

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Pascoag is one of eight village centers that form the Town of Burrillville, Rhode Island.

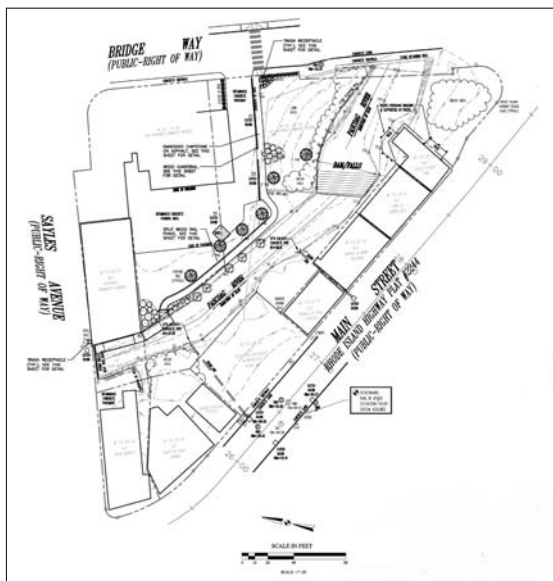
Originally established as an agricultural community, Burrillville grew during the industrial era as a result of the development of mills along natural streams within the Blackstone River Valley. These were mostly textile mills, and the concentration of them in Pascoag attracted enough population and services to generate a real village center.

With the decline of the industrial economy in the region after the 1950s, the mills were demolished. Retail plazas and commercial services took their place. The rest of the historical village fabric remains, however, largely unaltered although in strong need of renovation and update.

The purpose of this study is to identify opportunities, constraints, and resources available to improve the physical and economic conditions of the village, and unlock dormant redevelopment opportunities that may result in an overall enhancement of the quality of living in Pascoag.

The Cecil Group, Inc., a planning and design firm working throughout New England, together with Pare Engineering Corporation, from Lincoln, Rhode Island, and Bonz and Company, a real estate consulting firm, were selected by the Town of Burrillville to conduct this study.

The fabric of the historic downtown in Pascoag has all of the elements of a picturesque traditional village that should be a desirable place for visiting, shopping, working and living. The meandering path of Pascoag Main Street, clusters of historic buildings, and the natural resource of the Pascoag River are just the kind of distinctive assets that make Pascoag special. But the economic forces that shaped the downtown have shifted, and the configuration and organization of the downtown is no longer capable of attracting steady investment that is a sign of a healthy center.



Proposed River Walk

Pascoag has physical assets that should shape the future and attract reinvestment. The participants in past planning efforts have underlined the potential of the Pascoag River as a unifying amenity, for example. A River Walk has been proposed along its banks and a first phase is currently in the design stages. The traditional architecture and tight pattern of streets offers another promising contrast to the monotony of strip-type development that has become commonplace in many commercial areas.

Through the years downtown Pascoag has suffered from disinvestment. As economic activity has declined, disinvestment in many properties has become a trend. It may no longer make financial sense for an individual property owner to reinvest in a property, if the neighboring buildings are in such poor condition that they negatively affect the ability to lease space, attract high quality tenants, or achieve an adequate sales value.

In order to reverse this trend, a “critical mass” of reinvestment must occur on multiple properties that are adequately close to one another to shift the perception and value of an entire area. This can only be achieved through a choreographed process that is managed, involves significant investors, and parallel public improvements. The recommendations included in this document are geared towards the redevelopment of a few vacant or underutilized properties located in prominent sites within the downtown, in hopes that improvements at these locations will help unlock the potential for renovation and upgrading of other smaller buildings.

One of the important uses of this redevelopment plan may be to support future state and federal funding assistance for the downtown revitalization initiative. The approach to the infrastructure assessment, evaluation and recommendations takes into consideration available policies and programs that link local needs to state and federal dollars. Plans are often needed in many communities in order to align their needs with existing or new programs for redevelopment support. This redevelopment plan is seen as an opportunity to establish direct links to success in gaining funding and grants for park improvements, streetscape enhancements, and major roadway changes that will help enhance and consolidate the overall image and appeal of downtown Pascoag (refer to the *Implementation* section of the plan for more information on funding sources).

Existing Conditions

The project area comprises approximately 36 acres and is shown in *Figure 1*. According to the Town’s assessor’s records, there are 71 properties within the study area. The majority of these are in average condition (55% of the buildings). However, 16 buildings are in need of repair (22% consider to be in “fair” condition) and four prime properties are vacant. These contribute to create substandard and blighted conditions, and a perception of disinvestment in the downtown, even when they only correspond to approximately 5% of the total number of properties.

Downtown Pascoag is fully served by modern standard utilities, including sewers. This is an

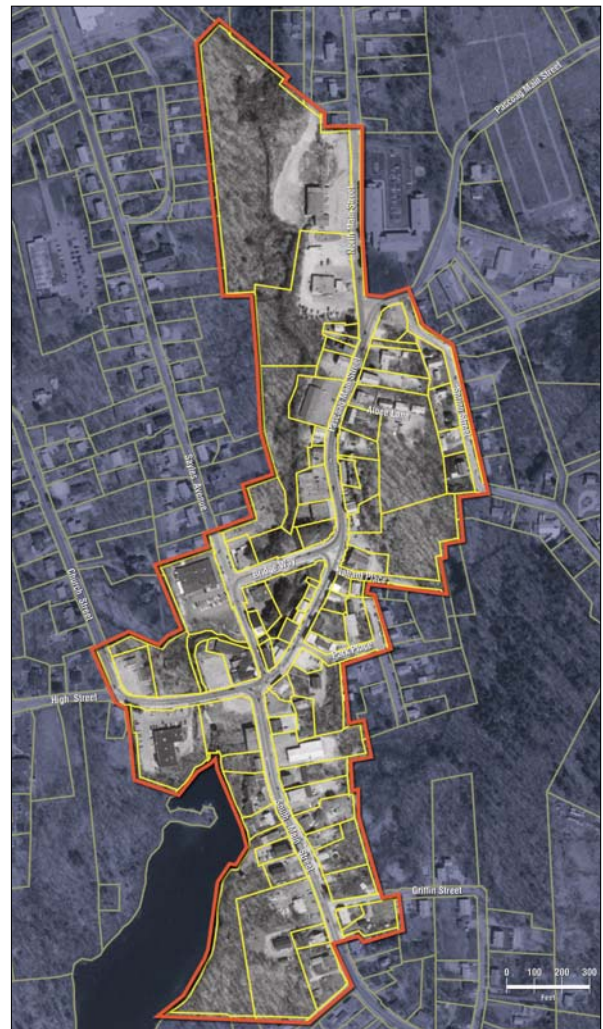


Figure 1 - Project Area

important asset for the village since it ensures the capacity of the village center to sustain the current population and provide for modest future growth.

Roadways in the planning area include Routes 107 and 100, two minor arterials that intersect at the core of the village. The central block defined by Pascoag Main Street, Bridge Way and Sayles Avenue is sometimes backed up due to traffic congestion at the Sayles Avenue/Pascoag Main Street (Routes 100/107) intersection. It is on this block and its immediate surroundings that some of the oldest buildings that remain in Pascoag and give it its particular village character are located.

Previous engineering studies have identified several options to resolve traffic issues at this intersection. A new proposal derived from some of those choices is recommended as part of this plan. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) currently has studies underway to resurface Route 107 along the most of the project area and reconstruct a damaged bridge along High/Pascoag Main Street (the CVS Bridge). Improvements to the Sayles Avenue/Pascoag Main Street intersection (Routes 100/107) and the Pascoag Main/North Main Street intersection (Route 107/North Main Street) are planned as part of the resurfacing study.

The Town has implemented the development of two municipal parking lots within the village, which has resulted in a significant improvement of the parking situation during the last four years (approximately 80 new parking spaces in all). Still, parking congestion is visible in parts of the district during business hours and it is reasonable to expect that parking demand will increase if the vacant or underutilized parcels in the downtown become redeveloped.

Market Overview

An analysis of market trends, conditions and development influences served to identify the following market opportunities and constraints:

- Retail uses offer the strongest opportunities for new business and new development. This opportunity is shaped by the following factors:
 - Despite its access limitations, downtown Pascoag occupies a central location in a small but growing and underserved market.
 - As a local commercial center the village faces limited competition in the future.
 - Recent interest from franchise businesses reflects its potential to attract additional businesses providing goods and services in convenient proximity to a local market.
- In addition to retail space, as growth continues in the Town of Burrillville, professional office-oriented businesses providing financial services, insurance, design-related services, health care and others may also seek space in downtown Pascoag. These would most likely include independent as well as franchise businesses.
- While most franchise businesses are likely to target proven “mainstream” markets, it is important to recognize the limitations of this market analysis: in small-scale settings such as Pascoag, independent, entrepreneurial ventures can find inexpensive space,

and – given the small scale of their surroundings -- can draw recognition to the area and exert profound impacts on local physical and economic environments.

- As commercial development and public improvements are implemented, downtown Pascoag will offer enhanced prospects for residential development. At this time the strongest, most-tested market would involve single-family homes situated close to amenities -- including Pascoag's waterfront, recreational and retail amenities. As developments proceed, the incremental development of attached as well as detached housing will offer opportunities, and such opportunities may increase as public improvements and new business development add new enhancements to the village.

Visioning Process

As a result of the review of existing conditions and prior studies, and based on comments received at a public visioning meeting on May 2005, three overall planning alternatives were identified for the project area (refer to the *Visioning Process* section for more detail). These represent different planning approaches, and are illustrated in alternative concept plans in the *Visioning* section. Each concept plan portrays a different land use character as a result of planning strategies that would emphasize either redevelopment for commercial uses (Alternative A), mixed use redevelopment with downtown residential units on upper floors (Alternative B), or lower density/public improvements (Alternative C).

These alternatives addressed redevelopment options for two key redevelopment parcels, which include two vacant sites located at the intersections of Routes 100/107 and Route 107/North Main Street. These parcels are important because of their prime location and visibility at points of access into the core of the village. The site located at the corner of Pascoag Main Street and Sayles Avenue (Routes 100/107 intersection) has recently been sold, which opens up the possibilities for private redevelopment to take place in the near future. The other site, however, has been vacant for a long time and has environmental issues that arise from its previous use as a gas station and automotive repair garage. Public intervention may be required to unlock the site's redevelopment potential, at least at the initial level of assistance with environmental cleanup.

Additional infill redevelopment could take place on other vacant or underutilized parcels along Pascoag Main Street, including new development on the site of the former Music Hall and the renovation of the former Laundromat building.

Vision Plan

Choices and alternatives were presented and reviewed at several meetings with the Burrillville Redevelopment Agency (BRA), Town officials, business representatives and members of the community in general (including public meetings in May, June and November 2005). As a result of the comments and insights received during these reviews, the following *Figure 2, Vision Plan*, preferred plan elements and recommendations are proposed as the basic strategic components of this plan (a detailed discussion of elements and recommendations is presented in the *Visioning Process* section of this document).

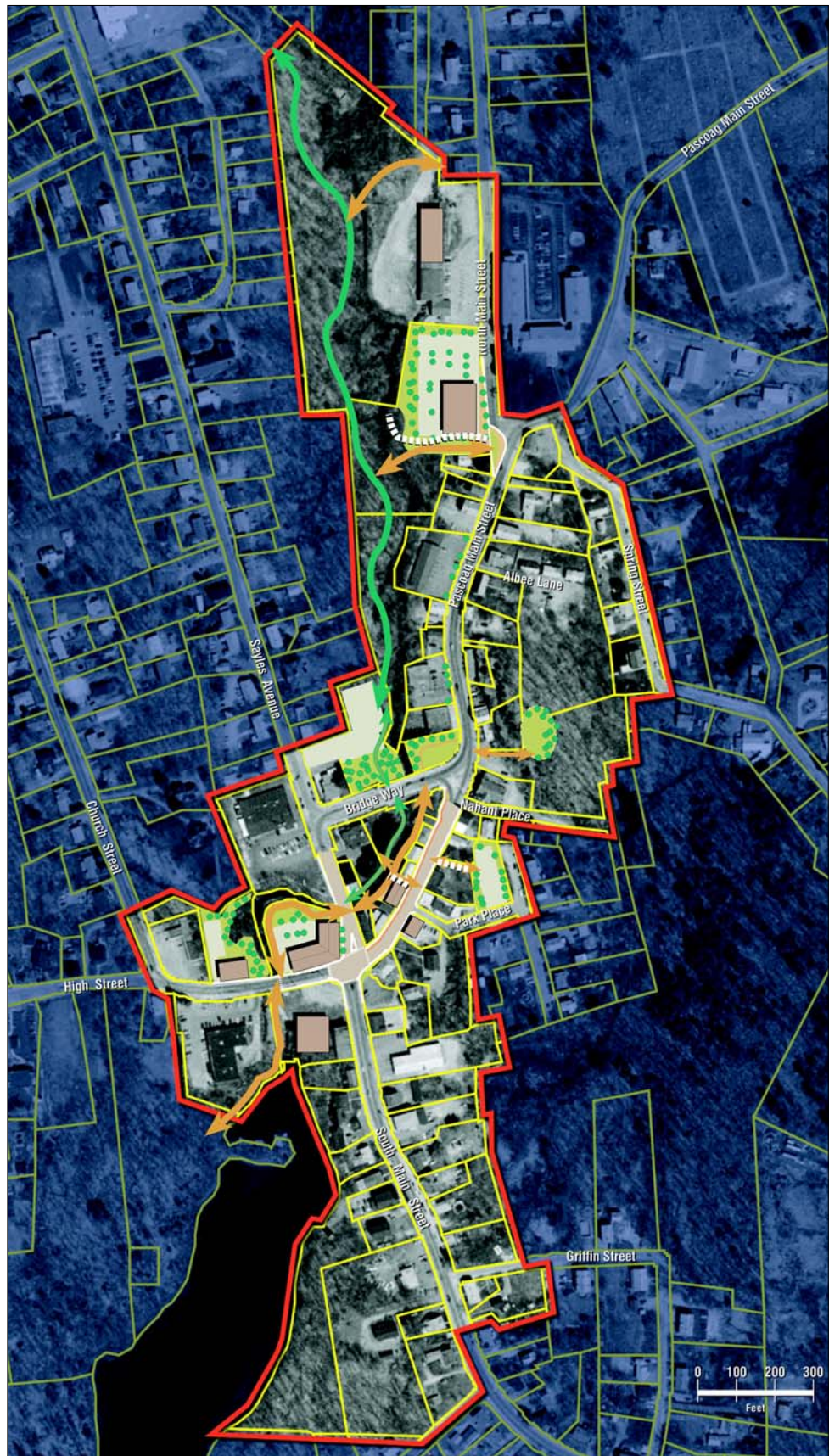


Figure 2 - Vision Plan

Preferred Plan Elements

1. Redevelopment of Vacant Sites
2. Building Improvement Program
3. Parking Development Program
4. Roadway Improvements
5. Construction of the River Walk
6. Creation of “Pocket Parks”
7. Streetscape Improvements
8. Infrastructure Relocation
9. Zoning Review and Update
10. Code Applications and Enforcement
11. Downtown Promotion and Marketing
12. Long-Term Financial Support

Redevelopment Plan

The proposed land uses for the project area are to remain consistent with the requirements of the existing Village Commercial Zoning District, which emphasize neighborhood commercial uses and allows for the development of residential units as part of mixed use buildings within certain limitations.

Important revitalization goals for downtown Pascoag include the preservation and expansion of downtown businesses activities. The plan elements and recommendations are aimed at attracting new businesses including restaurants, encouraging pedestrian activity, and enhancing the overall quality of the village streetscape. Neighborhood retail must remain the prime use at the ground level. Professional offices should be located on upper levels to maximize the use of the ground floor levels for pedestrian oriented activities.

To the extent that market support is available, the conversion of underutilized upper floors for downtown residential uses is encouraged. Downtown residential uses often contribute to increase pedestrian activity beyond regular business hours and provide economic support to existing businesses.

Roadway and Circulation

The reconfiguration of the intersection of Routes 100/107 is recommended as an integral part of the redevelopment plan. By reconfiguring this intersection, the “canyon effect” created at the south end of Sayles Avenue would be eliminated, eastbound High Street traffic would be calmed or slowed, and pedestrian safety would be improved.

Parking

Additional parking development opportunities in the downtown may include the redevelopment of a vacant warehouse building located off Park Place. This could be achieved in conjunction with the redevelopment of 67 Pascoag Main Street for more active pedestrian uses in the long term, such as a restaurant or retail specialty store. Depending on the overall redevelopment approach, it is estimated that approximately 7 to 23 new parking spaces could be created to the east of Pascoag Main Street.

Utilities

Wooden utility poles and aerial utilities currently flank both sides of Pascoag Main Street from Sayles Avenue to Bridge Way. Five poles along the west side limit use of the sidewalks, detract from aesthetics, and may hamper emergency response. The redevelopment plan proposes to relocate service on these poles to the east side of Pascoag Main Street. In the long term, underground relocation of overhead utilities along this particular stretch of the road from Sayles Avenue to Bridge Way is proposed.

Zoning

A review of current zoning requirements is proposed in order to refine the list of uses allowed by special permit or prohibited. The creation of a special zoning overlay district is recommended in order to:



Existing village character

- Protect the historic qualities and traditional design character by establishing special design guidelines and design review process.
- Create easements/setbacks/rights-of-way for public access at special locations when parcels become redeveloped.
- Establish conceptual design limits (building square footages, location and amount of parking, drainage areas, etc.) that could allow the opportunity to initiate a streamlined environmental permitting effort for potential redevelopment parcels.

Implementation

Phasing

While downtown Pascoag may offer long-term potential for unique retail businesses and upscale residential development, initial revitalization phases should focus on additional public amenities and small-scale commercial development.

In augmenting the local amenities, commercial developments can begin to form a substantial base that can enable the area to gain recognition as a commercial district. In seeking to maximize its long-term potential, the town should promote the redevelopment of underutilized core locations – most notably parts of Pascoag Main Street adjacent to the park areas – for future commercial and/or mixed-use developments that can contribute to a unique environment that can attract visitors as well as local clientele.

Preliminary survey and engineer design, and environmental regulatory permits are critical first steps in the process of implementing additional amenities and facilitating small-scale commercial development. The BRA could work with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to initiate the permitting process for envisioned public improvements and selected redevelopment parcels, and benefit from the possibility of advancing a streamlined permitting process (more details about this option are discussed in the *Implementation* section of the plan).

Redevelopment Costs

Redevelopment costs have been estimated as part of this plan including concept-planning level costs for estimated public and private investment that would be required to implement the proposed recommendations (see *Table 1* on next page). These estimates are opinions of probable cost and are provided for planning purposes (not for construction).

Public costs considered include the cost to relocate utilities along the east side of Pascoag Main Street, reconfigure Routes 100/107 intersection, install pedestrian level ornamental lighting, construct a new municipal parking lot with a play area in the vicinity of Pascoag Main Street, and limited acquisition of land associated with the proposed improvements. These cost estimates are conceptual and cannot forecast the fluctuation of design or construction costs that are dependent on the specific project context and timing. This is also the case for the estimated private costs, which focus on opinions of probable costs of renovating and upgrading buildings assessed as being in “fair” conditions. Design, engineering and contingency costs have not been included, and will be dependent on the specific context and timing. Typically these may run between 15% and 25% of the total projected construction costs (see the *Implementation* section for more details).

Table 1- Estimated Total of Public and Private Costs Required for Implementation

Estimated Costs	Mid-term Costs	Additional Long-term Costs
Utilities	\$1.3 million for consolidation	\$2.6 million for undergrounding
Streetscape improvements	\$35,000 (ornamental lighting)	\$400,000 allowance for trees and sidewalk enhancements
Intersection improvements	\$160,000 (not including associated land cost)	
Demolition	\$35,000	
Parking Lot Construction	\$400,000	
Potential Land Acquisition	\$280,000	
Building Rehabilitation	\$1.7 million (13 buildings)	
Estimated Total Costs*	\$4 million	\$3 million

** Rounded to nearest million.*

Financial Strategy

Funding mechanisms and incentive programs that could be used as part of the implementation strategies include the following:

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) Funding
- Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) Pilot Program
- Transportation Enhancements (TE)
- Business Improvement District (BID) programs
- Tax Stabilization programs
- New Markets Tax Credit Program
- IRBA/Bond Mortgage Insurance
- Other Loan Guarantee/Credit Enhancement Programs
- The Rhode Island Small Business Loan Fund Corporation (SBLFC)
- Linkage programs
- Building Improvement Programs
- Main Street Program

A more detailed description of these programs and their applicability to Pascoag is provided in the *Implementation* section of this plan.