merge, but without bringing traffic to a complete halt. On Spring Street, a roundabout at the intersection with Route 2 could replace the current triangle that frequently results in lines of stopped cars.

### **Potential obstacles to a pathways system**

These tools present a variety of ways to deal with the following obstacles that could impede the building of a pathways system:

- *The steep grade between B&G buildings*

Circled on both Figures A.2 and A.3 as a problematic area, the narrow and uneven grade between the Buildings & Grounds loading dock and the heating plant area stands directly in the way of any off-street path from the OTG site to Spring Street. The area merits repaving regardless of its future use, but to accommodate bicycle traffic safely might require a costly widening of the passage via removing part of either building. Accepting Latham Street as an accessible alternate route between Water Street and Spring Street, the state Architectural Access Board regulations would not apply to the grade (Eric Beattie, Personal Communication, November, 2000).

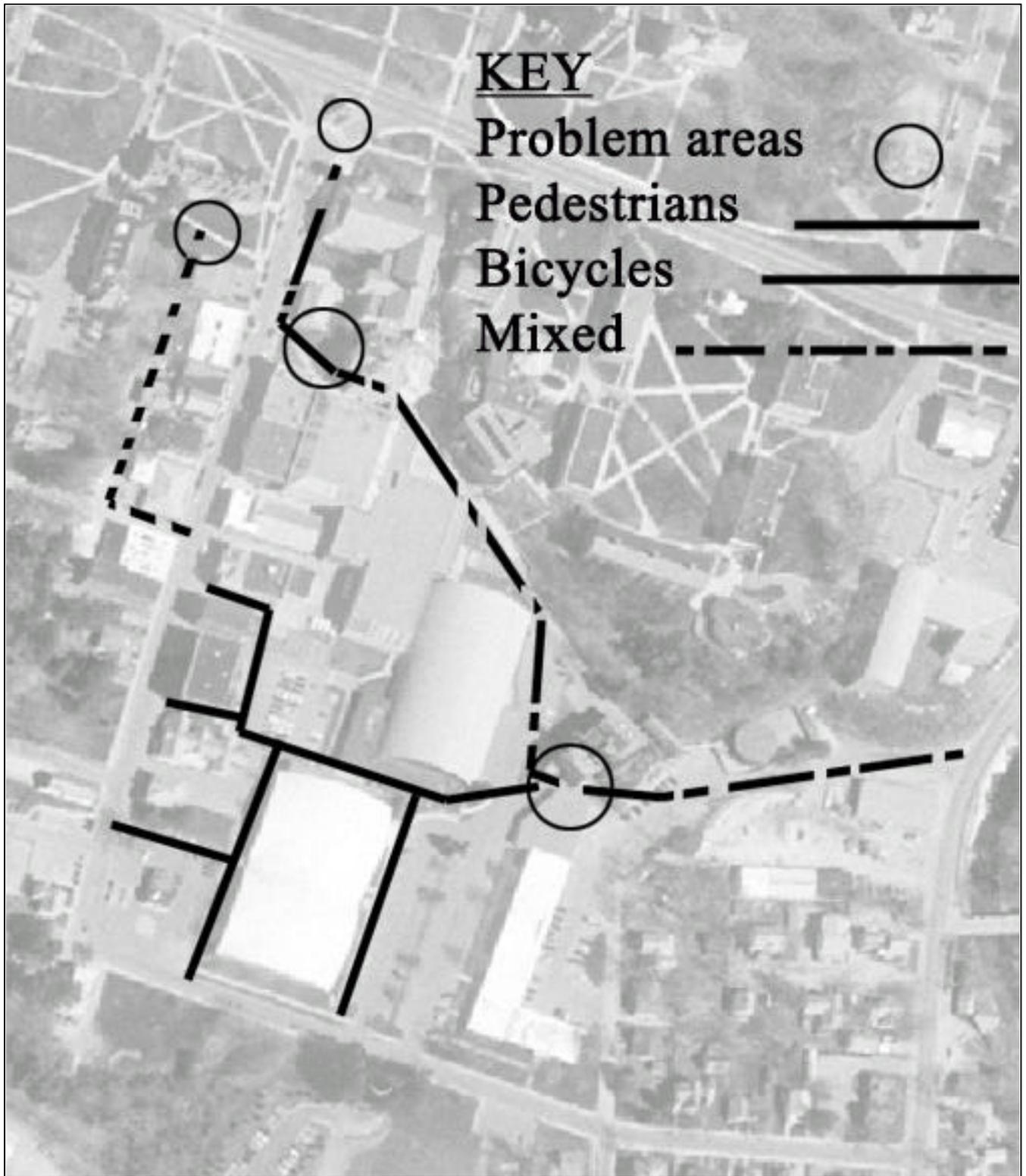
- *Stairs between hockey rink and field house*  
Although these few stairs constitute a costly problem for bicycle traffic, a pedestrian path can use the area as is (excepting the possibility of cosmetic additions like beautification, coverage and lighting) because the Latham Street exemption applies again in this case.
- *Parking lots dominate routes*  
All of the possible off-street routes go through what are currently parking lots. Though it is possible to travel on these routes, they will not serve well as paths without some repaving and landscaping.
- *Ownership issues*  
Though the Town has spoken of a pedestrian path between Spring Street and Water Street for almost two decades, it is the College that owns the land over which this route would pass. Administrators are not adverse to building such a path (Helen Ouellete, Personal Communication, October 2000; Anita Barker, Personal Communication, October 2000), the discrepancy between ownership and demand could slow down the process. Also, the potential for an off-street bike route behind the row of shops on the western side of Spring Street is limited by the private ownership of that area, which is currently a parking lot (Eric Beattie, Personal Communication, November 2000).

- *Intersections with other pathways on campus*  
Current pedestrian paths on campus were not designed with bicyclists in mind, creating a dangerous potential for conflict where bike routes would intersect with pedestrians, such as at the plaza between the entrance to Chandler Gymnasium and Pappa Charlie's. Signage and other traffic calming devices might be necessary for safety reasons.

**Conclusions:**

Any combination of pathways would improve the current situation. Most of these combinations will have a few of the same features in common, ranging from the basic (some pathway from B&L to OTG) to the elaborate (a bicycle roundabout at the top of Spring Street). Figure A.2 shows one such possible combination, making use of off-street pedestrian paths, off-streets bike paths, and off-street mixed-use paths. Figure A.3 shows a second combination, which eschews mixed-use paths in favor of one contra-flow bike lane on Spring Street. The second option appears to create less conflict between different modes, as it minimizes intersections between bicycles and pedestrians, and avoids most ownership issues.

Figure A.2: Pathways systems with mixed-use path





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