North Side Riverfront District

Planning Guide

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Binghamton North Side Riverfront District Planning Guide

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In partnership with
City of Binghamton
North Side CARES

With funding from the New York State Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources, under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund.
This aerial photograph illustrates the location of the North Side Neighborhood within the context of the City of Binghamton and the relationship of the Riverfront District along the Chenango River. It is important to note the prominence of the Riverfront District along the river and the potential connections between the district and downtown Binghamton as well as to points north. (photo from http://terraserver-usa.com)
INTRODUCTION

Background
In the past five years, the City of Binghamton has made a commitment to proactively planning its future in a way that sets the course over the next 10 to 15 years for place-appropriate economic development, revitalization, and improved quality of life throughout the metropolitan area. A Comprehensive Plan and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) address recommendations for city-wide planning issues, while the Metropolitan Greenway Plan proposes ways to create a county-wide trail system. In addition to these broad city-wide planning efforts, community leaders have begun to recognize that the rich diversity and unique characteristics of the different districts and neighborhoods contain resources upon which to base its future.

Tapping into these resources requires a different type of planning process to encourage community residents and neighborhood organizations to become involved in defining and shaping their neighborhood’s future. As the Comprehensive Plan and LWRP were being developed, things were happening in the city’s North Side Neighborhood that would set the stage for the type of community-based process that encourages community residents and organizations to become active partners in planning and implementing revitalization strategies. A group of residents, calling themselves “Communities of Shalom” and representing a variety of faith traditions, undertook a training program to learn how to be catalysts for neighborhood transformation and began to initiate neighborhood events and projects. As more North Side residents and supporters became involved in the Communities of Shalom, the group expanded to become North Side CARES (Community Action, Revitalization, and Empowerment Strategies). The City Planning Department, recognizing the potential for developing a longer-term community-based approach to neighborhood revitalization, proposed a partnership of North Side CARES and the landscape architecture departments at Cornell University and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) as part of the New York State Quality Communities Initiative.

In the Spring of 2002, this partnership facilitated a series of community workshops through which neighborhood residents worked together to create a positive, place-based vision for the North Side. The vision planning process introduced residents to a participatory approach that created a setting for dialogue, the creation and discovery of shared values, and the exploration of alternative ideas to achieve the goals that they established. The Vision Plan that they created is a comprehensive, action oriented document that is an accessible tool to guide revitalization and redevelopment in

North Side Neighborhood Planning Time Line

| Event | Date
|-------|------
| Feb. – May 2002 | Vision Planning Process
| May – June 2002 | Grant Proposal
| June 2003 | Grant Awarded
| July 2003 – May 2004 | Vision Plan Concluded and Documented
| Dec. 2003 – May 2005 | Riverfront District Planning and Design Process

North Side Shalom in partnership with Cornell and SUNY ESF, and the City facilitate a vision process to discover community values, explore alternative ways of using opportunities and assets, and create a draft vision statement and goals.

The partners submit a proposal to NYS DOS for an EPF grant to advance the neighborhoods revitalization efforts, particularly the riverfront district

The partners secure the EPF grant

A leadership advisory committee is formed to help broaden community participation and facilitate refinement of the Vision Plan. Final Vision Plan Document is prepared.

The partners work with residents and other stakeholders to create the Riverfront District Revitalization Plan to promote investment, education and accessibility to the riverfront district.
Related Planning

In addition to the Vision Plan, several recently completed plans address or impact revitalization of the North Side Riverfront.

The City of Binghamton Comprehensive Plan, completed in 2003, provides a citywide vision for land use and development while preserving and enhancing the community identity. In addition to documenting inventory and analysis of existing social, economic and environmental conditions, the plan outlines policies and projects required to achieve the vision. One section in the comprehensive plan specifically address the North Side neighborhood and includes a series of action steps, many of which will be reiterated and reinforced in this document.

The LWRP is a comprehensive land and water use plan for the city’s waterfront that is meant to protect the environmental integrity of the waterfront resource while maximizing its potential to contribute to the city’s economic vitality and quality of life. While its policies are fairly broad, the plan does contain a number of specific recommendations that involve the North Side riverfront.

The Metropolitan Greenway Plan proposed a county-wide trail network that takes advantage of the river and stream corridors to provide an interconnected system of trails. The Riverwalk being designed to connect Confluence Park to Cheri Lindsey Park is a central part of this Plan. If the vision of the Greenway Plan is accomplished residents of the surrounding communities will have trail access to the North Side Riverfront District and North Side residents will have direct access to an extensive trail network.

The North Side Vision Statement:

The vision of the North Side of Binghamton is a community living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common vision of safety, beauty, and opportunity. The plan for the north side will affirm the lives and dignity of all people who live here, foster intergenerational relationships, celebrate diversity, and strengthen neighborhood unity.

• Goal 1: Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, cultivate community partnerships, and become leaders in the community.

• Goal 2: Create a safe and secure district for all ages and all aspects of community life.

• Goal 3: Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents.

• Goal 4: Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix, and housing types.

• Goal 5: Assemble a mosaic of safe, diverse, and accessible open spaces as an interconnected network throughout the neighborhood, serving visitors and residents of all ages.

• Goal 6: Celebrate the North Side’s unique social, cultural, and environmental identity.

• Goal 7: Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan that strengthens desired patterns and practices of living.

(see “The North Side Vision Plan” document for detailed information on each goal and associated action strategies)

Riverfront District Planning: A Priority Action of the Vision Plan

In addition to broad goals for the neighborhood, the Vision Plan describes the specific need to strengthen connections between residential, recreational, and commercial areas within the neighborhood and to redevelop commercial areas to better provide goods and services for people living there. It identified the Chenango River waterfront, Binghamton Plaza and Cheri Lindsey Park as underutilized resources and places of opportunity where these more specific neighborhood goals could be realized. Designated as the “Riverfront District”, this area contains the neighborhoods largest concentration of retail and commercial land use, as well as its most significant park and open space resource.

The City’s plan to create the Riverwalk, a multi-use riverside trail that would run between downtown and Cheri Lindsey Park further enhances the Riverfront District’s potential to expand neighborhood access, recreation, and open space for residents and visitors, as well as the potential for trail related commercial activity and economic development. The construction of the Riverwalk within the neighborhood is seen as a way to not only promote redevelopment of commercial and recreation areas but also as a setting to express the North Side Neighborhood’s history and character.
The Economic Benefits of River Restoration and Redevelopment

The American Planning Association’s guide to riverfront redevelopment, Ecological Riverfront Design: Restoring Rivers, Restoring Communities, documents the experience of many communities in rethinking their riverfronts. Many cities have found that restoring their rivers makes sense economically for the following reasons:

1. Improving water quality and reduce costs associated with cleanup
2. Curb flood damage and lower the costs of flood control
3. Decrease stormwater management costs
4. Reduce sprawl and related infrastructure costs
5. Revitalize the downtown riverfront with new opportunities for housing, offices and commercial services that attract new residents, businesses and visitors
6. Provide jobs for residents in construction and commercial businesses
7. Offer recreational opportunities, open space and park amenities
8. Raise property values and generate new tax revenues
9. Attract state and federal funding, new volunteers and broad financial support

The Chenango Riverwalk as a Catalyst for North Side Neighborhood Revitalization

Riverfront redesign can be an effective first step in revitalizing Binghamton’s North Side. By providing better access to the Chenango River, creating adjacent recreational facilities and commercial destinations, and improving streetscape aesthetics, the Riverfront can be transformed into an economic asset, a community gathering space, and a source of neighborhood pride.

The Riverwalk can serve as a catalyst for Riverfront redesign and North Side revitalization. Connecting Cheri Lindsey Park and Confluence Park, the trail will offer pedestrian and bicycle paths so that trail users can experience the river as both a recreational resource and a natural asset. It will offer attractive and usable green space, provide a diversity of recreational opportunities, connect the North Side to other city districts, and spur commercial development. By enhancing the North Side’s image and creating riverfront destinations, the Riverwalk will be a magnet drawing citizens from outside the North Side into it. At the same time, it can also promote a higher quality of life for North Side residents. By increasing levels of pedestrian activity and the numbers of “eyes on the street,” the Riverwalk can provide neighborhood residents and visitors opportunities to gather, participate, build a sense of community, and thereby contribute to neighborhood stability.

While the Riverwalk can potentially be a valuable asset to the North Side and afford greater recreational and commercial possibilities, existing barriers to access threaten to reduce its impact. These barriers include heavy traffic volume on State Street, streetscapes inhospitable to pedestrians, the absence of sidewalks in Binghamton Plaza, the lack of visual connection to the river, and the fear of crime. Because of these barriers, it would be naïve to assume simply that “if you build it they will come.” Any strategy that envisions the Riverwalk as a catalyst for district revitalization will need to broaden its scope to embrace a more comprehensive Riverfront redesign. This broadened scope will include Binghamton Plaza and the adjacent streets, and render them more active, inviting, and people friendly.

The Riverfront District Planning Process

In June 2003 the partnership received Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grant through the New York State Department of State (DOS) to continue the community based design and planning process begun with the Vision Plan, with emphasis on exploring strategies for the Riverfront District as the setting to realize many of the neighborhood goals. Using the North Side Neighborhood Vision Plan as the grounding and foundation, the Communities of Shalom, the University teams from Cornell and SUNY ESF, and the City Planning Department designed and facilitated a participatory process of stakeholder meetings and workshops that involved neighborhood residents working in association with university
planning and design faculty and students to develop, discuss, and refine a vision, goals, and possible approaches and strategies for redevelopment of the Riverfront District. The results of that process and recommendations for action are documented in this report.

**Purpose of the Riverfront District Planning Guide**

The purpose of the report is to communicate and describe the guiding vision and goals for revitalization of the North Side Riverfront District that were established through the collaborative planning process. It is designed to be accessible to the many varied stakeholders interested in playing a role in strengthening the quality of life and economic vitality of the North Side Riverfront District, including citizens, religious and community organizations, business owners, developers, and city and state government.

The common values expressed by stakeholders have been used to develop the vision and a series of supportive goals. Based on an understanding of existing conditions, opportunities and challenges, the vision and goals provided the framework for development of place appropriate community design principles and a series of suggested action steps.

The graphic plans and images that are included in the report illustrate some possible ways to apply design principles to help achieve the Riverfront District goals. However, the principles can be applied in numerous ways, and most important for successful revitalization of the North Side is for everyone involved to understand and agree on the purpose and desired future outcomes of their collective efforts. The report is designed to promote understanding of the common values and neighborhood centered vision that must be the foundation for district revitalization.

**Organization of the Document**

In Chapter 1, Understanding the Riverfront District, existing conditions, assets and concerns are described, through the collective perspective of neighborhood residents, community group members, city and county personnel, and University Design team members.

From this understanding and additional dialogue with stakeholders, the vision and goals were developed and are described in Chapter 2. Also reintroduced, but in the context of the Riverfront District, are the North Side Neighborhood vision and goals. Their importance and relevance were reinforced through the district planning process.

Chapter 3, Translating Goals into Physical Form, introduces ways to apply the goals to guide physical development that achieves desired
relationships and characteristics. A series of Patterns, or design principles, have been developed, which can be applied in multiple combinations depending on specific conditions or circumstances.

Chapter 4 of the report describes the Riverfront Design Concept Plan. This plan illustrates an approach to redevelopment of the Chenango River waterfront that utilizes the neighborhood Patterns as its inspiration. Redevelopment of the riverfront will require public and private cooperation and resources to accomplish, and this plan illustrates the exciting potential that can be unlocked through cooperative partnerships and innovative, sensitive design.

The final chapter in the main body of the report, describes Recommended Actions to achieve the district and neighborhood goals. Within the earlier chapters, desired physical characteristics and qualities, as well as issues that need to addressed are defined. The action steps identify specific, tasks, programs or planning that can be undertaken for both short term and long term outcomes that will contribute in some valuable way to the revitalization of the North Side.

The Appendix contains two important resources. The first, “Tools for Developing and Evaluating Project Proposals” provides additional information on desired characteristics and design elements to achieve neighborhood and district goals. It is geared towards community members and organizations that want to ensure that redevelopment proceeds in accordance with the district and neighborhood vision and goals. However, it can also be useful to developers who would like to have a better understanding of the issues and characteristics that are important to the neighborhood.

Finally, the “Riverfront Design Process Summary” provides an overview of the planning process, including community meetings and workshops, team research and discussions that were undertaken to complete the project.
Meetings with stakeholder groups such as the BMX group (right) and Pleasant Avenue neighbors (far right) provided different perspectives about the neighborhood.

The process of developing an understanding of the North Side Riverfront District involved many stakeholders, both individuals and organizations, through the sharing of knowledge and understanding of the history, existing conditions, and opportunities of the Riverfront District. Community members who not only live in the neighborhood but who work, shop, play, attend school, or to attend one of the neighborhood’s religious institutions were invited to participate in a series of facilitated discussions and workshops. Meetings between the project partners and other groups such as the City of Binghamton Department of Engineering, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, SUNY Brownfields Center, Broome County Planning Department, and Broome County Health Department provided information about issues not immediately visible within the Riverfront District, such as infrastructure, and potential site contamination, as well as future plans for the site. Finally, design students from SUNY ESF and Cornell University brought their own observations about the neighborhood into these discussions. The dialogue that resulted provided important understanding of how people experience and use the Riverfront District.

Describing the North Side Riverfront District

The Riverfront District, centrally located within the North Side Neighborhood, contains a variety of different land uses, including retail, recreation and residential, all in close proximity to each other.

The Riverfront District includes the following land use areas:

• Binghamton Plaza
• Colonial Plaza
• Cheri Lindsey Park
• Chenango River Riverfront

Together, these areas make up the majority of the neighborhood’s retail and recreation opportunities.
The entrance to Binghamton Plaza is located at one of the neighborhood’s busiest intersections. Community members have expressed their concerns about the negative image that is created by such a large parking lot that they say is never filled, even on the busiest of shopping days. Large parking lots are often seen as being necessary, however, to attract new businesses.

Land Use Areas
• Binghamton Plaza
The land currently occupied by Binghamton Plaza was formerly within the floodplain for the Chenango River and flooded frequently. As a result, the area, then known as Stowe Flats, remained undeveloped and through the 1930s was used for temporary events such as the circus, fairs, and races. After several decades of use as a landfill, development occurred in the 1960s, along with the construction of Interstate 81/Route 17, in the form of a regional shopping center – Binghamton Plaza. The large, sprawling scale of the buildings represents a suburban pattern of development that favors vehicles over pedestrians and greatly contrasts with residential neighborhoods throughout the North Side. The buildings are set back from the adjacent streets by large parking lots and located directly adjacent to the Chenango River, which runs behind them.

Binghamton Plaza plays an important role in the North Side Neighborhood. Establishments such as K-Mart, other discount stores, and restaurants are actively used both by neighborhood residents and by people from the larger metropolitan region. The current configuration of buildings on the site, however, neither meets the needs of this urban, residential, pedestrian community nor supports their vision for a neighborhood retail center. Over the years, many of the establishments that were used on a regular basis, such as grocery store, bank, and cards stores, have left Binghamton Plaza and have not been replaced, making it more challenging for many people within the neighborhood to conveniently access these services. Additionally, Binghamton Plaza has fallen into disrepair in recent years. The buildings themselves are in poor condition, many of them vacant. The large expanse of asphalt has settled unevenly because of shifting material in the old landfill that lies under most of the plaza, creating numerous potholes and resulting in a steep and hazardous elevation changes between the parking lot and stores, which remain stable because of their construction on pilings.
• Colonial Plaza
Colonial Plaza, located across West State Street from Binghamton Plaza, is composed largely of single and two-story buildings and large, underused parking lots. The plaza contains a number of establishments that are frequently used by neighborhood residents such as CVS and Big Lots, as well as other local businesses and services, including a local Muslim school.

Even though Colonial Plaza and the adjacent retail establishments are completely surrounded by the neighborhood’s major roads – Chenango Street and West State Street – it remains isolated from the surrounding neighborhood. A steep grade change left over from the historic Chenango Canal and insufficient access to and from the plaza make this retail center challenging for both drivers and pedestrians. The settling of landfill materials below the asphalt is also causing the parking lot at Colonial Plaza to sink.

• Cheri Lindsey Park
Cheri Lindsey Park, the neighborhood’s largest public open space, is located on the bank of the Chenango River and adjacent to both Binghamton Plaza and residential neighborhoods. A patchwork of different sports facilities, the park contains an outdoor swimming pool, baseball diamond, basketball court, and playground that are used by groups from throughout the city. Two of the more unique facilities within the park are a BMX track and a recently constructed skate park. The park’s main entrance is off of Trusdell Street, a narrow residential street that runs perpendicular to Chenango Street just south of the I-81 overpass. The park’s second entrance is located at the southwest corner of the park, along the riverfront adjacent to the K-Mart loading docks.

The proximity of Cheri Lindsey Park to the surrounding residential and retail areas is a unique asset for the neighborhood. The sports facilities encourage and support increased levels of activity in this part of the District; however, the focus on active sports also limit use

Colonial Plaza consists of a number of separate retail and commercial buildings that sit within large parking areas.

The buildings (above) are at a more pedestrian scale yet are separated from the main street and do not provide safe pedestrian access to the entrances.

Colonial Plaza is separated from adjacent residential neighborhoods by a change in grade and the placement of a service road along the backs of the buildings.

While located in close proximity to both residential neighborhoods and retail centers, access to Cheri Lindsey Park is one of its more significant challenges.
A service road and parking lot runs along the length of the park, separating it from the Chenango River, which flows alongside.

of the park by neighborhood residents, some of whom feel that a significant shortcoming of the park is that it does not contain areas for passive recreation such as strolling, gathering with friends, or sitting alone to read a book. Some additional factors that community members identified as limiting the use of the park include the absence of support facilities such as restrooms, payphones, and drinking fountains as well as the lack of convenient access and parking. Community members also feel that an overall lack of vegetation such as trees, shrubs, and flowers, in addition to the abundance of sports facilities, many of which are enclosed by fences, does not create a park-like setting. Additionally, the presence of litter and graffiti as well as other forms of vandalism creates a negative image within the park, contributing to the negative image that many people have about the North Side Neighborhood.

• Chenango River Riverfront

The Chenango River runs the length of the western edge of the North Side Neighborhood. While the river frequently flooded, as mentioned previously, city residents used to be able to fish and swim in the river. Following the floods of 1935 and 1936 and the subsequent construction of the flood control levee, physical access to the river became more difficult. This construction, which destroyed the river’s natural banks and separated the river from the adjacent land by a significant change in elevation, allowed for more intensive use of the land along the river. A small patch of land known as Noyes Island, located southwest of Binghamton Plaza now provides the only direct access to the water.

The way that development occurred along the river resulted in the creation of two different characters as it runs through the Riverfront District. The more naturalized area that runs alongside Cheri Lindsey Park provides space for community members to walk. In contrast, the back of Binghamton Plaza, paved with asphalt and serves as the service road for the retail center, dominates the majority of the riverfront.

The Chenango Riverfront is an untapped resource for the North Side Neighborhood. While past development has not acknowledged this natural resource, more recent plans have begun to explore new ways to connect the district and neighborhood residents to this significant feature. Currently the City of Binghamton Engineering Department is designing a riverwalk trail that will run along the top of the levee within the Riverfront District, connecting the neighborhood to Confluence Park to the south and Otisino Park to the north. This trail, which includes a 12 foot wide paved path separated from adjacent roads by a 12 foot wide landscape strip will not only connect the North Side to other parts of the City and County, but also bring people from those surrounding areas into the North Side. There is also great potential for this trail to be much more than currently envisioned within the Riverfront District. Future development must seek to balance development and environmental interests while creating a place that can enliven the riverfront as well as the entire Riverfront District and surrounding residential neighborhoods.
Tracking Change Along the North Side’s Riverfront (1935-present)

1935 Aerial Photo: agriculture (see rectangular plots). At this time the area that is now Binghamton Plaza is being used as fairgrounds. The oval in the photo is a racetrack. Trees are visible along the riverbank, and access to the river is readily available.

1955 Aerial Photo: By 1955, the earth fill levee has been constructed, leaving a park-like, lower area along the river and an upper terrace to the east of the levee. River access is still evident along a path or road running perpendicular to the levee.

1958 Aerial Photo:

1965 Aerial Photo: North Side neighborhood, and two bridges have been constructed across the Chenango River. Binghamton Plaza has been built just east of the levee.
The developers of Binghamton Plaza own the approximately 100 feet of land that extends from the top of the levee wall to the backs of the buildings. The city’s proposal for the riverwalk include purchasing an easement along the bank of the river, where the trail will be located.

• District as Former Landfill

Much of the area now referred to as the Riverfront District was once used as a municipal waste landfill for the City of Binghamton during the 1950s. As the area began to fill with waste, the City built an incinerator in the southwest corner of the site. The incinerator was still located on the site when Binghamton Plaza was constructed in the 1960s. This construction project brought other significant changes to the site, including the filling of the area known as Stowe Flats, the realignment of State Street, and the construction of Colonial Plaza and Country Towne Apartments. The district’s history as a landfill and the impact from the incinerator has led to great concern about the condition and safety of the soil and other material beneath much of the development within the Riverfront District.

Although the specific details of the site are currently undocumented, an official with the Broome County Health Department speculates that trash was burned and the ash was then dumped on the site. Monitoring for methane was done in the late 1960s based on concern that the buildings could blow up but levels were found to be non-threatening. No other monitoring for methane has been done recently. Tests done in the northern area of the site do not indicate hazardous conditions, but there is additional speculation about the presence of heavy metals and ash. An official with Broome County Health Department has expressed the need for testing in order to
The extent of the former landfill is not exactly known. The outline shown is based on a study of historical aerial photographs.

• Impervious Surfaces
A large percentage of the land within the riverfront district is covered with pavement, primarily in the form of roads and parking lots. The effect of this amount of paving is two-fold. First, covering such large expanses of ground with pavement means that the ground becomes impervious to water. Rainwater that would typically be soaked into the ground and filtered before running back into the water table runs off of the pavement, carrying with it various contaminants from the surface. This contaminated water is then directed into the stormwater system and finally discharged into the Chenango River. The second effect of the impervious surfaces throughout the District is more visible - an overall lack of greenery. The more land
With the exception of Cheri Lindsey Park and parts of the river’s edge, the Riverfront District is almost entirely impervious. This means that only 5% to 10% of the rainwater that falls on the ground percolates through the soil.

In general, reducing the amount impervious surfaces would help improve the environmental characteristics of a site; however, doing so also raises some environmental concerns. While improving the overall image of the Riverfront District, such changes would make the site more permeable to stormwater runoff, allowing it to percolate through the soil, usually a beneficial environmental goal. However, the area’s history as a landfill suggests that increased site permeability might be at the expense of the river’s health; runoff water could pick up contaminants as it percolates through the landfill material and through the Tioga silt loam soils below, potentially allowing contaminants to enter into ground water and the Chenango River. It is speculated that the existing levee wall may,
in fact, be blocking the flow of leachate directly to the Chenango River. It is imperative that redevelopment plans address the issues of river and ground water quality, stormwater runoff, landfill location and characteristics, percolation, and permeability.

**District Characteristics**

In addition to sharing their knowledge about the different land use areas within the Riverfront District during neighborhood meetings and workshops, stakeholders also identified Riverfront District characteristics that they believe are its strongest assets as well as the characteristics that they are concerned about and would like to see changed.

• **Assets**
  
  **Neighborhood Location**
  The location of the North Side Neighborhood within the larger region provides the opportunity to take advantage of a variety of unique qualities and characteristics of the Riverfront District. Located in the Chenango River Valley and along the Chenango River, the neighborhood provides views to the surrounding hillsides, one of the most prominent of which is the view to Mount Prospect, located across the river to the west of the neighborhood.

  The location of the North Side neighborhood in the immediate context of the City of Binghamton is an additional asset. The neighborhood is located at the intersection of two major highways, Interstate 81 and Route 17, making it a major gateway into downtown Binghamton, located just to the south.

  **Proximity of Areas Within the District**
  One of the most significant district assets is that the primary retail and recreation areas are all located within close proximity to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. This closeness affords neighborhood residents with the additional benefit of being able to walk both to destinations within the Riverfront District as well as to points throughout the neighborhood.

  **Proximity to Chenango River**
  The neighborhood is also located along the Chenango River, a significant natural resource and recreational asset. While there is no longer a strong connection between the neighborhood and the river, this body of water links the neighborhood to other parts of the city and county. This relationship will be highlighted as the City’s plans for a riverwalk move forward.

• **Concerns**
  
  **Lack of Pedestrian Safety**
  Pedestrian activity occurs throughout the North Side Neighborhood. Children walk to and from neighborhood schools, families and seniors walk to the various retail areas, and some neighborhood
The high speed of the cars traveling along the main roads through the neighborhood such as West State Street may mean that drivers are responding more to the design of the roadways (wide driving lanes and lack of streetscape detail) and less to the posted speed limit signs.

Some community members can recall the fanfare that marked the opening of Binghamton Plaza. Today, however, many of the storefronts are vacant and the buildings and parking lot are in need of significant repairs.

The back of Binghamton Plaza, which currently consists of loading bays and a service road, is devoid of any vegetation. This area has been backfilled to an elevation level below the top of the levee to cover the wastes and provide level building ground.

residents walk downtown. However, while the need and opportunity to walk exists, actually doing so is a challenge. Many of the pedestrian routes both within the district and throughout the rest of the neighborhood are not safe places to walk. While there are sidewalks throughout much of the neighborhood, they are often not well maintained. Additionally, there are several significant locations throughout the neighborhood where sidewalk and other walkways do not even exist such as along West State Street and through shopping center parking lots. As a result, informal pedestrian paths have been established from residential neighborhoods and elsewhere (such as the Rainbow School) to destinations within the district that cross streets and parking lots in unsafe locations.

**Dominance of the Automobile**

The majority of vehicular traffic in the Riverfront District occurs on Chenango Street and West State Street, the major north-south roads that connect downtown Binghamton to the northern parts of the city. These roadways, and other connector roads, have been designed to meet the needs of drivers without taking into consideration the need to maintain a safe walking environment for pedestrians. The wide drive lanes and lack of pedestrian-scale streetscape details and amenities encourage higher speeds that present a hazard for neighborhood residents and adds to the dominance of the automobile on the neighborhood’s streets.

**Negative Neighborhood Image**

Years of disinvestment have had a negative effect on the North Side Neighborhood. Most immediately visible is the overall run-down appearance of the neighborhood – abandoned and boarded up buildings, poor quality roads and sidewalks, and lack of greenery and public open space. This negative image makes it appear that people don’t care about this part of the neighborhood.

**Lack of Businesses and Services**

While many of the stores located within the Riverfront District are used by neighborhood residents and other people around the city, businesses such as a grocery store, bank, and other stores to meet the residents’ everyday needs are no longer located within the District.
Community members bring local expertise to design and planning processes

Through a series of facilitated meetings and workshops (described in more detail in Appendix B), community members expressed their ideas and preferences for the future of the North Side Riverfront District. The university partners synthesized the information shared during these events to prepare the Riverfront District Vision Statement and Goals. Community members reviewed the vision and goals, which address the conditions, opportunities, and challenges that are specific and important to the Riverfront District.

Complementary Visions
As discussed in the Introduction, a Vision Plan has been prepared for the entire North Side Neighborhood. That Vision Plan describes the neighborhood’s desired future, sets a direction around which there is collective community agreement, and establishes a framework for community decision-making. A series of goals that the neighborhood desires to accomplish are identified within the Vision Plan and action strategies are proposed that will lead to the attainment of the goals. Development of a Riverfront District Revitalization Plan is one of the action strategies proposed in the North Side Vision Plan.

The vision and goals that were developed for the North Side Riverfront District provide a more detailed decision-making framework to specifically address the conditions, opportunities, and challenges that are specific and important to this area. The North Side Riverfront District Vision fits within and complements the North Side Vision.

Neighborhood Goals Revisited
In addition to the goals developed for the Riverfront District, the previously established goals for the entire North Side Neighborhood have been incorporated into the design and planning process for the Riverfront District. All of the neighborhood vision goals are relevant, but in varying degrees, to decisions regarding redevelopment of the Riverfront District. These goals and their relationship to the Riverfront District are described as follows:

Neighborhood Goal 1:
Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, cultivate community partnerships and relationships, and become leaders in the community.
Participating in community activities related to the revitalization of the Riverfront District can create new relationships between community members, community organizations, business owners, and city government. Community members have actively participated in the Riverfront District design and planning process and should
Traffic calming strategies can increase pedestrian safety, support other means of transportation, and encourage more pedestrian traffic (photo from http://apps.atlantaga.gov)

Housing units located in mixed-use developments can provide a greater diversity of residential and commercial uses in urban neighborhoods.

continue to be invited and encouraged to be involved in on-going discussions and review of development proposals, community-build projects, and similar events that help strengthen relationships and build decision-making capacity in the neighborhood. Community engagement also includes acknowledging community members’ ideas and considering their ideas for proposals. Developing and implementing an ongoing publicity and outreach strategy can help keep community members informed about the process and provide the opportunity for more people to become involved.

**Neighborhood Goal 2:**
Create a safe and secure district for all ages and all aspects of community life.
Promoting safe access within and through the Riverfront District using both public policy approaches and thoughtful design is absolutely necessary to encourage a large number of residents and visitors to be out on foot in the waterfront and commercial areas throughout the day and night. The active, well-lit feeling of Chenango Street helps create a sense of safety and should be maintained. This sense of safety can be extended to the riverfront by adding lighting and encouraging active use of this part of the District. Improving the physical appearance of the Riverfront District, by addressing rundown buildings and vacant lots, and improving basic maintenance can also promote a sense of ownership, care, and safety.

**Neighborhood Goal 3:**
Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents.
Improving the existing commercial area that is a central part of the Riverfront District will help bring new economic opportunities to the North Side neighborhood. The presence of the Chenango River and the development of the Riverwalk are tremendous assets that can be used to attract new businesses, as well as offer new opportunities to existing businesses.

**Neighborhood Goal 4:**
Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix and housing types.
During the planning process community members discussed the potential of having senior citizen housing or housing as part of mixed use within the Riverfront District. The feasibility of this use within the Riverfront District will require more in-depth economic and market study, related in part to remediation of the existing landfill that covers most of the Riverfront District. However, even if housing is not developed within the Riverfront District, strengthening connections and access between the Riverfront and the residential neighborhoods will open up a range of opportunities for residents of all ages.
**Neighborhood Goal 5:**
Assemble a mosaic of safe, diverse, and accessible public open spaces in an interconnected network throughout the neighborhood.

The entire North Side neighborhood’s proximity to the Chenango River is an asset that can play a major role in creating an open space network unique to this neighborhood. The river has the potential to provide educational and recreational opportunities for residents and for people from outside the neighborhood.

**Neighborhood Goal 6:**
Celebrate the North Side’s unique social, cultural, and environmental identity.

The natural features of the Riverfront District, in particular the Chenango River, and the cultural features such as Cheri Lindsey Park already contribute to the unique identity of the neighborhood. In addition, redevelopment in the district itself provides an opportunity to celebrate the neighborhood’s identity through the design of landscape features such as signage, paving, and structures and by sponsoring events that take advantage of the riverfront location or neighborhood traditions.

**Neighborhood Goal 7:**
Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan that strengthens desired patterns and practices of living.

As currently designed, the existing buildings and circulation network within the Riverfront District do not support activities or patterns of use desired by many neighborhood residents. Most obvious are the almost total lack of access and connection to the riverfront and the difficulty of being a pedestrian in almost any part of the district. Property owners, developers, and the City can have a significant impact on the quality of life in the North Side Neighborhood by creating the physical setting to support desired activities and practices. When planning and designing redevelopment proposals in the private and public realm, these entities should take the opportunity to make positive changes in the pedestrian environment and in opening up visual and physical access to the riverfront. Design decisions for redevelopment in the Riverfront District should be based on the six neighborhood “patterns” described in Chapter 3.
Riverfront District Vision Statement

Our vision for the North Side Riverfront District is to regain a sense of purpose, destination, and community identity by breathing new life into the community and its relationship to the river.

Riverfront District Goal 1:
Improve the pedestrian experience throughout the district

There are a large number of people who walk to destinations in and around the North Side, and many others who walk for exercise and recreation. Improving the pedestrian experience throughout the neighborhood - within retail areas, along the river, within Cheri Lindsey Park, and along major roadways - is a priority for the community. Pedestrian routes need to be safe, convenient, and accessible. Some specific ideas expressed during workshops to achieve this goal include:

- Ensure safe crossings at busy neighborhood streets.
- Design wide sidewalks with a diversity of amenities – places to sit such as benches, tables and chairs, other site furnishings such as smaller-scaled street lights and trash receptacles, and planters and planting beds for street trees and flowers.
- Create places within retail areas to stroll and to gather with friends, and that have a variety of shopping options to choose from.
- Develop a riverfront trail that provides a variety of attractions and destinations and accommodates a variety of different uses such as running, walking, and biking.
- Create paths through blocks instead of only on sidewalks.

Riverfront District Goal 2:
Provide a diversity of uses and activities in the district

Another goal of residents for the Riverfront District is to encourage a greater diversity of uses within the District’s retail and recreation areas to attract a greater variety of people. An important consideration in determining what types of uses should be included is ensuring that the needs of local residents are balanced with the desire to attract people from outside of the neighborhood. Some specific ideas include:

- Attract new businesses within the retail center such as a grocery store and other neighborhood-oriented businesses and services while retaining retail that is currently used.
- Create more places to walk and engage in passive recreation such as picnicking, gardening, and sitting in the shade within Cheri Lindsey Park while maintaining active recreation facilities.
• Accommodate other uses within the retail center such as community services, mixed-use buildings that include housing, and temporary or seasonal events such as markets and festivals

• Create new entrances to the riverfront and Cheri Lindsey Park

• Create more open lawn for picnics, soccer, and meetings

• Encourage vendors, concerts, and festivals to occur along the riverfront, including existing events such as fireworks and the Balloonfest

• Consider utilizing both the front and back of the buildings in Binghamton Plaza to take advantage of the new riverwalk

• Have businesses that are open throughout the day and night

Riverfront District Goal 3: Ensure that new development in the district respects the traditional urban neighborhood scale
Another important issue related to the vision of the Riverfront District is determining the appropriate scale of development. Recognizing the impact that large-scale development has on an urban residential neighborhood, future development plans need to better relate to the scale of the surrounding residential context. Some specific ideas include:

• Encourage the development of building styles and types that complement and acknowledge the scale, materials and detail of traditional buildings in the neighborhood.

• Limit building height to one to three stories along major roadways

• Maintain views to Mount Prospect and open up new views of the Chenango River

• Use other site details such as signage, lighting and walls and fences to enhance the overall character of the district

Riverfront District Goal 4: Improve the image of the district
Improving the image of the district is seen as a way to show that people care about the neighborhood. This involves not only cleaning up areas within the district, but also including elements and activities that reflect a sense of pride and caring, result in increased investment in the neighborhood, and create a sense of identity. Some specific ideas include:
Community volunteers can play an important role in maintaining and improving the image of their neighborhood by organizing regular clean-up days. (photo from www.park2parkla.com)

- Plant more trees, shrubs, and flowers throughout the District to alleviate large expanses of asphalt and buildings
- Reduce unbroken expanses of parking lots and make more attractive with plant material
- Renovate existing buildings
- Encourage more activity to create a sense of vibrancy within the district
- Build on the existing positive aspects of the North Side’s identity by encouraging new development that responds to the neighborhood’s characteristics and strengths.

- Improve maintenance of the existing plaza
- Improve trash pickup in Cheri Lindsey Park
- Include public art in the Riverfront District, such as murals on K-Mart
CHAPTER 3: TRANSLATING GOALS TO PHYSICAL FORM

To translate the community’s vision into physical design, the design team developed six “patterns” to guide planning decisions and to suggest important and desirable relationships between elements of the built environment. The knowledge to develop the patterns has come from the experience and observations of community members as well as that of the design team and through the process of creating the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District goals. Once the patterns were identified and described, they were taken back to community members for confirmation.

Multiple Approaches to Achieve the Goals
In the Riverfront District planning process, once the goals had been defined, the design team sought to develop a way to translate the goals into physical form. They chose to work with a design methodology known as “Patterns”. A pattern describes a common or recurring problem or issue in the environment, and then describes the core solution to that problem. They are not rules or formulas but rather suggest a prescribed set of relationships between parts of the environment and how people experience or react to them. The solution can be applied many times but it will never be done the same way twice because of the different conditions that exist in a certain place and time. Patterns can be combined with other patterns to address different sets of issues that may be present at a specific site or in the broader neighborhood.

Patterns are grounded in our experience and knowledge of the places in which we live, acquired by both professional designers and community residents, with the understanding that there are appropriate ways of addressing issues to make our communities and environments more habitable and sustainable. In the case of the North Side neighborhood, the knowledge to develop the Patterns has come from the experience and observations of community members as well as that of the design team and through the process of creating the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District goals.

Organization of the Riverfront District Patterns
Based on the established goals for the Riverfront District, the design team identified six patterns, each of which addresses a design and planning concept that is especially important to the North Side Neighborhood and the Riverfront District. Each pattern is composed of related subpatterns, which range from the neighborhood scale (and occasionally city scale) down to site-specific relationships. Described first under the primary pattern and then under each subpattern are reasons why the concept is important, the conditions that currently exist in the neighborhood or district, and recommendations to achieve the desired relationships. Some patterns are fairly general in their recommendations while others provide specific recommendations such as dimensions.
between elements. Individual subpatterns may be relevant and related to more that one of the six primary categories and can be combined in different ways.

**Use of the Patterns**

The Patterns are intended to be used by anyone interested in the revitalization of the North Side Neighborhood and therefore should be widely distributed and understood. For organizations or individuals developing redevelopment proposals, whether it is the city, private developers, or community organizations, the patterns should inform the conceptual approach and design development for every physical action proposed for the North Side. In turn, city and neighborhood residents can use the patterns to review and determine the suitability of proposals. Further explanation of how to use the Patterns to develop and evaluate design proposals is included in Appendix A: Tools for Implementing the Vision.

**Pattern 1.**  
**Identifiable Districts Within the Neighborhood**

*Recognizing and creating neighborhood identity*

Neighborhoods can be defined and described in many different ways, both physical and social. The North Side Neighborhood is a diverse community of approximately 5000 persons. It is bounded on the west by the natural boundary of the Chenango River, on the north by the municipal boundary of the city line, and on the south and east by the transportation corridors of the railroad viaduct and the Brandywine Parkway. (See diagram at left.) Within the North Side, major roadways such as Chenango Street, West State Street, and Bevier Street create a hierarchy of streets that begins to delineate identifiable smaller neighborhoods as well as the area that we have identified as the “Riverfront District”.

**Subpattern 1a: Riverfront District as Community Center**

The Riverfront District is a kind of community center, formed by the local services, retail and recreation that are and should continue to be located there. Intensity and density of activity will naturally be highest closest to the community center. There should be connections between the residential areas and the community center that allow residents to move freely from where they live to and through the Riverfront District (which may also include housing in the future). However, the integrity and identity of the residential neighborhoods must be respected.

**Subpattern 1b: Identifiable Smaller Neighborhoods**

People need an identifiable place to belong to. They want to be able to identify the area they live as distinct from all others. Strengthening neighborhood identity is important because it can encourage stronger social ties and commitment to care about and stay in the community. Further study would be required to discover
how the North Side residents now define their neighborhoods, and the reasons why. With this understanding it would be possible to make more place-specific recommendations on how that identity could be strengthened. However, the following characteristics help to define identifiable neighborhoods.

Identifiable neighborhoods:
• are small in scale and area and have small populations. Organized neighborhood groups are usually created out of 500 to 1500 citizens encompassing two to seven blocks around one's house depending on density.

• have identifiable boundaries that can be reinforced by gateways to strengthen neighborhood identity. These boundaries also function to restrict access into the neighborhood, which limits heavy traffic from entering these smaller neighborhoods.

• do not have major roads through them. Roads with high traffic volume will destroy a residential area; they create a barrier to free pedestrian movement, hinder the ability for people to informally gather and talk in front yards and sidewalks, and limit children’s ability to safely move around the neighborhood.

Subpattern 1c: Accessible Green Spaces
Accessible green spaces embedded within each neighborhood can serve as community space for gathering and play. Children should have access to green space within their neighborhoods where they have space to run, play pickup games and sports, or relax under the shade of a tree. However, when the North Side was developed no green space for informal or formal recreation was set aside within the residential neighborhoods.

Therefore, when possible, create accessible green spaces within existing small neighborhoods by reclaiming several adjacent vacant lots or demolishing houses that have no hope of renovation. Accessible greens should be located within a 3 minutes walk from every neighborhood residence or within 2 to 3 blocks (750 feet) Applying
this standard, greens will be located throughout the North Side neighborhood at 1500 foot intervals.

Accessible green spaces can also help improve a neighborhood’s image. Some neighborhoods might choose to have signature elements in these spaces such as signs, trees, community gardens or flower planting. Others might have regular events and celebrations. Another approach for larger accessible greens is to locate places for team and individual sports through all parts of the neighborhood with the action visible to passers-by as an invitation to participate. Create sports places as part of the life of the community, with easy access, and create places for passers-by to stop, sit, and watch.

Pattern 1, Identifiable District Within the Neighborhood, addresses the following goals:

**Riverfront District**
- Improve Pedestrian Experience
- Provide Diversity of Uses
  - Develop at Neighborhood Scale
- Improve Image of District

**Neighborhood**
- Community Relationships
- Safety
  - Economic Opportunity
  - Diverse Housing
- Accessible Open Space
- Neighborhood Identity
- Holistic Planning
Pattern 2.  
Webs of City Life 

_Encouraging a network of uses and activities_

Vibrant daily life in urban communities is the result of the interconnection of people, activities, land uses, and transportation routes. However, many times, the land uses and spaces within a city or neighborhood are treated as separate elements without considering the relationships between them. Evidence of this separation can be seen within the North Side Neighborhood. While the neighborhood has a variety of activities and land uses such as shopping areas, a city park, an elementary school, and numerous churches, these spaces are scattered throughout the neighborhood without strong connections between them or to the many residential neighborhoods.

Therefore, treat the North Side Neighborhood as an interconnected web of different land uses and activities that encourages complex, dynamic, and interconnected relationships within the neighborhood and with other parts of the city in order to create the vibrant daily life of an urban community. The individual elements within the web support and rely on each other. And while not all are directly connected, what happens in one part of the web will eventually affect the entire network. Thinking of the Riverfront District and surrounding neighborhood as part of a larger web of city life is a way to balance local, city-wide, and regional use within the district and encourage more people to come to and spend time in the neighborhood.

_Development often occurs as separate actions that happen in isolation, the result of which is disconnected and fragmented urban fabric (above right). Thinking about cities as interconnected systems and developing neighborhoods that are interconnected will help develop and reinforce vibrant daily life in an urban community (below right). (photos from www.urban-advantage.com)
Subpattern 2a: Activity Nodes

Activity nodes are significant public spaces that provide community members with the opportunity to come together for public events and activities. Creating places for concentrated public life is important because most people are attracted to where other people are and it helps make them feel part of the neighborhood. There are few places in the North Side that support public life and those that do, such as Cheri Lindsey Park and Roosevelt School, are spread out and not well connected to other parts of the neighborhood.

Therefore, strengthen these existing activity nodes to ensure that they function as significant public space within the District. This can be done by supporting the events and activities that currently occur in these places by providing additional amenities and services, as well as creating opportunities for new uses and activities in these places. In existing parts of the neighborhood, reinforce pedestrian connections by improving sidewalks, ensuring safe street crossing, and in general, make walking a more enjoyable activity.

Creating new activity nodes in areas of redevelopment within the Riverfront District will require the following:

• Locate nodes of activity at a distance of about 900 feet apart

• Bring paths to these locations

• Provide safe and convenient access by both motorists and pedestrians. (Refer to Pattern 3: Network of People and Cars for more information.)

Subpattern 2b: Small Public Squares

Public squares play an important role in the life of urban neighborhoods. Traditionally, they are spaces associated with public streets and provide place for public gatherings, celebrations, protests, festivals, and display. In today’s culture of shopping malls and privatization, there is concern that true public space is disappearing and spaces that are thought of as public are actually privately owned and regulated. Within the existing Riverfront District there are no public squares to fulfill this role.

Therefore, create small public squares throughout the neighborhood and in the redevelopment of the Riverfront District. Surround these spaces by facilities that are mutually supportive and encourage activities at the same times of day. Ensure that there are clear
views into these spaces, both from in and around the spaces as well as from the surrounding buildings and order to create a sense of safety.

**Subpattern 2c: Hubs of Night Life**

In many communities, attractions that are open at night are separated from each other, which can create perceptions that such spaces are unsafe because of a lack of activity and density of use.

Therefore, group shops, restaurants, and other activities that are open at night to form a hub of night life. Creating a concentration of activity within parts of the neighborhood, rather than in separate single-use areas, can bring a sense of vibrancy and create a sense of safety due to extended hours of use.

**Subpattern 2d: Webs of Shopping**

Retail is one of the more prominent land uses within the North Side Neighborhood. Binghamton Plaza and Colonial Plaza are centrally located within the neighborhood and attract people both from within the neighborhood and from the larger region. Over the years, however, significant neighborhood-oriented stores and services have moved out of the neighborhood, leaving the neighborhood without a grocery store, bank, and other small shops. The businesses and stores that have remained are not functioning as vibrant centers of urban life because they do not contain a balanced mix of businesses and services that meet the needs of local residents or attract a greater variety of people from outside of the neighborhood.

Competition among retailers is a key factor in understanding the distribution of shopping areas within a city. Less competition means more business for retailers. However, for residents, less competition also means fewer shopping options. The North Side Neighborhood used to have a balanced variety of retail establishments that formed a “web of shopping,” providing residents with many of their daily shopping needs. As stores moved or closed over the years, this web has disintegrated, forcing neighborhood residents to leave their neighborhood to do much of their shopping. Bringing back webs of shopping within the North Side can help recreate a balance of shopping opportunities. This will require looking at these shopping areas within in the larger context of the city to understand the role that they play within the larger region.

Therefore, conduct a market study that takes into consideration the needs of the North Side Neighborhood as well as other potential consumers in the city and region. Determining the appropriate location for a new shop or service should be based on understanding the use and needs of potential customers and also on the mix of other shops already in the location. Creating a balanced mix of stores and services that support each other (rather than compete) requires an understanding of the location and distribution of other retail areas.
Subpattern 2e: Pedestrian-oriented Shopping Areas

The North Side is a neighborhood of pedestrians. People want and need to walk to destinations throughout the neighborhood. Strip developments such as Binghamton Plaza and Colonial Plaza do not have the qualities needed to support and encourage pedestrian use. The large expanses of parking are dangerous for pedestrians and the buildings themselves are not in character with a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood.

Therefore, create areas for shopping that fit the character and use of this residential, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood and still attract people from outside of the neighborhood.

- Create shopping streets with pedestrian-scaled buildings lining the street that will allow for more convenient access that fits within the context of the neighborhood.
- Make big box buildings appear smaller through facade articulation, varying building heights, and adding building detail
- Use consistent building materials
- Include site details such as lighting and signage to enhance the overall character of the neighborhood

Pattern 2, Webs of City Life, addresses the following goals:

**Riverfront District**
- Improve Pedestrian Experience
- Provide Diversity of Uses
- Develop at Neighborhood Scale
- Improve Image of District

**Neighborhood**
- Community Relationships
- Safety
- Economic Opportunity
- Diverse Housing
- Accessible Open Space
- Neighborhood Identity
- Holistic Planning
Pattern 3.
Network of People and Cars
Reducing the Dominance of Automobiles

The presence of both people and cars helps create a sense of vitality and activity within cities. However, when one system dominates, that sense of urban life cannot be achieved. Evidence of this imbalance can be seen in parts of the North Side Neighborhood, especially within the Riverfront District. The Chenango and State Street corridors have been designed to meet the needs of motorists – the roads have wide lanes and large signs, and the buildings are large and separated from the street edge by large parking lots. These car-dominated areas are uncomfortable and dangerous for pedestrians.

Therefore, create a circulation network in which cars do not dominate but rather coexist with pedestrian systems. Implementing the following patterns or subpatterns will create and maintain a balanced and safe relationship between people and cars.

Subpattern 3a: Pedestrian System in the District
Currently, the Riverfront District does not have a pedestrian system that provides safe and convenient access to destinations within the neighborhood and connections to other parts of the city. The Chenango and State Street corridors as they pass through the District are designed to meet the needs and viewpoints of people driving, with wide driving lanes, large signs, and buildings with few details. Street features and characteristics that support and encourage walking are missing from the street corridors within the District. Additionally, a large percentage of the District is devoted to asphalt for single use parking purposes, thus discouraging pedestrian use and creating an image of desolation and vacancy.

Therefore, create a pedestrian system that provides a variety of convenient options for walking that includes the following characteristics:

- safety
- interest and detail
Shared Corridors

Within the hierarchy of roads through the neighborhood, the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists must be given the same level of understanding and attention as is given to motorists.

- desirable destinations
- environmental comfort (such as shade and resting areas)
- access to a network of paths that allow choice and shortcuts

This system should link and interconnect neighborhoods, streets, shopping areas, the river’s edge, downtown, and schools. The routes within this system should include sidewalks along neighborhood streets as well as paths and trails that are dedicated to pedestrians only. Additionally, the pedestrian system should exist both in public spaces such as neighborhood sidewalks and parks and on privately owned land such as parking lots and retail plazas.

Where pedestrian and vehicular systems overlap, shared use must be clearly signalled, by well-marked or raised crosswalks. Sometimes the two systems should separate entirely in places where cars are not appropriate such as shortcuts between blocks and in many park areas.

**Subpattern 3b: Shared Corridors**

Roads are the primary transportation system within the Riverfront District. The main roadways that run through the Riverfront District are car-oriented and do not meet the needs and requirements of pedestrian and bicyclists. However, for many residents, walking and bicycling are the primary modes of movement through the neighborhood. The District’s wide roads and minimal streetscape details (such as interesting buildings, sidewalks, and street trees) encourage drivers to go faster, creating dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as for other drivers.

Therefore, design main roadways as shared corridors that balance the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars and reduce the speed and volume of traffic on neighborhood streets. Focus efforts on improving the corridors to provide the characteristics that support pedestrian and bicycle use. On side streets, pedestrians and bicycles should dominate and be privileged.

This can be done by slowing cars and discouraging through-traffic by using a variety of traffic calming measures such as alternate road surface treatments, traffic diverters, and pedestrian-scaled streetscape details.
Changes to the design of roadways such as median strips (above top) and speed tables (above) can calm traffic by reducing the speed and volume of traffic on neighborhood streets. These traffic calming strategies can increase pedestrian safety, support other means of transportation (left), and encourage more pedestrian traffic. Introducing traffic calming throughout a larger area of a neighborhood can help reduce the risk of an individual element diverting traffic problems to other areas of the neighborhood.

(photos from www.pps.org)

The addition of trees and planted islands can break up expansive parking lots

**Subpattern 3c: Neighborhood-scale Parking**

Large retail strip malls like Binghamton Plaza are often required by zoning code to have large amounts of on-site parking. The greater expense of garage parking may make a retail project economically unfeasible, resulting in expansive surface lots. The parking lots in front of Binghamton Plaza pose particular challenges for the pedestrian scale of the North Side Neighborhood because such spaces are neither neighborly, socially interactive, nor safe.

Therefore, reduce the visual and environmental impact of parking and provide parking that is appropriate for the North Side Neighborhood. Parking should take place in smaller surface lots, to the side or behind buildings, mid-block, or along streets. On-street parking along State Street and Chenango Street can promote an urban shopping street character and can help calm vehicular traffic. Provide appropriate and substantially massed plant materials to

Within our neighborhood we should never create a road where the traffic density is so high or the traffic speed so fast that we have to totally separate pedestrians and cars with wide buffers.

Although the North Side road and path network seems well established, an alternate network can be created by providing pedestrian paths that run at right angles to parallel roads, linking them and creating small “activity spots” at the points of intersection.
buffer and shade parking lots and help reduce their visual impact.

Because some people will be walking to the Riverfront District from the surrounding residential areas or will be taking the bus, reduction of on-site parking requirements should also be considered. Requiring defined and attractive walks and paths through parking lots from adjacent streets and residential neighborhoods will encourage pedestrian travel within the neighborhood from bus stops.

One strategy for reducing the visual impact of large parking lots is to place smaller lots between buildings that can be shared (above) or serve individual businesses (below).

On street parking (above) provides direct access to store entrances. If more parking spaces are needed, placing a lot behind buildings allows for storefronts to remain at the edge of the sidewalk (below).

Pattern 3, Network of People and Cars, addresses the following goals:

**Riverfront District**
- Improve Pedestrian Experience
- Provide Diversity of Uses
- Develop at Neighborhood Scale
- Improve Image of District

**Neighborhood**
- Community Relationships
- Safety
- Economic Opportunity
- Diverse Housing
- Accessible Open Space
- Neighborhood Identity
- Holistic Planning
Pattern 4.
Promenading in the District
Supporting the patterns of a successful promenade

A promenade is defined as “a place for strolling” or “a leisurely walk especially in a public place for pleasure or display.”

People both need and want to walk throughout the Riverfront District but are currently unable to safely or easily do so. As mentioned previously, there is no existing pedestrian network within the North Side Neighborhood. The City, however, is designing the Riverwalk along the Chenango River to provide a continuous, connective public path for walking, biking, and jogging. The section of this trail planned within the Riverfront District runs along the service road behind Binghamton Plaza and does not currently provide an attractive, supportive setting for such uses.

Therefore, consider the Riverwalk within the Riverfront District as a promenade, a linear pathway for strolling or leisurely public walking. It should be a public place where community members have the opportunity to exercise or gather, and can also serve as the entrance way for other parts of the neighborhood. This requires careful thinking about its characteristics and its relationship to the entire North Side Neighborhood.

The North Side Riverfront Promenade should include the following characteristics:

- a greater number of safe and convenient connections to the promenade from areas to the east

- significant attractions (“activity nodes”) at the ends of the promenade to create constant movement along its length

- smaller destinations along the length of the promenade to encourage and support activity.

**Subpattern 4a: Walkable Distances**

People are typically willing to walk about 10 minutes, or a distance of 1500 feet, to reach a destination. The area within this 1500-foot ring is referred to as a “catchment area.” Within the Riverfront District,
the catchment area extends in only one direction - towards Chenango Street - and is made up primarily of Binghamton Plaza. This means that the vast majority of the neighborhood’s residential areas are farther than a 10-minute walk away from the riverfront.

Therefore, to expand the catchment area of the riverfront promenade implement the following design strategies:

- Strengthen existing connections from adjacent residential neighborhoods to the Riverfront District and create new ones from the east
- Include other significant public spaces in and around Chenango Street that help draw people into the Riverfront District
- Support and expand events that currently take place and plan new events, programs, and attractions that compel more people to come to the river
- Create new centers of life and activities within the 1500-foot catchment area, such as housing, nightlife, offices, mixed uses, and temporary events
- Provide a variety of options for seating and gathering to encourage people to spend time on the riverfront promenade

**Subpattern 4b: Activity and Destination along the Promenade**

The back of Binghamton Plaza is about 1200 feet long. Two significant end point activity nodes already exist in the form of Noyes Island and Cheri Lindsey Park. It is another 1500 feet south from Noyes Island to the underpass at the railroad tracks, another point of entry into the North Side district. 1500 feet is the recommended distance between significant attractions or “activity nodes” to anchor the ends of a successful promenade in a city.

Therefore, use these existing conditions to create a promenade that links activity nodes and creates constant movement along its length. Locating smaller destination points such as seating and gathering areas, kiosks, and vendors along the length of the promenade also helps create and support activity and

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**Walkable Distances**

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**Activity and Destination**

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Street promenades that meet pedestrians’ needs can add life and vitality to a neighborhood and can be active gathering spaces, restful seating or dining areas, and settings for art and entertainment. (photo from www.pps.org)

Subpattern 4c: Street Promenades

Neighborhood residents also need and want to walk along the main corridors within the North Side but are currently unable to do so safely or comfortably because of the dominance of cars. (Refer to Pattern 3: Pedestrian System within the District for more information.)

Therefore, expand the pattern of promenading along Chenango Street and West State Street. Making these streets attractive public space corridors by focusing design on the human scale characteristics, providing places to sit and gather, encouraging the development new pedestrian scaled mixed-use buildings, and incorporating the other district patterns will create the environment for promenading along the neighborhood’s “Main Streets”. These improvements will enhance the image of the district and help draw people to the riverfront promenade.

Pattern 4, Promenading in the District, addresses the following goals:

**Riverfront District**
- Improve Pedestrian Experience
- Provide Diversity of Uses
- Develop at Neighborhood Scale
- Improve Image of District

**Neighborhood**
- Community Relationships
- Safety
- Economic Opportunity
- Diverse Housing
- Accessible Open Space
- Neighborhood Identity
- Holistic Planning
The North Side neighborhood is home to many families with young children. Children learn through play and exploration. Traditionally neighborhoods provided the setting for that experience, with ever increasing opportunities for independence as children matured. However, parents are reticent to allow their children to venture far from home until they are teenagers because of fear for their safety. Thus, children cannot learn incremental and age appropriate independence.

Therefore, design a network of spaces and paths in the neighborhood to promote safe exploration by children, allowing them to see and be seen, and to be invited into the life of the neighborhood. Adults should be nearby and able to see and have access to the children out of the corner of their eye. Places for families to play and be together both close to home and further afield in the neighborhood can give young children an introduction and access to the neighborhood while still under watchful eyes. Parks, the riverfront promenade, and shopping streets can all be places that families go together. The children’s spaces should be interwoven with all aspects of the community, such as combining places for play with seating close by for adults in retail areas.

As children mature from elementary to middle to high school, opportunities for growing independence should be available. Networks of paths should be identified that allow safe street crossings and access to and from schools, with homes and shops along them. For older children, there should be connections to places beyond the neighborhood, into other parts of the city. Implementation of the Binghamton Riverwalk and the Binghamton Metropolitan Greenway Plan can provide the framework for this city and region wide access for older children.
**Subpattern 5a: Signs of Caring**

Family and child friendly neighborhoods are well maintained and show visible signs of caring. Children notice run down places, such as abandoned houses and littered lots. They learn to care and be good neighbors through the actions of others.

Therefore, establish programs that promote and support a culture of care for buildings and landscape in the neighborhood. In addition to providing guidance in yard and house appearance and maintenance, programs should encourage collaboration, sharing skills and experience, and rely primarily on the assets and resources present in the people and organizations in the neighborhood. There are numerous possibilities for programs, such as yard and block improvement workshops, community cleanup days, and youth intern yard and work programs.

Also establish maintenance programs for retail and recreation areas within the Riverfront District to address concerns about the appearance of buildings and issues of litter and graffiti.

**Subpattern 5b: Networks of learning in the District**

Networks of learning are not only physical but intellectual as well. These networks are composed of the thousands of situations that occur all over the city that constitute the city’s curriculum and the ways it teaches its children, as well as promoting life long learning in adults. The community should activate learning and cultivate creative, interactive individuals.

Creating an age-appropriate network stages will for support growing independence in children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Walking up down the block; for children approx. 5 years old</td>
<td>5 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Walking around the block; for children 6 - 8 years old</td>
<td>6 - 8 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Throughout the small neighborhood; for children 9 - 11 years old</td>
<td>9 - 11 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Across main roads to the riverfront district; for children 12 - 14 years old</td>
<td>12 - 14 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Throughout the city; for children 15 years old and older</td>
<td>15 years old and older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neighborhood playgrounds provide places for families to play and spend time together.
Children can learn many lessons about their neighborhood and how to care for it by observing and participating in events that emphasize and reinforce the concept of signs of caring. (photo from www.pps.org)

Having nice, well maintained houses is one way for residents to show that they care about their neighborhood. (drawing done by a third grade student from the North Side Neighborhood)

Therefore, create the urban environment as the place of contact with living and learning so that people have rich interactions in all parts of their lives. Conceive of many diverse situations and circumstances as opportunities for learning by promoting workshops and seminars in community centers, in homes and along paths and greenways.

The North Side itself provides the setting to create places of learning where residents and people from outside of the neighborhood can learn about the social and natural history of the both the neighborhood and larger region.

Pattern 5, Children and Family Friendliness in the District addresses the following goals:

**Riverfront District**
- Improve Pedestrian Experience
- Provide Diversity of Uses
- Develop at Neighborhood Scale
- Improve Image of District

**Neighborhood**
- Community Relationships
- Safety
- Economic Opportunity
- Diverse Housing
- Accessible Open Space
- Neighborhood Identity
- Holistic Planning
Pattern 6.
Ecological Life and Vitality in the District
Making Ecologically Sound Design and Development Decisions

The Chenango River is a source of neighborhood identity, a valued resource and an asset that can be used as the foundation for neighborhood revitalization. Past decisions and actions in the District and in the region have impacted the natural processes and harmed the environment in ways that are visible as well as hidden. Recapturing the ecological life and vitality of the river is important for the health and well being of all living things, people as well as other animals and plants, and to once again make it a beautiful place.

Therefore, promote ecologically responsible redevelopment in the riverfront district to mark the beginning of the restoration process and show commitment to being good stewards of the environment.

Subpattern 6a: River Edge Buffer Zone

Recapturing the ecological life and vitality of the Chenango River requires attention to the design of the river’s edge and the adjacent district that drains into it. One design approach for the river edge is to establish a River Edge Buffer Zone to reclaim some of the ecological attributes of the Chenango River’s banks and shoreline that existed before flood control, river straightening, landfilling and urbanization began in the mid 20th century.

The buffer zone should be as long as possible without any breaks in order to maximize the ecological vitality. One goal of the buffer is to create an ecological “patch”, a continuous wildlife habitat that maximizes species diversity in the district. Species diversity is directly related to patch size - the larger the patch, the greater the diversity of birds, insects and invertebrate species. Due to regulations that limit planting and modification of the existing flood control levee, the buffer zone in the North Side Neighborhood will need to occur primarily on the land side of the levee.
Planting trees along the sidewalk edge can effectively screen and improve the image of parking areas. (photos from www.toudestrees.org)

This variety of vegetation will provide wildlife habitat, shade for temperature mediation, and help slow and filter runoff. The width of the buffer zone will need to be flexible due to the existing development and ownership patterns. As parcels are redeveloped, a minimum average width of 40 to 50 feet is recommended. In areas of the Riverfront District where the former landfill underlies the buffer area, its design will need to be coordinated with the overall site remediation strategy.

Factors that typically reduce the performance of a river edge buffer zone include slopes of more than 5% and overland storm water flows over 75 feet. Development proposals should include environmentally responsible methods to treat stormwater runoff. It is desirable to integrate stormwater management in ways that makes collection and filtration a feature of the site design.

Subpattern 6b: Reduce Impervious Surfaces
A very high percentage of the area of the North side is composed of impervious surfaces, such as pavement and roofs. Impervious surfaces do not allow rainfall to soak back into the soil but cause it to runoff quickly into the stormwater system. Stormwater runoff across large areas of pavement picks up sediments and pollutants that are carried unfiltered into the river. Large areas of pavement with no significant vegetative areas result in large volumes of concentrated stormwater runoff being channeled into the river.

Therefore, reduce the amount of impervious surface, especially in the commercial and industrial areas of the neighborhood. Current city standards, which took effect after most of the development in the North Side occurred, allow no more than 70% impervious surface. This should be the minimum standard used for redevelopment in the district.

Subpattern 6c: Healthy Trees
Neighborhood residents have requested more trees and green space in response to the barrenness of large expanses of parking lot paving and unattractive street corridors. In addition to improving the visual quality, trees and other vegetation can serve a variety of ecological functions. Plant materials can help moderate or reduce warm temperatures caused by the extensive paving and development in urban area through transpiration and by providing shade. They can also filter pollutants, control stormwater runoff, and reflected heat, and attract birds and wildlife. However, the average lifespan of a tree in urban areas is only 7 years due to improper and difficult growing conditions. Many trees are planted just to satisfy approval requirements without consideration to long-term growth.

Therefore, create planting areas along streets and in parking lots that have proper conditions for healthy root growth. This includes
continuous planting beds rather than individual tree pits in paving. Groups of trees have a greater impact than single trees from a visual and environmental perspective. Continuous rows or groupings provide consistent shade and a sense of enclosure.

**Subpattern 6d: Addressing Landfill Cleanup**

A natural response to the expansive, impermeable paved parking lots, service roads and buildings of Binghamton Plaza is to recommend the removal of areas of paving and their replacement with soil and plant material. This would make the site more permeable to stormwater runoff, allowing it to percolate through the soil, usually a beneficial environmental goal. However, the area's history as a landfill suggests that increased soil permeability might be at the expense of the river’s health; runoff water could pick up contaminants as it percolates through the landfill material, and this leachate (runoff water with contaminants) could potentially flow into the Chenango River. Another possibility is that the existing levee, while limiting access to the water, may also be blocking flow of leachate directly to the Chenango River.

Therefore, when developing strategies to remedy or correct the environmental problems associated with Binghamton Plaza and other property atop the old landfill, consider and address river and ground water quality, stormwater runoff, landfill location and characteristics, percolation and permeability. Redevelopment of the North Side Riverfront District must address its brownfield status and the environmental realities that are affecting its current use, its relationship to the river, and the economic viability of development proposals.

Remediation should promote dramatic reconfiguration of the site to support and enhance the other patterns in the riverfront district. Thus, remediation strategies should consider new land use and ownership patterns that reinforce neighborhood scale, mixed use, day and nighttime use, better interrelationships between people and vehicles, and public access.

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**Pattern 6, Ecological Life and Vitality in the District, addresses the following goals:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Riverfront District</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve Pedestrian Experience</td>
<td>Community Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x Provide Diversity of Uses</td>
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</tr>
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<td>x Improve Image of District</td>
<td>Diverse Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accessible Open Space</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x Neighborhood Identity</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>x Holistic Planning</td>
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</table>
Students from SUNY ESF and Cornell University developed alternative design proposals for the Riverfront District that illustrate a variety of redevelopment possibilities, applying the patterns to achieve the goals identified by community members. Community members commented on and critiqued the design concept plans at an end-of-the-semester workshop. The Cornell University design team then reviewed the community’s comments, conducted additional site analysis, and developed a more detailed design study of the Riverwalk and its connection to Cheri Lindsey Park. Additional community feedback and comments from the City of Binghamton have been incorporated into the final concept plan.

CHAPTER 4: RIVERFRONT DESIGN CONCEPT PLAN

Introduction
Riverfront redesign can be an effective first step in revitalizing Binghamton’s North Side. By providing better access to the Chenango River, creating adjacent recreational facilities and commercial destinations, and improving streetscape aesthetics, the Riverfront can be transformed into an economic asset, a community gathering space, and a source of neighborhood pride.

Old photographs of Binghamton and the North Side most typically portray the city with the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers in view. Based upon these photographs, coupled with the city’s historical development, it is difficult to conceive of the city separated from its rivers. River and city life seem inextricably linked. As mentioned in previous chapters of this report, the development that occurred along the river has significantly impaired this link.

Recovering the link between city and river is the conceptual basis for the proposed Riverfront redesign. Restoring physical and visual access to the river is not only intrinsic to the North Side’s historic identity, but also essential for its future revitalization. The Riverfront is an economic and cultural asset from which the North Side has been separated. Reconnecting the two offers an array of new possibilities for instigating and activating the neighborhood’s long awaited turnaround.

The Economic Benefits of River Restoration and Redevelopment:
The American Planning Association’s guide to riverfront redevelopment, Ecological Riverfront Design: Restoring Rivers, Restoring Communities, documents the experience of many communities in rethinking their riverfronts. Many cities have found that restoring their rivers makes sense economically for the following reasons:

1. Improving water quality and reduce costs associated with cleanup
2. Curb flood damage and lower the costs of flood control
3. Decrease stormwater management costs
4. Reduce sprawl and related infrastructure costs
5. Revitalize the downtown riverfront with new opportunities for housing, offices and commercial services that attract new residents, businesses and visitors
6. Provide jobs for residents in construction and commercial businesses
7. Offer recreational opportunities, open space and park amenities
8. Raise property values and generate net tax revenues
9. Attract state and federal funding, new volunteers and broad financial support
The multi-use Riverwalk trail that the City of Binghamton proposes to build atop the Chenango River levee and behind Binghamton Plaza can serve as a catalyst for Riverfront redesign and North Side revitalization. It will offer attractive and usable green space, provide a diversity of recreational opportunities, connect the North Side to other city districts, and spur commercial development. By enhancing the North Side’s image and creating riverfront destinations, the Riverwalk will be a magnet for drawing citizens from outside the North Side into it. At the same time, it can also promote a higher quality of life for North Side residents by providing opportunities to gather, participate, and build a sense of community. It will provide significant amenities that will encourage North Side residents to continue living there and thereby contribute to neighborhood stability.

While the Riverwalk can potentially be a valuable asset to the North Side and afford greater recreational and commercial possibilities, existing barriers to access threaten to reduce its impact. These barriers, as discussed in previous chapters, include heavy traffic volume on West State Street, streetscapes inhospitable to pedestrians, the absence of sidewalks in Binghamton Plaza, the lack of visual connection to the river, and the fear of crime. Because of these barriers, it would be naïve to assume simply that “if you build it they will come.” Any strategy that envisions the Riverwalk as a catalyst for district revitalization will need to broaden its scope to embrace a more comprehensive Riverfront redesign. This broadened scope must include Binghamton Plaza and the adjacent streets, and render both more active, inviting, and people friendly.

**Analysis Findings**

A more detailed study of the riverfront revealed some of the opportunities and challenges specifically related to the river and its edge that are addressed in this design concept.

Visual access to the Chenango has become increasingly difficult in the last seventy years. City and river, though in close geographic proximity, have been made to appear to operate separately. Currently the visual quality of lands adjacent to the Chenango River evokes an unsightly, urbanized strip mall image. The blank service facades of mall buildings and empty storefronts, degraded pavement, utility lines, and urban desolation are the principal features of the scene. Uninhabited and unfrequented spaces between the commercial service side and the levee are devoid of vegetation with the only areas of visual and green relief occurring solely at Cheri Lindsey Park and Noyes Island. Therefore, design proposals for the riverfront should seek to improve the image of the buildings and land along the river’s edge.

**Safety and security** are major issues of concern along the North Side Riverfront that contains many hidden and vandalism-prone areas with low visibility and lack of lighting. A sense of isolation and remoteness is amplified by the lack of active adjacent uses,
Binghamton Plaza exists out of scale with the surrounding neighborhoods of the North Side. The plaza area is dominated by single use, commercial development and is constructed on pilings surrounded by a layer of asphalt topping settling ground.

An earth fill levee running along the Chenango River behind Binghamton Plaza protects this area from floods, but severely restricts access to the water. Therefore, to safeguard the North Side watershed there is a need to dramatically reduce the amount of contiguous asphalt and carefully redesign overland water flows.

A recent photo shows the Chenango during flood conditions. Any modifications to the riverbank must be able to withstand the force of flood waters.

Land that drains into the Chenango River constitutes the North Side's urban watershed. The Binghamton Plaza's impermeable parking surfaces currently rely on storm water sewers and drainage outfalls daylighting directly into the banks of the Chenango River. All parts of the watershed system need to be addressed comprehensively to minimize non-point pollution, enhance water quality, habitat and river vitality. Therefore, to safeguard the North Side watershed there is a need to dramatically reduce the amount of contiguous asphalt and carefully redesign overland water flows.

The riverfront's historic cultural landscape features include extant remnants of the North Side's major 19th century economic development generator, the Chenango Canal system. Remnants of the former Noyes Island, now home to the NYSEG station, provide evidence of the Canal’s contributions to developing the North Side. While the canal bed was filled in to create what is now the roadbed for the State Street extension, fragments of its alignment, edges and topography can still be seen. Connecting downtown Binghamton with the North Side, Chenango Street is the North Side’s most historic road and containing significant landmarks and views to the Chenango River and beyond. To recognize and celebrate this history, Chenango Street's view sheds should be preserved or opened up and every effort should be made to reconnect this important street physically, spatially and symbolically to the river for which it is named and along whose shoreline it was originally aligned. Additionally, every opportunity should be taken to document, interpret and rehabilitate the North Side’s cultural landscape and architectural features as part of the riverfront’s revitalization.
Site ownership
With the exception of Cheri Lindsey Park, all of the land within the North Side Riverfront District is privately owned. In its efforts to redevelop the riverfront, the City of Binghamton has purchased and easement from private property owners upon which to build the Riverwalk trail. This type of public/private partnership is essential for any additional redevelopment within the Riverfront District, including the area directly behind Binghamton Plaza, as shown on the Riverfront Concept Plan. Meaningful dialogues must take place between the city and private developers to ensure that redevelopment plans that occur on both public and private lands occur in an agreed-upon manner, maximizing the investments made by both parties, to implement the community’s the vision for the North Side Neighborhood.

User analysis
Because the North Side Riverfront is part of a greater Binghamton Riverwalk system, it is poised to become a major destination for nearby neighborhood users and should be designed to address their needs for access, programming, services and safety. Other significant users should also be accommodated in the design. More visitors to the riverfront means potentially more customers and shoppers. Therefore, local businesses have a major stake in the North Side’s development and the reciprocity between business and community goals and needs should be balanced and equitable. Visitors and tourists will find the North Side Riverfront a place worth visiting especially if it includes recreational attractions, wayfinding, restrooms, access, parking, and a sense of neighborhood welcome. The North Side Riverfront should be designed to encourage and accommodate outdoor enthusiasts and river recreationists coming for fishing, boating, or bird watching.
**North Side Riverfront Design Program**

Riverfront redesign encourages recreational and commercial opportunities essential to the North Side’s revitalization, while seeking to renew the district’s historic relationship with the Chenango River. Extrapolating from the City of Binghamton’s proposed Riverwalk, it envisions an inhabitable “river realm” where city and river meet.

**Design Concept: The Living River**

Reshaping the North Side’s riverfront as a major community asset has the potential to strengthen the economic, social, and recreational identity of the North Side Neighborhood. River life and community life have an opportunity to converge and interact with one another in a dynamic and exciting way.

The Living River design concept is based on two interweaving design themes emerging from the earliest community dialogues. These two themes work in unison to guide a future vision for the North Side’s Riverfront

- **River Life:** The river life theme calls for the expression of the Chenango River as a living river’s edge and habitat. To restore its living river status requires the reintroduction of indigenous river plantings, reclamation of the river’s dynamic, wetland and wildlife habitats and celebrating its historic value to community life, settlement and life in the North Side.

- **Community Life:** The community life theme calls for the expression of dynamic community life at the river’s edge, opening up barriers and forging stronger pedestrian networks, neighborhood connections and riverfront access. By creating a network of community oriented spaces for a diversity of users, the riverfront can be designed to be infused with people, life and energy and become an active generator of community pride, caring and use.

The specific design elements of the proposed Living River concept emerged through community dialogue, expert consultations, site analysis, and careful design and planning research and include the following features:

- **Interactive Realm of River and Community Life**

  In the realm where river and community live meet - extending from the river’s bank to Binghamton Plaza - plantings, activities, and uses are diverse, changing, and dynamic. Plantings from a range of habitats that signify and evoke the transition from city to river will be introduced throughout the riverfront. Native floodplain vegetation will be planted in the constructed mounds of earth (or berms) designed to create visual and spatial character, reinforce proximity to the river, increase a sense of privacy and retreat, and periodically block vehicles while creating diverse microclimates and habitats. More characteristically riparian plantings will be inserted within the levee’s stone facing to regenerate bird and fish habitat.
The siting of paths and overlooks are specifically designed to maximize frequent access to the pathway and to connect to adjacent attractions and activities. Viewing and gathering and stopping and resting points are frequently found along the walkway’s length.

In the river realm, construction materials, such as indigenous stone, accompany more traditional urban materials and blend the vocabulary of river and community to evoke a unique sense of place.

**• Woonerf Street**

The riverfront design features a pedestrian friendly “woonerf” (Dutch for “living yard”) type street that is non-linear, meandering and specifically designed to encourage slow vehicular traffic. The “woonerf” is a traffic calming strategy that turns streets into social space. It becomes a “green street” with narrower lanes, paved areas, and raised crosswalks privileging the pedestrian over the vehicle. Curbside and nose-in parking are interwoven with plantings and vegetation.

The woonerf design is considered flexible because it can be transformed periodically for alternative uses. For example, on weekends it might be entirely closed to traffic and become open to recreation, walkers and bicyclists. With the addition of stalls and kiosks it might be used for a festival, antiques show or farmers market.

**• Meandering River Walkway**

The walkway is designed with an informal meander that recalls the flowing nature of the Chenango before the levee and channelization. It also creates a variety of views and interactions with the river and city in its interactions with the riparian edge and convenient neighborhood access. The walkway also been conceptualized to complement the city’s existing Riverwalk right of way and preserve the levee’s flood control function. It is constructed on the crest of the levee wall (elevation approximately 852.50 feet behind Binghamton Plaza).

The berms that define the walkway are designed to reestablish native vegetation and are in essence raised beds. Meetings between university researchers and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) (see note at end of chapter), led to the understanding that the landfill from the old municipal dump buttresses the levee wall and permits the placement of structures such as paths, overlooks, and planting beds atop its crest without in any way compromising its structural integrity. Siting the Riverwalk on the levee’s crest also maintains the existing carrying capacity of the Chenango’s channel to accommodate storm events.
Riverfront Patterns in the Living River Concept

The six neighborhood patterns were used in the development of the design of the Riverwalk’s features and other parts of the design proposal and are described below:

Pattern 1: Identifiable Neighborhoods
Creating a district within the North Side that celebrates the Chenango River requires the assertion of the river’s presence throughout the district. The Living River conceptual design gathers the focus and energy of the community in a vibrant, active space along the riverfront that is identifiable of the Chenango River and distinctively North Side.

This riverfront community space reclaims lost open space and enables residents from the surrounding neighborhoods to easily access a variety of passive and active recreational uses, community activities, and shopping. The design concept provides the broad strokes for a cohesive plan that directs vehicular and pedestrian circulation, structures larger planting areas, and allocates spaces for a given range of uses. This foundation can be built upon with local beautification, caring, and unique community statements and contributions. Elements, features, character, and identity should celebrate and enhance the sense of place of the North Side and allow the Riverfront to evolve as a community place. Site-specific design is therefore favored over generic features and elements that might be found anywhere. Interpretive features, signs, public art, and civic sponsorship should be encouraged to facilitate a sense of community ownership and pride in place.

The Riverfront’s design also encourages the formation of neighborhood boundaries in the Pleasant Street neighborhood. This is done by limiting public access to Cheri Lindsey Park through the neighborhood and relocating the Cheri Lindsey entrance road to a more publicly visible location off of West State Street and Rte 17.

Pattern 2: Webs of City Life
The Chenango Riverwalk is a critical part of the web of city life in the North Side District. This is why, wherever possible, the Riverfront should be thought of as not just a single line, but also a series of interconnected locations on, beside, and near the river. This web of locations draws users to and from the riverfront, shopping areas, stores, neighborhoods, public spaces, streets, and sidewalks.

The Riverfront’s redesign creates a web of city life with a variety of uses and a mixture of elements from both the city and river. It facilitates recreational activities such as bicycling, boat launching, and partaking scenic views. At the same, it transforms the backside of Binghamton Plaza from an eyesore into an asset by remaking it into a gathering place of shops, cafes, and plazas. This mixture of recreational and commercial functions should be sufficiently flexible and adaptive to engage and accommodate a wide variety of potential users. It should foster in citizens both from the North...
The newly constructed skate park provides North Side teens with a fun, visible and safe recreation spot.

Sometimes uses overlap, as in this case, where an artist’s rock sculpture is serving as play space for a child.

The newly constructed skate park provides North Side teens with a fun, visible and safe recreation spot.

The Riverfront’s redesign prioritizes pedestrian connectivity from the North Side by creating easily recognizable, pedestrian friendly routes linking the neighborhood to the river’s edge. These routes include circuits and loops within the riverfront area with destinations such as the Riverwalk and Cheri Lindsey Park as focal points.

Pattern 4: Promenading in the District
The design concept suggests making physical changes that will activate the Riverwalk, such as cutting through the structure of Binghamton Plaza and providing ample pedestrian access from nearby neighborhoods. Along the riverfront, there are opportunities to create activity nodes - overviews, sitting areas, pavilions, and east-west connections - at 300’ intervals, to activate and insure the safety and use of the river walkway. These nodes of neighborhood use include twin pavilions for community gatherings and family picnics, the skateboard park, BMX track, river overviews, a boat launch, and windmill overlook. Changing Binghamton Plaza uses and adding rear entrances and façade improvements allows people to easily spill out onto the riverfront.

In addition to physical changes, much of the activity on the Riverwalk will be generated by programming the space for special larger-scale events such as festivals and sports events as well as smaller-scale and more frequent uses like environmental education programs, canoe tours, and community planting and cleanup days. The Living River conceptual design “thickens” the narrow Riverwalk space to allow for programmatic flexibility, so that the Riverfront can accommodate the single visitor or the neighborhood-wide gathering.

Pattern 5: Children and Family Friendliness
The riverfront’s spaces and networks have been designed so they are inviting to families, elderly, young people and especially safe for children to explore, to be seen and see and to be invited into the city.

Locating activity nodes so that adults are nearby and able to see and be seen is important. Benches, shade, picnic tables, pavilion...
structures have been incorporated throughout the Riverfront area to invite clusters of users. The addition of windows and building entrances that face the riverfront will also promote eyes on the street. A network of walking and biking loops and children friendly spaces directly connected to the Riverwalk have been included in the design suggestions for Cheri Lindsey Park. Creating connections to this network from nearby neighborhoods will allow kids can get onto to a path without crossing major roads.

The action from team and individual sports should be visible to passers-by as an invitation to participate. Sports places should not be isolated but rather designed as parts of the life of the community and river walk, with easy access, changing rooms, and places for passersby to stop, sit and watch. The creation of more overlapping uses, better access, better visibility and activated adjacent uses that support it will help overcome Cheri Lindsey Park’s current isolation from West State Street and Chenango Street.

In the North Side, the riverfront offers one of the best urban environments or outdoor classrooms for activating learning and cultivating creative, interactive individuals. Workshops, seminars, summer camp programs, nature study, bird watching, spiritual gatherings, services, recreation, urban history, health, and fitness are among the programs and offerings that the riverfront could generate. The North Side can promote such workshops and seminars in the spaces and places on the riverfront or in nearby neighborhood community centers, homes, local institutions, and schools.

Pattern 6: Ecological Life and Vitality
Recapturing the Chenango River’s ecological life and vitality requires redesigning both the river’s edge and the adjacent district’s layout and storm water discharge system. The design calls for removing some of the levee stone (which was not part of the initial levee construction) and planting a mix of non-woody species in patches along the banks of the River. Over time, these patches should be encouraged to expand and connect to create a long, contiguous strip of vegetation along the bank of the river that contains many types of floodplain species adapted to these site conditions. Maximizing the diversity of birds, insects, and invertebrate species in the North Side Riverfront District requires enacting strategies to enlarge ecological patch size.

The site’s redesign also aims to limit overland flows to 75’ while increasing the area of permeable landscape infrastructure using such features as lawns, planting areas, constructed wetlands, detention areas, and bioswales. For example, the curbs bordering the planted areas along the riverwalk were removed so that stormwater could flow into these areas during storm events and be absorbed there, rather than flowing into drainage pipes and to the River.

The materials used along the Riverfront embody and promote good ecological design. The “river realm” is created by lush river species.
plantings that provide bird habitat thrive on mounds of earth that rise up through the asphalt and separate this realm from the activities of the woonerf. This realm also makes use of natural materials in its construction, such as different types of stone. In the upper realm of the woonerf, bioretention swales run through plaza and cafe space, draining rainwater and filtering it before it reaches the river. If constructed, this bio-drainage system would serve as a pilot project and would set the tone for water and river-sensitive development in the North Side.

**Strategies for Implementation**

Full implementation of the Riverfront Concept Plan requires additional dialogue and coordination over several years between the city, county, private developers, and community members to further develop the details of the proposed concept. There are aspects of the concept plan, however, that can begin to be applied to the Riverwalk that the city will be constructing in the North Side Neighborhood in the summer of 2005 and to other parts of the Riverfront District that can involve various stakeholders and begin to achieve some of the community’s goals.

**Step 1: Rallying around the River**

The first step to revitalizing the North Side’s Riverfront will be to cultivate a culture of caring for the Chenango River. None of what has been presented within this report makes any sense if people don’t value the river as an essential and significant North Side asset. Other communities around the country have found that transforming their rivers and riverfronts has led to state and federal funding, broad financial support from private developers and corporations and a burgeoning group of volunteers whom are uninterested in reading another planning document, but happy to come out for a neighborhood cleanup day, where results are gratifyingly immediate.

Initiating and nurturing an appreciation for the River need not wait for the planners or designers or politicians, but can begin with a small group of residents within the community who take on one small project to improve the health of the River, to raise awareness of river issues or to celebrate the River’s role in the community. Programs the community can begin today include walking tours to show residents the river, canoeing trips, guided to teach residents about watershed issues, cleanups and planting days, clearing brush, etc. Planning a North Side Riverfront Festival will bring people out to the get reacquainted with their riverfront, introduce the Chenango Riverwalk and begin to assemble a group of volunteers interested in further involvement.

**Step 2: Weaving a web of partnerships**

Case studies of riverfront revivals in cities across the United States reveal a common thread - the importance of partnerships between city government, state and federal agencies, and community
groups of all kinds. Unusual and unpredictable collaborations often result from these groups coming together and trying to get things accomplished under the umbrella of a shared vision.

Assembling a group that is charged with keeping track of the activities of all partners, organizing actions and keeping the community groups informed is necessary for successful and productive collaboration. All involved must be willing to compromise and communicate.

For the North Side Riverfront District, this will also require significant cooperation between the city and the private owner of Binghamton Plaza, on whose land the design proposal has been prepared.

**Step 3: City constructs Riverwalk; North Siders make it their own**

The City’s Chenango Riverwalk can be an important catalyst for the redevelopment of the North Side Riverfront District, as it connects the once isolated Cheri Lindsey Park to downtown Binghamton and in turn potentially activates adjacent areas along its length. The City plan provides the “bones” of the trail, including a 12-foot wide asphalt shared bike and walking trail along with a grass strip and some provisions for parking along the way. The City has purchased the right-of-way for the trail and has worked with landowners and varying site constraints to piece together a contiguous strip of walkable land along the riverfront.

It is up to the North Side community to retrofit this basic walk structure and transform the trail to be distinctive to the North Side. We have begun this process by meeting with the City to propose some modifications to the trail alignment, including adding curves and several planted berms, boulders and small stone retaining walls. Other additions to the walk might include signs that offer historical information about the North Side and its relationship to the Chenango River and the canal, watershed issues, and/or ecological information such as bird identification images and data. A series of sculptures prepared by local artists and sited along the walk could interpret the changing river/city relationship. A large mural painted on the rear façade of Binghamton Plaza would provide a temporary boost in visual appeal until more permanent changes are made.

Plantings along the Riverwalk should include river-related species that will tolerate the conditions on the berms, including strong winds, full sun in most cases, winter icing, frequent drought and occasional flooding. Plants selected should also provide food sources and nesting areas for birds expected to use the area. The berm areas can make use of a “successional” planting strategy in order to make the most of a limited budget. This strategy involves seeding early successional species such as grasses and forbs on the mounds. This species generally have the ability to withstand harsh growing conditions. As these plants grow over the next few years, they will improve the soil, making it ready for more tender perennial species, shrubs and even small trees. This varying pattern of vegetation development will also ensure that the experience of the walk

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**Box or Sidebar:**

**The Restoration of the Chicago River:**

The Friends of the Chicago River suggest the following 5 concepts for successful riverfront revival (Otto, McCormick and Leccese, 2004):

- **Collaboration** was critical to the success of the restoration of the Chicago River, with many of the projects involving five or more key partners.
- **Communication** means that every partner is aware of what every other partner is doing.
- **Connection** to the river is essential. The Friends of the Chicago River mantra is “to love the river, you need to know the river”. The group spends much of their time familiarizing residents with the river and river-related issues.
- **Customization** of projects and planning is required because, as David Jones of the Friends of the Chicago River states, “Each and every river has its own scale, its own landscape, and its own political and economic setting”.
- **Change** in people’s attitudes, thoughts and feelings about the river is a given. Expect that the community’s collective mind will be dynamic, changing as the project progresses over the years to come.
changes over time. Grants are also available for the reclamation of certain areas with native plantings, and may be applicable for these purposes.

Step 4: Maximizing access to the Riverwalk
Construction of Phase III of the Chenango Riverwalk is due to begin in the summer of 2005. The community can now begin to consider ways to ensure that all North Side residents have safe, comfortable and convenient access to the trail. Analysis findings reveal that east-west connections across the Binghamton Plaza area need to be created. Pedestrian travel on State Street must be made safe and inviting. Crosswalks and adequate street lighting must be provided. Without easy access from within the North Side, the Riverwalk will not be fully integrated into the everyday living patterns of the residents, and will exist only as an isolated strip along a mostly barren riverfront.

The community should work with the City and the owners of Binghamton Plaza to determine the layout of a system of pedestrian access that links the North Side’s residential areas to the Riverwalk. The construction of this system will require substantial funding and securing these funds should be considered an essential part of the success of the Riverwalk in the North Side.

Step 5: Strengthening Destinations along the Riverwalk
A city promenade thrives on adjacent uses and attractions. Destinations are what keep trail users moving, drawn to what lies ahead. Within the North Side, the following existing locations must be emphasized and bolstered to encourage and maintain a high level of activity and excitement along this linear system:

a. Binghamton Plaza redevelopment, rear façade improvements: Currently, the rear façade of Binghamton Plaza consists of service entrances only. Since this building runs for nearly ____ feet along the Riverwalk, in its current state it detracts from the quality of the experience of the trail. The building’s location gives it great potential to serve a variety of purposes along the promenade, such as providing services for trail users like dining, restrooms and shopping. Some of the businesses within the building are likely to be open at night, and will provide activity and increased “eyes on the street” in the evening hours. If plaza owners adapt the building to the Riverwalk by adding several entrances at the rear of the building along with windows, awnings and outdoor plaza space and provide a diverse set of attractions and uses for visitors and residents, it could easily become a hub of indoor and outdoor activity at the heart of the North Side.

b. Cheri Lindsey Park improvements: As part of this implementation strategy, Cheri Lindsey Park, already a destination for many North Siders, would be improved to expand the diversity of park space and uses, increase
accessibility to the park and build in community identity. This design plan calls for a new entrance to the park and reconfiguration of the vehicular circulation, the construction of a series of pedestrian path loops, some changes in topography to diversify the ground plane and create a variety of spaces, numerous planting areas and two pavilions at the river’s edge. The key component of larger design moves, such as the new entrance and road system, will require a master plan to be implemented with the City’s oversight. Once these foundational systems are in place, the community can work with the City Parks Department to continue to enrich the park experience by constructing smaller pedestrian loops, community garden areas, outdoor art, benches, trees and shrubs, and paving materials such as brick and stone. Areas of Cheri Lindsey might even support a community compost program and small tree nursery.

**c. Noyes Island Boat Launch construction:** Noyes Island is significant in that it offers what all other destinations within the North Side do not- access to the water. Therefore, the design plan celebrates this floodplain remnant and bolsters its role as a major Chenango River access point. The boat launch planned for Noyes Island requires construction of a small roadway and a few parking spaces. These additions will require coordination with the New York State Department of Conservation.

**NOTE:**

We recognize that the plan to insert riparian plantings for bird and fish habitat within the levee’s stone facing will potentially affect channel carrying capacity. While a HEC-RAS analysis has not yet been done, we believe that this impact will be relatively slight. This judgment is based upon the limited scale of contemplated plantings as well as the existence of freeboard within the present channel. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, the flood elevation for a 100-year storm for the reach behind Binghamton Plaza is approximately 849.00 feet, while the corresponding height of the levee wall is approximately 852.50 feet. In addition, siting the Riverwalk and associated structures on the crest of the levee wall will effectively raise the wall’s height and increase channel carrying capacity, albeit slightly. Concerning current maintenance practices, the plantings can be designed to accommodate periodic mowing, and with less area needing to be mown, maintenance costs, rather than increasing, might even be reduced.

Citations: Brownfield studies, SUNY ESF, Pattern Language, New Urbanism
Citation: Watershed Protection Institute
A Tour of the Design:
Cheri A. Lindsey Park:
coming soon...
Throughout the Riverfront District Design Process, conversations between the various partners led to the development of specific action strategies by the University Design team that can be taken by a variety of participants to achieve the community’s vision for the North Side Riverfront District. The recommended actions range from immediate tasks that can be initiated by both the City and community members on the North Side as well as longer-term projects that will require greater coordination with different parties.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Role of Action Strategies to Achieve Goals
The goals developed by the community for the overall North Side Neighborhood and for the North Side Riverfront District define where the community wants to be in the future and provide a broad decision-making framework to guide revitalization. While there are multiple ways to achieve the goals depending on available assets, resources, and opportunities, communities typically develop and implement a series of action strategies to accomplish their goals. The action strategies should be a mix of both short term and longer term approaches. The short term, easily accomplishable steps take advantage of readily available existing resources and result in quick visible changes that communicate positive action to community members. Long range action strategies may involve more complex planning, gathering of funds and project support, and time to accomplish the changes. Action strategies can combine multiple approaches to achieve the goals that include physical design changes, policy revisions, and defining appropriate partnerships.

The North Side Neighborhood Vision Plan contains numerous action strategies, many of which are applicable to the Riverfront District. As they are undertaken, these strategies will help achieve the riverfront goals as well as those of the broader neighborhood. The action strategies include recommendations for tasks and programs, some that can be initiated and accomplished by community organizations working alone, and some that require partnerships with the City, other organizations or agencies. In order to begin to accomplish the North Side Neighborhood Vision Plan action strategies, there must be additional discussion undertaken and decisions made to identify the priority actions, determine responsibility for oversight and implementation, and develop detailed work plans, schedules, and funding.

At this point in the neighborhood revitalization process it would be counterproductive to add another layer of numerous action strategies specific to the Riverfront District on top of the ones that have been defined for the overall North Side Neighborhood. However, there are several major issues and opportunities that have become evident during the course of the Riverfront Planning Process that if addressed through appropriate action would have a significant positive impact on attaining the district goals.
Recommendations for Action in the Riverfront District

1. The North Side Riverwalk

Develop strategies to allow neighborhood residents and organizations to contribute to the character and quality of the Riverwalk within the North Side Neighborhood.

During the course of the Riverfront District design process, the project partners met several times with the City engineering department to discuss the design and characteristics of the Riverwalk. For the first stage of trail development, which is scheduled to begin construction in 2005, the Riverwalk will consist of basic grading and site development, a 10 to 12 foot wide asphalt path, and pedestrian scale lighting. The University Design Team prepared design studies, applying relevant design patterns to illustrate modest adjustment to the alignment of the Riverwalk proposed by the engineering department so that it is more in keeping with the qualities proposed in the Riverfront Conceptual Design Plan, illustrated and described in Chapter 4.

Although this initial stage of the Riverwalk is very basic, the trail’s planners anticipate that once community members start using the trail, its availability and waterfront location will promote additional use. This may very well be the case, but organizations and community members in the North Side should be enlisted to help promote the use and identity of the Riverwalk in the North Side. The more that people use the trail, the safer and more attractive it will be. As discussed in the Strategies for Implementation section of the previous chapter, community members can also be organized to contribute to the development of signature elements, such as ecologically oriented planting, site artwork, seating/resting features, and temporary event structures.
2. Cheri Lindsey Park Master Plan

Prepare a master plan for Cheri Lindsey Park that will guide long term improvements that will allow the park to function more effectively as a neighborhood recreation and open space asset in addition to being a regional attraction.

Cheri Lindsey Park is the largest active recreation open space in the North Side neighborhood. Its riverfront location and diverse recreational facilities make it a valued asset in the neighborhood and the city. However, there are several issues that need to be further studied and addressed so that the park can be used to its fullest potential. It is recommended that a master plan for Cheri Lindsey Park be prepared that will provide guidance for phased improvements over the next three to five years.

One major issue that the master plan must address is the need for new vehicular entrance to alleviate the park related traffic on Trusdell Street. The Planning Department is well aware of this need, which was studied conceptually during this design process as part of design studies of Binghamton Plaza and the Riverfront. Second, the current park design does not take advantage of its riverside location and the space adjacent to the river is totally asphalt paved and devoted to parking. Many residents expressed the desire to walk, sit, and relax along the river, as well as within the main body of the park. Because the park also serves as a terminus of the Riverwalk, this role can be supported with the addition of shelter and rest room facilities. All of these issues are addressed in the Riverfront Conceptual Design prepared as part of this study and illustrated and described in Chapter 4. This design can serve as the basis of a Master Plan but should have further input and review by stakeholders and the city.

![Diagram of proposed improvements for Cheri Lindsey Park]
3. **Binghamton Plaza:**

Create the process and setting for a public/private dialogue that promotes and enables redevelopment of Binghamton Plaza.

Revalorization and redevelopment of Binghamton Plaza in accordance with the neighborhood vision and design principles is the keystone to achieve the North Side Neighborhood and North Side Riverfront District visions. Although many positive changes can result from action in other parts of the neighborhood, Binghamton Plaza is the largest, most visible, and most often cited concern and opportunity in the neighborhood.

During the Riverfront District design process several meetings were held with the current owner of the plaza to discuss the neighborhood vision and district goals, to review the developer’s ideas for plaza redevelopment, and to consider how both neighborhood's and developer’s goals can be achieved. While these meetings were informative and the developer's initial overtures toward redevelopment received local press coverage, they did not result in continuing dialogue between the city and the developer.

The property owner, the city, and neighborhood residents have much to gain through redevelopment of the plaza in accordance with the neighborhood and riverfront district vision, and everyone involved must be willing to make an investment and commitment of resources in order to for any substantive change to occur. The property owner must be willing to make the financial and creative investment to develop a retail or mixed use development that both fits within this neighborhood and offers a reasonable financial return on their investment. The City must consider where it can make the most judicious investment of public funds and staff assistance that will spark investment of private funds, and design review processes that will expedite decisions and approvals of proposals that meet the neighborhood vision and city standards. Residents must be willing to offer comment and feedback on the types of businesses needed and desired, and then be willing to support and respect those businesses when they come into the neighborhood.

This type of partnership requires ongoing and open communication that might best be facilitated by an independent third party with expertise in planning, development, and negotiation.

4. **Brownfield Opportunity Area:**

Ensure that the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District Vision Plans serve as the foundation for the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Study.

Binghamton Plaza and the entire Riverfront District are within a Brownfield Opportunity Area that has been submitted for funding for a Step 2 Nomination Study through the New York State Department of State and Department of Environmental Conservation. Through this study, brownfield sites that are catalysts for revitalization will be identified and prioritized.
If the BOA funding is awarded, the Vision Plans for the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District are necessary first steps in the BOA process, and will be used to guide decisions about future uses and actions to redevelop brownfield sites and revitalize the neighborhood.

In addition to an in-depth understanding of existing conditions and opportunities, the BOA study will require preparation of an Economic and Market Trends Analysis to understand local and regional market forces. This study will help determine how the market can be capitalized on within the context of the neighborhood vision.

The BOA process requires active public participation, which can build on the foundation of participation and outreach begun during the neighborhood vision planning process. Participation of neighborhood residents must continue to be cultivated and encouraged and North Side CARES must continue to play an active role in community organization and leadership development.

5. District Design Guidelines

Prepare design guidelines for the Riverfront District, including Binghamton Plaza, that are based on the Patterns and Evaluation Criteria described in this report.

This recommendation reiterates a similar one made in the City of Binghamton Comprehensive Plan for the area referred to as the North Side District. Many commercial properties in the Riverfront District are reaching a point where their condition and age make renovation or redevelopment imperative. Preparing design guidelines in advance of the actual redevelopment will help ensure that changes on individual properties will collectively result in a Riverfront District that achieves the goals of all stakeholders.

Design guidelines describe the physical characteristics and relationships to achieve a desired appearance and condition. Guidelines can address a number of characteristics that affect the quality of the neighborhood environment. For urban main streets and shopping districts, guidelines typically address building height, scale and modulation, setbacks, sidewalk width, location and size of parking lots, signage, density and mixes of land uses, all issues that community members raised and discussed throughout the Riverfront Design Process. Design guidelines should be illustrative so that they effectively communicate the desired physical characteristics and qualities for the district. This action will promote common understanding among property owners, developers, residents, and the City and should make design and evaluation of proposals more streamlined.

Preparation of the guidelines should include provisions to allow or encourage pedestrian oriented, neighborhood scale development in the district. This may require extensive modification of the existing zoning or the creation of an overlay district, and thus may require a longer term process. However, even if the design guidelines
are in the short term recommendations rather than requirements, property owners and developers may be more likely to adhere to them if there is a sense of commitment and support on the part of neighborhood residents, the City, and other property owners.

Thus, the first step in the development of design guidelines is the agreement and commitment on the part of the City Council and neighborhood leaders to support the concept of guidelines and the redevelopment of the Riverfront District in accordance with the vision, goals, and patterns established during the Riverfront Design Process. This may require special presentations and outreach on the part of city staff and North Side CARES to promote the Riverfront District Vision and ways to achieve it.

6. West State Street and Chenango Street Redevelopment Plan
Prepare a redevelopment plan and funding strategy for the public right-of-way of West State Street and Chenango Street to create a roadway corridor that balances the needs and requirements of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

In order to fulfill many of the neighborhood and riverfront district goals improvements to these primary routes must be implemented to create a setting to encourage and support pedestrian activity and human scale relationships. These streets currently are the primary public spaces in the neighborhood and their design as great public streets will define the character, quality, and demand for private investment on the adjacent properties. All city departments responsible for implementation of capital improvements, such as the planning department and the engineering department need to understand and champion the concept of balanced use and, in particular, the design of pedestrian and bicycle oriented use and access.
The corridor plan should adhere to the patterns that have come out of the Riverfront planning study and should be prepared concurrently with or immediately after the design guidelines for the district.

7. Building Community Participation

Continue to encourage community involvement in the riverfront and neighborhood revitalization process.

North Side CARES has taken a leadership role throughout the neighborhood revitalization process. Their outreach efforts lead to the participation of many of the community members involved in the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District planning processes and they continue to work to make positive change through neighborhood-based activities and projects. Citizen participation will continue to be important as revitalization planning continues and moves into implementation.

Sometimes it is difficult to maintain interest and excitement because many improvement projects can take years to accomplish and involve many layers of investigation and planning. People can get discouraged if they do not see changes resulting from their contribution of time and ideas. A well-planned outreach and community action strategy should be implemented to ensure that effective participation continues. Components of the strategy should include regular and broadly distributed communication of activities and progress, opportunities for different levels and types of involvement, enlarging the network of both individuals and organizations involved, and cultivation of additional community leaders.

Some specific, immediate roles for community members include participation in the review of design proposals submitted by developers and property owners for site improvement or redevelopment. Contained in this planning guide are a series of principles and questions that community members can use as they review plans. (See Appendix A: Tools for Developing and Evaluating Project Proposals.) There should be an open and non-threatening forum for review of design proposals, which creates a place for dialogue rather than conflict.

Another important opportunity for community participation is the BOA Study. If funded, the study process will require the formation of an advisory committee to oversee the BOA planning process. The committee should include representatives of the North Side neighborhood, including several people who have participated in the vision planning process. In addition, community members will have the opportunity to contribute their expert knowledge and ideas to the study and should be encouraged to play an active role in the development and review of the recommendations for potential redevelopment of priority brownfield sites in the North Side Neighborhood and Riverfront District.
Using the Patterns to Guide the Development of Design and Planning Proposals

Rather than suggesting one specific master plan concept, the Riverfront Design Process led to the development of the six neighborhood patterns which provide an organizational framework to be used by designers when developing design proposals for the Riverfront District. Depending on the core concept behind redevelopment plans and the amount of change that is being proposed, the patterns can be applied to help ensure that ideas and concerns voiced during the Riverfront Design Process are addressed. For example, community members strongly expressed their wishes for having a network of safe pedestrian routes throughout the neighborhood. Within the patterns, the physical characteristics of pedestrian routes are described without identifying a specific location where such routes are to be located. This approach allows designers and developers to propose design solutions for specific projects within the Riverfront District, that, by using framework established by the patterns, ensure that the community’s ideas and concerns are addressed.

The patterns can also be used to review design proposals. The Riverfront District Master Plan Case Study shown on the following page is an example of how the patterns can be used to prepare a design that recreates the Riverfront District to fulfill many of the goals identified by the community. While not a specific proposal for the site, this design serves as an example of one idea that was developed during this process.
Riverfront District Master Plan Case Study #1

Cheri Lindsey
Riverfront Plaza

New Park Entrance

Active Recreation Fields

Community Event Space

Riverwalk Promenade

Riverfront Dining Plaza

Retail Buildings

Grocery Store

Community Center / Branch Library

Master Plan design prepared by Mauricio Gomez, SUNY ESF student, May 2004
Master Plan Case Study #1 Project Description

Design Concept
The design concept for this proposal drew its inspiration from the theme of “connections.” Connections require the coming together or linking of disparate elements or parts. In this design proposal, “green fingers” and “urban edges” create the essential link between people and places. The points where these entities overlap create exciting and inviting locations of either retail or recreation uses.

Design Goals and Objectives
This design for the riverfront district seeks to address three major themes that surfaced from the various North Side stakeholder meetings and community workshops: connections, gathering places, and identity. The goals and objectives for this proposal relate directly with these themes while accounting for the concerns, comments, and suggestions of people in the community.

Gathering Place Goals:
• to create dynamic and engaging places along the riverfront that attract a mixture of different uses
• to provide flexible spaces that accommodate the needs of various groups or events

Connection Goals:
• to make visual and physical connections between the North Side neighborhood and riverfront
• to create a pedestrian friendly environment within the North Side Riverfront District that links to the river, retail locations, and recreational areas

Identity Goals:
• to create a unified visual quality that addresses the streets and the adjacent neighborhoods
• to improve conditions and appearance of retail areas within the North Side Riverfront District

Building Uses
In order to accommodate a multitude of activities within the Riverfront District, the building uses vary depending on their relationship with the neighborhood. Retail and offices uses are located along West State Street, while more community-oriented functions lie closer to residential areas. The community center, branch library, and daycare are all located in reuse buildings.
Evidence of Patterns in Master Plan Case Study #1

Pattern 1: Identifiable Neighborhoods Within the Neighborhood
The new configuration of buildings within the district, in addition to the redesign of streetscapes, proposes the creation of a new and distinct identity for the Riverfront District. The proposal does not contain the level of detail needed to fully develop and express ideas for gateways or signature elements.

Pattern 2: Webs of City Life
This proposal locates activity nodes throughout the district and includes pedestrian and vehicular connections to these spaces. Some of these nodes include public squares surrounded by new uses such as retail buildings, dining establishments, or community facilities. The variety of uses proposed in this plan includes evening and night uses, helping to encourage uses of the district at different times of the day. The plan, however, does not indicate what types of retail or dining establishments might be best for the neighborhood. Determining this information will require undertaking a market study.

Pattern 3: Network of People and Cars
The relationship between people and cars is dramatically changed within the site plan. In addition to creating a more “Main Street” feel along West State Street and new cross streets, this plan provides a pedestrian network that includes sidewalks, trails, and paths that connect the District to other parts of the neighborhood. Additionally, this plan proposes significant reconfiguration of parking, placing larger lots behind buildings and also providing on-street parking along primary thoroughfares.

Pattern 4: Promenading in the District
This plan proposes two types of promenades within the Riverfront District – a riverfront promenade connecting Cheri Lindsey Park and new retail areas to points south of the district, and a main street promenade along West State Street. As suggested by this pattern, the promenades are linked through a series of east-west connections, both vehicular and pedestrian. This plan does not show enough detail to distinguish activity zones; however, the plan does locate public spaces and squares and new uses and activities along the promenades. Locating some of these spaces along the east-west connections allows for the catchment area of both promenades to extend farther into the neighborhood.

Pattern 5: Children and Family Friendliness in the District
The extensive pedestrian network proposed in the plan begins to address this pattern’s emphasis of creating an environment for exploration and learning. While not located at the frequency suggested by this pattern, the green space and areas for team sports located in areas throughout the district makes these spaces more accessible to people in the neighborhood.

Pattern 6: Ecological Life and Vitality of the District
While this plan does not fully incorporate the detailed recommendations within this pattern, the dramatic reconfiguration implies site remediation. Additionally, the new site plan includes more green space than currently exists, and a vegetated buffer zone along the river.
Diagram illustrating the application of the six neighborhood patterns
**Using the Vision Plan and District Goals to Develop and Evaluate Proposals**

The neighborhood goals and objectives from the North Side Vision Plan, along with those developed during the Riverfront Design Process should be the basis for evaluating development proposals in the district. Using the neighborhood and district goals and supporting information, the research team has developed a list of desired characteristics and questions to be considered during the review, discussion, and response to design proposals and site plans submitted by developers, property owners and the city.

These characteristics should be shared with developers and property owners so that they know how their efforts can contribute positively to the community’s vision for the district and the neighborhood. Making these expectations clear during the early planning and discussion stages will increase the chances that lines of communication will remain open. These characteristics can also be used as a first step in developing design guidelines that more definitively set out desired characteristics. Such guidelines can be either voluntary or required by regulation.

Most of the characteristics and questions outlined in this section were originally used in the review of a conceptual plan for Binghamton Plaza submitted in July 2004 by the Galesi Corporation to the North Side CARES Coalition. (See the Riverfront District Process Notebook for more information on that plan and its review.) While this list can serve as a prototype for most development or improvement projects in the district, not all characteristics or questions will be relevant to all projects and additional ones might need to be developed for different projects or sites. To develop additional questions we should review the goals and objectives that make up the Vision Plan.

**Neighborhood Goal #1: Community Relationships**

Our goal is to…Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, to cultivate community partnerships and relationships, and become leaders in the community.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Engage the community in the project review process
   - What is the process for community review?
   - How has the community been able to share what it knows?
   - How is information about the project communicated and shared with the broader community?

2. Encourage the organization of community events and activities

**Neighborhood Goal #2: Safety**

Our goal is to…Create a safe and secure North Side district for all ages and all aspects of community life.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Consider physical design as a means to promote safe use
   - Does the design provide clear views into public spaces, both from in and around those spaces as well as from nearby buildings?
   - Does it provide improved visibility and appropriate lighting?
o Does it provide compatible land uses?
o Does it encourage personal contact among neighbors and residents?

2. Enable pedestrian safety
   o Is there separate space for pedestrians and vehicles on roadways and in parking lots?
   o Are there easily identifiable building entrances and building frontages located along streets?
   o Do pedestrian routes offer convenient connections between neighborhoods and surrounding areas, and reduce travel distance?
   o Are routes accessible to and through the site?
   o Are there site furnishing such as lighting and seating along pedestrian routes?

3. Calm vehicular traffic
   o Does the plan include elements to calm traffic such as narrow streets, neckdowns, speed tables, etc.?

**Neighborhood Goal #3: Economic Opportunity**

Our goal is to...

*Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents*

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Redevelop Binghamton Plaza
   o Is the plaza integrated with the riverfront?
   o Does the plaza take advantage of, acknowledge or respect adjacent land uses?
   o Does the plan include commercial development guidelines? What are they?

2. Strengthen retail currently being used
   o Is vehicular and pedestrian access to retail establishments improved?
   o Are stronger connections made to adjacent land uses such as recreation and the riverfront?

3. Meet regional retail/commercial/service needs
   o Does the plan provide convenient access to destinations within the neighborhood?
   o Does it provide adequate services and accommodations, including parking?
   o Are visitors encouraged to explore the district and surrounding areas?
   o Is there a variety of businesses and retail opportunities throughout the District such as small shops along the river and vending pavilions in the park?
   o Does the plan provide a mix of retail that includes neighborhood-oriented services such as a grocery store, bank?
   o Is there improved access, both on foot and by car, to destinations within the District?

4. Encourage additional support services for neighborhood residents
   o Does the plan accommodate support services for residents seeking employment such as childcare, business attire workshops, transportation, etc.
   o Will the uses and activities described in the plan attract more people to the district in general?

**Neighborhood Goal # 4: Diverse Housing**

Our goal is to...

*Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix, and housing types.*

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:
1. Consider mixed-use development that includes residential units.
   - Taking into consideration the potential brownfield status of the district, have the developers considered including residential units in association with appropriate service, business or retail land use

**Neighborhood Goal # 5: Accessible Open Spaces**
Our goal is to… Assemble a mosaic of safe, diverse, and accessible public open spaces in an interconnected network throughout the neighborhood, serving visitors and residents of all age groups.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Contribute to an open space network of streets, trails, bike lines, and accessible green spaces that link land uses and places
   - Are commercial spaces connected to residential areas?
   - Are public open spaces incorporated into private developments?
   - Does the plan create shared civic spaces and places for community events and programs?
   - Are existing gathering areas within the park and along the riverfront strengthened or expanded?

2. Accommodate and encourage the arrival of recreational users (bikers, skaters, walkers, etc.) within commercial and retail areas
   - Does the design include site amenities such as bike racks, water fountains, seating?
   - Are there a variety of seating options, including ones that accommodate larger groups of people?
   - Are businesses such as cafes and shops oriented towards the river walk and recreational users?

3. Provide access to the river
   - Are there ways to physically access the water such as boat launches and docks?
   - Are there ways to visually access the water along the riverfront such as overlooks?
   - Are there ways to visually access the water from within the district by providing openings between buildings?

**Neighborhood Goal # 6: Neighborhood Identity**
Our goal is to… Celebrate the North Side’s unique social, cultural, and environmental identity.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Address or respond to the district’s natural setting and surrounding landscape features
   - Does the design reintegrate the river as an essential part of the community?
   - Does the design reinforce the Chenango River Valley identity by accentuating view to hills, the river, and landscape features?

2. Acknowledge and incorporate neighborhood history

3. Provide shared civic and community spaces
   - Does the plan include spaces such as plazas, sidewalks, streets, community/public buildings, riverfront promenade, and connections to Cheri Lindsey Park?

4. Provide information and orientation
   - Is signage provided at a variety of scales and viewpoints, including car and pedestrian?
o Does signage reflect neighborhood identity?

o Are there additional means of orientation and way finding such as maps or landmarks?

**Neighborhood Goal # 7: Holistic Planning**

Our goal is to... *Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan that strengthens desired patterns and practices of living.*

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Organize and design streets to support the neighborhood’s historic identity, provide easy orientation, and provide linkages and gateways.
   - Do east-west streets terminate at the Chenango River?
   - Is West State Street recreated as a vital community conduit and mixed-use main street?

2. Address land use and zoning issues
   - Are underutilized spaces reclaimed and reused?
   - Does the redevelopment plan better integrate the site into the neighborhood and riverside context?

3. Incorporate gateways and access to major highways
   - Has a hierarchy of streets been created?

**Addressing Environmental Issues**

Although not a specific goal of the North Side Vision Plan, taking steps to restore environmental health and respect natural processes should yield beneficial results.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Understand and address the brownfield status of properties in the Riverfront district
   - What is the site's status as a brownfield?
   - How does the plan acknowledge and remediate its brownfield condition?
   - Does the plan propose to improve any environmental or potential health problems associated with the brownfield condition?

2. Improve or create a river edge buffer zone
   - Is runoff slowed and filtered, and handled in an environmentally responsible way?
   - Does the plan address restoration of wildlife habitat?
   - Does the plan use a variety of native plant species?

3. Reduce the amount of impervious surfaces
   - Have zoning regulation been modified to allow for smaller parking lots?

4. Provide proper growing conditions for trees and other vegetation
   - Has soil been tested and properly amended to ensure maximum growth and health of vegetation?

**Riverfront District Goal #1: Pedestrian Experience**

Our goal is to... *Improve the pedestrian experience throughout the district.*

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:
1. Provide a safe and enjoyable pedestrian experience both on public streets and private property
   - Is there a network of safe pedestrian routes?
   - Do the routes provide convenient access to other parts of the neighborhood?
   - Are the routes accessible from areas throughout the district and neighborhood?
   - What are the characteristics of sidewalks and pedestrian areas within the development? (lighting, protected and comfortable places to sit and/or gather, interesting things to look at, street trees and other planting)
   - Is the pedestrian experience incorporated into the design of roadways within the development?
   - Are there land uses, activities, and nodes that will encourage pedestrian use?

2. Encourage pedestrian activity along the riverfront
   - Is there a riverfront trail that can accommodate a variety of different uses such as running, walking, and biking?
   - Are there other activities and destinations along the riverfront that will attract and support greater pedestrian use?

Riverfront District Goal #2: Diversity of uses and activities
Our goal is to...Provide a diversity of uses and activities in the district.

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Encourage greater use of areas within the Riverfront District
   - Is there improved access to Cheri Lindsey Park and other areas in the District?
   - Are there more services within the park such as restrooms and drinking fountains?
   - Are there additional activities and uses that can occur at different times of the day, throughout the year, such as concerts, festivals, river activities, and community gatherings?
   - Is space allowed for existing events to occur such as watching the fireworks, Balloonfest, and BMX events?
   - Does the design support daytime and nighttime uses with adequate lighting, a variety of seating options, and improved public transportation?
   - Does the design include other significant public spaces along West State Street or in Binghamton Plaza?

2. Provide a balance of activities and spaces that attract neighborhood residents and outside visitors
   - Is there a variety of businesses and retail opportunities that includes those establishments currently being used?
   - Is there space for passive recreation such as strolling, gathering with friends, sitting in a shady spot to read a book?
   - Are there additional amenities such as restrooms and vending pavilions?
   - Is space provided for different groups such as families, teenagers, seniors, walkers, and joggers?
   - Are additional uses such as housing, hotels, and camping provided?
   - Are existing recreation and gathering areas in the park kept and expanded?

Riverfront District Goal #3: Traditional urban neighborhood scale
Our goal is to...Ensure that new development in the district respects the traditional urban neighborhood scale
Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Include architecture and urban design appropriate to the neighborhood context
   - Does the design attempt to make large “big box” buildings appear smaller? (façade articulation, varying heights, building detail)
   - Are building heights limited to 1 to 3 stories along major roadways?
   - Are building materials similar to those used throughout the neighborhood? (masonry, wood)
   - Are other site details designed to enhance the overall character of the neighborhood? (signage, lighting, walls/fences)
   - Do the buildings or other site features create a unified streetscape? (storefronts, street trees)
   - Does the development encourage people to walk to and through the site? (sidewalks, crosswalks, places to gather)

2. Include parking areas that are appropriate for the neighborhood context
   - Does the location and scale of the parking lots fit in with the neighborhood context?
   - Do the parking lots meet current zoning requirements? Do they propose alternatives for less parking?
   - Can pedestrians safely cross parking lots?

3. Create strong connections to adjacent residential areas.
   - Is the development at a human scale so that it fits within the context of the existing neighborhood without the need for excessive screening or separation?

4. Include service and loading areas are sensitive to the neighborhood context.
   - Are service and loading areas screened from other land uses such as recreation and residential?
   - Is the design of service and loading carefully considered along the riverfront and other high-pedestrian areas?

**Riverfront District Goal #4: Image of the district**
Our goal is to...*Improve the image of the district*

Ways to achieve this goal in the Riverfront District:

1. Make the district a more beautiful place
   - Is the appearance of existing buildings are areas around those buildings improved?
   - Does the plan include a variety of different plant material throughout?
   - What maintenance practices are included? How does the proposal address the issue of litter and graffiti?

2. Make the district more vibrant and festive
   - Does the design provide space for community events and gatherings?
The Riverfront Design Process consisted of interrelated stages through which the project partners and community members explored and shared information, ideas, and approaches for the North Side Riverfront. This cumulative effort resulted in an understanding of the complexities of the site and the development of ideas for redevelopment efforts.

- **Design Studios** – landscape architecture students from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) and Cornell University met with community members and developed design concept alternatives based on their shared dialogue.
- **University Research** – research teams from SUNY ESF and Cornell University undertook more focused research about site history and brownfield redevelopment.
- **Development of Riverfront District Plan** – “neighborhood patterns” were developed as a tool to guide and prioritize future redevelopment efforts within the district.
- **Development of Riverfront Concept Plan** – patterns were applied to riverfront.
- **Review of Design Proposals** – The Galesi Corporation’s design proposal and the riverfront concept plan were reviewed, using goals from North Side Vision Plan as the guiding criteria.

Each of these stages is summarized below. Specific documents related to these processes are included in the *North Side Riverfront District Design Process Notebook*.

**Design Studios**
Integrating the university design studios into the Riverfront Design Process allowed for new relationships to be made between the different partners within this process. The students were able to make connections between what they had been observing within the North Side Neighborhood and comments from community members in addition to more specific design-related research. To broaden the support base for the Riverfront Design Process, students from Cornell University and SUNY ESF developed an outreach strategy that involved first meeting with key stakeholder groups individually before organizing the community workshops that would allow the different groups to meet together.
Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder meetings were designed to involve a broader range of community members and represent the diverse perspectives within the neighborhood. The small groups were formed from community contacts made during the Vision Workshop, an event that was part of the neighborhood’s vision planning process, and from the identification of other key group with connections to the North Side Neighborhood.

Stakeholder Meeting 1:
The goal of the first stakeholder meetings was to gain a better understanding of how members of the different stakeholder groups currently use and perceive areas within the neighborhood and riverfront district, and to understand what the different groups would keep, change, and add within the Riverfront District. The meeting involved mapping exercises that answered questions about existing use, circulation, and image. Through brainstorming, each stakeholder group explored what they valued about the riverfront district and discussed their desired future.

In preparation for the second stakeholder meetings, a series of questions was developed to promote in-depth discussion of how the goals could be achieved through appropriate design. From the information shared by stakeholders, students from Cornell and SUNY ESF developed a draft vision statement and goals for the Riverfront District.

Stakeholder Meeting 2:
The goal of the second stakeholder meetings was to review and confirm findings from the first meeting and to look more specifically at desired qualities and characteristics of the Riverfront District. The meetings began with a brief review of findings from the first series of stakeholder meetings, including a description of the other groups, a summary of synthesis and analysis process that led to the creation of the draft goal statement and action strategies, and a review of findings related to existing conditions. Participants began to explore potential design scenarios by reviewing and discussing illustrative precedent sheets prepared by the students. Groups also sketched desired characteristics in response to goal questions.

Community Workshops
The stakeholder meetings served an important purpose in establishing relationships and expanding participation. Two community workshops were planned to bring those smaller groups together for a collective discussion on the issues that had been discussed and ideas that had been developed.

Community Workshop 1:
The goal of the first community workshop was to broaden the discussions that had been occurring in individual stakeholder
meetings and to begin considering preliminary design ideas. The workshop including the following activities:

- Summary of comments from each stakeholder group as they relate to the different riverfront goals. These summaries were illustrated in the form of three matrices, each of which addressed ideas or elements that should be kept, changed, or added to.

- Introduction of “neighborhood patterns” as an important design tool introduced during the community riverfront visioning process: promenading, ecological life, the lively interaction of people and cars, webs of city life, children and family friendliness and identifiable neighborhoods. These patterns are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 of the Riverfront District Planning Guide.

- Review and discussion of preliminary design ideas for specific areas of the Riverfront District

Based on the community feedback and input during the first workshop and ongoing research about design patterns, students developed master plans.

**Community Workshop 2:**
The goal of the second workshop was to review and discuss students’ designs for the Riverfront District. After the students gave a brief overview of their designs, community members discussed strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches. More important than illustrating specific design solutions, the student proposals illustrate some of the principles that need to be addressed as the city and private developers consider redevelopment alternatives for the Riverfront District.

**Student Research**
In addition to community outreach, students engaged in other research projects – gathering information both about the site as well as looking at other projects that addressed issues similar to those facing the Riverfront District. The research documents are included in the Process Notebook.

**Site Inventory:**
Students documented the patterns of use within the neighborhood’s retail centers.

**Design Research:**
Students provided examples of pedestrian shopping areas, market shopping areas, compatibility, mixed-use, and reuse options, and parking configurations.
Additional Meetings
In addition to the meetings organized by the university students, other stakeholder meetings were organized by members of university research teams. Discussions with local business leaders, the owner/developer of Binghamton Plaza, city and county officials, a local arts council, and representatives from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation provided additional information that allowed the students to better address the wide range of issues affecting the Riverfront District.

Student Design Concepts
In order to explore a variety of redevelopment possibilities, each student developed a design concept based on one of three development strategies. The design concepts that were developed provided alternatives for illustrated differing degrees of change – minimal change to existing building footprints, moderate change, and complete change. The designs explored different expressions of the design patterns and also sought to integrate more specific concerns voiced by community members during the design process. Some of the students’ concepts are illustrated below.
University Research
Throughout the Riverfront Design Process, Cornell University and SUNY ESF conducted research that included a review of contemporary literature on ecological riverfront design, site research of history and existing conditions, and the site’s brownfield status and related state and Federal remediation programs.

The literature review was conducted and used as the basis for programming and applying the patterns along the North Side Riverfront. Examples of other successful contemporary riverfront projects were investigated to understand the issues and variables that affected projects’ success, especially the development of public-private partnerships for riverfront and city revitalization. Throughout the entire design process, meetings were held with the owners of Binghamton Plaza to encourage creative redevelopment concepts and partnerships with the North Side Neighborhood and the City.

Site research included field work and site observations to prepare a ground verification topographical survey. The survey information was used along with a site survey prepared by the City of Binghamton Engineering Department to develop a detailed understanding of the site’s topography along the riverfront, from the back edge of the buildings in Binghamton Plaza to the river’s edge. This information was then used to create changes in the topography along the riverfront in the final Riverfront Concept Plan. Site research also included discussions and meetings with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to understand the levee’s construction and viable options for modifying it’s banks to establish vegetation along the river’s edge.

Additional site research was conducted on the history of the site where Binghamton Plaza is now located to better determine the site’s status as a brownfield. The findings, which were compiled and exchanged with Broome County Planning, are included in a publication “Stowe Flats, North Side Binghamton, NY” that was part of Brownfields Opportunity Area (BOA) application submitted by the City of Binghamton and Broome County in late 2004. A summary of analysis findings is located at the end of this section.

Finally, a series of discussions were held with county officials and brownfields experts to better understand both the status of the site’s official designation as a brownfield and to learn about brownfield redevelopment issues. Researchers met with a representative from the SUNY Brownfield Center to better understand general issues surrounding brownfield redevelopment in New York State, including the various remediation incentive programs that might be appropriate for the project site. This meeting was followed up by discussions with representatives from Broome County to better understand the status of the project site in terms of its official designation as a brownfield and to learn what testing has been done on the site. A more detailed discussion about brownfields is included in Chapter 2 of the Riverfront District Planning Guide.
**Development of Riverfront District Plan**

**NOTE:**
Requires coordination with Cornell for plan, sections, and confirmation of design by city. Expanded description of design will be prepared in association with illustrations.

**Development of Riverfront Concept Plan**

The Cornell University team developed a conceptual design plan for the Riverfront that incorporates ideas and themes that came out of the Riverfront Design Process, including the six design patterns. The conceptual design for the North Side riverfront area includes the rear of Binghamton Plaza, the riverwalk and promenade and Cheri Lindsey Park.

**Review of Design Proposals**

The final part of the Riverfront Design Process focused on the development of a process to review and respond to design proposals. The plan submitted to the community by the Galesi Corporation was used as an example for how to go through this process.

Conversations between Cornell University and representatives from the owner and developer of Binghamton Plaza, the Galesi Corporation, led to the submittal of a design proposal by the Galesi Corporation. The plan was received and initially reviewed by members of the North Side CARES Coalition. A larger community meeting was later organized to further analyze the plan and to formulate an official community response to that plan.

Using the vision goals from the North Side Vision Plan as a basic framework in combination with goals from the Riverfront Design Process, the SUNY ESF team developed a matrix of issues related to the riverfront, a Community Project Evaluation Matrix. This matrix allows for a comprehensive review of any design proposal and was used by the SUNY ESF team to review the design plan submitted by the Galesi Development Corporation. The design was evaluated by the degree to which it addressed issues related to each of the vision goals. Each issue was given a rating of yes, no, moderate or unclear along with more detailed comments or explanation about the specific rating. Using their analysis of the Galesi plan, the SUNY ESF team also prepared a series of diagrams to analyze the design proposal and to suggest an alternate strategy to address some of the weaknesses as identified in the review matrix.

The design review meeting was organized into three sessions.

- a review of the design proposal submitted by Galesi Development Corporation, using the design review matrix and diagrams described above.

- a review of the riverfront design proposal prepared by the Cornell University research team, also described above.
• community response to design proposals, asking participants to write down what they liked and didn't like about both of the proposals reviewed during the meeting.

The community’s comments were summarized and sent, along with the review matrix, to the Galesi Development Corporation.

The riverfront design proposal was subsequently presented to the Mayor and the City Engineer in Spring 2005 with the recommendation from the university partners that the design proposal provide the basis for developing the first phase infrastructure design of the North Side Riverwalk, to be constructed in late 2005 or early 2006.