
Planners see city as vibrant tech center

◆ Manchester's future:

Aldermen to review two studies that may guide city's progress into the next generation.

By RILEY YATES

Union Leader Staff

MANCHESTER — An expanded Center of New Hampshire. A vibrant southern Elm Street neighborhood with a commercial center. A city where high-tech professionals live, work and study.

Those are some of the plans contained in two city-sponsored development studies that aim to chart the direction of Manchester's future.

The studies say Manchester

needs to promote housing and a more livable city, continuing commercial development south of the downtown and encouraging high-tech companies to locate here.

They offer a new vision for a city that's already seen years as a textile center, a down-on-its-luck mill town, and, more recently, as a nighttime recreation destination for the region. They stress efforts to pull a well-educated, highly-trained workforce to live in Manchester.

"They'd like to see more of a 24-hour community," said Bob MacKenzie, the city's planning director. "It is kind of a new direction."

One of the studies, con-

► See **City Plans**, Page A12

Studies envision '24-hour community' of life, work, play

City Plans

Continued From Page A1

ducted by Hillier Architecture, focused on a 10-year development plan for the downtown. The other, by AngelouEconomics, looks from a 5-year citywide perspective.

The downtown study sees potential in the southern Elm Street area, where residential development could mix with a commercial center at the city-owned Jac Pac site and Queen City Avenue parcels on both sides of the Merrimack River.

Among other recommendations: a midsize performing arts theater, a downtown grocery store at the Gaslight district, and a doubling of conference center space at the Center of New Hampshire.

Also touted are a river walkway along Interstate-293, and establishing a transit center at Elm and Auburn streets that could serve light rail and bus service.

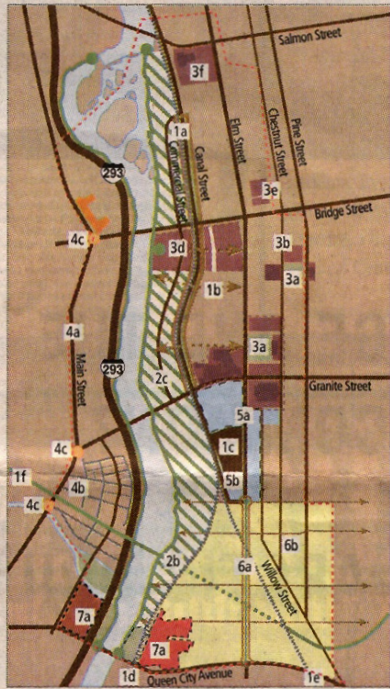
The transit center would also provide a link with Manchester Airport. Kevin Dillon, its director, said a centralized transportation authority could help pull together local, state and regional options.

"As the airport grows and develops, it can't just keep adding parking lots," Dillon said.

The citywide study, meanwhile, pushes Manchester to focus on high-tech and growth industries such as finance, defense, aviation, software and information technology, and medical and life sciences.

It recommends the city partner with its colleges to promote

Manchester's downtown strategic development plan



Projects

1. Core Transportation Project:

- 1a. Reconfigure Canal Street.
- 1b. Streetscape enhancements along Stark, Spring, Pleasant and Commercial streets.
- 1c. Construct a multi-modal, mixed-use transit center.
- 1d. Explore implementing commuter service
- 1e. Establish a direct airport link to downtown.
- 1f. Create a bike trail system.

2. Merrimack River Park System:

- 2a. Create a riverfront walkway along I-293.
- 2b. Create a riverfront park in the South End.
- 2c. Incorporate river-oriented signage, programming and landscaping of the area between Canal Street and the Merrimack River.

3. Arts/Culture/Education Project:

- 3a. Upgrade critical parks and squares.
- 3b. Create a performing arts center.
- 3c. Create an expanded conference/meeting facility.
- 3d. Expand the UNH campus and connect it with the downtown core.
- 3e. Develop the Pearl Street lot.
- 3f. Encourage adaptive reuse of the Armory building.

4. West Side Project:

- 4a. Develop the Main Street Corridor into a high-quality employment center.
- 4b. Create a new downtown residential neighborhood.
- 4c. Create gateways at major nodes along Main Street to highlight entrances and transition points.

5. Gaslight/Warehouse District Project:

- 5a. Expand the Gaslight District boundary.
- 5b. Locate an urban grocery store in this district, preferably within the mixed-use transit center.

6. South End Project:

- 6a. Transform south Elm Street into an urban residential boulevard with open-space gateways.
- 6b. Re-knit the neighborhood fabric and increase residential density.

7. Queen City Commercial Project:

- 7a. Create employment centers on both sides of the Merrimack River including the Jac Pac site.

Source: Hillier Architecture

NORM WELSH/UNION LEADER

science and technology — an idea Manchester is already pursuing with the University of New Hampshire, which wants to expand its Millyard campus.

Mayor Frank Guinta said the UNH partnership is one of the top projects he would like pursued. Also, he said the city needs to push development at

the Jac Pac site and at the Hackett Hill business park — for which officials are now developing a new marketing plan.

Neither studies contain cost estimates, and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen will select priorities.

Guinta said he expects pri-

problems include difficulties retaining young professionals, an underdeveloped riverfront, and limited land for commercial developers. Like the downtown study, it says a lack of housing and amenities are slowing growth.

MacKenzie, the planning director, said efforts are different from the last major study in 1993, which eventually led to the city building the civic center to spur growth in the downtown.

This time, Manchester is doing well and can focus on attracting private investment by improving its look with street improvements and better pedestrian access, trails and parks.

"In 1993, when the city was in tough shape, it needed to invest in private development," MacKenzie said. "Now developers are much more interested in the city."

MacKenzie said the proposed performing arts theater awaits private funding. The city is unlikely to sponsor development at the Jac Pac site, he said, beyond a potential initial investment for infrastructure such as utilities.

To entice the Radisson Hotel to expand its convention space, Manchester could consider offering up the city-owned concrete park that sits in front of it, MacKenzie said.

On Monday, final drafts of the studies will be presented to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen at a 6 to 9 p.m. meeting at City Hall.

Skip Ashooh, the former chairman of the Manchester Development Corporation, said the proposals are "the next

layer" of city efforts.

Promoting development south of Verizon Wireless Arena "makes all the sense in the world," Ashooh said. "We still have some of our important properties on Elm Street underutilized."

Ashooh said it is difficult to say which proposals will go forward and which will be left behind. He wouldn't say which he prefers.

"There's a great shopping list in there," Ashooh said. "The reports give us a good starting point on a discussion of what's most needed."

He agreed housing is a key issue in Manchester, and not just for people entering the work force. Many retirees who sell their homes now want to move to the city, not the country, he said.

"I retire and am 70 years of age," Ashooh said. "It would be nice to know I can walk to a good restaurant and take in a show at the Palace Theatre."

The downtown study also slates the Pearl Street parking lot and the National Guard Armory near Amoskeag Bridge as potential parcels for redevelopment.

On the West Side, it proposes upgrading a portion of Main Street to attract more corporate business. Main Street between Bridge and Winter streets needs restaurants and shops to serve residents of the neighborhood, it says.

The study tabs many streets for improvements or redevelopment, including Stark, Spring and Pleasant streets in the downtown; and Canal and Bedford streets near the Millyard.