

MEMORANDUM

To: Member of the Phillipsburg Land Use Board
From: Angela Knowles, PP/AICP, LEED-AP
Date: 6/21/2017
Re: Union Square Design Charrette Summary & Next Steps

The purpose of this memo is to inform the Phillipsburg Land Use Board about the results of the Union Square Design Charrette held on Friday May 19, 2017 and Saturday May 20, 2017 and provide a list of next steps for the project. About 45 people participated over the course of the day and a half program, offering their insights on concepts for the design of Union Square and also on issues such as the perception of the town as a whole, how to attract new businesses and how to retain talent in the community. What transpired was a vision for Union Square that, along with an updated redevelopment plan and forthcoming design guidelines, will work in concert with other aspects of the town's ongoing work. In particular, the plan for Union Square will incorporate Historic Preservation elements, Land Use elements, Recommendations for Parking, Green Infrastructure strategies, Complete Streets designs for safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle use, Marketing strategies coordinated with the town's retail consultant, and Open Space and Recreation elements to connect residents and visitors to town parks and public spaces, the Delaware River, the Morris Canal Greenway and other rails-to-trails projects.



On Friday night, participants were divided into the following three groups based on their interest in planning around Union Square:

1. Waterfront (north of the "free bridge" – Areas 1 & 3);
2. Waterfront (south of the "free bridge" – Areas 2 & 4); and
3. Main Street – Area 5).

Each group developed a list of goals for the area, identified aspects of Union Square that are in need of improvement, and brainstormed ideas for uses that would fit the location and physical constraints of

their area. Generally, the groups' visions for Union Square, and the town as a whole, were in line with each other.

On Saturday, the three groups began designing physical spaces based on the Friday night discussions. Working with the Design Team, the groups created drawings that articulated the visions for each section of Union Square. The results are attached to this memo and are described on Pages 9-12.

VISION

Perhaps the largest discussion of the evening was the perception of Phillipsburg to outsiders. The town has beautiful architecture, a rich history, and perhaps its greatest asset, the Delaware River. Still there is a perception that the town's primary focus is sports, that there is apathy for community involvement and town issues, and that the town has social issues. When we started talking about the reality of what it is like living in the town, participants did not necessarily disagree with the perception, but they focused on the positive and said that what they experience in Phillipsburg is really no different than any other town. The fact that over 400 people responded to an online survey shows that there is the opposite of apathy in the community, but they would like there to be a greater sense of pride, focus on families and appreciation for history in the town. Participants understood how the town could benefit from its community assets, but feel that right now they are not being capitalized on as much as they could be. They also felt that any benefits gained from these assets are not necessarily shared throughout the whole community. These are some of the issues that, once something positive is initiated in Union Square, could have a ripple effect through the whole community.

The vision of the 2013 Revised Riverfront Redevelopment Plan was *"to capitalize on the recreational and cultural assets of the riverfront district to support the revitalization of the historic downtown through the creation of new business, residential, and eco-tourism opportunities."* While this is largely still the case, the vision statement could be revised to include the intention for any added benefits gained from this revitalization to be a catalyst for economic growth throughout the town. A revised statement could read:

The vision of the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan is to capitalize on the recreational and cultural assets of the riverfront district to support the revitalization of the historic downtown through the creation of new business, residential, and eco-tourism opportunities and to encourage economic growth town-wide.

Current Goals and Objectives

The adopted Revised Riverfront Redevelopment Plan (2013) lists a number of Goals and Objectives that are directly related to the Union Square redevelopment project. In order to begin crafting new language for an updated redevelopment plan and for design guidelines, it is important to review the existing Goals & Objectives to where updated language may be needed. In general, these goals were supported through the charrette process.

1. To encourage redevelopment in a manner that is compatible with the character of adjacent neighborhoods and land uses; and to minimize negative impacts on new and existing residential neighborhoods.

2. To provide for an increase in the economic base by redeveloping underutilized and non-productive properties.
3. To create new residential neighborhoods and support facilities, which will provide an economic stimulus for existing businesses and create new opportunities for growth.
4. To enhance riverfront areas and river views, improve accessibility to the water, and promote recreational use and water-related activities to attract and increase the use of riverfront lands.
5. To utilize the existing railroad properties and riverfront to create a system of footpaths and bikeways that will link the entire waterfront to local attractions and neighborhoods along the river, including routes extending inland to Walters Park and north and south to the regional trail system.
6. To promote tourism opportunities based on the transportation history of the town and region, through the use of such facilities as the original rail station, Black Bridge signal tower, excursion railway, miniature railroad, and the Morris Canal arch, and creating new facilities to showcase the Town's rail and canal heritage.
7. To provide adequate infrastructure to support redevelopment, including roadway accessibility and safe, convenient and accessible parking to adequately serve the existing and future commercial and residential needs of the redevelopment area.
8. To attract educational and cultural amenities and provide for linkages to a variety of tourist, recreational and cultural facilities in Phillipsburg and the region.

Union Square Design Standards & Guidelines

Section 3.5.3 of the Revised Redevelopment Plan (2013) lays out the Design Standards & Guidelines for Union Square, which are “intended to reinforce the physical, visual, and spatial characteristics of the district through the consistent use of compatible urban design and architectural design elements.” These standards address the urban design and architectural design elements that will become a part of the approval process for development or re-development within the district. Specifically, the design standards speak to:

- A. Context & Continuity
- B. Street Definition
- C. Plazas, Courtyards & Open Space
- D. Building Scale, Location & Orientation
- E. Pedestrian Circulation
- F. Landscaping
- G. Street and Site Lighting
- H. Street Standards

These design standards will be amended to include new suggestions that emerged from the charrette process, including strategies for *Green Infrastructure* in new construction and re-construction/rehabilitation and *Complete Streets* for pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation.

Union Square Architectural Standards

Section 3.5.4 of the Revised Redevelopment Plan (2013) also lays out specific Architectural Standards meant to “capitalize on Phillipsburg’s architectural assets, particularly of the high quality, turn of the 20th century buildings that line South Main Street.” These standards will be amended to include any new information gained in the charrette and will include photos and drawings to better visualize the text of the plan. Specifically, the architectural standards include language related to Local Context and Architectural Standards.

Proposed Amendments to the 2013 Revised Redevelopment Plan

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

In reference to Objective #1 above, Phillipsburg’s vision for Historic Preservation is to encourage redevelopment in a manner that is compatible with the character of adjacent neighborhoods and land uses. In particular, the groups focused on the existing structures in the area that have either been repaired or are in need of repair. These include the Union Hotel at the center of Union Square and 102 and 104 South Main Street at the southern end of the district, as they are generally considered to be “anchors” or “gateways” to the town. Ideas for repurposing The Union Hotel included a co-op building for a mix of businesses or a Bed and Breakfast, or some other type of mixed-use commercial property.

102 and 104 South Main Street are currently used as offices or shops and could remain as such. The purpose of including these buildings as examples is to illustrate the historic architectural character of the town and how the public wishes to maintain this character with any new development that is proposed for Union Square. Funding from the State Historic Preservation Office or other similar organizations could support the rehabilitation of other historic structures along South Main St. so as to create a unified historic district.

LAND USE

The subject of Land Use had been addressed in Goals and Objectives #s 1., 2., and 3, above. In order to accomplish the objectives sought in the 2013 redevelopment plan, charrette participants suggested that proposed land uses should be unique, family-friendly, timeless, abundant in public event space (especially next to the water), simple, accessible from town, visible from Easton, and should promote local businesses. Green technologies such as pervious areas, additional trees and water features were also listed as priorities. Specifically, participants named land uses such as a B&B or hotel, restaurants / dining



Union Square Hotel (left)



102 (red) and 104 (brown) South Main Street

looking out to water, Studio and loft spaces for artists, Eco-tourism, Water sports, Fitness, and Trail connections.

Table 3.5-1 of the 2013 Revised Redevelopment Plan lists the following uses as “Permitted” within Union Square (Waterfront & S. Main St. corridor). This list also generally follows the consensus of the charrette participants in that the variety of permitted uses is in line with what was suggested at the charrette, and therefore would not need to be updated.

Use	Waterfront	S. Main Street
<i>Principal – Non-Residential</i>		
Retail and specialty shops	✓	✓
Retail & personal services	✓	✓
Hotels and B&Bs	✓	✓
Restaurants (excluding drive-through)	✓	✓
Retail sales of prepared food for consumption outside of a building	✓	✓
Taverns and brewpubs	✓	✓
Craft distilleries	✓	✓
Offices above ground floor	✓	✓
Offices on ground floor but only with open shop/display windows	✓	✓
Cultural facilities such as museums, nature/science center, aquarium, theater, art galleries, libraries	✓	✓
Instructional facilities such as dance, music, fine art, martial arts, and fitness schools and studios including recital and concert halls	✓	✓
Banquet facilities	✓	
Outdoor recreation-oriented retail sales, services and rentals such as but not limited to bicycles, hiking, fishing, canoes and kayaks	✓	
Visitor center for the dissemination of information and retail sale of gifts, souvenirs, and other sundry convenience items in support of a local or regional tourist, cultural or educational facility	✓	
Public recreational facilities	✓	
Multi-level parking structures	✓	
<i>Principal – Residential (see additional standards below)</i>		
Multi-family residential only above the ground floor		✓
Multi-family residential only above the ground floor if the building fronts Union Square	✓	
Multi-family residential	✓	
<i>Accessory</i>		
Use customarily associated with a permitted principal use	✓	✓
Outdoor dining in conjunction with a restaurant	✓	
Outdoor storage of rental recreational equipment such as canoes, kayaks or bicycles	✓	
Mobile vendors, farmers markets, fairs	✓	

From a more regional standpoint, new land uses introduced to the district should promote Union Square as a destination for the region. This could be accomplished by promoting the Delaware River as a destination, expanding and improving public transportation and promoting local culture and markets throughout the region.

MARKETING / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The town is currently working with the JGSC Group, a retail marketing firm that “fills vacancies and/or enhances the retail mix of communities.” They are conducting an assessment of Phillipsburg that will result in recommendations for an appropriate strategy for attracting new and retaining existing desirable businesses. A few topics were covered in this discussion. Charrette participants agreed there appears to be adequate existing building stock in the business district and in Union Square, although there are many vacant buildings. They also noted that many of the buildings’ 2nd and 3rd floors are rented as either office or residential, but that 1st floor retail spaces are vacant. The cause could be attributed to rental prices that are low enough for those spaces to be more readily occupied, but just high enough that the rent covers the mortgage on the building; therefore, a landlord may not feel it necessary to lease the first floor spaces. Incentives for landlords to rent first floor spaces should be explored.



Additionally, participants agreed that there currently isn’t enough to draw people to Union Square and the Riverfront. A good rule of thumb is the “Power of 10” (a strategy developed by the Project for Public Spaces <https://www.pps.org/reference/the-power-of-10/>). This strategy encourages a city to identify at least 10 Major Destinations in the city; at least 10 Places to go in each Major Destination; and at least 10 Things to Do in each Place. If we applied this rule of thumb here for Phillipsburg we might be able to get 10 for each category. The purpose of the retail market study is to attract people to all 10 things to do in all 10 places identified and more.

One group at the charrette took it upon themselves to identify what those uses could be, including what they currently have:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Tailor | 13. Comic books |
| 2. Locksmith | 14. Italian gourmet imports |
| 3. Wigs | 15. Sports memorabilia |
| 4. Laundromat | 16. Garden center |
| 5. Bike shop | 17. Hardware store |
| 6. Drug store | 18. Shoe shop |
| 7. Chinese restaurant | 19. Candle shop |
| 8. Book store | 20. Hobby / crafts |
| 9. Cigar store | 21. Frozen yogurt |
| 10. Sporting goods | 22. Adult Education Center / Tutoring |
| 11. Music store | 23. Yoga Studio |
| 12. Café on river | 24. Community Center / Art Studio |

Use	Required Parking
Retail and specialty shops, personal services	2 spaces per 1,000 sf of Gross Floor Area (GFA)
Offices	3 spaces per 1,000 sf GFA
Hotels, B & B's	1 space per room plus appropriate number for other uses in the building
Restaurant and banquet facilities	0.3 spaces per seat
Drinking establishments, lounges	5 spaces per 1,000 sf GFA
Cultural and educations uses	2 spaces per 1,000 sf GFA
Studios for arts and instruction	2 spaces per 1,000 sf GRA
Residential	Per RSIS

Lastly, the plan also recommends in **Table 3.5-4** that structured parking should be permitted in the Waterfront Subareas as follows:

Parking Structure Requirements	
Minimum front yard	Equal to or greater than the abutting buildings
Minimum side yard	Zero if attached fully to an abutting building or 5 feet
Maximum height	Equal to or less than the abutting buildings; 35ft where no buildings immediately abut the site
Maximum coverage	85%

In terms of the design of the parking structure, it should be designed to have the appearance of a retail business when viewed from the street, including windows, and should be comparable and compatible with the general architectural style of the surrounding buildings or area.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Green Infrastructure is a term to describe a stormwater management practice that captures, filters, absorbs, and/or reuses stormwater to help restore the natural water cycle by reducing stormwater runoff, promoting infiltration, and/or enhancing evapotranspiration.¹ Examples of these practices include Bioretention & rain gardens; Bioswales; Downspout planters; Stormwater planters; Cisterns & rain barrels; Permeable pavements; and Tree filter boxes. The Revised Redevelopment Plan hints at green infrastructure practices in the Landscaping section of the Design Standards & Guidelines; however a separate section should be added to the guidelines. Green Infrastructure practices that would be appropriate for the Union Square District could include:

- Bioswales along sidewalks / streets
- Downspout planters at the base of buildings
- Enhanced Tree Pits
- Tree filter boxes
- Pervious concrete or paver sidewalks

A final concept plan and design guidelines will detail appropriate locations and sizes of these features.

COMPLETE STREETS

The Town of Phillipsburg has a Draft Complete Streets policy, crafted in 2012. Although not formally adopted, the contents of the Policy are relevant to conveying the need for safe and accessible streets for

¹ Green Infrastructure Guidance Manual for New Jersey, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program, Published August 2016.

all users. The Revised Redevelopment Plan should be amended to include a separate Complete Streets section that includes the existing language for Pedestrian Circulation, and adds Bicycle and Vehicular Circulation sub-sections. These newly added sections should also be compatible with language in the Street Definition section of the redevelopment plan.

The following elements of a Complete Street should be included in the redevelopment plan for Union Square:

- Sidewalks
- Crosswalks
- Bike Lanes
- Transit
- Travel Lanes
- Sustainability Practices (cross-reference with Green Infrastructure)

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Because Union Square is a connecting piece of the Phillipsburg Riverfront, participants in the charrette felt it necessary that the district be easily accessible from the existing and proposed trails. The Town of Phillipsburg is currently pursuing access to the City of Easton via an abandoned railroad bridge across the Delaware River that is slated to become a rail-to-trail project. With funding from the EPA, this project will connect bicyclists and hikers to the two towns. This is one example of incorporating recreation and open space projects into the Riverfront Redevelopment plan.

Design guidelines for the Union Square district should include Open Space & Recreation to support the many ideas generated at the charrette. These include:

- Ice Skating Rink
- Amphitheatre
- Carousel
- Ferris Wheel
- Boardwalk / Trails along the River
- Public Space with Fountain
- Promenade with Seating
- Boathouse / Boat Launch
- Beach

Concepts

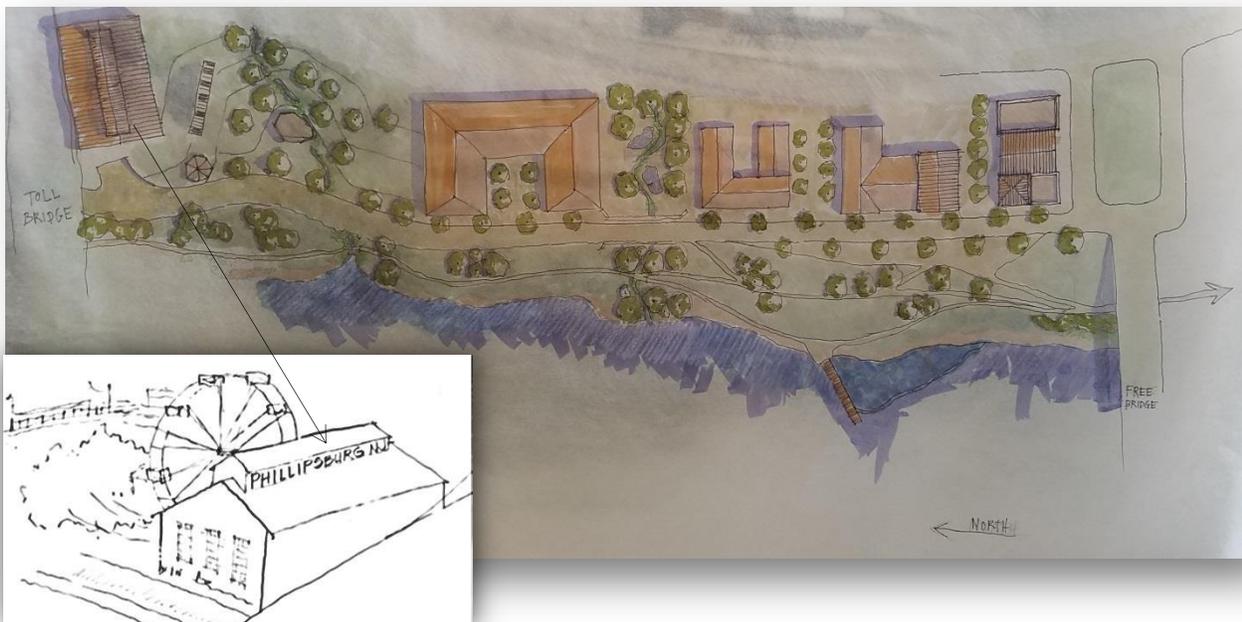
Building on ideas generated on Friday night, Saturday included a walking tour of the Riverfront and Union Square. The groups then began drawing the visions they saw for the District. A number of concept designs were created for each area and are illustrated below.

GROUP 1 – Waterfront North #1

This group envisioned an enhanced waterfront that is anchored by a more defined “square” at the intersection of Northampton St Bridge and South Main Street and an indoor event/sports area and Ferris Wheel at the terminus of Riverside Way and adjacent to the Route 202 bridge. In between these two features, the group looked at ways to:

- develop mixed use buildings intertwined with green space for either casual gatherings or more formal events;
- incorporate parking under the mixed- use buildings;
- incorporate green infrastructure in the form of swales that follow the contour of the topography and the Delaware River;
- establish trails along the waterfront for ease of access to the River; and
- create connections to the Riverfront and Union Square from under the toll bridge as well as under the free bridge.

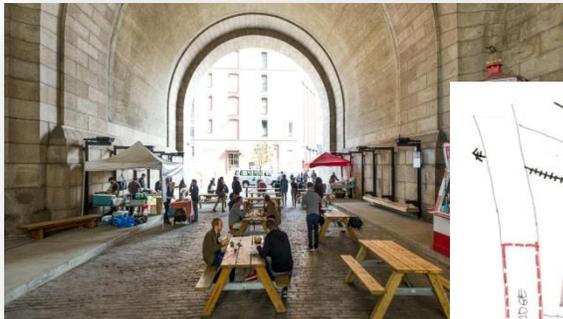
Other public spaces incorporated into this concept are an amphitheater, appropriately designed with seating facing westward, an indoor event / sports area for multi-seasonal use, and a carousel and Ferris Wheel to attract families, generate income, and provide a unique identifier for Phillipsburg.



GROUP 2 – Waterfront North #2

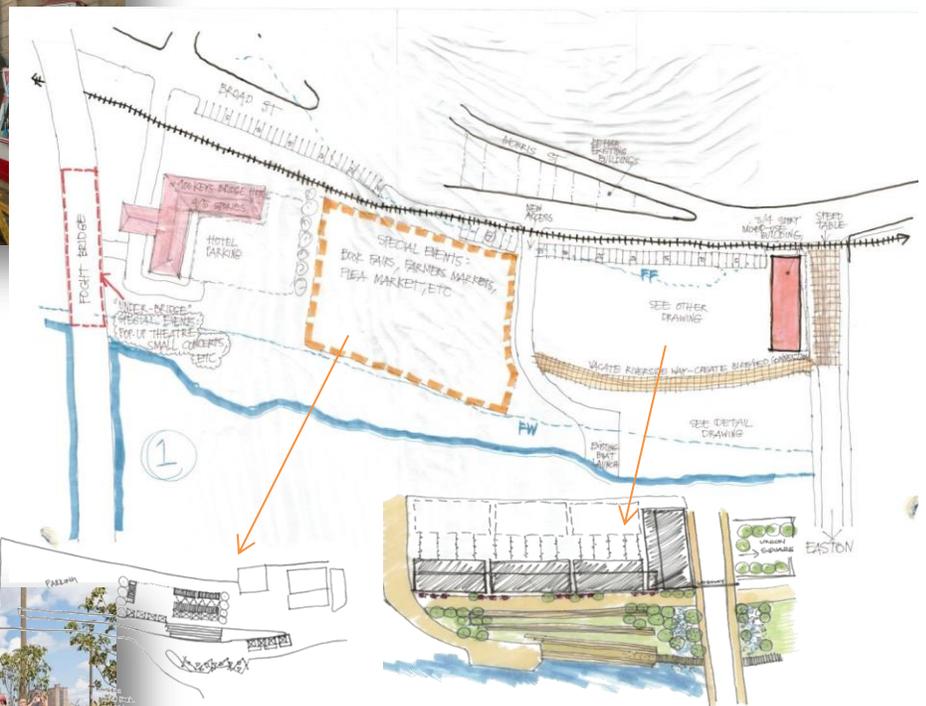
This group created a waterfront experience that includes mixed use development along a newly arranged Riverside Way. This concept proposes two new accesses from Broad St.; one to directly access the boat ramp and parking along the railroad, and the other to access a hotel across from the Route 22 ramp. Buildings are oriented toward the river with parking behind and Riverside Way is vacated to allow for a pedestrian / bicycle connection to Union Square and the riverfront. The detailed drawing below indicates a more open Union Square with plantings and public space, a Gateway sign across the traffic calmed free bridge and a 3- to 4-story mixed use building framing the square. The detailed drawing indicates additional mixed-use buildings that could be constructed as needed with parking behind, also able to be phased in as needed. The riverfront is also accessible by a terraced public seating area and incorporates green infrastructure practices on either side of the free bridge.

A “Special Events” area would accommodate “pop-up” events and other temporary uses, such as Fairs, Farmers Markets and Flea Markets. A detailed drawing of this space includes an area for parking and an area for vendors and public seating. Adjacent to the special events area, the drawing proposes a 4- to 5-story hotel situated next to the Route 22 Bridge with parking and landscaping. Lastly, this group proposes to use the space Under the Bridge for temporary uses like theatre, small concerts, and outdoor exercise classes like yoga. This concept also considers areas for additional parking.



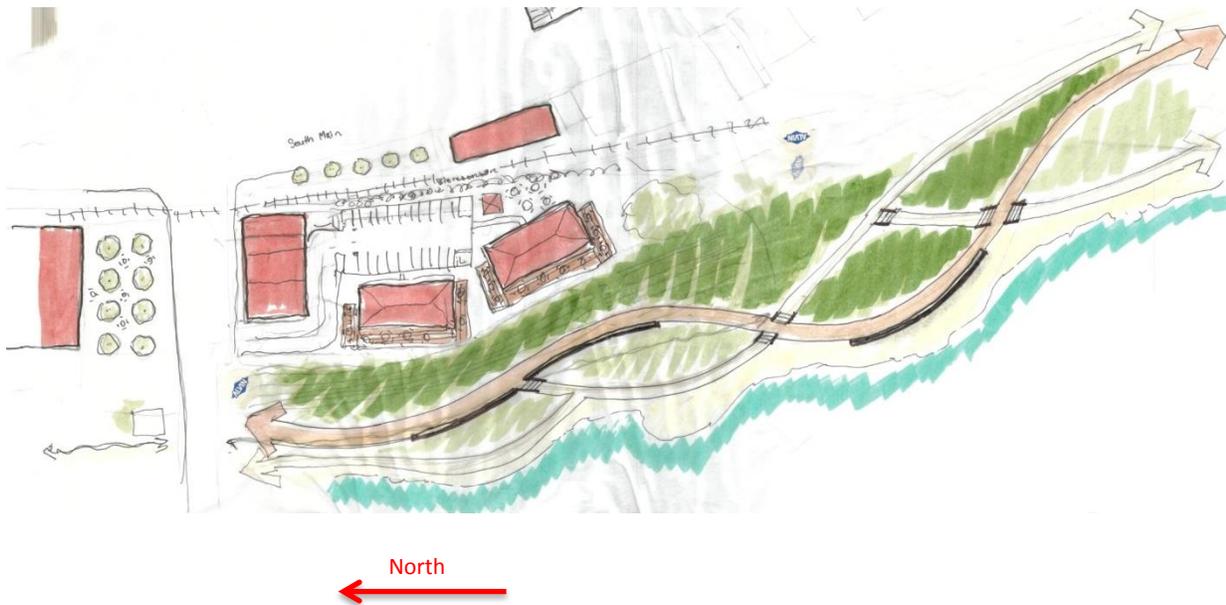
Examples: Under the Bridge.

top: DUMBO BID, The Archway
bottom: DUMBO, BID, Brooklyn Bridge Park



GROUP #3 – Waterfront South

The group working on the Waterfront south of the Free Bridge envisioned the area as a continuation of the trail network from the north side of the bridge and continuing further south to connect with more regional networks such as the Phillipsburg-Easton Rail Trail and the Morris Canal Greenway. Trails would intertwine and intersect along the riverfront and would accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists. Moving toward South Main Street, the group proposed to replace the gas station with a 3- to 4-story mixed-use building similar to what was historically at that location. The existing restaurant would be moved closer to the riverfront allowing for parking to be created behind the buildings and adjacent to the railroad. There may be opportunity to expand upward from the restaurant to create additional residences, as well. A third building, possibly more shops, restaurants and/or residences, would be developed along the riverfront to accommodate more activity and to anchor the southern end of the Union Square District. We heard from participants that keeping access to water sports would be a good attraction to the riverfront. These uses would be better suited for the area north of the Free Bridge and therefore have been proposed to be moved to a different location.

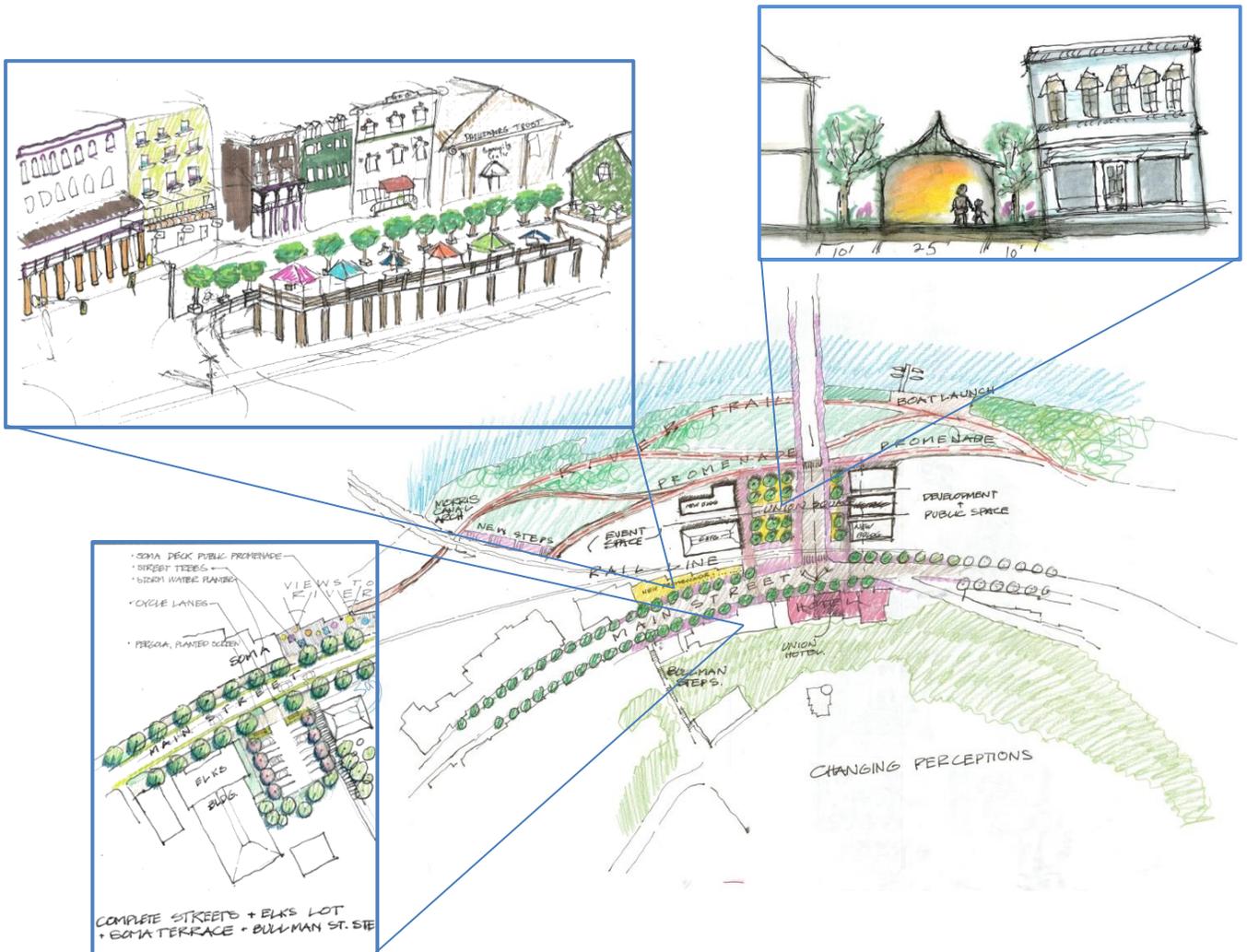


Group #4 – South Main Street

This group took the opportunity to envision how South Main Street could be transformed into a place for public gatherings, and how it could connect to the other proposed concepts. They looked at the big picture of the corridor and then defined spaces within the area. As shown in the concept drawings below, a redesigned Union Square would include a tree-lined, pedestrian “square” or plaza, with buildings set back to allow for an event space.

With the newly redesigned deck at SoMa, this group recommended continuing the height of the public space along South Main Street and include an elevated boardwalk with seating to enjoy the views of the river, to provide a space for pop-up events like a farmer’s market or concert space, or to provide seating for new restaurants along South Main St. This promenade would be connected to the riverfront with a walkway down to the “waterfront-south” area, crossing the railroad into a new parking area.

Lastly, this group looked at the area around the Elks Building as a place for enhanced landscaping and perhaps additional or reconfigured parking to accommodate more vehicles. They also suggested retrofitting the roadway along South Main St. to be a “Complete Street” (see discussion on page 8) to accommodate all users, but especially bicycles and pedestrians.



NEXT STEPS & TIMELINE

1. Determine a final concept plan for the Union Square / Riverfront District based on these initial concepts, environmental constraints mapping, and market retail study results. Consult with Design Team to develop a more final design. **Present to Land Use Board at September meeting.**
2. Update the 2013 Revised Redevelopment Plan to include Design Guidelines with illustrative examples of these concepts for Union Square and the Riverfront. Include the following sections:
 - a. Land Use
 - b. Context & Continuity – *Historic Preservation*
 - c. Building Scale, Location & Orientation
 - d. Pedestrian Circulation
 - e. Street Definition
 - f. Street Standards – *Complete Streets*
 - g. Plazas, Courtyards & Public Spaces
 - h. Open Spaces & Recreation
 - i. Green Infrastructure
 - j. Landscaping
 - k. Street and Site Lighting
 - l. Parking Standards
3. Present Design Guidelines to Land Use Board at **November meeting.**
4. Submit deliverables to the Highlands Council.