



TOWN OF GRAY, MAINE



MONUMENT SQUARE MASTER PLAN

PROGRESS REPORT

January 2011

Presented by the Gray Community Economic Development Committee
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Part 1—Background and Purpose

Like many historic downtowns in Maine, Gray Village has seen a decline from its heyday in the 19th and early 20th centuries. During those earlier periods, the Village was the primary focus of commercial activity and community life, and the character of the buildings and landscape reflected its social importance.

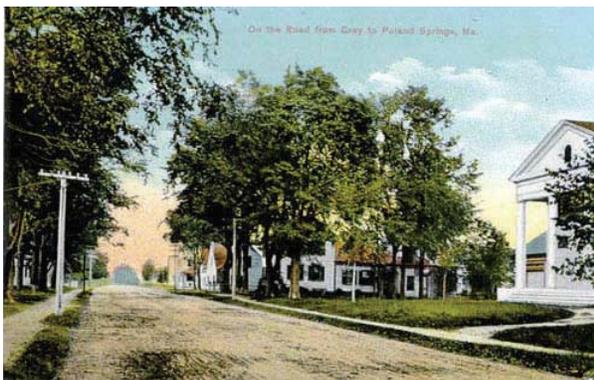
In the post-WWII period, development of the automobile culture drew activities and focus to more regional locations, and care and attention to the Village and its structures waned. Historic buildings were allowed to decline, and many of them were torn down and replaced with service stations and fast food restaurants.

The Village is now an odd mixture of historic buildings and more modern structures and sites that lack visual or functional cohesiveness needed for a vibrant downtown. The declining quality and hodgepodge results have discouraged investment in properties, and the overall economic health of the Village and community has suffered as a result.

The portion of the Village identified for this master planning study is a classic case of this syndrome. The Town owns three adjacent properties on Shaker Road—Stimson Hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Town Hall and old Post Office, both vintage 1960s utilitarian structures that detract from the Village's historic character and quality.



Historic Stimson Hall and the Civil War Monument



Shaker Road in early 20th Century



Shaker Road in early 21st Century

With completion of the new Town Offices at the Pennell Complex on Main Street the Town has vacated its Shaker Road offices. Now that the former Town Hall is vacant, there is strong potential that it will decline like the abandoned Post Office beside it, which has been vacant for nearly a decade. Because of the recession and the condition of the properties, attempts to sell them for private redevelopment have failed. This planning project will develop a future vision for the block that will stimulate private investment and redevelopment in keeping with the historic Village character. It will also help catalyze revitalization in other parts of the Village.

Past Attempts at Revitalization

A year after the new Post Office was built on Portland Road outside of the Village, the Town attempted to stimulate interest in redevelopment of the old Post Office on Shaker Road. In 2002, a local architectural firm prepared a conceptual design for expanded Town offices that would fill in the space between the Town-owned buildings and modernize both structures. Due to budget concerns, that effort failed, and the idea was abandoned.

In 2006, the Town undertook a master planning process for the entire Village and adopted the current Village Master Plan that has been guiding policies, programs, and projects, including the Town's applications for CDBG funding. That plan set goals and objectives for revitalization of the downtown and created vision and momentum for achieving them. When voters approved renovation of the historic Pennell Institute on Main Street for new Town Offices in November of 2008, the Council put the Shaker Road properties on the market. After nearly two years in the hands of two of the region's top commercial brokerage firms, only one serious offer for any of the three properties materialized, and concerns over lack of parking and joint use of the limited parking available quickly ended that opportunity.

Challenges to Redevelopment

Stimson Hall was originally designed for public assembly but lacks modern amenities, and the small lot lacks adequate parking to make it a viable stand alone site. The adjacent Town Hall has limited floor space with split levels that make handicapped accessibility difficult and expensive. The Post Office is in the worst condition of all three buildings. Successful redevelopment of the block will require a coordinated plan with shared parking and utilities.

Given these site conditions and the current recession, there is not enough development and/or leasable space potential in the properties to attract private capital for redevelopment unless a creative and workable master plan is developed.



Stimson Hall



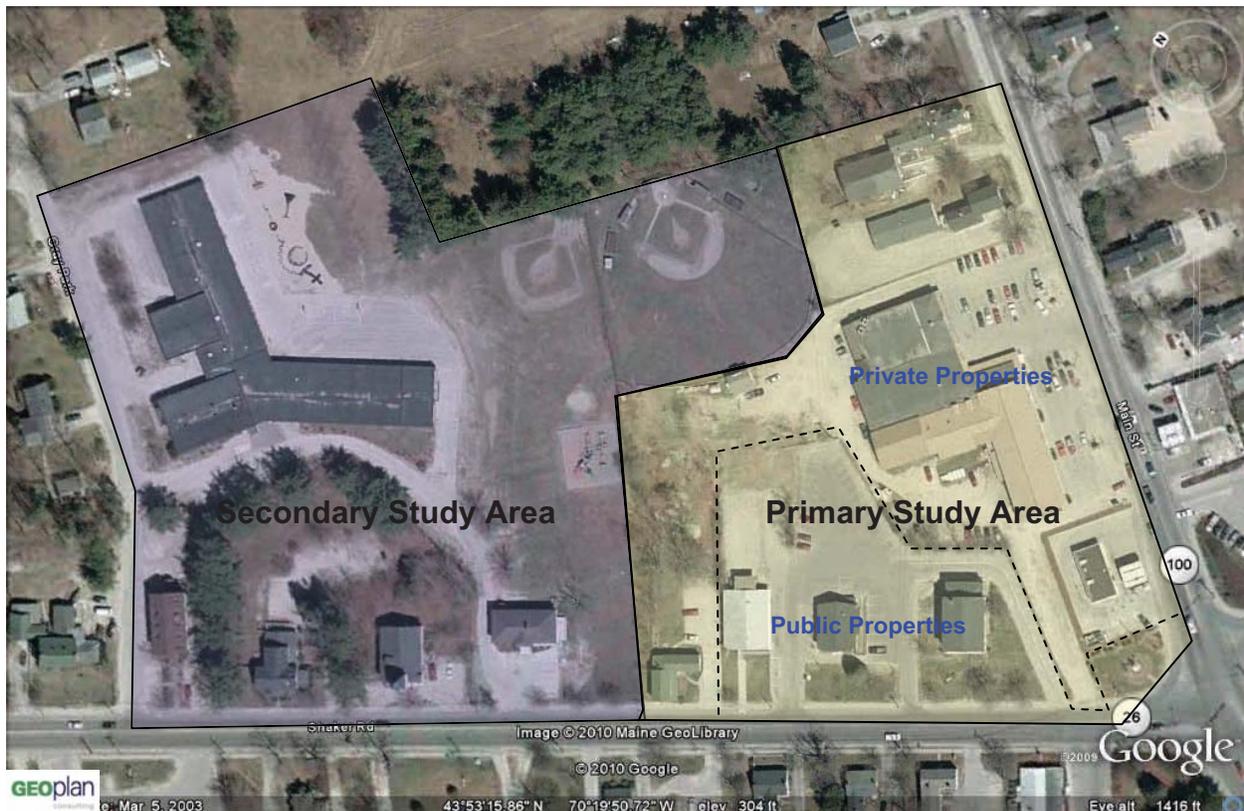
Old Post Office



Former Town Hall

Planning Study Area

Although the primary focus of this study was the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road, successful redevelopment of the block requires careful planning and cooperation with adjacent property owners. The project consultants identified two study and analysis zones, with the primary study area being the properties containing the Old Post Office, Town Hall, and Stimson Hall, along with the abutting properties on Main Street. That primary study area was further divided into the two categories of public and private ownership as indicated in the figure below.

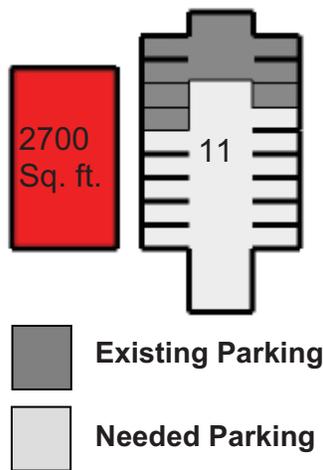


Monument Square Master Plan Study Area

Part 2—Engineering Analysis

The process started with an engineering analysis of the site constraints and opportunities for redevelopment, looking at stormwater and wastewater management and parking as the physical limiting factors. Calculations were made to establish a maximum build out capacity of the block. Engineers at Gorrill-Palmer Associates considered that the soils of the study area are ideally suited for both wastewater and stormwater treatment, and these oftentimes limiting factors would not impose significant limitations on the build out potential of the properties. That assessment was qualified by recognition that certain uses that consume high volumes of water such as restaurants and laundries would limit other uses on site. Both wastewater and stormwater treatment systems might need to be located beneath parking lots, which would affect costs of construction and redevelopment.

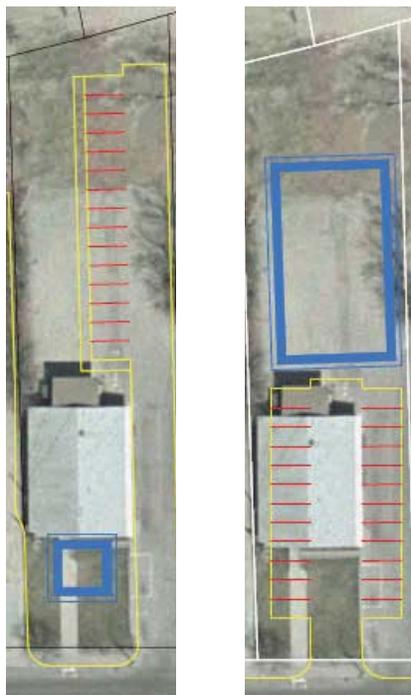
Based on the preliminary engineering assessment, the primary determining factor for the block's build out potential is the availability of land for parking. In addition to zoning requirements for parking, potential investors will look at parking as a critical factor in purchase and development decisions. For uses such as office and retail, the general rule of thumb is that for each 1000 square feet of building that is in



Parking needed for Post Office

service, between four and five parking spaces are needed for employees and customers. Based on that assumption, Gorrill-Palmer Associates evaluated the redevelopment potential of seven properties in the primary study area. The engineers first looked at development potential under current conditions where for the most part, each individual property has its own access drives on Shaker Road or Main Street, and parking is used exclusively by the tenants of those properties and their customers.

The limitations of the Monument Square block under current conditions for redevelopment can be illustrated by the parking analysis conducted for the Old Post Office. The current building has 2700 square feet of floor area, and if it were sold and converted to office space, it needs at least 11 parking spaces, where 18 currently are in place on the property. The Old Post Office is currently being marketed as a stand-alone sale, however, and if redeveloped separately from the other Town-owned properties, parking and access would need to be reconfigured, and a maximum of 16 parking spaces could be accommodated under the engineering review.



Post Office expansion options

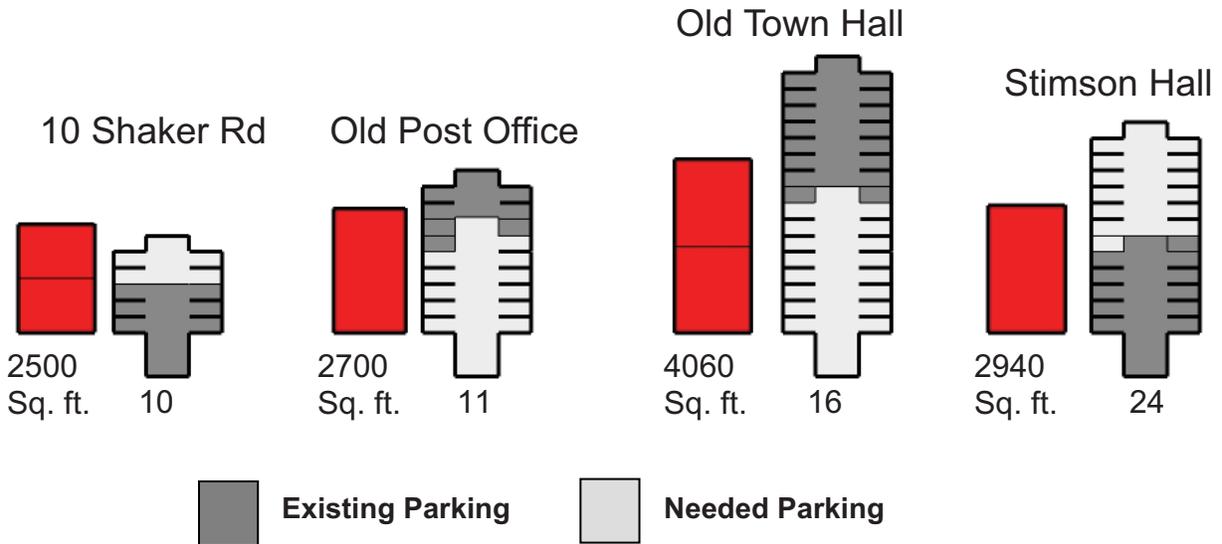
These 16 parking spaces would allow a small expansion of about 1000 square feet off the front of the building. A more efficient layout for parking could be achieved if the existing building were demolished and a new two story structure were built further back on the property. That would allow a double loaded parking lot in front with a total of 24 parking spaces, allowing up to 6000 square feet of building on the site, or more than double what is there now. The purchase price of the lot, the costs of demolition and construction, and the market rates for commercial space leasing would all determine which, if any, of these options would be economically viable for an investor.

The length of time that this property has set vacant would seem to indicate that the redevelopment potential is severely limited by the property's configuration, the building's condition, and the soft real estate market. The engineering analysis indicates, however, that there is greater development potential for the site if the existing building were torn down. That option would also provide an opportunity to use the new building's architecture to restore and enhance the character of Gray Village.

	Old Post Office
Existing Building Area (square feet)	2700
Existing # of Parking Spaces	18
Building Area – Addition Option (square feet)	3700 (net increase of +1000)
Proposed # of Parking Spaces – Expansion Option	16
Building Area – New Construction Option (square feet)	6000 (net increase of +3300)
Proposed # of Parking Spaces – New Construction Option	24

Expansion Potential of Shaker Road Properties

Gorrill-Palmer Associates made a detailed review of all of the properties on Shaker Road within the block. Their analysis indicates that the Old Post Office and Town Hall have excess parking for the building sizes, while Stimson Hall and 10 Shaker Road lack adequate parking for the existing buildings to be fully utilized. Each of the buildings on Shaker Road could accommodate a small addition and could be reconfigured to improve parking. The net expansion potential for the Shaker Road properties if this approach to redevelopment were pursued would be in the range of about 5000 to 6000 square feet.



Parking analysis of Shaker Road Properties



Expansion of Shaker Road Properties using small additions

Far more significant expansion potential results from demolishing three of the four buildings on Shaker Road as shown in the diagram below. The architectural quality of Stimson Hall and its placement on the National Register of Historic Places indicates that it should be preserved and restored under any redevelopment program.

By tearing down the existing buildings and reconstructing them elsewhere on site, an improved parking layout can be achieved on each lot, which will allow fairly significant expansion. The project engineers estimate that up to 16,000 square feet of net increase could be achieved on the Shaker Road properties under this approach to redevelopment of the block. In addition to creating more taxable property value, construction of new buildings would provide new opportunities for site improvements and architectural forms and facades that could restore and enhance Village character as previously mentioned. This redevelopment scenario anticipates that Stimson Hall and the Old Town Hall would be sold as a single parcel with joint access and parking for both buildings.



Expansion of Shaker Road properties using building replacements

Expansion Potential Main Street Properties

The engineers performed the same analysis for the block's properties that front on Main Street. That analysis indicated that there is virtually no expansion potential for the Main Street properties, even if buildings were to be torn down and replaced. The lack of expansion potential on the Main Street properties stems from the fact that three of the four properties have inadequate parking for the existing buildings, with two of the properties being severely under parked. Tearing down the buildings and replacing them would not increase parking efficiencies enough to offset reconstruction costs, and would actually result in a net decrease of leasable floor area.



Parking analysis for Main Street properties showing parking deficiencies



Parking analysis indicates no expansion potential for Main Street properties

Part 3—Architectural Assessment

Lachman Architects & Planners, a Portland firm with extensive experience in downtown revitalization and historic preservation conducted architectural assessments of all of the Town-owned buildings. Buildings were evaluated according to standard use and redevelopment criteria that would affect the marketability of the properties.

Old Post Office

Considering that the building has been vacant for nearly a decade, it came as no surprise that this building was in the worst condition of the three properties owned by the Town of Gray. The single story construction provides proper exit doors, but smoke detectors and emergency lighting are missing. The entrance ramp meets ADA requirements, but entrances lack ADA compliant hardware and thresholds. The concrete foundation is sound, and the floors and walls are marginally sound. The brick exterior is in good condition, but the walls lack any insulation, and the exterior woodwork and trim are deteriorated. The furnace and heating system are outdated and inefficient. Plumbing and electrical systems are generally sound. Given the building age, lead paint is likely, and asbestos tiles are visible.



The entrance ramp meets ADA requirements, but entrances lack ADA compliant hardware and thresholds. The concrete foundation is sound, and the floors and walls are marginally sound. The brick exterior is in good condition, but the walls lack any insulation, and the exterior woodwork and trim are deteriorated. The furnace and heating system are outdated and inefficient. Plumbing and electrical systems are generally sound. Given the building age, lead paint is likely, and asbestos tiles are visible.

The overall quality of the building is low, with interior concrete block walls with no finish, a concrete floor, and acoustic tile ceiling. The building is not eligible for financial incentives for rehabilitation.

	Poor	Fair	Good
Life Safety	✓		
Accessibility		✓	
Structure	✓		
Envelope	✓		
Systems		✓	
Hazardous Materials	✓		
Quality of the Building	✓		
Financial Incentives for Rehabilitation	✓		



Old Town Hall

Given the recent use of this building as the Town Offices, it is in much better condition than the Old Post Office. The split level design, however, places significant restrictions on reuse of the building for commercial purposes. The main floor meets basic exiting requirements, but the existing ramp does not conform to ADA requirements, and the basement is not accessible at all. There are no ADA hardware or thresholds on the entry doors. The foundation, exterior walls, and floors are all sound. The brick cladding is in good condition, but the walls lack sufficient insulation to be energy efficient. The exterior wood is in good condition. The furnace and heating system are outdated and inefficient. The plumbing and electrical systems are sound. Given the age of the building, there is a possibility of lead paint, and asbestos tile is visible.



The interior finishes are of very low quality, with acoustic tile ceiling, tile and carpet flooring, and fake wood wall paneling throughout the upper level. The basement level has painted concrete block walls, and one office has no windows. Exterior trims are in good conditions but are low quality like the interior. The building is not eligible for financial incentives for rehabilitation.



	Poor	Fair	Good
Life Safety		✓	
Accessibility	✓	✓	
Structure		✓	
Envelope			✓
Systems		✓	
Hazardous Materials		✓	
Quality of the Building	✓		
Financial Incentives for Rehabilitation	✓		



Stimson Hall

Stimson Hall was used for public meetings in conjunction with the former Town Hall until quite recently. The main floor meets basic exiting requirements, while the basement level and second floor do not. The concrete of the steps and entry porch is severely cracked, allowing moisture penetration. Some smoke detectors and emergency lights are missing. The existing ramp does not meet ADA standards, and the doors have no ADA compliant hardware or thresholds. The foundation is sound, as are the floors and walls. The roof is under framed for current snow loads. The exterior clapboards are in good condition, but the gutters and soffits are leaking and allowing water to run down the interior walls of the building. The exterior trim in many locations is also rotting. The structural integrity of the front supporting columns has been questioned. The furnace and heating system are outdated and inefficient. The plumbing is sound, while the electrical system is outdated. Lead paint has been identified as a hazard, but no asbestos ceiling tile is visible.



The building architecture has many character defining features of the period in which it was constructed. Both interior and exterior detailing reflects excellent quality of materials and craftsmanship. The iconic quality of the building's architecture make it one of the defining structures of Gray Village. This property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and may be eligible for financial incentives for rehabilitation.

	Poor	Fair	Good
Life Safety	✓		
Accessibility	✓	✓	
Structure		✓	
Envelope	✓	✓	
Systems		✓	
Hazardous Materials		✓	
Quality of the Building			✓
Financial Incentives for Rehabilitation			✓



Part 4—Environmental Site Assessments

Through the Greater Portland Council of Governments, Gray received a brownfields grant to conduct environmental assessments of the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road. The first phase of analysis reviewed property records and did visual inspections of the properties to identify past activities and/or visual clues indicating a potential for on-site contamination by pollutants. The presence of such indicators of potential contamination led to more intensive soil and groundwater sampling to determine whether contamination in fact exists on the properties.

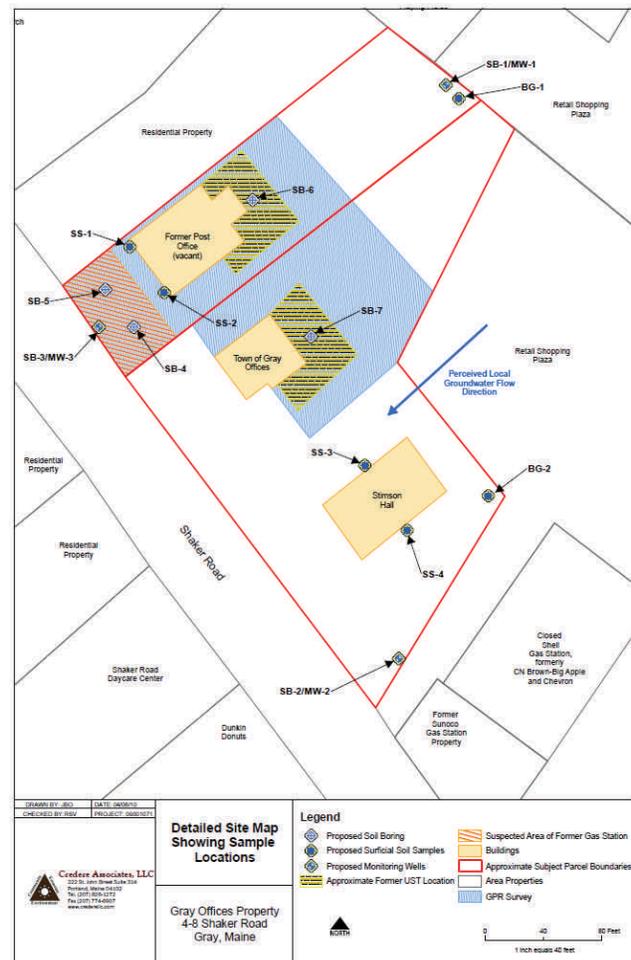
The Phase I Environmental Assessment performed by Crede Associates of Portland in March of 2010 identified several indicators of the potential presence of hazardous materials:

1. A gasoline service station was located on the Old Post Office property until the mid-1950s.
2. Town records indicated the removal of two underground fuel oil tanks without closure assessments.
3. Heavily peeling paint on Stimson Hall and the Old Post Office and the age of the buildings indicated potential for lead paint contamination of the soil around the buildings.
4. The history of gasoline service stations on adjacent properties in the Village indicated a concern for potential migration of contaminants onto the property.
5. Caulking on the windows of the Old Post Office could indicate presence of PCBs.

Engineers took soil surface samples, drilled soil bores, and installed groundwater monitoring wells at selected locations on the properties to detect the presence of contaminants in the soil and/or groundwater. The results of these studies were:

1. A 1000-gallon gasoline tank was found on the Old Post Office property and removed. No soil contamination occurred.
2. No evidence of soil contamination from previously removed fuel oil tanks was found.
3. Lead exceeding regulatory guidelines was identified in surface soils around Stimson Hall and the Post Office.
4. No evidence of petroleum releases from surrounding properties was seen.
5. No PCBs were identified in caulk samples from the Old Post Office.
6. Asbestos and lead-based paint were identified in all three buildings.
7. Mold is present in the basement walls of Stimson Hall.

The Phase II environmental assessment recommended remediation of the lead paint, asbestos, and mold problems.



Map showing locations of soil borings and groundwater test wells.

Part 5—Redevelopment Concepts

Using the build out analysis of the Monument Square Block's publicly and privately owned properties, Lachman Architects & Planners worked with Gorrill-Palmer Engineering and GEOplan Consulting to prepare conceptual redevelopment ideas for the block. Three different scenarios were explored starting with a modest expansion of the buildings along Shaker Road with small additions as previously described in the engineering analysis (Part 2) and showing progressively ambitious plans for redevelopment.

Although the redevelopment concepts reflect the general suitability of the properties for construction of improvements, they are not based on precise designs of buildings or sites and do not evaluate costs of those improvements or their economic viability in the local and regional real estate market. The Vision plans are solely intended to help citizens explore policy options in the community planning process.

The first scenario or vision for the Monument Square Block assumes that the status quo continues and that the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road become private through outright sale by the Town of Gray following the current marketing approach. Under this vision, individual property lines remain intact, and each property has separate access drives and parking. Leaving the Old Post Office and Town Hall buildings intact limits expansion potential to small additions, most likely off the front of the buildings to maintain the existing limited parking.



Redevelopment concept based on minor additions to Town-owned buildings

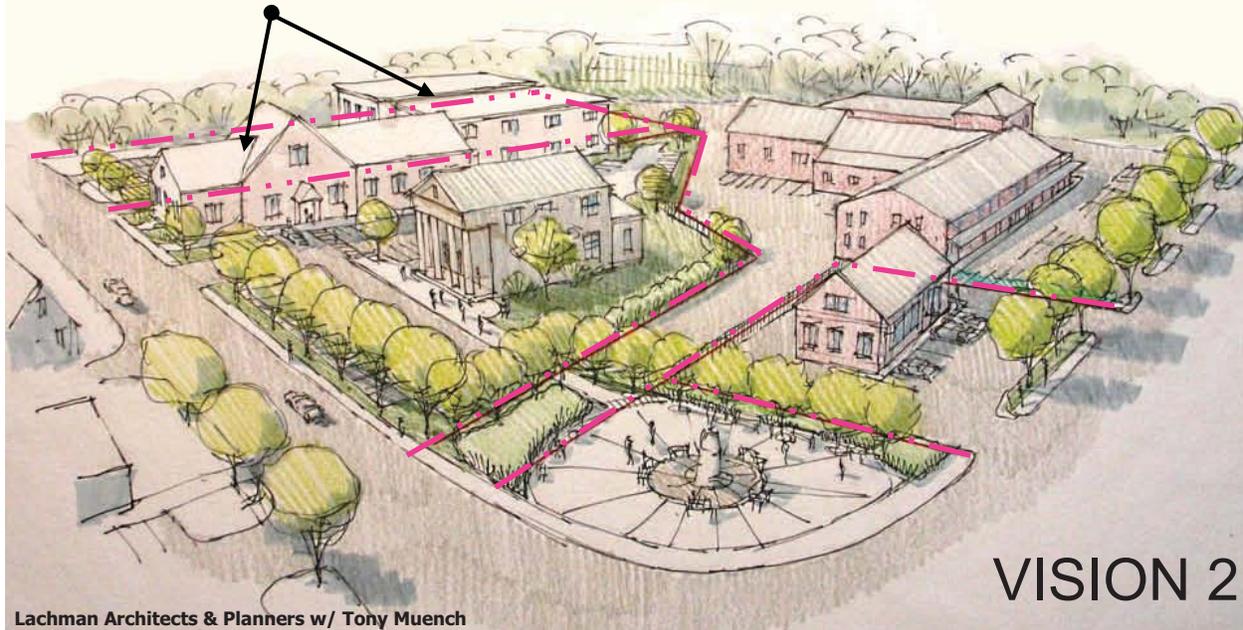
This Vision plan also contemplates minor public improvements to the corner park that contains the Civil War Monument and a pedestrian connection from that park across to Stimson Hall. New street trees would be planted along the Shaker Road properties, and planting islands with street trees would be installed along the Main Street properties to narrow the entrance curb cuts for pedestrian and vehicle safety. Overall, the block would look much like it does now, and there would be little added value for property owners or the Town's tax base.

Under this redevelopment approach, a little under 6,000 square feet of new floor area would be added on the entire block. Because of the limited level of property and building improvements, this Vision is the least costly of the redevelopment concepts prepared by the project consultants, and it may be the most likely future for the Block without direct involvement by the Town.

The second vision concept for the Monument Square Block realizes greater redevelopment potential for the properties along Shaker Road by tearing down the existing Old Post Office and Town Hall as well as the small building at 10 Shaker Road. Story and a half to two-story replacements would be constructed. To meet this build out goal, parking lots would be added in front of Stimson Hall, the Old Post Office, and 10 Shaker Road, allowing full utilization of Stimson and the independent sale of the Post Office lot. The extension of the proposed replacement building on the Town Hall lot out toward Shaker Road would break up to some extent the presence of those new parking lots along the street, and the installation of street trees would also have some limited buffering effects. Similar modest improvements are proposed for the Civil War Monument park and for the landscaped islands along Main Street.

This vision concept anticipates a net increase of nearly 16,000 square feet of floor area on the block, which would significantly increase property values and tax revenues over the current condition. Due to the costs of demolition, site redevelopment, and new building construction, this vision would require significantly more private investment and/or public financial incentives to be achieved. Each project could, however, be done on a stand alone basis over time.

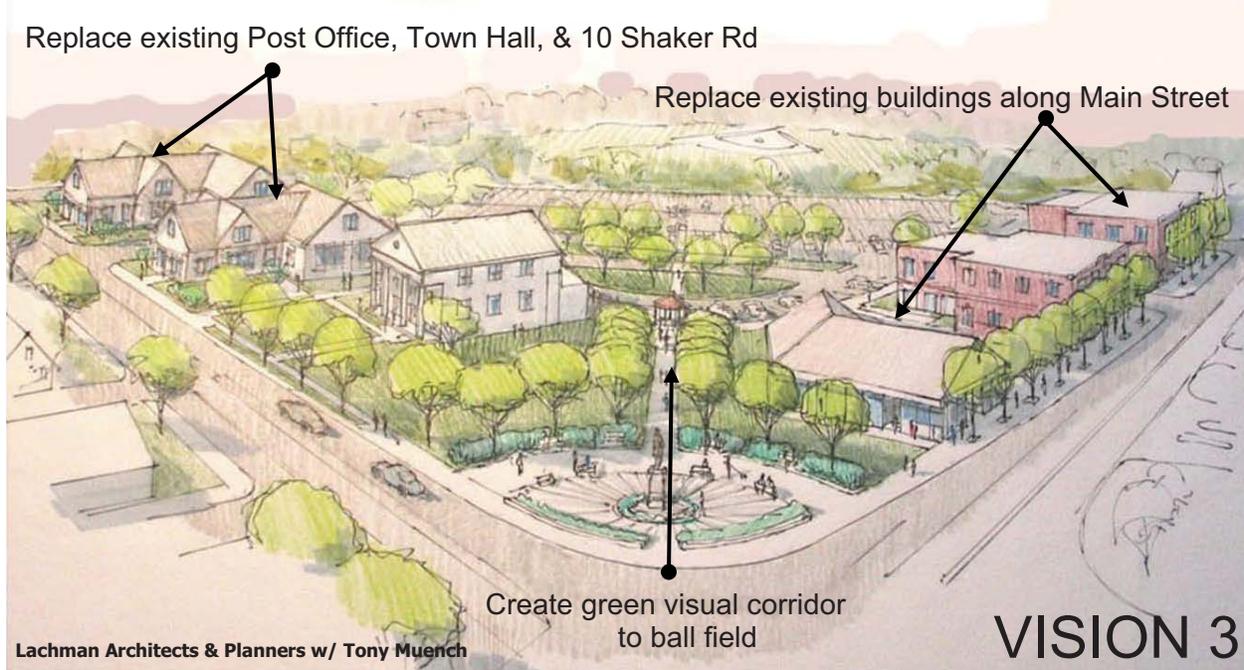
Replace existing Post Office, Town Hall, & 10 Shaker Rd



Redevelopment concept based on replacements of Town-owned buildings

A third and more ambitious redevelopment plan for the entire Monument Square Block was explored by the project consultants. In preparing this additional concept, the consultants realized that the feasibility of a master plan involving all of the publicly and privately owned properties is extremely low, as getting the participation of all parties and the coordination of all their activities in a redevelopment program is unlikely.

The consultants felt it important, however, to present what could be accomplished under ideal conditions to stimulate thinking beyond existing limitations. If a single development entity were to acquire property interests on multiple properties, the feasibility of the master plan's future success would increase greatly. This open examination of greater possibilities for the Block was also useful in identifying creative elements that could be incorporated into less intensive redevelopment approaches.



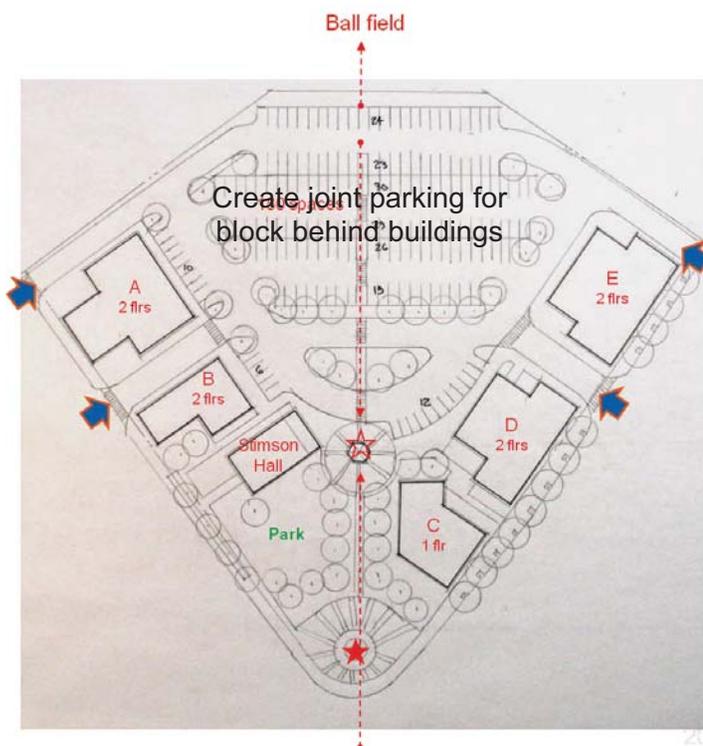
Redevelopment concept based on replacements of all block buildings except historic Stimson Hall

If all of the existing buildings on the block were removed (with the exception of Stimson Hall) and replaced, greater opportunities emerge for creating a true village and downtown environment with buildings close to the street along sidewalks and with joint parking behind the buildings. Shared use of access drives into a larger, common parking field would improve traffic circulation and safety, while shared use of parking would increase parking availability for all property owners.

This approach would also preserve and improve access and parking for the Town-owned Little League Field that is primarily active on summer evenings and weekends. Encouraging such public gatherings would be beneficial to the commercial tenants that could market their goods and services to families attending recreational events.

Most buildings in this approach would have multiple stories and could contain a mix of uses with differing peak activity times, which makes shared parking more workable. Apartments or condos on upper floors over offices or retail is a typical feature of downtown development.

Green spaces and attractive visual and pedestrian links are additional features of vibrant and economically successful downtowns that would be included in this conceptual redevelopment plan.



Conceptual master site plan showing common access points and shared parking for the block

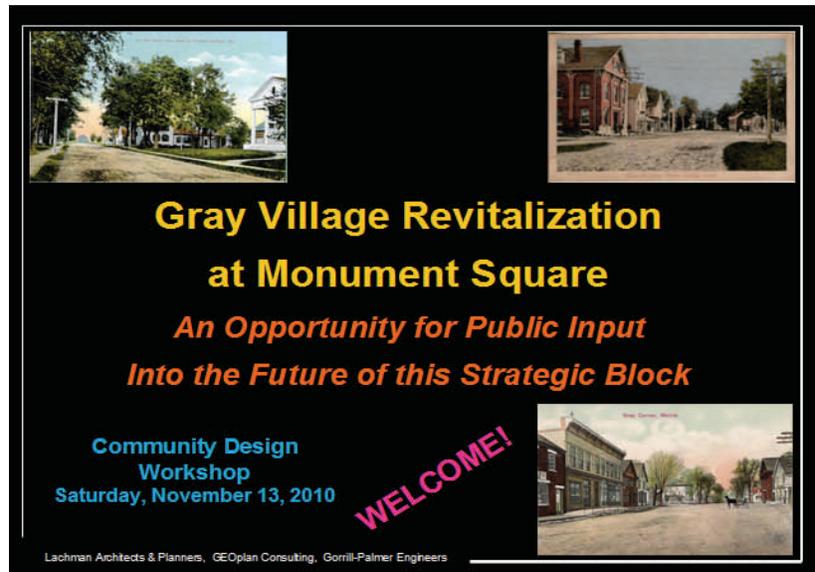
Part 6—Community Design Workshop

In addition to the engineering, architectural, and environmental assessments of the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road, the Monument Square master planning project included a public participation process following a frequently used workshop exercise known as a design “charrette.” Notices were sent to all Gray households inviting members of the community to attend a planning session for the future of this Village block on Saturday, November 13, 2010. A display describing the project and the event was exhibited at the polls on Election Day and remained in the lobby of the Pennell Municipal building until the day of the event.

Just under fifty people attended the community design workshop, including members of the Community Economic Development Committee and Gray New Gloucester Development Corporation, who generously donated their time to organize the event and facilitate small group discussions. The project consultants prepared a slide presentation to help participants understand the issues and opportunities related to the future of the Monument Square Block.

Community design workshops typically involve a limited component of the total population and those that are particularly interested in the specific properties involved or in general improvement of the community. The major advantage of this approach to public participation is that attendees can engage in very detailed discussions of complicated development issues that defy accurate and comprehensible translation into a simple citizen survey.

Although the results are clearly not significant in terms of representing the views of the larger community, the input can be critical to effectively exploring opportunities and options being considered by community leaders and decision makers. Event organizers look for common themes that arise during small group discussions and for creative ideas that may be generated by one group or one individual. The input gathered from such small focus groups can help fashion an effective policy proposal to put before the community.



Large group presentations at community design workshop provide participants with detailed information.

Discussion Topics

Participants at the Monument Square community design Workshop were asked to respond to three questions relating to the future of this strategic set of downtown properties:

1. What should the block look like in the future?
2. What property uses are desirable?
3. What level of involvement should the Town have in the redevelopment process?

Six small discussion groups explored these three questions over the course of the day. To assist their efforts, the consultants prepared a set of discussion boards presenting options to consider for each question.

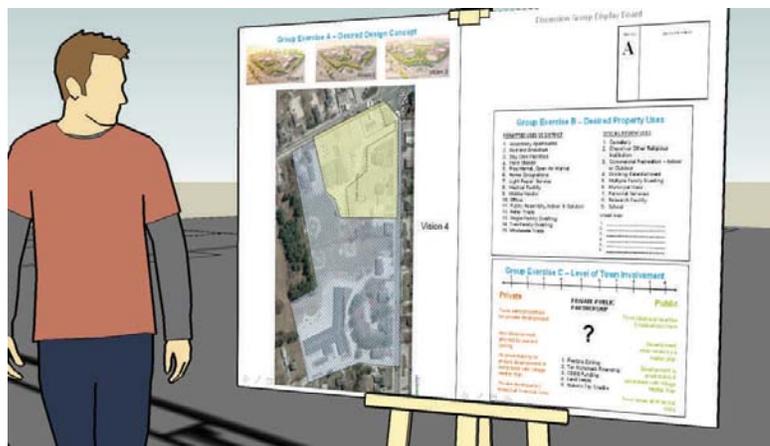
Exercise 1—What should the block look like in the future?

The three Vision plans presented and discussed in Part 5 of this report were offered as possible outcomes for what the block might look like in the future. The range of options included keeping existing zoning, property lines, and vehicle access points intact and doing some small additions off the existing buildings. The other extreme of a grandiose plans where all of the buildings except historic Stimson Hall would be removed and replaced with new buildings served by a common parking lot behind buildings fronting on Shaker Road and Main Street. The third options was somewhere between the two extremes.

The small groups were asked to rank the three Vision plans in terms of the worst outcome, best outcome, and the outcome most likely to happen. Six small groups acting independently came to exactly the same conclusion on what the worst outcome for the block would be—the status quo of individual sale and redevelopment of the properties with minor additions (Vision 1).



Small group discussions provide opportunities for in-depth discussions by participants

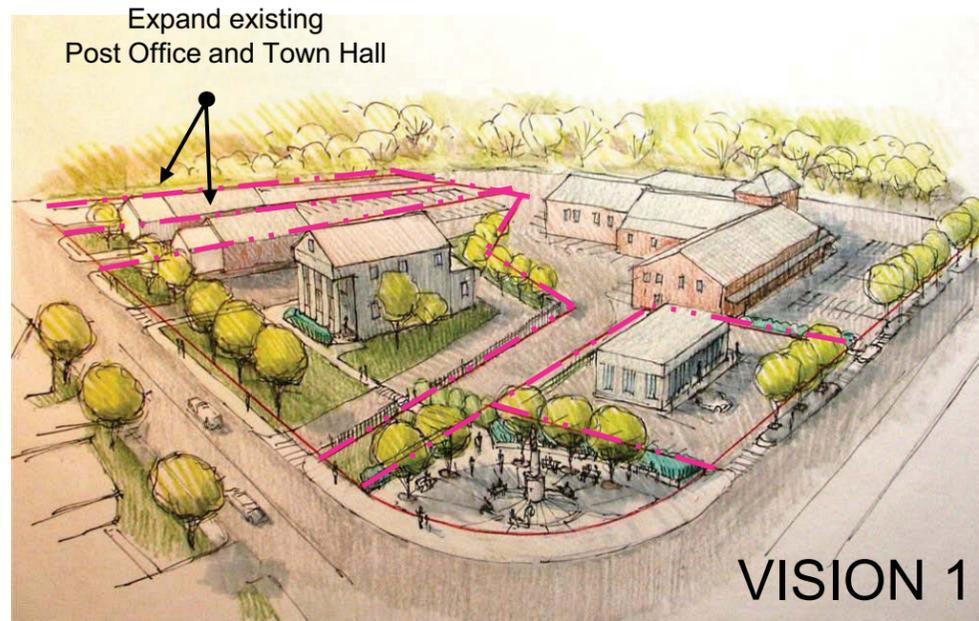


Discussion display boards allowed group members to see their progress and to share results with other groups (below)

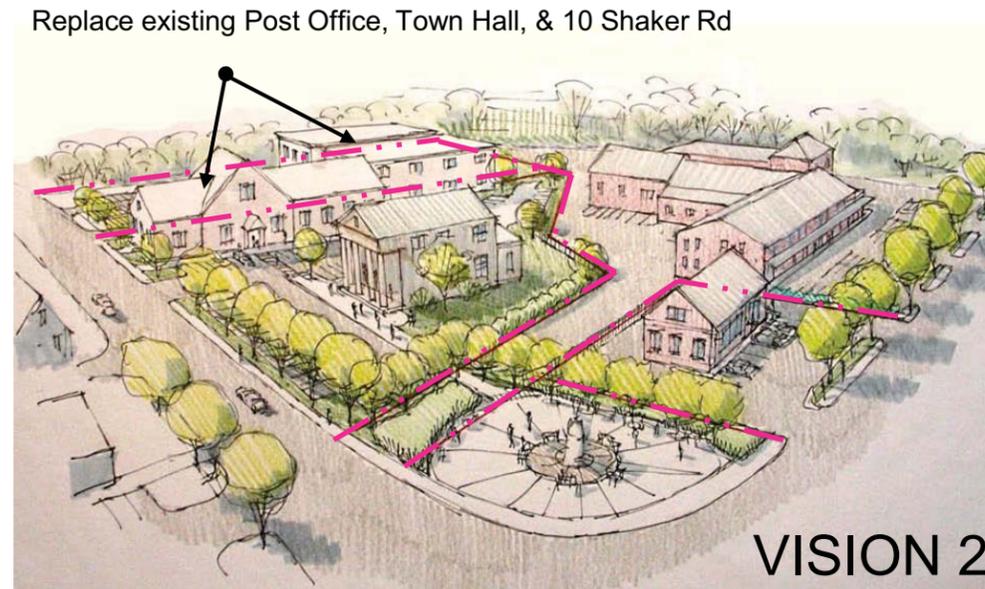


MONUMENT SQUARE COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOP NOV 2010

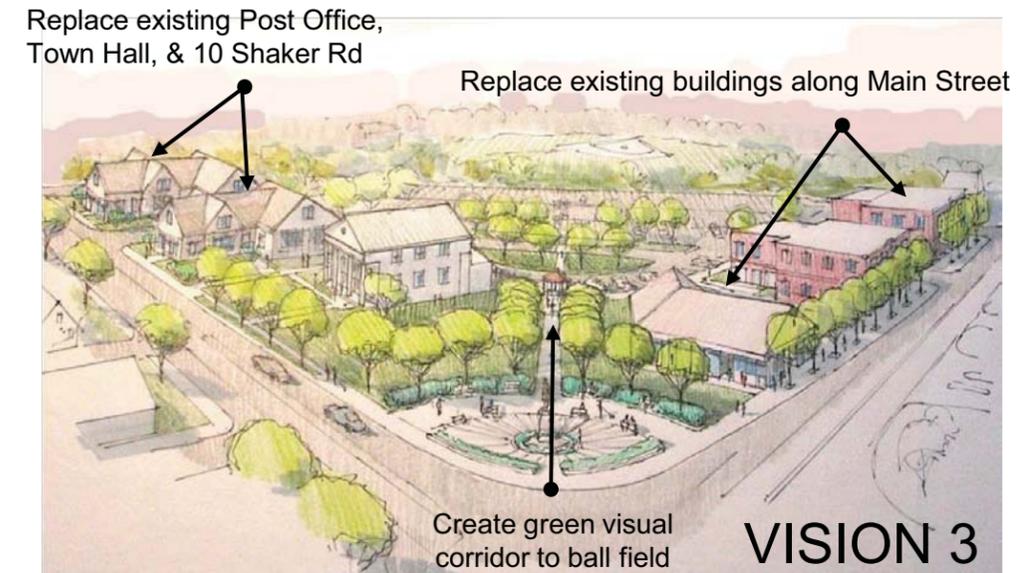
Participant Reactions to Block Redevelopment Options



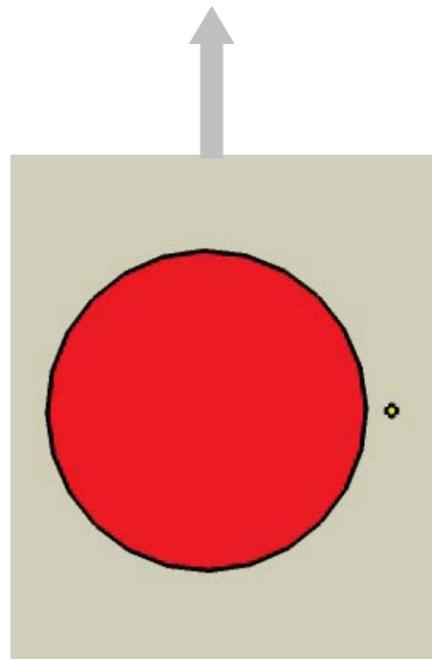
Redevelopment concept based on minor additions to Town-owned buildings



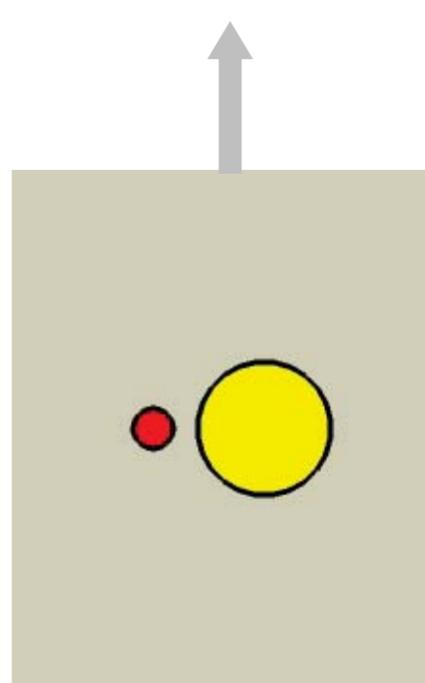
Redevelopment concept based on replacements of Town-owned buildings



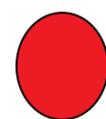
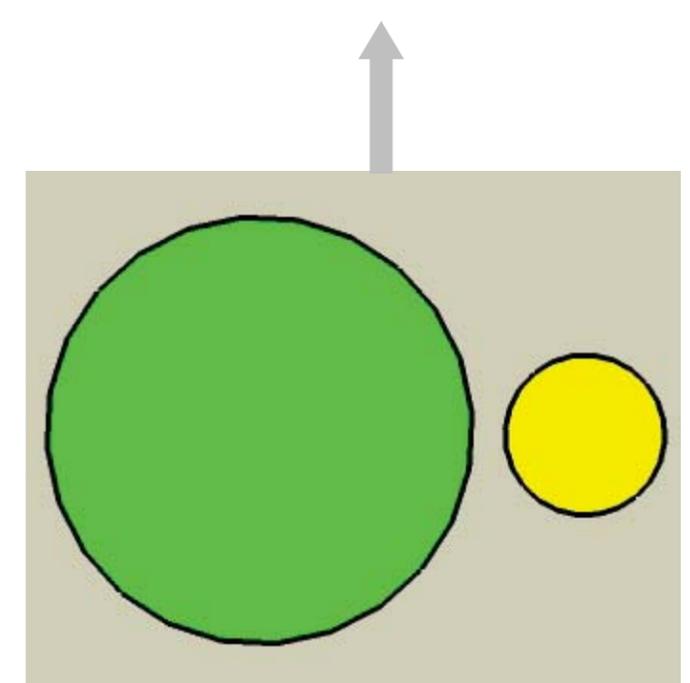
Redevelopment concept based on replacements of all block buildings except historic Stimson Hall



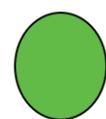
Participant



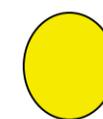
“Votes”



Worst Outcome



Best Outcome



Most Likely Outcome

As the illustrations in the fold out indicate, the six discussion groups came to nearly complete consensus that maintaining the status quo conditions of the block would be bad for the Town (large red circle). Correspondingly, they all thought that the grand plan, where the block's building were mostly replaced with a traditional downtown appearance would be the best possible outcome for the Town (large green circle). As a partial reality check, participants were then asked to indicate with colored dots the outcome they thought most likely to happen. Surprisingly, the small group discussion results were pretty evenly split on this question between those who thought the grand plan most likely to happen and others seeing the hybrid plan as the logical future of the block.

The small groups were then given the opportunity to create their own vision plans using trace paper over a scaled air photo of the block. Cutouts of various sized buildings and accompanying parking areas were also provided as a design tool for each discussion group. Finally, flip charts provided the opportunity to verbally describe their vision for the block's future.



Small group explores alternative design layouts for the Monument Square block

Exercise 2—What uses are appropriate for the block?

Participants were provided with a list of the property uses allowed by right under current zoning and those requiring a special review by the Planning Board to be permitted. The groups were given the opportunity to expand the lists of uses and to then vote with green dots for the uses they would like most like to see there.

With the exception of retail trade, there was little consistency in preferences between the six discussion groups. Other uses that attracted support included senior housing, multi-family, offices, farm stands and open air markets, drinking establishments, public assembly, municipal uses, and mobile vendors. Some individuals indicated a desire to see day cares, medical facilities, light repairs, and personal services. One group supported the idea of a business incubator.

2. How Might the Block be Used?

PERMITTED USES VC DISTRICT

1. Accessory Apartments
2. Bed and Breakfast
3. Day Care Facilities
4. Farm Stands
5. Flea Market, Open Air Market
6. Home Occupations
7. Light Repair Service
8. Medical Facility
9. Mobile Vendor
10. Office
11. Public Assembly, Indoor & Outdoor
12. Retail Trade
13. Single Family Dwelling
14. Two-Family Dwelling
15. Wholesale Trade

SPECIAL REVIEW USES

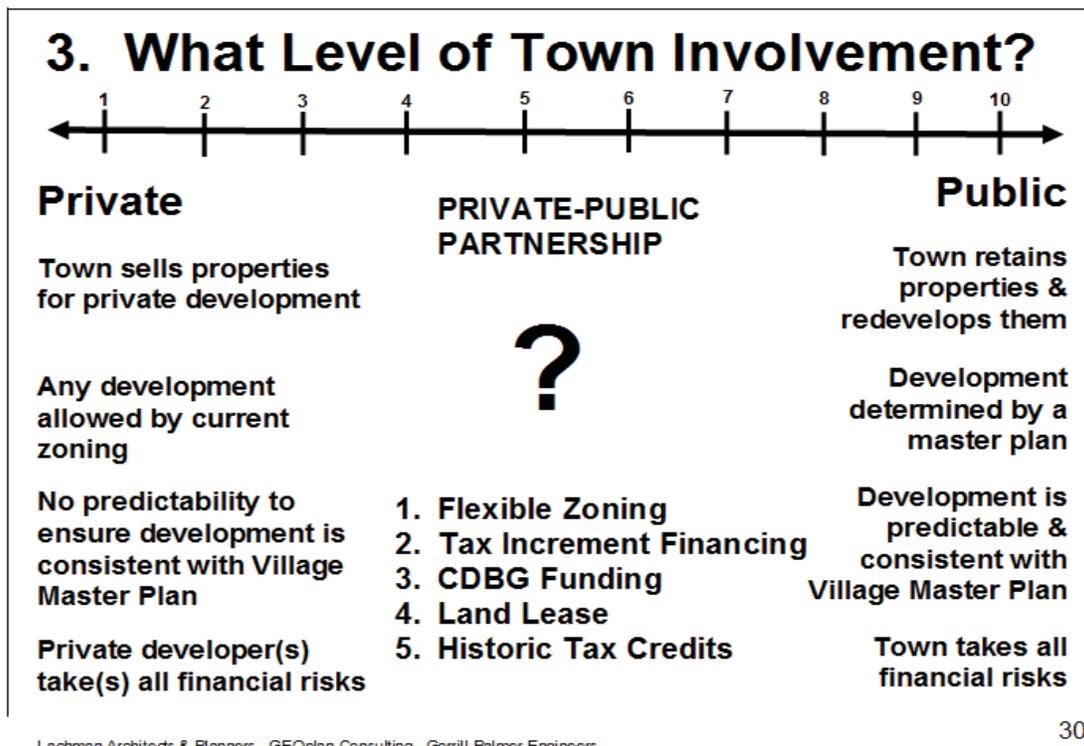
1. Cemetery
2. Church or Other Religious Institution
3. Commercial Recreation – Indoor or Outdoor
4. Drinking Establishment
5. Multiple Family Dwelling
6. Municipal Uses
7. Personal Services
8. Research Facility
9. School

Property uses allowed under current zoning

Exercise 3—What level of involvement by the Town in redevelopment of the block is acceptable?

The final group discussions explored a range of options for Town involvement in the redevelopment process. On one end of the spectrum, the Town would not be involved at all apart from the normal requirement of building and zoning permits for any improvements that might be proposed by individual property owners. This position would support the status quo and argue for outright sale of any and all Town-owned properties for whatever money can be obtained. This goal would argue against any restrictions being placed on Town-owned parcels that would reduce opportunities to liquidate them. This position is illustrated in the diagram below and would be ranked as “1” on a scale of 1 to 10 for the Town’s level of involvement in the redevelopment process.

The primary advantages of this approach are the lack of risk or significant actions by the Town. The disadvantages are the lack of predictability and loss of opportunities to pursue development that will achieve goals established in the 2006 Village Master Plan.



Spectrum of possible involvement by the Town of Gray in the redevelopment process

On the other end of the spectrum at a “10,” the Town could take control of its destiny by using the properties it now controls to pursue implementation of the vision plan for the larger Village. Those properties would be redeveloped following a master plan prepared by the Town and financed with public revenues following the process used to renovate the Pennell Institute. Advantages of this approach would be the level of control and predictability afforded to the Town and the opportunity to stimulate additional redevelopment of Gray Village. The main disadvantage would be the financial burden and risk of the Town-initiated and directed redevelopment process.

Participants at the community design workshop were provided a third option involving a public-private partnership where private investment risks would be reduced by financial incentives provided by the Town in the form of tax increment financing revenues, Community Development Block Grants, making the Town’s land available at low or no cost, and/or through historic preservation tax credits for Stimson Hall renovations. In exchange for the incentives offered by the Town, private developers would agree to invest in the properties and follow a mutually developed site master plan following the Village Master Plan goals and principles. The small groups placed colored dots on the sliding scale at the level they felt comfortable.

As the graphics below illustrate, the six independently working focus groups seemed to consistently favor the public private partnership approach. This common response reflects the prior consistent strong negative reactions to allowing the status quo of the Town-owned properties and the larger block to continue. It also reflects the unanimous strong desire of participants to see the block transformed in keeping with the Village Master Plan goals. Although the input leaned slightly toward public control of the redevelopment process, the realization of the physical and financial challenges to redevelopment indicates a need to partner with private developers if the Town desires to pursue positive changes to the Monument Square Block.



Small group indicators of possible involvement by the Town of Gray in the redevelopment process

Final Wrap Up—Presentations & Next Steps

The final function of the November 13 Community Design Workshop on the Monument Square Master Plan was to have the six working groups present their discussion results for the three morning exercises answering the questions:

1. What should the block look like in the future?
2. What uses should be allowed?
3. What level of Town involvement in the process?

In addition to the reactions registered to the three Vision plans prepared for the Monument Square Block by the project consultants, the small groups each presented their own design concepts.

After viewing the six additional design visions, the larger group of all participants was given the opportunity to vote for the group design they thought the most positive and conducive to their goals for the block.

The overwhelming majority of participants favored two of the six plans prepared by the working groups. Those two concepts shown below included many common elements, including buildings out close to the street with parking behind. Both plans expanded consideration of the block master plan beyond the scope of analysis done by the project consultants in that they included the adjacent ball fields as open space components in addition to the small park around the Civil War Monument that would be expanded toward Stimson Hall.



Small group presenters show design concepts



Vision plans created by two small groups contained consistent elements and attracted broad support by community design workshop participants

The community design workshop participants expressed strong interest in being included in future discussions of the Monument Square Master Plan. Event organizers explained that the event was just one step in the master planning process and their input would be processed and considered in any future recommendation to the Town Council. Participants will be included as the planning process continues through the contact information provided when they registered.

Part 7—CEDC Analysis & Recommendations

With the assistance of the Cumberland County CDBG program, the Town of Gray has undertaken an historic, comprehensive study of a strategic block of properties in Gray Village. The Town has a unique opportunity to influence the future of that block given that it has substantial property interests there. Ownership of the three properties on Shaker Road (Old Post Office, former Town Hall, and Stimson) puts the community in position to set a direction for future redevelopment of those properties and to provide incentives to the private sector to invest capital in the downtown.

As indicated in the engineering analysis provided by Gorrill-Palmer Associates, the Town-owned properties have substantial expansion potential if the existing Post Office and Town Hall buildings are removed and those sites reorganized to expand available parking. That reorganization should be done in such a way as to facilitate integration of parking and access with adjacent properties on Shaker Road and Main Street as shown on the master plan, to provide incentives for those properties to explore and possibly pursue redevelopment in conjunction with project(s) on the Town-owned properties.

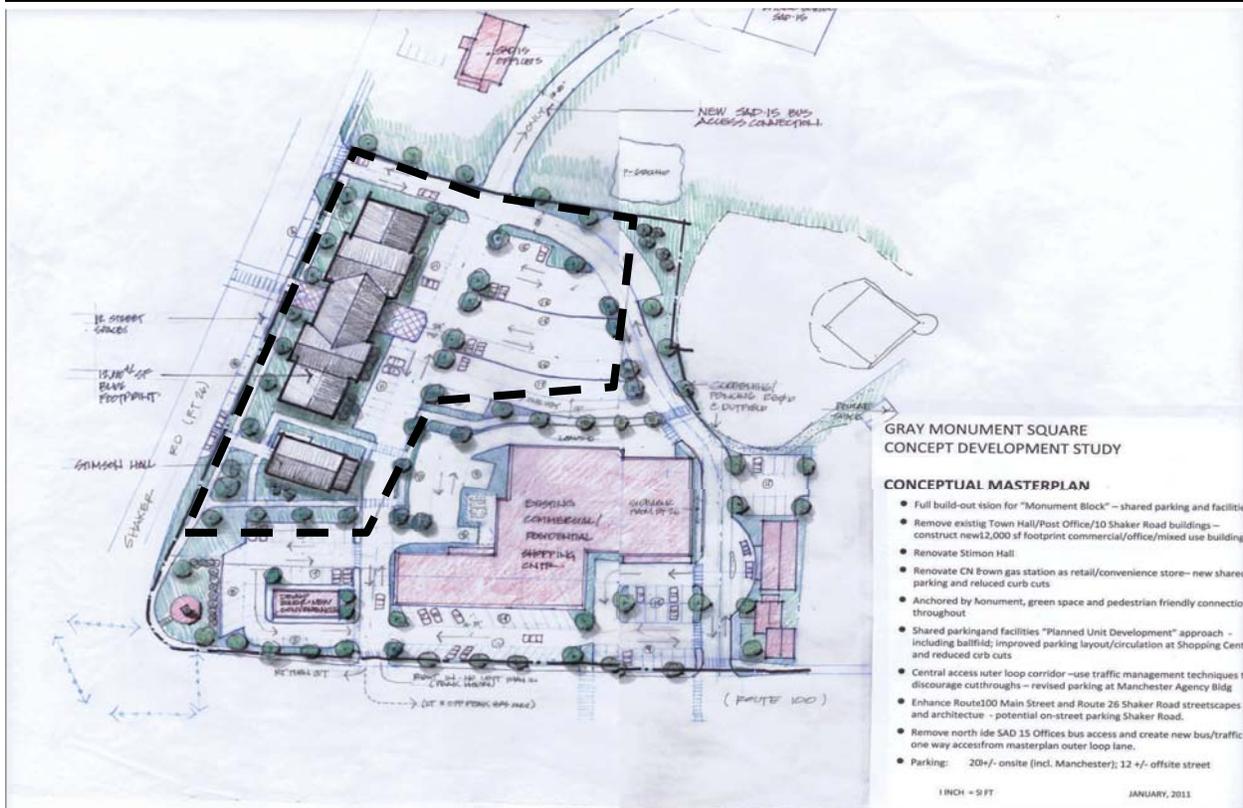
The architectural assessment provided by Lachman Architects and Planners supports removal of the Old Post Office and Town Hall given the outdated design and substandard conditions of those buildings. At the same time, the current depressed real estate market may make it necessary to hold open the option of upgrading those existing buildings rather than removing them. The Town should ensure, however, that any such reuse of the existing buildings accomplishes the goals of the Village Master Plan for downtown revitalization.

The Community Economic Development Committee met in November after the community design workshop and again in December to process the results of the public participation event and to set a course for completion of the Monument Square master planning project.

The Committee concluded that the general consensus of the Community Design Workshop participants was that they saw the unique opportunity of the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road as strategic assets to use in pursuing a larger redevelopment vision for the block. Based on the strong and consistent input obtained at that weekend event, the CEDC does not consider the current policy track of liquidating those property assets to generate short-term cash as being in keeping with the long-range plans adopted by the Town, particularly the Village Master Plan.

Based on the master planning research and results of the Community Design Workshop, the Town should pursue a public-private partnership where private investment risks would be reduced by financial incentives provided by the Town in the form of tax increment financing revenues, Community Development Block Grants, making the Town's land available at low or no cost, and/or through historic preservation tax credits for Stimson Hall renovations. In exchange for the incentives offered by the Town, private developers would agree to invest in the properties and follow a mutually developed site master plan following the Village Master Plan goals and principles.

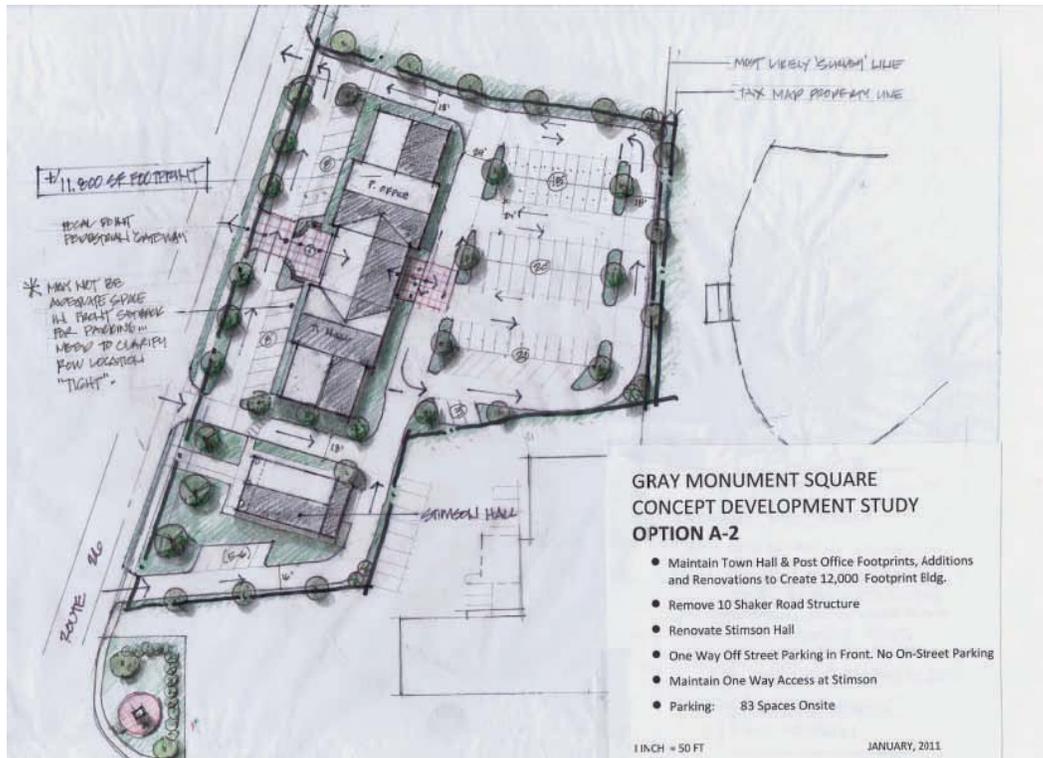
To illustrate what such a public/private partnership might produce, CEDC member and engineer Rick Licht and volunteer architect John Scheckel, working with Economic Development Consultant George Theborge, have prepared a conceptual master plan for the Monument Square Block and three different alternative redevelopment concepts for the Town-owned properties to give developers a sense of the development potential available in those properties and the flexibility that would be allowed by the Town to anyone willing to invest in the project. The draft master plan and alternative development concepts are shown on the following pages.



Conceptual master plan for Monument Square Block showing joint access and parking for all buildings.



Conceptual redevelopment plan for Town-owned properties showing replacement of 10 Shaker Road, Old Post Office, and former Town Hall with a new 12,000 square foot building (A-1).



Conceptual redevelopment plan for Town-owned properties showing retention of Old Post Office and former Town Hall buildings with new additions for a 12,000 square foot building (A-2).



Conceptual redevelopment plan for Town-owned properties showing removal of Old Post Office, former Town Hall, and Stimson Hall and replacement with two new buildings (A-3).

The draft master plan for the Monument Square Block and the three alternative development concepts for the Town-owned properties on Shaker Road reflect the engineering and architectural research and the public participation input of the project. The intent of the master plan is to present a coordinated vision for redevelopment of all properties of the block that could be done over time to achieve the goals of curb cut reductions, shared access, increased parking, improved traffic circulation, safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian connections, and maximum utilization of buildings and properties.

The three redevelopment concepts for the Town-owned properties (and 10 Shaker Road) show how a private developer could maximize building square footage while redeveloping those properties in keeping with the block master plan and while advancing downtown revitalization. Given the conditions of the Town-owned buildings, the weak real estate market, and the need to purchase 10 Shaker Road to achieve the long-range goals for improved traffic circulation, CEDC considers that it may be necessary to offer the three town-owned buildings and parcels on a long-term lease basis to a developer willing to invest in site and building improvements. The Town could offer additional incentives such as applying for Community Development Block Grant funding and/or application of Tax Increment Financing as has been done on other economic development projects. Any plan to renovate Stimson Hall if done by a private entity would be eligible for federal and state historic preservation tax credits.

The CEDC recognizes that such a significant policy shift and proposal to pursue a public-private partnership with private developers for revitalization of those Town-owned properties warrants input from a larger cross section of the community than participated in the community design workshop. To that end, the CEDC recommends that the Town conduct a citizen survey to determine whether the larger public would support using the Shaker Road properties and other Town economic development tools to provide incentives to attract private investment and revitalization following the Village Master Plan goals and objectives.

Doing a community-wide survey on a complicated redevelopment plan with multiple technical issues is a serious challenge. The CEDC strongly recommends that a simple and direct proposal be tested rather than a range of options. That proposal should include the composite master plan based on the project design studies and an implementation program based on the most effective economic development tools available to the Town.

The basic question to be posed on the survey will be:

“Should the Town of Gray offer the properties on Shaker Road to interested and qualified developers on a long-term lease basis at no cost provided that the developer(s) invest private funds into substantial improvements to those properties in keeping with a master plan prepared by the CEDC and adopted by the Town Council.”

The survey will also query whether citizens would support additional incentives, if necessary, such as TIF revenues, CDBG funds, and historic preservation tax credits that would not increase the tax rate.

A third and final question could be included that would specifically acknowledge public statements made during the Pennell Institute bond approval process that the Shaker Road properties would be sold to generate revenues to pay off those bonds. This question and response option would provide an alternative to the proposal being offered by the CEDC and would honor the commitments made at that time.

If the survey results confirm input from the community design workshop, the Town should issue a Request for Proposals offering the Town-owned properties on a long-term lease basis to a developer willing to redevelop them following the master plan. The length of that lease could be determined by comparing the anticipated tax revenues that will be generated based on a no-build sale of the properties compared to the enhanced value created by a redevelopment program under the master plan concepts.