



Market Street Extension Gateway STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

SUMMARY REPORT

Existing Conditions & Stakeholders Interviews

Prepared for:
The City of Portsmouth

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INTRODUCTION

Market Street is a heavily traveled route used by many vehicles and trucks driving to downtown Portsmouth from other locations via Interstate Route I-95. Along with the substantial volume of vehicular traffic, Market Street also serves resident pedestrians and some visitors staying in local hotels who wish to walk and bicycle to the stores, restaurants and services of the central business district. The streetscape is comprised of a mix of land uses with different scales and styles of architecture. The overall visual character of the Market Street processional sequence could be enhanced to provide the visitor and residents with a strong sense of approaching the heart of a historic and desirable community.

Improvements to the corridor represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the City to strengthen the visual and functional qualities of the Market Street area. The conceptual scope of recommended streetscape improvements are intended to:

- Develop a memorable gateway to downtown Portsmouth
- Create a strongly defined spatial corridor on Market Street
- Slow traffic approaching the downtown area and improve safety
- Orient visitors to the attractions of Portsmouth
- Provide useful public places and meaningful connections between the downtown and the neighborhoods
- Enhance pedestrian movement by developing clear, continuous pedestrian routes and safe street crossings
- Develop a streetscape that will visually unify some of the disparate district elements,
- Create an identity for this historic area

EXISTING CONDITIONS - ROADWAY

Kearsarge Way to Michael Succi Drive

The principal arrival route for many visitors to downtown Portsmouth is Market Street corridor from Interstate Route I-95. The alignment and cross-section of the road along this axis are among the principal determinants of the streetscape environment in the district. From the Kearsarge Way intersection east to the Bethel Assembly of God Church, Market Street has two travel lanes in each direction, has a raised median between the lanes and broad shoulders on both sides.



As eastbound Market Street passes the church, the wide shoulder on its south side is reduced to a four foot width where guard rails have been installed at the Cutts Cove bank and the center median has been narrowed to create space for a left turn lane at Michael Succi Drive

On the north side of Market Street, a six foot bituminous concrete sidewalk extends from the project limit at Kearsarge Way to its current terminus at Michael Succi Drive

Michael Succi Drive to New Hampshire Port Authority Intersection

Near Michael Succi Drive, broad views of the Piscataqua River and the Route 1 Bypass bridge open over city-owned land on the north side of the street. The parcel drops about 4-5 feet across a 120' wide grass covered lot to groves of sumac and cottonwood trees close to a stone-armored slope at the edge of the river. On the south side of the right of way, a narrow shoulder and NHDOT guard rail separates the road from a steep slope at the edge of Cutts



Cove. Across this narrow pond, attractive views of a wooded shore line and a few private homes are available. While no sidewalks currently exist on either side of the road on this segment of Market Street, the City intends to construct a sidewalk and dedicated bike lane from the Port Authority intersection to Michael Succi Drive.

Approximately 300' past Michael Succi Drive, the 20' wide paved median becomes a grass strip that functions as a swale draining parts of both the eastbound and westbound lanes. The intersection at the Albacore Museum drive is controlled by traffic signals suspended from an overhead cable. East of the intersection, the eastbound lanes appear to pitch largely toward the North Mill Pond side of the road.



As Market Street passes under the Route 1 Bypass viaduct, the road alignment curves to the right and pleasant views of the riverfront on the left are replaced by the industrial buildings, railroad track and scrap metal piles at the New Hampshire Port Authority complex. These elements are only partly buffered by a discontinuous installation of screening evergreen trees. North Mill Pond and a number of attractive private homes, the brick buildings of Nobles Island and the Chamber of Commerce building are part of a pleasant prospect on the south side of the street beyond the Route 1 Bypass viaduct.

At the viaduct, the wide grass median narrows again and is paved where the street crosses the North Mill Pond outlet to allow the creation of a dedicated left turn lane at the signalized intersection controlling Nobles Island and New Hampshire Port Authority driveways.

Port Authority Intersection to Russell Street

East of the Port Authority intersection, views toward Portsmouth downtown are dominated by the artificial “mountains” of the Port Authority and Granite State Minerals Corporation material / salt piles. From this location, sidewalks providing a continuous pedestrian route are found on both sides of the street extending to the center of town. Another lobe of the North Mill Pond water sheet approaches the south side of Market Street between the building housing the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the Russell Street intersection. A narrow strip of City-owned lawn on the bank of the pond creates a pleasant foreground for this water view.



Russell Street to Deer Street

The Market Street pavement cross-section begins to narrow at Russell Street. The two lanes in each direction become single wide lanes and the width of the paved way is dramatically reduced between Russell Street and Deer Street. In addition, the paved median disappears east of the Russell Street intersection.

For the first time, the open, visual character of the streetscape becomes compressed by the Portsmouth Sheraton Harborside Hotel on the high ground to the south and the Granite State Minerals Corporation material piles and tall brick wall at the back of the sidewalk on the north side of the street. The sidewalk zone in this area contributes an urban character to the streetscape by extending its paved surface from the Market Street curb line to the face of the retail storefronts at the base of the Sheraton Hotel. Metered on-street parking spaces are available on both sides of Market Street between Russell Street and the Deer Street intersection.



A significant component of pedestrian traffic in this area is contributed by guests of the Sheraton Harborside Hotel. The hotel is wrapped around a large central auto court with a wide stair descending from the court and front entrance to the southwest corner of the Deer Street intersection. The intersection is wide, has a number of not-obvious vehicle entry points and is subject to heavy traffic.



A combination of often fast, eastbound Market Street traffic, heavily laden trucks exiting the Granite State Minerals property and limited sight distance at westbound Market Street for northbound Deer Street vehicles makes this location a hazardous intersection for pedestrians and drivers alike.

Kearsarge Way to Michael Succi Drive

Visitors exiting Route I-95 to Market Street are presented with a limited amount of orientation signage and the wayfinding “system” combines both directional signs and information on attractions. Traffic signals require most cars turning onto Market Street to stop and this presents an opportunity to develop a coordinated graphic “family” of signage icons for these locations. This system of signs can direct visitors to Portsmouth and can have common graphic elements that will be repeated at various decision points and attractions as the driver approaches the downtown. The sign graphics should be based on images with cultural/historical meaning for the community.

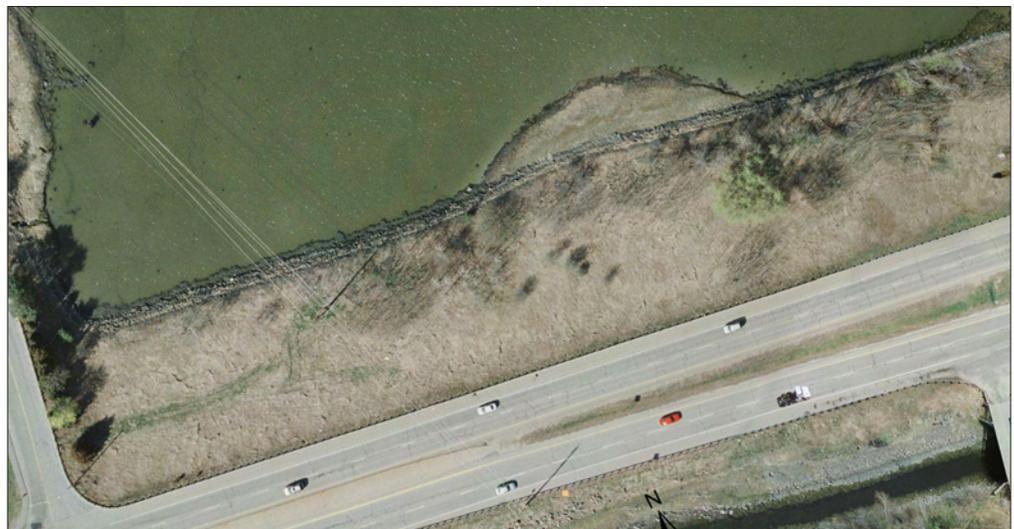
The walls of the Route I-95 bridge facing Market Street provide an additional opportunity to develop large-scale murals based on Portsmouth industry and history. These can create a gateway event that will reinforce the impression that Portsmouth is a distinct community with a long history and an important maritime heritage.



Eastbound drivers on Market Street tend to maintain near-highway speeds because the paved way is wide, has multiple lanes and feels like an extension of the highway environment rather than a pleasant parkway leading to the center of the town. The wide road right of way and median presents an opportunity to install tree plantings at the shoulder and in the median to both create the character of a parkway and to provide visual feedback to speeding motorists.

Michael Succi Drive to New Hampshire Port Authority Intersection

Market Street east of Michael Succi Drive continues to be a wide straight road with relatively fast traffic and no facilities (currently) for pedestrians or bicyclists. The undeveloped parcel between Market Street and the Piscataqua River could be developed into a gateway



park and important pedestrian amenity at comparatively low cost and very modest impact to the coastal zone.

Salt-tolerant street trees can be installed on both sides of the road and on the median as far as the Route 1 Bypass viaduct. The line of trees with openings at key view locations will reinforce the parkway environment and provide a visual framework to anchor the waterfront park on a true pedestrian axis. Median plantings will require installation of guard rails for vehicle safety and plant material locations will have to be carefully coordinated with median regrading to minimize road salt damage.

The City intends to construct a new sidewalk and bike lane on the north side of the street between Michael Succi Drive and the Port Authority and a new sidewalk and bikeway on the south side between Nobles Island and Albacore Museum access drive . The narrow existing shoulder and steep slope on the banks of Cutts Cove west of the Albacore Museum drive will make constructing a matching sidewalk on the south side of the road an expensive undertaking and is not recommended.

Orientation at the Albacore Museum drive intersection can be improved with coordinated signage and the competing mix of signs adjacent to the Chamber of Commerce building drive should also be coordinated with the overall signage program.

Existing screening between the Port Authority building and the street should be supplemented with an additional mixed planting of evergreen and deciduous trees to further buffer the visual impact of this structure

Port Authority Intersection to Russell Street

East of the Port Authority intersection, Market Street views of the materials piles should be, at least, partially buffered by the installation of street trees on both sides of the road and on the paved median, where feasible.

A simple park might be developed on the south side of Market Street between Nobles Island and Russell Street. Arcing paths, pond overlook, shade trees and site furniture could create a new bird watching opportunity, neighborhood amenity and a passive recreation facility that will support the desired visual character of Market Street as a progressively more urban corridor for the visitor approaching the downtown area.

The currently chaotic sign cluster for the charter boat operations and excursions vessels should be better reorganized for better readability as part of a private effort coordinated with the overall Market Street wayfinding program.



Russell Street to Deer Street

Currently, each of the two travel lanes on Market Street between Russell Street and Deer Street are approximately 18' wide. If these lanes were somewhat narrowed, the sidewalks could be made correspondingly wider. This additional sidewalk width would create a generous pedestrian zone with potential space for ornamental treatment and the installation of street trees.

The Deer Street intersection should be studied carefully to determine whether the pedestrian zone at its edges can be expanded without compromising the function of the intersection for traversing vehicles. Curb extensions, enhanced crosswalks, ornamental lights and more continuous pedestrian pavements, shade trees and site furniture are some elements that might be incorporated in the study of the square.



OPERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF CORRIDOR STAKEHOLDERS

An important part of developing a practical streetscape design concept is the outreach effort to Market Street residents and business stakeholders. The comments of these corridor users represents many of the operational issues and goals of a significant group concerned with the outcome of the project and should, to the extent practical, be considered in the streetscape vision for Market Street.

The following summary of issues and goals have been drawn from comments made by attendees at several stakeholder meetings hosted in Portsmouth during December, 2007 and January, 2008.

Project Kickoff Meeting

Date/Location: November 13, 2007 at Portsmouth Administrative Offices
Attending: Nancy Carmer, City of Portsmouth Economic Development Office
Deborah Finnigan, City of Portsmouth Traffic Engineer
Geno Marconi, Director of NH Ports and Harbors
David Chaote, Nobles Island

Comments:

- There is a noticeable level of pedestrian and bicycle traffic traveling between the Atlantic Heights/Bersum Gardens neighborhoods and the downtown area
- Some trucks from Granite State Minerals Corp (GSMC) exit the waterfront yard and travel up Deer Street to GSMC's other yard and Buzzy's Truck Stop on Maplewood Avenue
- Early in the morning, some trucks inbound to the Port Authority or GSMC park on the south side of Market Street under the Route 1 Bypass viaduct – and queue as far back as the Albacore Museum drive
- Port Authority feels that a public Piscataqua River overlook pier and possibly, a coastal cruiser docking area would be popular additions at the west end of the Port Authority property



Marine Industry Stakeholders

Date/Location: December 13, 2007 at NH Port Authority
Attending: Bob Hassold, Albacore Museum
Robin Whitaker, Isle of Shoals Steamship Co.
Deb Jordan, Charter captain

Comments:

- Lots of problems with vehicle circulation
- Bridge opens only on half hour, so all boats must leave dock at same time – creates pulses of traffic inbound and exiting
- Patrons inbound on Market Street make illegal left turn at Russell Street to reach charter boat parking lot – Can redesign of Russell Street intersection allow for u-turns?
- Many people exiting want to turn toward town – not possible now – must reverse direction at Albacore Museum drive
- Could charter boat patrons exit through Port Authority property at intersection?
- Busses for boat patrons often loop around Deer Street – If Deer Street is made one-way, prefer it be one-way away from river
- Charter boat operators currently feed Market Street parking meters for busses delivering patrons – can a few spaces be set aside (in season) at Market Street fence line for busses/delivery vehicles near entry gate? – alternately, on Russell Street or on Market Street near Port Authority?
- Could some bus parking be sited on vacant land opposite Albacore Museum driveway?
- Lots of confusion at the Russell Street intersection
- Market Street westbound traffic coming into Deer Street intersection is too fast - unsafe
- Signage is a problem – current City regulations require all sign be parallel to street – visitors can't read sign until last second - would work better if signs could be 90 degrees to street
- Sidewalks in poor condition
- Chain link fence at back of sidewalk in poor condition
- Screen Port Authority building and operations
- Signage needed on NB I-95 “Last Portsmouth Exit”
- Orientation signage needed on Market Street at bottom of I-95 off-ramps
- Need coordinated signage for Albacore Museum on both sides of Market Street near approach to driveway
- Noted trucks waiting for Port Authority and GSMC to open often park from 5-8am on south side of Market Street west of Albacore Museum
- If Chamber of Commerce building was relocated to the Albacore Museum driveway both operations might benefit



Business/Institutional/Marine Stakeholders

Date/Location: January 10, 2008 at Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce
Attending: Nancy Carmer, City of Portsmouth Economic Development Office
Doug Bates, Chamber of Commerce
Celina Adams, NH Charitable Foundation
Ross Hanson, Isle of Shoals Marine Lab
Hal Weeks, Isle of Shoals Marine Lab
Vin Cloella, Jardiniere Florists

Comments:

- Some charter boat bus parking at Bethel Assembly church parking lot
- Considerable pedestrian traffic on Market Street
- There is a bicycle link to Bersum Gardens neighborhood on Market Street
- Should be a Market Street pedestrian crossing at bottom of NB I-95 off-ramp
- Freight trains use the track across Market Street about once a week
- Note that coastal zone jurisdiction area extends 100' landward from shoreline
- Turn into Chamber of Commerce parking lot is dangerous - Is it possible to carve space out of median to create turn lane here?
- Eastbound Market Street traffic between Port Authority and Russell Street too fast
- Port Authority building and operations need screening from Market Street view
- Inbound charter boat patrons on Market Street want to make left turn at Russell Street into parking lot
- Food deliveries once a week - Delivery trucks want to turn EB on Market Street when exiting charter boat lot
- Would be a great improvement if charter boat patrons could exit through Port Authority property at intersection
- Should have a river overlook pier/structure at west side of Port Authority property
- Could Market Street east of Deer Street be one-way WB (outbound) and Deer Street be one-way away from water?



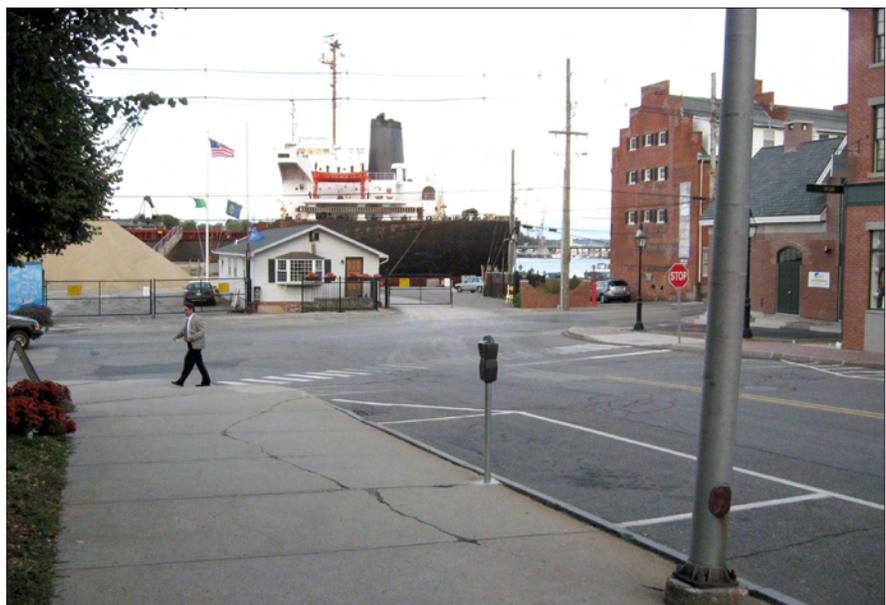
- Prefer Market Street between Russell Street and Deer Street be narrower
- GSMC trucks drive up Deer Street to stockpile parcel on Maplewood Avenue

Business Stakeholders

Date/Location: January 15, 2008 at Portsmouth Sheraton Harborside Hotel
 Attending: Nancy Carmer, City of Portsmouth Economic Development Office
 Deborah Finnigan, City of Portsmouth Traffic Engineer
 Shari Young, Sheraton Harborside Hotel
 Michelle Herman, Sheraton Harborside Hotel
 David Choate, Grubb & Ellis|Coldstream Real Estate Advisors
 Paul Sorli, Downtown Business Association

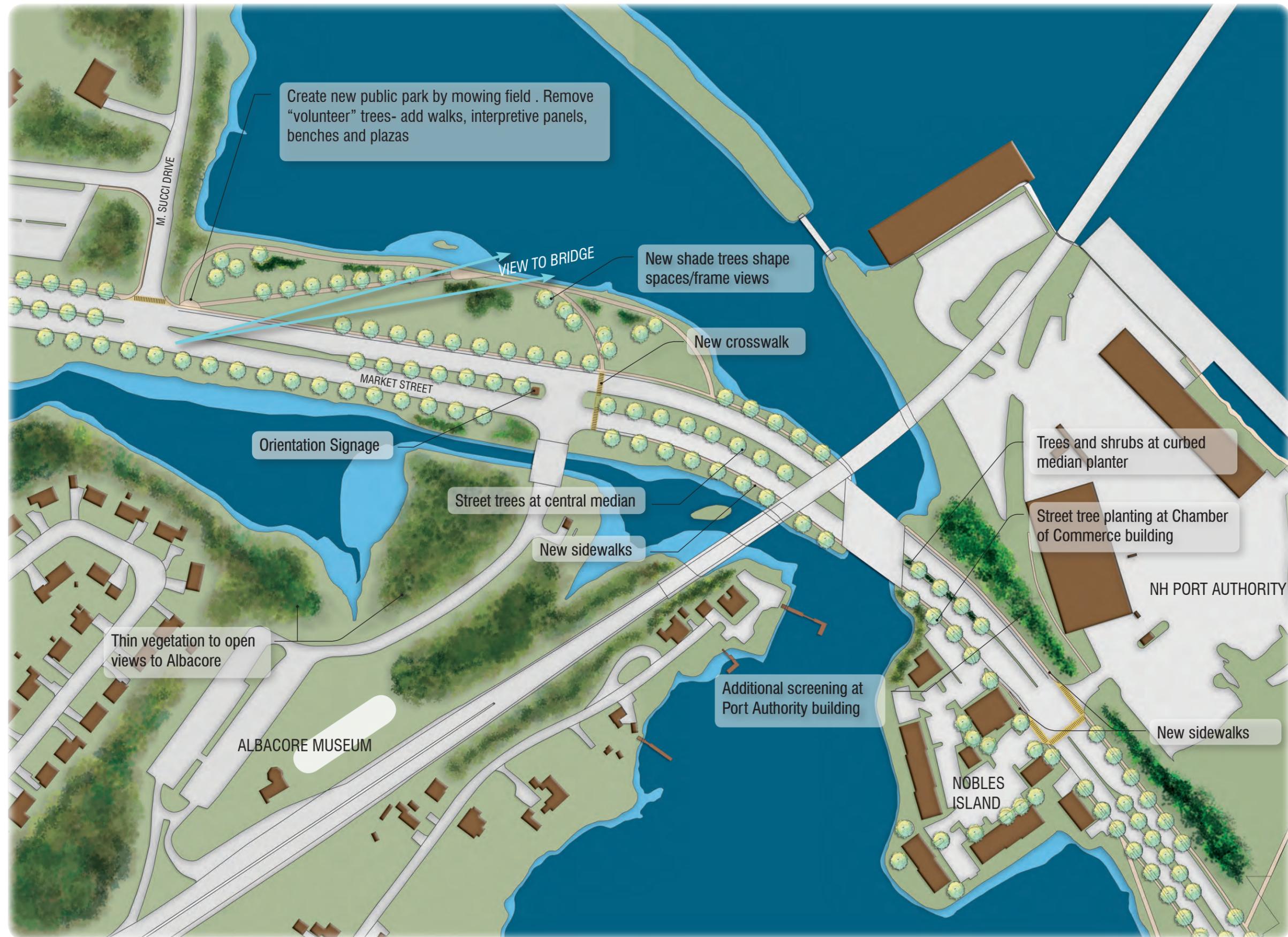
Comments:

- Truck traffic is queuing inappropriately - not using established traffic control radio system
- Granite State Mineral Corp. scalehouse to move across driveway - will ease traffic turn to/from Market Street
- Russell Street/ Market Street intersection being redesigned as a “Tee” intersection - Westin Hotel and Portwalk project to share cost
- Osprey Landing residents cannot bike/walk to downtown
- City to shortly issue RFP for a comprehensive signage/wayfinding system
- Build platforms on North Mill Pond for bird watching overlooks (herons)
- Develop interpretive exhibits at key locations on Portsmouth industrial activity and history
- Albacore Museum needs greater visual presence on Market Street
- Feel median break to allow turns into Isle of Shoals/charter boat lot is not a good idea - D. Finnigan
- Look for opportunities to improve views through ‘legs’ of Route 1 Bypass bridge





MARKET STREET CENTRAL



MARKET STREET EAST

