



# *Concept Plan: Pawtucket/Central Falls Growth Center*

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June 2014

# About This Document



## What's the purpose of this concept plan?

Five concept plans for Growth Centers have been developed as part of RhodeMapRI, a project of the State Division of Planning. Funding for RhodeMapRI comes from a federal Sustainable Communities Initiative Grant, and the project is organized around six key Livability Principles developed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development:

- Provide more transportation choices.
- Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- Enhance economic competitiveness.
- Support existing communities.
- Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
- Value communities and neighborhoods

RhodeMapRI focuses on plans to enhance economic opportunities and outcomes, meet housing needs across the income scale, and strengthen the state's Growth Centers policy, first established in 2002, with effective strategies to promote growth and development activity where it can best be supported. Well-aligned with the federal government's Livability Principles, the state's criteria for designating growth centers promote the following conditions:

- Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure
- Mixed land uses
- Diverse housing opportunities and choices
- Transportation choice
- Protection of environmental resources
- Design for sense of place
- Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.

The five Growth Center concept plans cover the range of rural, ex-urban (or semi-rural), suburban, small main street, and urban locations. These areas have been targeted by their communities as having opportunities for mixed-use, denser, and more walkable development. In some cases, plans already exist for development or redevelopment.

The purpose of these RhodeMapRI concept plans is to test Growth Center criteria and identify Growth Center needs to achieve implementation, and/or to provide options or materials to help these communities move forward toward implementation.

## What's in this concept plan?

- Background and summary
- Existing assets
- Existing issues and constraints
- Application of growth center criteria and identification of growth center opportunities
- Concept plan
- Growth center implementation strategies

# Overview

## Pawtucket/Central Falls Growth History and Development Patterns

Pawtucket and Central Falls are historic cities marked by their industrial identity in the 19th and 20th centuries. Both cities' existing land-use patterns largely combine older, underutilized and/or vacant manufacturing space and multifamily housing, with scattered retail along main corridors. The riverfront has attracted planning and development attention in both cities, and there are several redevelopment projects in downtown Pawtucket and vicinity. The cities are pursuing the creation of a joint commuter rail station at Barton Street.

## Pawtucket/Central Falls Growth Center

Pawtucket has designated a large Downtown Growth Center with six subdistricts, including the "Transit-Oriented Development & Industrial Park District" that is central to this concept plan. The map here show how that district and a riverside district straddle the border with Central Falls.

Both Pawtucket and Central Falls have established zoning districts—the Mill Reuse District—that promote planned, mixed-use development of historic mill areas and structures

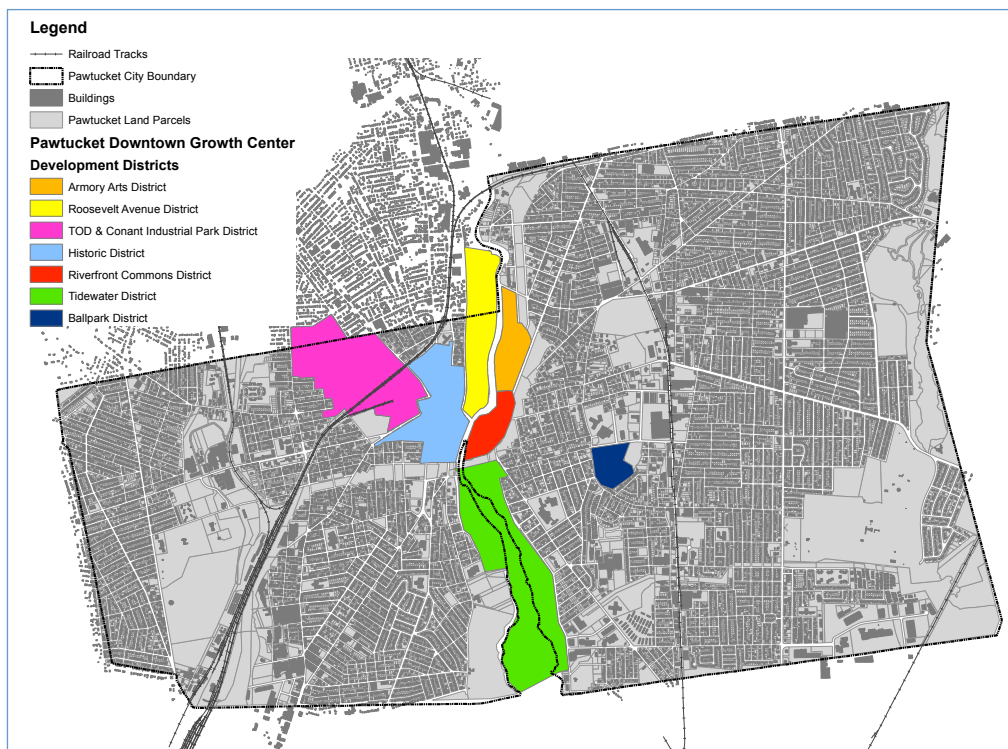
Because redevelopment attention is scattered across the subdistricts as well as in the Ballpark District and the Broad Street Regeneration Plan, creating connections and achieving critical mass can be problematic.

## The Conant Mill Site in Context

The 17-acre Conant Thread and Coats & Clark Mill site ("Conant Mill site") contains seven industrial buildings with over one million square feet of vacant and underutilized spaces. The site, included on the National Register of Historic Places, is an isolated enclave that straddles the Pawtucket-Central Falls border but has poor connections to the areas around it. In Central Falls, narrow streets and dense residential development surround the site. It sits within a mixed context in Pawtucket, with residential neighborhoods to the west and southwest, industrial buildings to the east, and an industrial/commercial mix adjacent to a rail line to the south.

## Relevant Growth Center Criteria

Transformation into a mixed-use development has long been the goal for the Conant Mill site. With the initiative to bring a commuter rail station to Pawtucket, the goal is to create a transit-oriented development (TOD) district. All Growth Center criteria are relevant to this site.



## Focus of this Concept Plan

This very large site presents significant challenges. The Concept Plan focuses creating connections to the context, improving the edges, and identifying improvements to pedestrian routes—and the pedestrian experience along those route—to and from the proposed rail station.

# Assets

The location of the Conant Mill site and its potential for major redevelopment with historic character are the site's primary assets:

- **Large site for redevelopment** sits close to the proposed commuter rail station.
- **The site is within walking distance of the Dexter Street commercial corridor** and is a short distance from community destinations in proximity to downtown Pawtucket
- **The Mill Pond could eventually serve as a water feature.**
- **Public bus service** is available within a few blocks of all edges of the site.
- **Adaptive-reuse residential development** in Pawtucket and Central Falls indicates long-term potential.

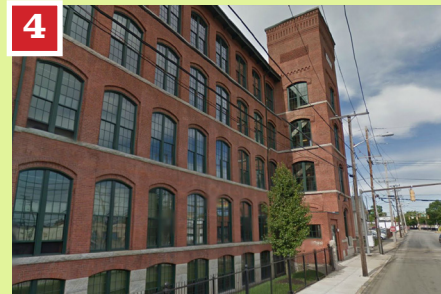


**1** **Potential redevelopment** at the Conant Street Industrial Park site

**2** **Potential commuter rail stop** at Barton Street site and associated transit-oriented development serving both downtown Pawtucket and Central Falls



**3** **Dexter Street** is an important neighborhood commercial corridor running through Central Falls to Pawtucket.

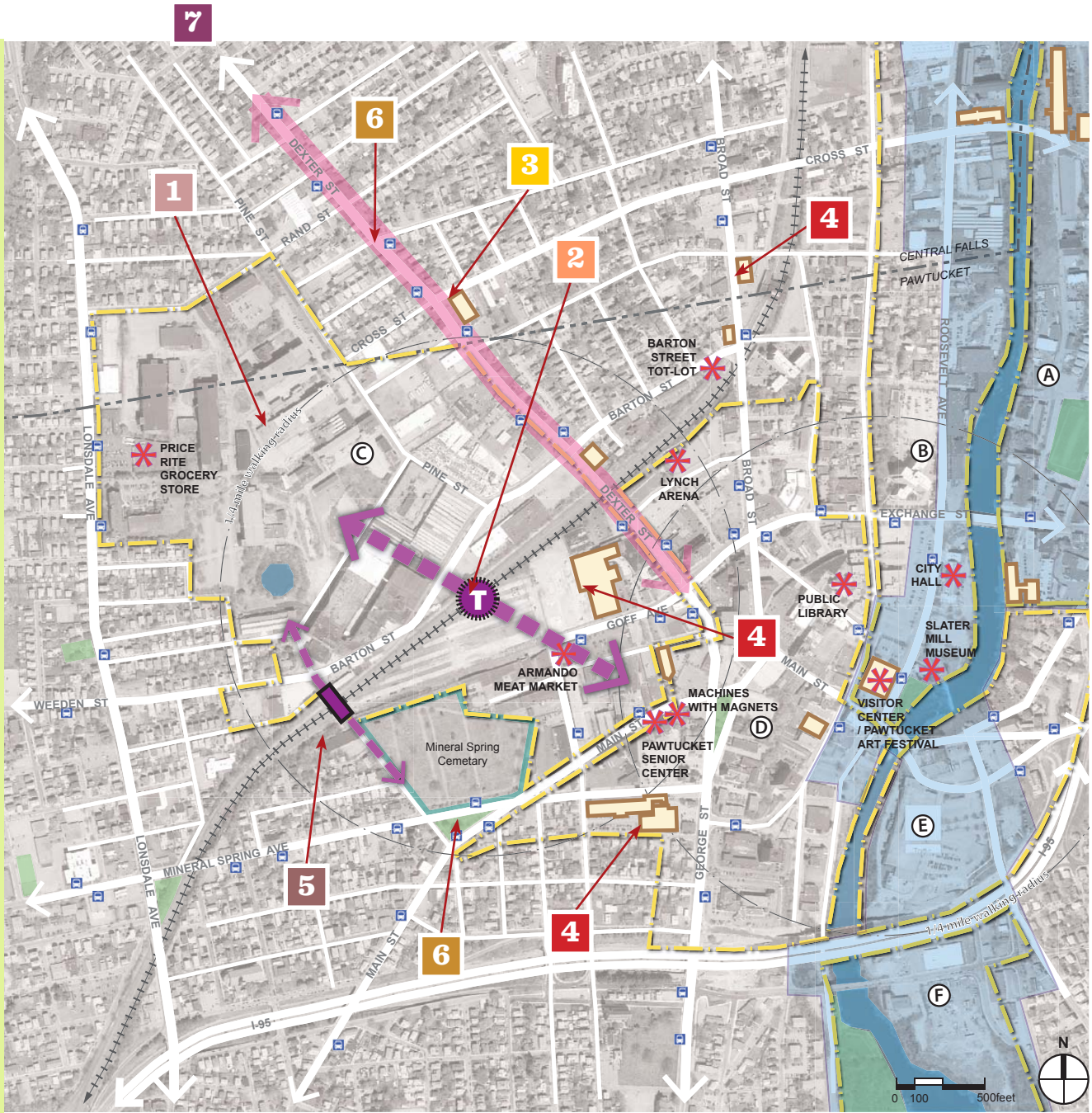


New/recent developments prove the site's **market potential**.

**5** **Reopening of the Conant Street bridge** restores easy access from downtown Pawtucket to Conant Street Industrial Park.



**6** **RIPTA lines and stops** provide connections to important destinations



PAWTUCKET/CENTRAL FALLS GROWTH CENTER  
 TOD and Conant Industrial Park District **Existing Assets**

LEGEND

- City boundary
- +++++ Railroad tracks
- ↔ Neighborhood commercial corridor
- River Corridor Development Plan area

- Recently developed
- \* Community destination
- 🚏 RIPTA service stop
- 🌳 Open space/park

■ Pawtucket Downtown Growth Center Development District

- (A) Armory Arts District
- (B) Roosevelt Avenue District
- (C) TOD & Conant Industrial Park District
- (D) Historic District
- (E) Riverfront Commons District
- (F) Tidewater District

# Issues and Constraints

The potential transit-oriented development area near the proposed commuter rail station has a number of physical and other challenges:

- **General**
  - > The area has many vacant or underutilized properties. To the south and east of the proposed station sit many smaller properties with multiple owners. The Conant Mill site presents a problem at the other extreme—a very large site with multiple vacant and underutilized buildings.
  - > Current market analysis suggests limited demand for new housing or businesses.
  - > Lack of public open space.
- **Connectivity challenges**
  - > No through streets connect the Conant site to the surrounding neighborhoods.
  - > Pine Street has a long blank wall.
  - > Sidewalks are narrow.
  - > There are no street trees.
  - > Surface parking lots line Pine Street



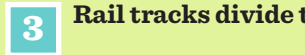
## 1 Large-scale industrial park

- > Vacant buildings
- > Limited vehicular / pedestrian access
- > No public park / open space
- > On the Pawtucket-Central Falls border



## 2 Poor pedestrian condition along Pine Street

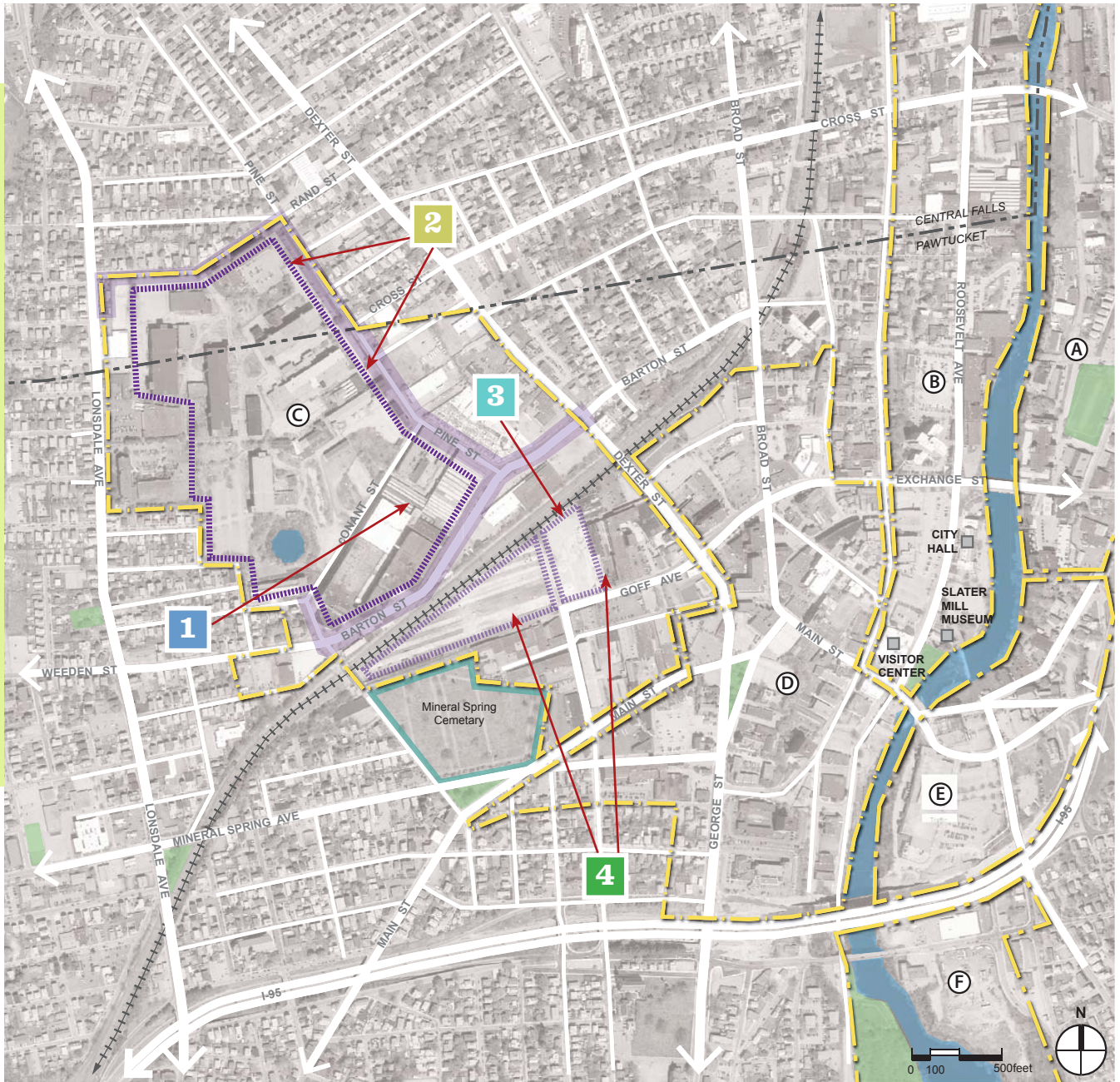
- > Blank building walls along Conant site
- > Narrow sidewalks
- > No street trees
- > Empty surface parking lots



## 3 Rail tracks divide the neighborhoods



## 4 Empty parcels and vacant buildings



PAWTUCKET/CENTRAL FALLS GROWTH CENTER

**TOD and Conant Industrial Park District Existing Issues**

**LEGEND**

- City boundary
- Pawt Pawtucket Downtown Growth Center Development District
- +++++ Railroad tracks
- Ⓐ Armory Arts District
- Ⓑ Roosevelt Avenue District
- Ⓒ TOD & Conant Industrial Park District
- Ⓓ Historic District
- Ⓔ Riverfront Commons District
- Ⓕ Tidewater District
- ▭ Poor pedestrian conditions
- ▭ Open space/park

# Applying Growth Center Criteria and Growth Center Opportunities

As a very urban site located within the state’s urban growth boundary, the Conant Mill site meets all basic growth center criteria:

- **Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure:** While some infrastructure improvements may be needed for redevelopment, the site would meet the compact-site definition with existing infrastructure.
- **Mixed land uses:** The site’s size and location within a matrix of dense development makes it suitable for mixed-use development. Retail uses would require increased site access and household growth to succeed.
- **Diverse housing opportunities and choices:** The site has significant potential for multifamily, loft, live-work, and townhouse housing types. Incorporation of affordable housing within the project is feasible.
- **Transportation choice:** With connectivity improvements, the site has potential to support multiple modes of transportation—potentially two modes of public transport (bus and train) and improved bicycle and pedestrian conditions both within and around the site.

- **Protection of environmental resources.** This highly developed site does not include natural environmental resources. The existing mill pond has potential as a water feature, but it would likely require environmental cleanup. Similarly, redevelopment of the site and adjacent areas to include green spaces will improve the area’s environmental performance.
- **Design for sense of place.** Sensitive adaptive reuse of existing 19th- and 20th-century buildings and contextual design—demolition of selected buildings and their replacement with new construction—can preserve sense of place.
- **Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.** The site is located in an existing center.

## Opportunities—Focus On Connectivity

Designate pedestrian routes from the site to the proposed commuter rail station.

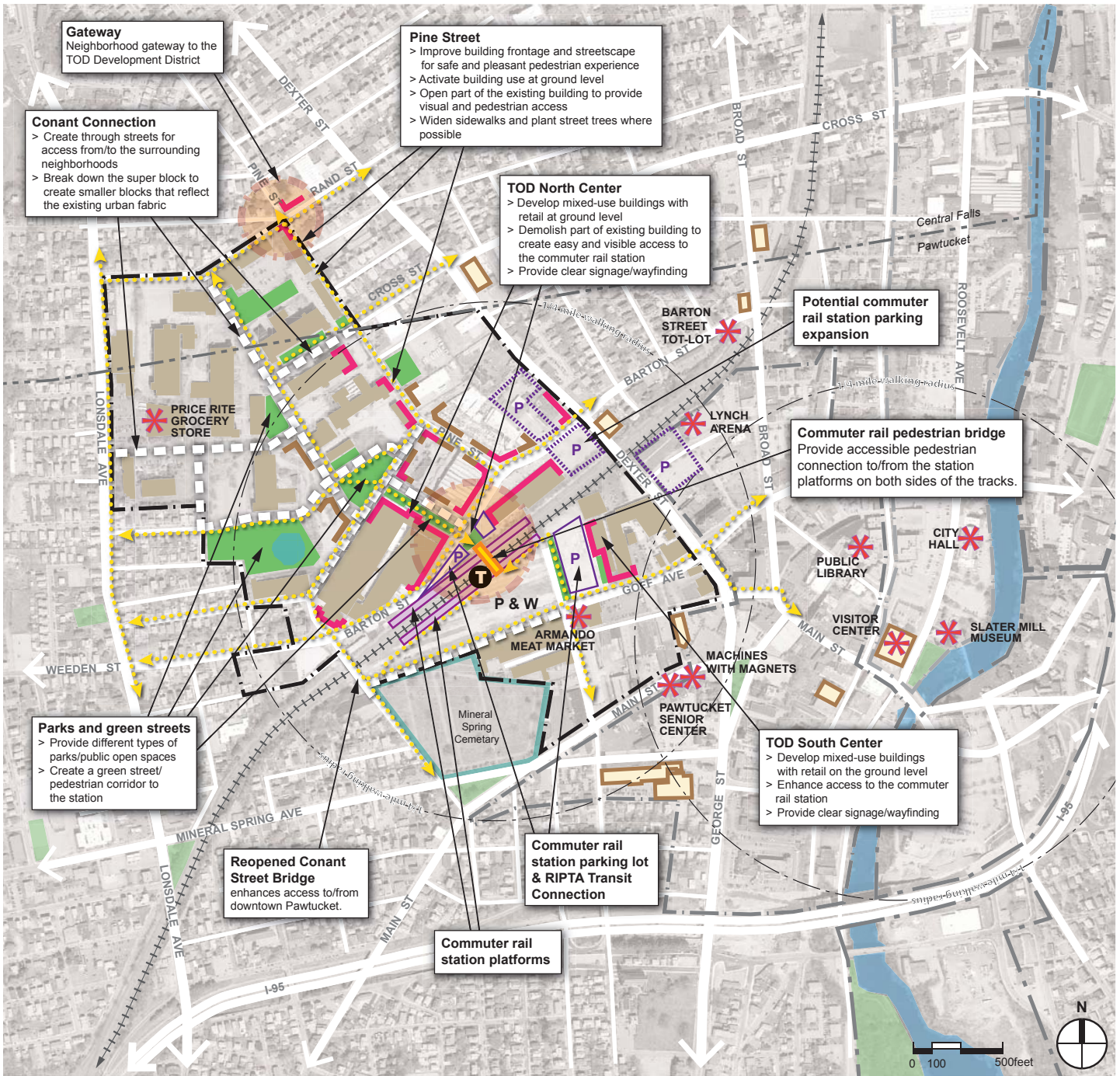
- **Conant Connection:** extend streets into the site and break up the site’s “superblock” organization.



Seek active ground-floor uses in buildings and redevelopment projects along the designated routes where feasible

- **Identify locations for a network of green spaces within the site** that are connected by tree-lined streets to external streets.





PAWTUCKET/CENTRAL FALLS GROWTH CENTER  
TOD and Conant Industrial Park District **Opportunities**

LEGEND

- City boundary
- Railroad tracks
- TOD & Conant Industrial Park District
- Open space/park
- New park/public open space
- Potential new street
- Improved streetscape and pedestrian connection
- Existing building
- New/recent development
- Potential commuter rail parking expansion
- Active ground-floor uses
- Important building edge along street
- Gateway
- Community destination

# The Concept Plan

Because this concept plan focuses on connectivity, it primarily addresses changes in the public realm.

## **Make the Conant Mill site more permeable to the surrounding neighborhoods.**

- Open up and integrate the site into the surrounding context by extending streets and creating breaks in blank walls, such as on Pine Street.
- Create a gateway treatment at Pine and Rand streets and at the Barton Street pedestrian/bike connection to the Conant Mill site.

## **Create a network of green spaces.**

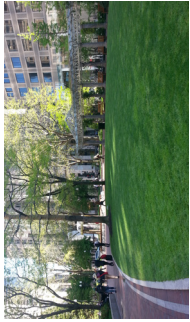
- Create green spaces within the Conant Mill site and tree-lined streets to connect the site to external streets.

## **Connect the site to the proposed commuter station.**

- Designate Pine Street as the primary pedestrian connection with the proposed MBTA commuter rail station and improve streetscape and pedestrian conditions.
- Create a park/plaza as transitional space at Conant Street.
- Create a central park and plaza at Conant Street and a safe, green pedestrian connection from the Conant Mill site to the proposed commuter rail station by demolishing a portion of a building in the Conant/Pine/Barton block: design with lighting, good sight lines, and other strategies to provide good security.
- When market support exists, seek retail or other ground-floor occupants to activate streets along primary routes to/from the commuter rail station.



Demolish part of the existing building to create a new street with liner park to connect to the MBTA commuter rail station



Central park and plaza at Conant Street



Activate ground-floor use and open part of the building to create visual and pedestrian access.

New internal streets connect to neighborhood streets.

Neighborhood park and open space with Mill Pond water feature

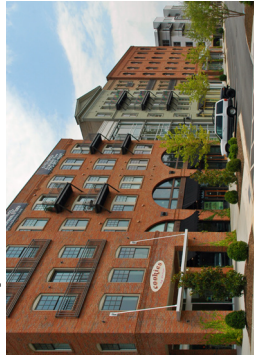


Commuter-rail parking lot north, with RIPTA transit connection

Streetscape improvements along Pine Street:  
> Widened sidewalks  
> New street trees

Neighborhood park

TOD north center mixed-use development



MBTA commuter-rail station, with pedestrian bridge connecting both platforms



TOD south center mixed-use development at Union Wadding Lofts

Commuter-rail parking lot south, with MBTA transit connection

# Implementation Strategies for the Growth Center

In its funding programs, the Federal Transit Administration looks for actions that promote transit-supportive development around transit stations, such as inclusion in a comprehensive plan and in zoning. The FTA also looks for planning and action that enhance access and pedestrian facilities. Pawtucket's Comprehensive Plan includes the idea of transit-oriented development on the Conant Mill site connected to a new commuter rail station. Both cities have a mill-building-reuse zoning district to allow mixed-use redevelopment of mills. This concept plan, with its emphasis on increasing connections between the Conant Mill site and the proposed commuter rail station, focuses on enhancing access and creating pedestrian-friendly routes.

## **Growth Center Designations**

In its comprehensive plan, the City of Pawtucket has designated the Pawtucket Downtown Growth Center. Central Falls does not have a designated Growth Center. Because Growth Centers can be large, it is beneficial to identify a smaller, strategic area where state assistance or incentives are desired for early action.

- **Central Falls**
  - > Designate the Conant Mill site and the boundary streets and buildings as a Growth Center in Central Falls.
  - > Designate the external boundary conditions extending into the city and toward Pawtucket as a Strategic/Priority Activity Center within this Growth Center.
- **Pawtucket**
  - > Designate the external boundary conditions extending into the city and toward Central Falls as a Strategic/Priority Activity Center within this Growth Center.

## **Regulation and Redevelopment Guidelines**

- Establish guidelines for connectivity and site integration with a site's context, working with the community and with the property owner.
- Establish zoning, as needed, to allow or enhance greater connectivity.

- Ensure consistent zoning and coordinate permitting across city borders at the Conant Mill site. Central Falls and Pawtucket should jointly create a zoning framework and permitting system that reduces the need for multiple duplicative development and permitting meetings.
- Review the zoning ordinances in both cities for barriers to redevelopment and update/amend the ordinances with modern approaches to zoning articles, such as use tables.
- Identify and resolve possible issues around modification of historic structures to enhance site integration with the context.

## **Funding Proposals**

- Include TOD/pedestrian connectivity concepts in proposals for further study of commuter rail.
- Seek transportation funding for pedestrian and streetscape improvements.
- Seek government or philanthropic funding to support writing regulatory changes.





# RHODE MAP RI

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***Building a Better Rhode Island***

*This concept plan was prepared by Stantec for Goody Clancy as part of the consultant team led by Horsley-Witten Group assisting the State of Rhode Island Division of Planning for the RhodeMapRI initiative.*