

Exchange Street

Revitalization and Action Plan



Source, USGS, <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/downloader/#/maps> University of New Hampshire, <https://library.unh.edu/find/maps-geospatial-data/maps-atlases>

The Exchange Street Revitalization and Action Plan (ESRAP) was prepared for the Town of Athol with input from local officials, stakeholders, and inhabitants by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission with assistance provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, District Local Technical Assistance program (2022).

Contents

Executive Summary	3
I. Millers River	6
II. Exchange Street’s “Sea of Pavement” from Millers River to its Main Street Intersection	8
Excessive Road Width on Exchange Street.....	11
III. Walnut Street Connectivity	13
IV. Parking	15
IV.A. Sally Fish Circle and Related Parking	15
V. Properties on Exchange Street and Reuse of Properties	16
VI. Public Access and Safety	21
VII. Reuse of Brownfield Sites.....	23
VIII. Public Spaces.....	24
Veterans Park.....	24
Other Public Spaces.....	25
IX. Recommendations from Urban River Visions Plan (2002) and Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (2022)	26
Don’t Build One Large Boardwalk: Build Five Small Boardwalks	35
XV. Business Improvements District	36
Insert information here about BIDs. The Importance of Investing in Oneself.....	36

Executive Summary

MRPC has been engaged to complete a second phase of urban revitalization planning in Downtown Athol. In 2019, MRPC provided a report of findings on the Downtown. The report was provided to the community.

During the COVID-19 pandemic MRPC continued its planning effort to analyze in more depth the issues surrounding Exchange Street and to create a highly focused document focusing upon improvements that could be made to and to foster redevelopment along the Exchange Street corridor from the Millers River (to the north) proceeding in a southerly direction to South and Traverse Streets.

The Exchange Street Revitalization and Action Plan (ESRAP) has been completed and submitted to the inhabitants of the Town of Athol and, if the action items included within this planning document are implemented in the future, they will complement other activities planned throughout the downtown such as the reuse of the former Cass Toy site, vice shop or foundry, demolition of the majority of the York Theater building (while maintaining the unique arch on Main Street, and other that have been completed throughout the downtown over the past 20 years (expansion of the public library, construction of a waterfront park behind the library, construction of Veterans Park, creation of Alan E. Rich Park, installation of a seasonal boat ramp in Cass Meadow, among others.

INTRODUCTION

Pequigog, was originally the home of the Nipmuc Indians who lived along the banks of what is now known as the Miller's River, who found the land fertile and right for growing corn. As Colonial settlers pushed west throughout the Commonwealth, many of them made their way to what would be known as Athol, or "New Ireland" in 1720. Just seventy (70) miles west of Boston Athol was rooted in farming and hunting. In 1762, Athol became incorporated and evolved into a hub of industry with mills dotting the map along the Miller's River. With the inception of the railway, industry continued to boom in Athol as tools and textiles became the primary commodities manufactured in town.

Nicknamed "Tool Town," Athol grew with homes first sprouting up along the common on a hill facing the factories. As manufacturing progressed, Athol exploded into a community made up of several villages named Pinedale, Proctorville, Riceville, Eagleville, Fairview, Fryville, and Intervale. Bisecting the mill villages was what would come to be known as Exchange Street. To the east of Exchange Street, the colloquialism for the area was "Uptown." On the other end, was of course "Downtown." Exchange Street and Up and Downtowns defined Athol's continued progress throughout the Industrial Revolution. Tool and furniture manufacturing advanced into the 1930s until much of the industry moved down south or overseas. Not unlike many mill towns throughout the Commonwealth, Athol's once booming landscape eventually evolved into one filled with many vacancies and tired infrastructure.

As time went on, Exchange Street remained the demarcation line between the Up and Downtown areas and continued to shape the identity of the community. Today, many businesses on this street remain successful due to its prime location in the center of town as well as being a gateway to the north and south portions of town. However, like most of the town, the street still shows signs of economic strain and neglect.

Currently, there appears to be agreement that a strategy should be created and implemented to make improvements to the properties and the road itself on one of Athol's most important Downtown streets. Throughout this document, recommendations of how which improvements needed to redevelop Exchange Street will be provided.

Exchange Street has a variety of assets including its connectivity to the Millers River, a variety of examples of historic architecture, and acts as a gateway to points north and south. The ESRAP will explore the assets mentioned above and offer recommendations for improvements.

MRPC recommends that the inhabitants of the community be well informed of the town's intent and should gather input during the creation of this Action Plan. Private sector partners should be sought to assist with redevelopment activities or lead where appropriate. All of the following matters should be addressed, not only by municipal leaders, but by all stakeholders:

- Improving pedestrian safety should be the Town's number one objective (additional information on this very important topic can be found in both the Local Rapid Recovery Plan and the Downtown Parking Management Plan [Stantec, 2020]).
 - The roadway and sidewalk need to be improved to protect pedestrians and better manage motor vehicles traveling at a high rate of speed on the street;
 - A green access corridor must be constructed from the river in a southerly direction to connect to walking and running paths identified in the 2020 planning document and ultimately to all, other greening efforts in the downtown (i.e. Fish Park, Alan E. Rich Park, Cass Meadow, the greening of Lord Pond Plaza, and other efforts);
 - Build upon the 2019 Downtown Report, MRPC reiterates its recommendation to connect pedestrian laneways and improving safety of these passages throughout the downtown;
- To encourage riparian activities (i.e. fishing, walking, running, boating, etc.), additional river access points need to be constructed and maintained by the municipality and downtown stakeholders (businesses and inhabitants);
- Converting every abandoned property to productive reuse must occur supported by thorough analyses of the potential reuse of all subject properties on Exchange Street coupled with the concurrent reuse of all other downtown properties (i.e. former Cass Toy site, York Theater, and others);
- The demand on commercial establishments should grow as the Town leads this, and other, downtown improvements efforts which should increase visitation to the downtown, patronage of new businesses, and an increased demand for parking;
 - Increasing the supply of off-street parking. Adding to off-street parking should also be a priority for the municipality such as demolishing the former gas station site and expanding the existing parking lot behind the now vacant Athol Savings Bank property and the Pequigog Hotel;

- Improvements to this expanded surface parking lot should be done in harmony with greening efforts along Exchange Street;
 - Build upon recently installed of-street parking signage installed in Downtown;
- Converting previously concreted areas to green spaces within the heart of the downtown will reduce the heat islands effect and provide more recreational opportunities, for the inhabitants of the region and visitors, which will increase the number of activities in a future, more robust mixed-use district.

This document will serve not only as a plan to identify improvements, but also information that supports the above recommendations that must be implemented by the community to kick off the regeneration of Downtown Athol. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) implores the Town of Athol to complete all of the recommendations within this document. We urge the inhabitants to identify and complete some of the “easy wins” in the early phase of Exchange Street’s regeneration (such as reducing the pavement width on the north end of Exchange Street) so that Athol will lead its downtown revitalization revolution. Doing so will leverage private sector reinvestment along this street, the entire business district, and ultimately, the community as a whole.

This space left intentionally blank.

I. Millers River

The area of study for this report begins at Exchange Street's intersection with the Millers River on the northern end and its terminus with South and Traverse Streets at its southernmost point. The Millers River's presence as an environmental asset must be used to benefit both the environment and those that inhabit the area around this river in the downtown. The Millers River is probably Exchange Street's, and the downtown's, best asset.

Businesses in commercial districts depend on in-person patronage (unless some of the businesses transact all of their business online). Visitations to downtowns increase when there are focused efforts by municipalities and non-profit organizations to implement strategies that increase foot traffic in areas where retail and service businesses are present.

Areas around this water body need to be developed maximize public access, while protecting this river and riparian corridor, to attract visitors in Athol's downtown. Commitments by the town and other, appropriate organizations will lead to business and employment retention and attraction. The same is also true for the continued education of the history of this community for the benefit of inhabitants and visitors.

Generally speaking, this waterway flows from east to west and then southwesterly through the downtown. Both the Native American Indians and Colonial settlers used the Millers River, and at least one tributary (Mill Brook), as sources for settlement and industry for hundreds of years. Native American and Colonial settlement era sites have been well documented by the community and interpretive signs recounting historical events, land uses, and former uses of land have been placed throughout the community.

18th Century water-powered production of products made by cold metal stamping, food products, and lumber have been well documented in the local town histories. The community's inhabitants used these resources to power the creation of industry and wealth along the Millers River in one of several industrial revolutions that has powered industry in the world for hundreds of years. Simply stated, over hundreds of years, development in Athol was very similar to the industrial revolutions that impacted human development, by the harnessing of animal and waterpower,," as documented by Klaus Schwab in *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*.¹

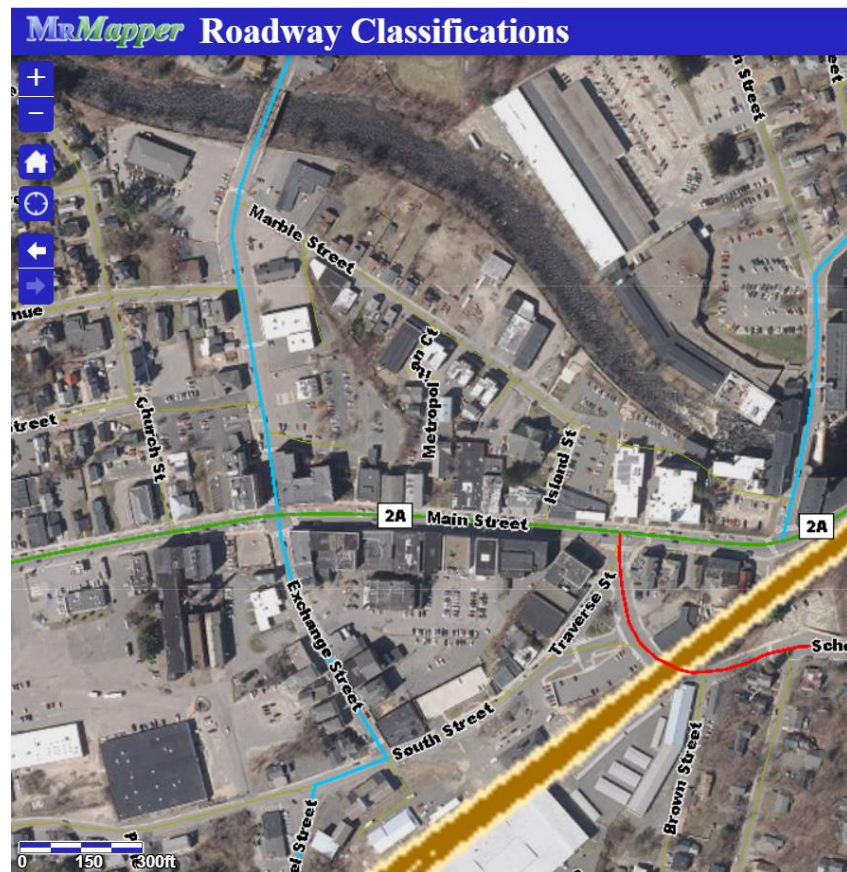
¹ "The first profound shift in our way of living – the transition from foraging to farming – happened around 10,000 years ago and was made possible by the domestication of animals. The agrarian revolution combined the efforts of animals with those of humans for the purpose of production, transportation and communication. The first industrial revolution spanned from about 1760 to around 1840. The second industrial revolution, which started in the late 19th century and into the early 20th century, made mass production possible, fostered by the advent of electricity and the assembly line. The third industrial revolution began in the 1960s ... the computer or digital revolution I believe that today we are at the beginning of a fourth industrial revolution. It began at the turn of this century and builds on the digital revolution. It is characterized by a much more ubiquitous and mobile internet, by smaller and more powerful sensors that have become cheaper, and by artificial intelligence and machine learning." Excerpts from *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Klaus Schwab, World Economic Forum.

Today, there is access to the Millers River via the Alan E. Rich Environmental Park and Cass Meadow. These places along the Millers River are especially popular when, each April, cartop boaters and spectators gather to participate or watch the beginning of the River Rat Race which terminates in downtown Orange. The Millers River is used throughout the warm weather months for boating and angling. Unfortunately, there is a limited number of well-maintained public access points along the Millers River, although some anglers use a riverbank along the Police Station property to catch some fish, or at least make the attempt.

This space left intentionally blank.

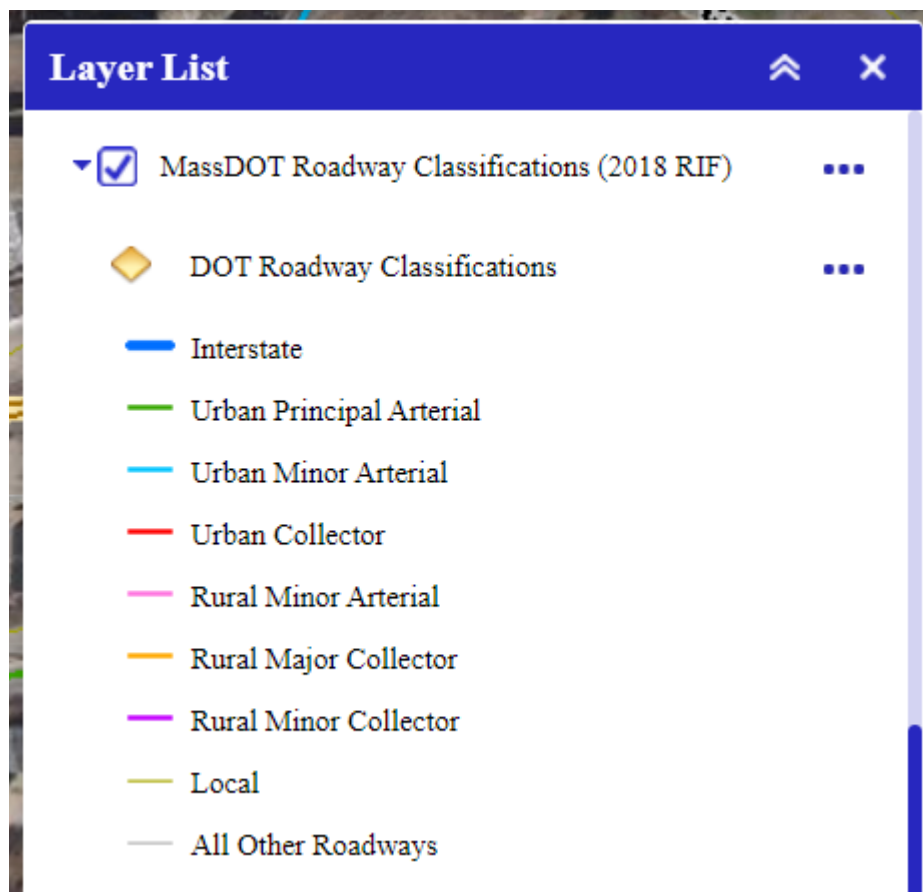
II. Exchange Street's “Sea of Pavement” from Millers River to its Main Street Intersection

Exchange Street is an “urban minor arterial” roadway located at the heart of what should be a focal point of a publicly-led transformation of Downtown Athol (Source, <https://mrmapper.mrpc.org/WebApps/v2.15/RoadwayClassifications/>).²



Source, MRMapper, www.mrpc.org

² Source, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning%20/processes/statewide/related/highway_functional_classifications/se ction03.cfm



Source, MRMapper, www.mrpc.org

Exchange varies in width from the Exchange Street bridge, that crosses the Millers River, to Main Street and then southerly to the South and Traverse Streets intersection. Starting where Exchange Street meets the Millers River bridge (newly renovated in 2021 by MASSDOT) the street's width is 36 LF. Proceeding southbound down Exchange Street, widths of 56 LF and up to 66 LF were documented. Field walking completed by MRPC staff revealed that the various widths are, as follows, at various points proceeding north to south:

1. Police Station to Dry Cleaners/Laundromat/Car Wash, 36 LF;
2. Tool Town Pizza to North Quabbin Community Coalition, 56 LF;
3. Apartment Building (Roselco Real Estate LLC) 230 Exchange Street to Athol Daily News located at 230 Exchange Street, 66 LF;
4. Law Office of Pamela E. Oddy (Owner, Oddy Ashenden Realty, LLC) 220 Exchange Street, to Vacant Gas Station, located at 220 Exchange Street, 56 LF;
5. The intersection of Walnut Street Extension with Exchange Street to Vacant Gas Station Property at 185 Exchange Street (owned by Athol Press, Inc., c/o Richard Chase, 1414 Bearsden Road, Athol), 56 LF;
6. Crosswalk Located at Exchange Street and Main Street Intersection (south side), 36 LF;
7. Blind Pig at 98 Exchange Street to the west side of the building located at 413 Main Street (NICDA, LLC, owner), 36 LF;
8. Hometown Bank, 90 Exchange Street to 89 Exchange Street (Richard P., Gatautis, owner), 36 LF;
9. Hometown Bank Drive-Thru entrance to the entrance to the parcel #030-240-000, 36 LF;
10. Athol Savings Bank Parking Lot Entrance to Entrance of Sally Fish Circle (entrance to parking lot behind Pequig Hotel Apartments and former Athol Savings Bank branch), 36 LF;
11. Crosswalk Located at Exchange Street and Main Street Intersection (north side), 36 LF;
12. Athol Dental Associates, located at 38 Exchange Street to 41 Exchange Street (Stephanie R. Oakes, owner), 36 LF;
13. Crosswalk on Exchange Street from South Street to Traverse Street, 36 LF ; and,
14. From Exchange Street's intersection with South and Traverse Streets, 36 LF.

Improvements to Exchange Street have been included in Athol's Complete Streets Plan and this topic was also identified as an issue in the Local Rapid Recovery Plan.

Excessive Road Width on Exchange Street

During several field visits, MRPC staff observed drivers were traveling at apparently excessive speeds from the Exchange Street bridge to the Athol Savings Bank property. Motorists appeared to be increasing their vehicle speeds, in both directions, on the wider parts of Exchange Street (north of Main Street).

According to Kayla Kress, GIS and IT Analyst with MRPC, the total area of the section of roadway from Main Street to the Millers River Bridge is 47,661.8 SF. If the roadway was lessened to a 37' width, then the area of the new roadway would be 33,303.8 SF and the amount of SF that would be "gained" for non-roadway use would be 14,358 SF on either side. Approximately 30% of the pavement is not needed for motor vehicle movements. This excessive pavement must be plowed in the winter by Athol's DPW and repairs to the road surface increasing road maintenance costs to the community.

Due to the excessive speed of motor vehicles, lack of a raised sidewalk to protect pedestrians on the east side of Exchange Street, significant amount of unnecessary amount of road surface, and lack of greenspace, MRPC urges Athol to implement the following in the near term:

- Cordon off the extraneous square footage on the east side of Exchange Street with appropriate, temporary structures delineating the street for vehicle traffic from a pedestrian walkway (where this is no safe walking area now).

The primary objective of the above would be to immediately protect pedestrians from traffic which would also allow safer access to the downtown from the residential area north of the river.

In the moderate term MRPC urges Athol to:

- Remove approximately 14,358 SF of bituminous concrete (road surface) on the eastern side of Exchange Street; and,
- Replace this road surface area with greenspace including a low impact drainage (LID) area, grass, trees, and shrubbery as appropriate, low maintenance concrete (or similar), picnic tables and benches and/or chairs, and granite curbing to segregate the roadway from this pedestrian-friendly area.

This newly created greenspace will connect new river public access points (possibly via to-be-constructed boardwalks) on the Millers River and into the network of trails through the downtown.

Reducing Parking Width On Exchange Street's Northern Segment

There are at least two immediate benefits of reducing the excessive width of Exchange Street, from 66 LF to 36 LF, south of the Millers River Bridge and north of the intersection of Main and Exchange Streets:

- 1) A raised, pedestrian-friendly, green walking area would be created space on either the east or west side of Exchange Street;
 - a) Raising this feature would increase protection of the pedestrians from vehicles traveling along Exchange Street;
 - b) The addition of greenspace in the downtown would reduce the heat island effect, thus lowering temperatures in the CBD during hot summer days;
 - c) The construction of this pedestrian area would add to the safe walking and running trail network developed in the 2020 Plan;
 - d) If the green walking area were to be constructed on the east side of Exchange Street, then this raised area could serve as a buffer between the new off-street parking area with the street;
 - e) If the green walking area were to be constructed on the west side of Exchange Street, the raised greenspace could connect more pedestrian-friendly Walnut Street, if the Walnut Street extension were to be closed, prohibiting motor vehicle access near the former fire station and proceeding north up to the Police Station and a new boardwalk (for river access) for angling, etc.;
- 2) Reducing the 66' wide street (in one place) and 56' wide space (in one place) could eliminate 20' to 30' of width from the former fire station northward to the Millers River Bridge. It is possible that one pedestrian-friendly green walkway could be created on the east or west side of the street or two pedestrian-friendly greenspaces be created on both sides of Exchange Street.

Regardless of which of the three, above options the community implements, traffic calming would be the result reducing a significant danger to pedestrians.

III. Walnut Street Connectivity

Walnut Street runs parallel to Main Street on the north side of Main. It connects with Main Street opposite Canal Street at its westernmost point and terminates on its east end where it intersects with Shore Drive and Church Street.

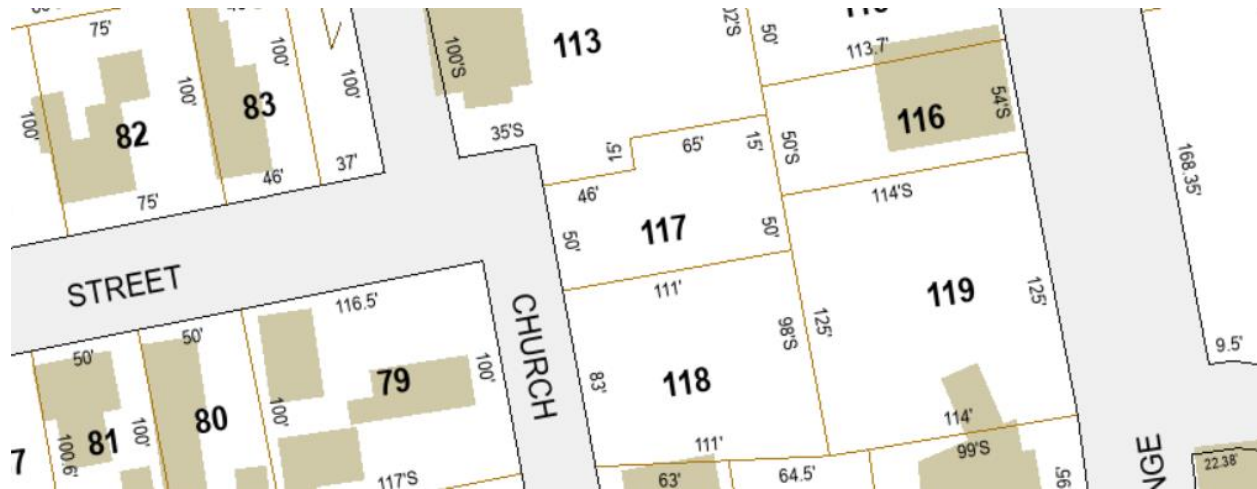
There is an unusual traffic pattern at Walnut Street's eastern terminus. To the unknowing driver, Walnut Street almost appears to continue easterly into an ocean of asphalt owned by the Athol Orange Baptist Church and Athol Savings Bank. At the east end of Walnut Street, Signage notifies drivers to proceed no further in an easterly direction. MRPC has been informed that many drivers proceed easterly into the parking lot and then proceed onto Exchange Street using this section of pavement as a "cut off" to Exchange.

The access point to the parking lots to Athol Savings Bank and Athol Orange Baptist Church is located off the west side of Exchange Street. This entranceway abuts the former fire station located at 206 Exchange Street (as seen below). Motorists are also able to access Church Street, Walnut Street, and Shore Drive from this entrance over these private properties. Concerns of Athol Savings Bank, Church, and local government leaders and public safety officials should be identified and a mutually agreeable solution to the needs of all parties should be addressed prior to implementing any yet-to-be-identified strategies for improving safety of motor vehicle and pedestrian access.

Should greenspace be created on the west side of Exchange Street? Greenspace and a sidewalk could be extended southerly and be used to block motor vehicle access from Walnut Street and onto Exchange Street. If Athol proceeds with this option, MRPC recommends that Athol consider the following options:

- 1) Create a corridor of greenspace, from the terminus of Walnut Street to Exchange Street, allowing pedestrians access but not motor vehicles (one benefit of this greened area would be to complement any reuse of the former Fire Station into a restaurant, other commercial space, housing, or mixed-use [housing and commercial uses]);
- 2) Improve signage at the eastern terminus of Walnut Street and enforce "No Entry" into the Athol Savings Bank parking lot from Walnut Street; or,
- 3) Remove the "No Entry" sign and allow vehicular traffic from Walnut Street into the Athol Savings Bank Parking lot.

What local inhabitants refer to as the “Walnut Street Extension” crosses 113 (Athol Baptist Church), 116 (Town of Athol), and 117 (Athol Savings Bank) in the Assessors map, below.



Source, <https://www.axisgis.com/atholma/>.

IV. Parking

IV.A. Sally Fish Circle and Related Parking

Off-street parking exists behind the (now vacant) Athol Savings Bank building located at 442 Main Street, on Sally Fish Circle behind the Pequig Hotel (416 Main Street), and on the vacant gas station site (185 Exchange Street owned by Athol Press, Inc.). According to local officials the former gas station property has not operated for more than 50 years (and is also owned by Athol Press, Inc.).

The Pequig Hotel is an historic former hotel building at 416 Main Street was built in 1894 by a leading local developer. It is one of the downtown's largest and most prominent buildings. After serving as a hotel into the 1950s, it was converted into a senior living facility in 1982. The ASB building and gas station facilities are vacant. ASB's plans for the building at 442 Main Street would be of use to the community concerning future redevelopment of the area surrounding Exchange and Main Streets.

Any future redevelopment of this area, such as for the construction of a mixed-use (commercial-housing) building(s), parking, open space, or other use at 185 Exchange Street) should ensure that connectivity with the inner-city trail system proposed by the MRPC in 2019, include greenspaces to break, use low-impact development (LID) construction techniques to better manage rainwater onsite.

Parking Spaces

There are a total of 42 painted parking spaces on Exchange Street; 38 of the portion of Exchange Street south of Main Street and only eight+/- on the northern segment (four in front of a law office on the western edge of Exchange Street and the remaining four in from of the Athol Daily News building).

Additional off-street lots also have marked parking spaces, as follows:

- Parking lot north of the ASB property fronting Main Street, approximately 20;
- Pequig Apartments parking lot, about 32;
- Former gas station, seven marked spaces, but the entire parcel could easily accommodate 20+; and,
- Former Athol Daily News building, we've estimated the number of spaces to be 17.

Several discussions between local officials and MRPC took place concerning the possibility of building additional off-street parking capacity by acquiring underutilized buildings and "putting up a parking lot." MRPC cautions the community to consider all options before increasing parking capacity in an area of the central business district with currently low demand.

V. Properties on Exchange Street and Reuse of Properties

Located at 280 Exchange Street is the Athol Police Station which is the newest building on Exchange Street. Use of the riverbank by anglers on this parcel is common. The land abutting the Millers River should be examined for a potential cantilevered or other deck to facilitate safe fishing and other passive riverside use.

Abutting the Police Station is the Tool Town Pizza commercial building constructed in 1970. This property is identified by the community as 246 Exchange Street. Both buildings are set near the rear property line interrupting the mid-19th Century urban design (where buildings were constructed in the front of the property along the edge of the sidewalk).

A multi-story residential complex, on 230 Exchange Street built in 1930, is located south of Tool Town Pizza. Parking is virtually nonexistent on this site which has sometimes led to conflicts between residential tenants and nearby property owners.

Attorney Oddy's commercial office building, erected in 1880, is at 220 Exchange Street and appears to be in full use. A parcel which is an abutting parking lot is also a part of number 220.

In 1893 Athol constructed the fire station at 206 Exchange Street which is used for storage of some fire equipment. This building has not been used in many years. A third-party feasibility study has been completed and identified this building as having potential for commercial reuse such as a restaurant. However, MRPC recommends that a structural analysis of the building be completed to determine if it is financially feasible to rehabilitate the structure. Any reuse of the building for retail, service, housing, or mixed-use purposes will need to address parking on this postage-stamp sized lot. The potential for demolition and converting this site to greenspace should also be considered. A new, downtown fire station is in the discussion phase among local officials, but this site is not a contender for the new facility.

There are three more parcels on Exchange Street that are all owned by Athol Savings Bank (ASB, 388 Main Street). ASB's parcel abutting the former fire station is used by motorists entering the parking lot for bank business and to access Walnut Street and the Baptist Church (260 Walnut Street).

Veterans Park is located at Vision ID 2921, Map 30, Lot 266 on the southwest corner of Main and Exchange Streets. The municipality is grateful for the contribution made by Mr. William Purple and Chuck and Cindy Hartwell for the materials used to construct the facility more than a decade ago. The retaining wall needs to be supported or reconstructed and some of the pavers in the park need to be adjusted or the park could be improved by the addition of some greenspace with the inclusion of low impact development (LID) construction techniques to improve onsite water management. Any LID techniques constructed onsite should not be administratively burdensome to the municipality.

The *Blind Pig* a former restaurant and lounge, located at 98 Exchange Street was built in 1885. The north side of the building proudly displays an out-of-date sign marking an anniversary year of the Rive Rate Race held annually, each April. Plans for reuse of this popular restaurant are unknown, but the site's idleness contributes to the blight of Exchange Street.

Hometown Bank is the official owner of a financial building located at 90 Exchange Street. Rebranded as *bankHometown* this building first constructed in 1926 includes a drive-thru addition accessible via Exchange Street and Lord Pond Plaza (a parking area under redesign by a third-party [BSC Group] working for the Town of Athol).

The residential-only and mixed-use (commercial and housing) properties located at 16, 20, 34, 38, 50, and 56 Exchange Street appear to be fully occupied. Long-term parking for tenants is located onsite (in at least one case) and in the rear or west of these buildings off Exchange Street.

The building located at 11 Exchange Street houses the *Steel Rail Pub* (facing Exchange Street) and a hair stylist business (fronting Traverse Street).

Two vacant lots with different, private owners are located north of 11 Exchange Street and south of a building at 25 Exchange Street locally referred to as the *Maroni's* building built in 1880 and in private ownership. Approximately nine years ago the Montachusett Enterprise Center, Inc. (an affiliate of the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission [MRPC]) hired an architectural firm (from Ashby) to produce a schematic plan for reuse of *Maroni's* into six housing and two commercial units for an estimated cost of \$1.8 million (2013+/-). The same design was estimated to be \$3 million by an eastern Massachusetts architect several years later.

In 1900, the Plotkin's building was built on a lot which is currently at 41 Exchange Street. This building, formerly a multi-story retail space, is privately held property and is being used for storage by a local contracting business (while another, new use is possible). Another multi-story, former retail building, locally referred to as *Teena's*, is located at 49 Exchange Street. Also built in 1900, this building has been vacant for decades. All three of these buildings are located on former manufacturing sites and were probably used for manufacturing purposes in the late 18th or early 20th centuries when a pond existed south of the *York Theater* building in what is now a surface parking lot.

Proceeding northerly along the east side of Exchange Street the Town of Athol owns two vacant parcels (parking) followed by a property owned by M Jemms Athol IV LLC that fronts onto Main Street (#435), and two more vacant parcels owned by M Jemms Athol IV LLC and Richard P. Gatautis, respectively. Mr. Gatautis also owns the building and property located at 89 Exchange Street.

NICDA LLC owns the 3.5 story building built in 1864 located on the southeast corner of Main and Exchange Streets which is 413 Main Street.

Pequoig House LLC (c/o realty Genesis Co. LLC) owns the former “Pequoig Hotel” at 416 Main Street which was built in 1895.

Due north of Pequoig House is Sally Fish Circle which separates this property from 185 Exchange Street, which was constructed in 1955 as a gas station and/or auto repair/sales facility and is believed to have been vacant for more than 50 years. This property is owned by Athol Press Inc.

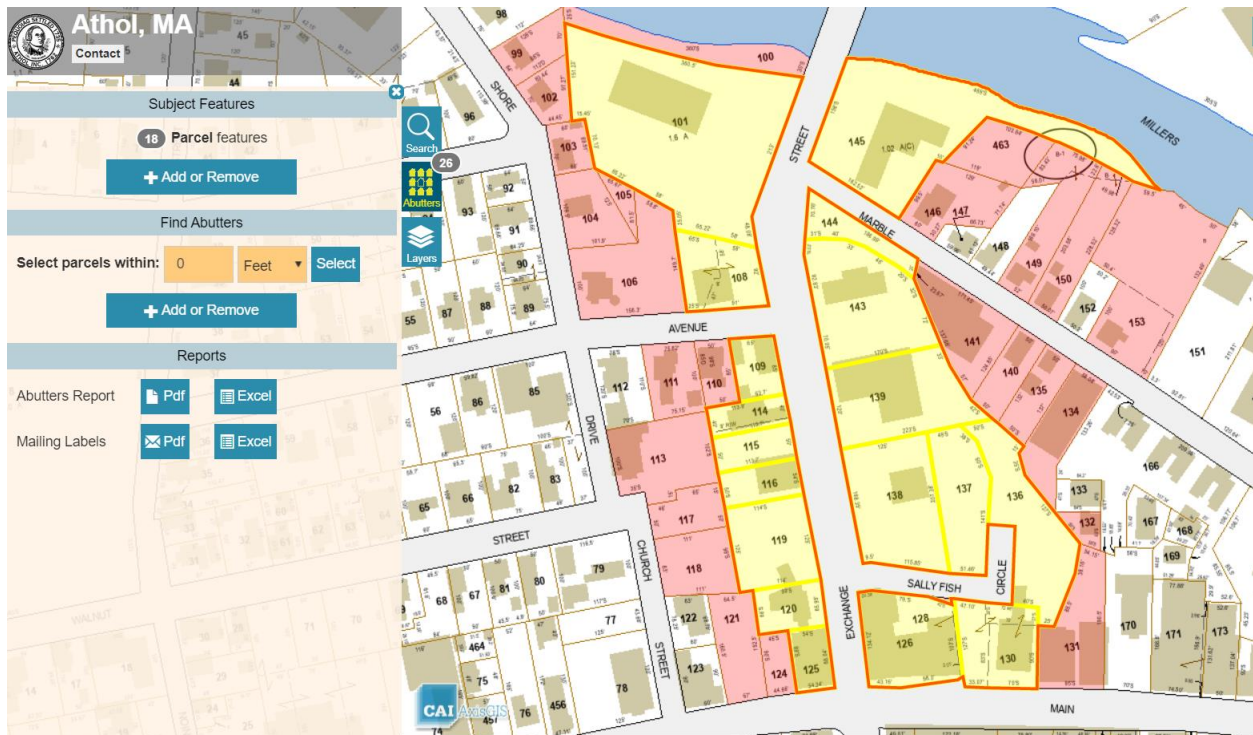
The former Athol Daily News facility, built in 1942, at 225 Exchange Street is also owned by Athol Press Inc.

Located due north of the former Athol Daily News is a property owned by Hometown Bank and leased to the North Quabbin Community Coalition. Located at 251 Exchange Street this building was constructed in 1965 as a restaurant (possibly, Kentucky Fried Chicken). Also owned by Hometown Bank is a small parcel located between the Coalition’s office building and Marble Street.

Finally, abutting Marble Street to its south and the Millers River to the north is a building that was built in 1965 which is currently home to three businesses (dry cleaners, laundromat, and car wash).

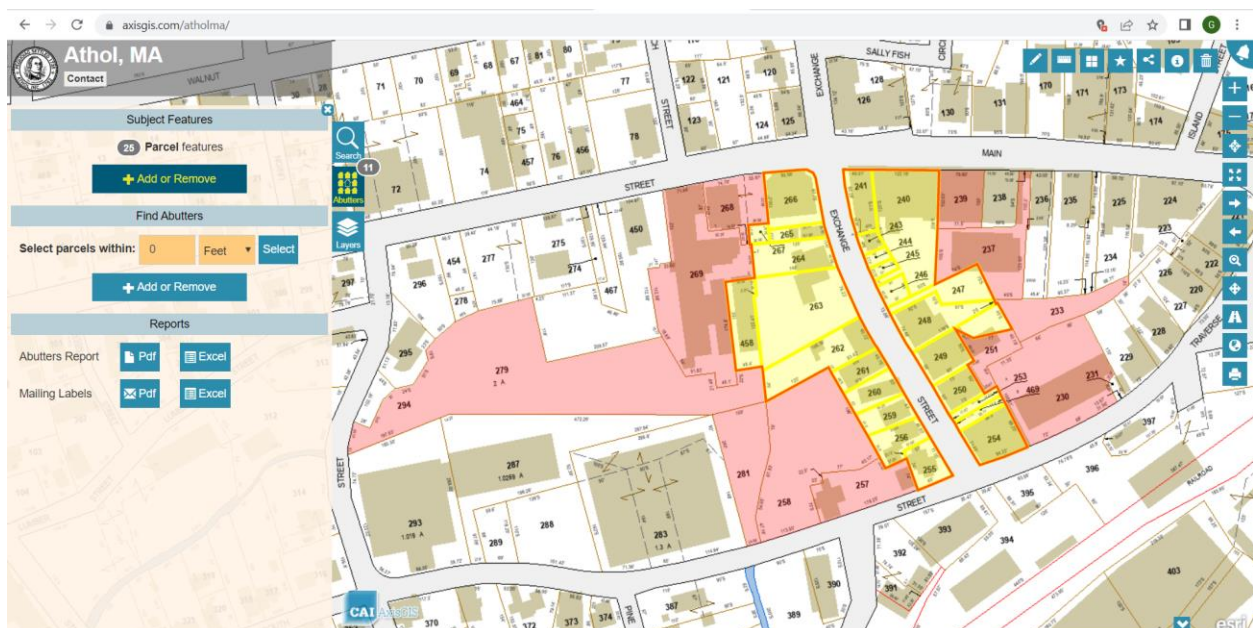
This space left intentionally blank.

Parcels abutting “Exchange Street North” in Downtown Athol



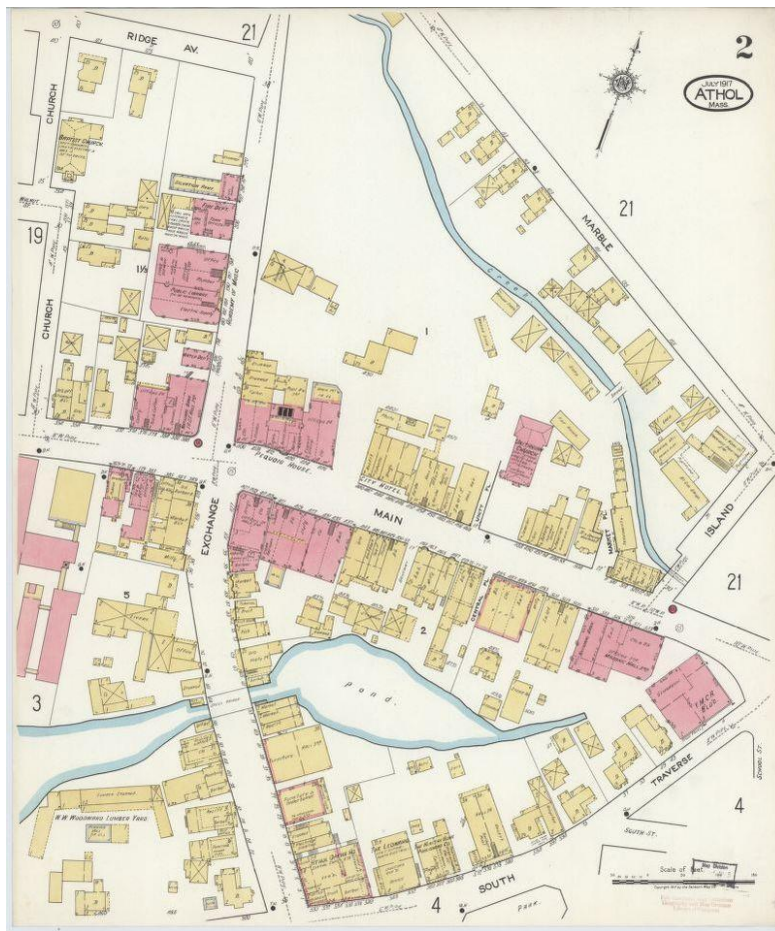
Source, Assessors, Town of Athol, <https://www.axisgis.com/atholma/>

Parcels abutting “Exchange Street South” in Downtown Athol



(Source, Assessors, Town of Athol, <https://www.axisgis.com/atholma/>)

Sanborn Map of Main and Exchange Streets



Source, Title Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Athol, Worcester County, Massachusetts.
Created / Published Sanborn Map Company, Jul 1917.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/q3764am.q036801917/?sp=2&st=image>

VI. Public Access and Safety

Public Safety

Regardless of whether the downtown is space, there are usually perceptions of safety that can, sometimes, be very different from what statistical data reveal. The total number of criminal offenses (per 100,000 persons) was calculated for the communities of Athol, Greenfield, Orange, Winchendon, Gardner, Fitchburg, Leominster, and Ayer in Massachusetts and Keene and Peterborough in New Hampshire. Athol has the second lowest crime rate than nine other communities analyzed along the Route 2 corridor (this analysis also includes two communities located within proximity to Athol, in New Hampshire). Further information concerning public safety can be found in Athol's Local Rapid Recovery Plan (LRRP)

Public access to the downtown and to the amenities located throughout the central business district must be the number one priority of all community leaders. Access to Exchange Street from the north is gained, by motorists and pedestrians, via the Millers River Bridge.

Unfortunately, drivers of vehicles tend to increase their speed when proceeding in a southerly direction toward Main Street, in front of the Police Station. Occurrences of high speeds of vehicles were observed at several site walks held on Exchange Street (dating back to 2019) making pedestrian use along both the west and east sides of the street, and crossing the street, perilous.

On the west side of Exchange Street, between Main and Marble Streets, there exists a crosswalk with an eight-inch-high granite curb. However, there is no sidewalk on the east side of Exchange Street (in front of the North Quabbin Coalition, former Athol Daily News, and former Gas Station properties.). The reduction in the amount of pavement on the north segment of Exchange Street, coupled with the installation of a raised sidewalk on the east side of the street, must be completed to increase pedestrian safety.

Athol Downtown Vitality Committee's Mission Statement is, as follows:

"The Downtown Vitality Committee (DVC) is a Town Committee charged with the mission of revitalizing Athol's downtown area as an appealing and vivacious focal point for residents and visitors. DVC is comprised of a group of volunteer residents, business owners, and community leaders. DVC is focused on encompassing Athol's unique character by enhancing the image of downtown and helps to promote economic vitality, design, and organize downtown elements to achieve the Committee's goals."

The perception or reality that any geographic area is unsafe can inhibit the public's use of any commercial area. A key part of any downtown's success is ensuring that the area is safe. Ensuring that the downtown is safe for employees, patrons, and visitors, and addressing other factors will *"enhance ... the image of downtown"* and will contribute to making the downtown and *"appealing and vivacious focal point"* of the community. Safety in any downtown, neighborhood, business park, recreation area, etc. should be the priority of every municipality.

MRPC invites the community to apply for transportation planning assistance from the Athol's regional planning district. Montachusett regional Planning Commission, or another party, to obtain traffic and speed counts including a vehicle classification study in the near term, and in the moderate term, a roadway corridor and pedestrian safety study.

In addition, the municipality should work with the private sector property owners, finding agencies, and consultants to complete a feasibility study for the installation of a camera network throughout the downtown to increase safety of visitors to the downtown.

Safety of the downtown's inhabitants and visitors should not be limited to improving the road, sidewalks, and video monitoring, but should also include the elimination of any and all contaminants from underutilized buildings and vacant lots (i.e. "brownfield" sites). Athol's current leadership has experience working with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP) on such matters. A "full court press" needs to be implemented to assess, clean, revitalize, and reuse properties located at:

1. North of Main Street;
 - a. 206 Exchange Street, former fire station;
 - b. 225 Exchange Street, former Athol Daily News facility;
 - c. 185 Exchange Street, former gas station and/or auto repair/sales facility;
2. South of Main Street;
 - a. 98 Exchange Street, former Blind Pig restaurant and lounge;
 - b. 11 Exchange Street, vacant lot;
 - c. 25 Exchange Street, vacant lot;
 - d. 41 Exchange Street, former Plotkin's building; and,
 - e. 49 Exchange Street, former Teena's building

The above blighted areas require immediate attention. Currently, 41 Exchange Street and 49 Exchange Street may be receiving some attention from the private sector. However, MRPC recommends that local leadership identify preferred uses of these properties, alter zoning as needed to reflect needs and desires of inhabitants, and create illustrations of possible reuse scenarios. Also, include this new information in any, other master plan for the community and/or downtown reuse plan if they exist.

VII. Reuse of Brownfield Sites

While most, if not all, of the vacant properties may be considered brownfields under Federal Law, further research should be conducted, site by site, to learn if any, some, or all properties qualify as brownfield sites. The Federal definition of a “brownfield” is, as follows: “A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.”³ If any of the subject properties are brownfields, then it is possible that the community may be able to access State and/or Federal resources to address these properties.

The Massachusetts “reportable lookup” website for possible contaminated properties, as administered by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), listed only one spill of petroleum on Exchange Street which was addressed (11 Exchange Street). There were no other reports of spills or contamination on any other properties on this street.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Technical Assistance for Brownfields Program provides funding for the University of Connecticut (UConn) to provide services to municipalities. Athol engaged the UConn TAB program and an inventory of brownfields in the community has been completed.

MRPC will continue to work with Athol, and other communities throughout the Montachusett region to facilitate some brownfields sites planning efforts to, ultimately, return these sites to active reuse. To that end, please be advised that:

- MRPC also has more than \$250,000 available to private- and public-sector applicants to fund assessment and cleanup projects at very favorable loan rates and terms; and,
- This fall, MRPC will prepare another Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) grant and submit it to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If awarded, the grant would commence on October 1, 2024, and assessments of sites could begin as early as the fall 2024.

³ Federal brownfields definition can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/overview-epas-brownfields-program#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20Brownfield%3F,substance%2C%20pollutant%2C%20or%20contaminant.>

VIII. Public Spaces

Veterans Park

According to local officials, the Veterans Park, located at the corner of Main and Exchange Streets, was constructed approximately ten years ago. At the park's center is a beautiful water fountain surrounded by an open, flat park covered in 2'x2' "pavers" and walls surrounding the perimeter of the park. Materials for this park were donated by Mr. William "Bill" Purple and Mr. and Mrs. Chuck and Cindy Hartwell. Today, this park needs some tender loving care. Specifically:

- Many of the pavers are raised and need to be levelled; and,
- The south retaining wall is leaning and will need to be addressed, much sooner than later.

MRPC informed local officials that Exchange Street is bereft of greenspace. Some local officials informed MRPC staff that when local officials were discussing improvements to what is now Veterans Park, that very little if any green space be constructed onsite, presumably due to maintenance costs. However, this may conflict with other local officials' desire to create green spaces in downtown Athol for families living in the central business district. Municipal leaders and stakeholders need to reconcile if the community will increase greenspaces in its downtown, or not.

This space left intentionally blank.

Other Public Spaces

There are no greenspaces along the Exchange Street corridor. There are at least six vacant buildings on Exchange Street (noted elsewhere in this report). Selective demolition of buildings should be implemented to “clean the slate” for redevelopment by the Athol EDIC and/or private-sector partners.

Potential reuses for these properties include construction of new, mixed-use buildings including living spaces on the upper floors and retail operations on the first floor, parking, greenspace/pocket park, or another use. All potential new uses have their benefits to the downtown. In the case of creating greenspace or a pocket park, this could be a key reuse on Exchange Street. This street is at the crossroads of a new trails network that MRPC recommended be created in a prior planning study (2019).

This space left intentionally blank.

IX. Recommendations from Urban River Visions Plan (2002) and Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (2022)

In 2002, Athol completed an Urban River Vision for the areas surrounding the Millers River under the Commonwealth's former Urban River Visions program. The Plan is still posted on the second floor of Town Hall outside of the office of Planning. Below you will find each recommendation from 2022 followed by suggestions from the MRPC. Two decades later, the Urban River Vision's concepts remain valid.

2002 Urban River Visions Plan Recommendations

Connections Group

1. Create local connections between the river and downtown by developing a riverwalk between Island Street and Exchange Street.
2. Open up views of the river from the downtown along Island Street, Exchange Street, and other streets.
3. Create connections to Fish Park, Cass Meadow, and the Environmental Center to the west, Silver Lake and Tully Mountains to the north, Veteran's Park and the old train depot to the south.
4. Maximize wayfinding signage (which MRPC understands will be completed with a recently awarded Wayfinding Planning Grant to the Town of Athol).
5. Design the addition to the public library so that it embraces the river behind it and allows patrons to access the river.
6. Form a local constituency around the ownership and maintenance of a riverwalk and associated recreational amenities.
7. Map and survey the area's assets and resources.
8. Encourage restoration of commuter rail between Athol and Boston as well as other public transit improvements that facilitate travel around Athol along the Millers River corridor.
9. Change zoning to guide appropriate development of properties along the river.

2021 MRPC Recommendations

Connections Group

1. Hire a civil engineering firm for the development of schematic plans including cost estimates for the construction and installation of five boardwalks behind the town hall and library, on the police station property, Cass Meadow and/or Fish Park, The former "Foundry"/"Vice Shop", and the town owned Waste Water Treatment Plant property. Prioritize the boardwalks based upon priorities of the Town of Athol and then develop bid-ready plans and specifications for one or more boardwalks until all five have been constructed. Final designs and costs vary greatly according to research conducted by the MRPC. The town should

make a minimal impact upon the natural environment. The objectives of constructing all five boardwalks would be to facilitate boating and angling access and increase patronage thus supporting economic development in the downtown.

2. Consult with the Conservation Commission and Board of Planning and Development to determine the practicality of removing foliage to expand views of the river given the State's strict Wetlands Protection Status and Rivers Protection Act. If feasible, identify potential areas where natural or invasive vegetation could be removed and areas maintained to expand views to the river for the enjoyment of all, and improved boating and angling access.
3. See next item.
4. Within the Urban Revitalization Plan (MRPC, 2019) the creation of walking and jogging trails through the downtown was recommended and mapped. Trail names include Cass Meadow, Downtown Loop, Lake Park Loop, Outer Loop, Cass Meadow North, Flats Trail Head, and Flats Trailhead B. The ESRAP recommends connections also be created through the alleys, or pedestrian laneways, in downtown. On all trails and laneways signage should be installed identifying names and directions of trails. Interpretive signs should also be installed identifying local cultural and historic sites such as the industrial sites that were once active on Exchange Street that used Mill Stream now located under the parking lots south of Main Street (behind the YMCA and Athol Credit Union) and Lord Pond Plaza.⁴ A Tool Town logo could be developed using a measuring instrument icon related to the Starrett company; a sponsorship from Starrett's and other private enterprises should be sought for the funding needed to pay for the local production of the signs. Signs should include directions to "Fish Park, Cass Meadow, and the Environmental Center to the west, Silver Lake and Tully Mountains to the north, Veteran's Park and the old train depot to the south." QR codes should be added to existing historic markers throughout the community and should also be on future interpretive signs.
5. The public library expansion project was completed in 2014. A low impact development (LID) stormwater management system was constructed north of the library abutting the Millers River including vegetation that allows for viewing the Millers River and an outdoor stage for performances.
6. If a "local constituency" can be formed to focus upon the creation and maintenance of a riverwalk, then this task is again recommended in this ESRAP document. However, 19 years have elapsed since the completion of the Millers River Urban River Vision by stakeholders and there is no, known movement to create such an organization. Thus, MRPC recommends that small boardwalks be designed and constructed as discussed in detail in point 1, above.
7. If local assets have not yet been mapped, MRPC recommends that Athol apply for the eight hours of free GIS technical assistance that Athol is provided (annually) to create an interactive web map and paper copies that can be used for multiple applications.⁵
8. MRPC has recommended that a bus rapid transit (BRT) service be created from Wachusett Station, Fitchburg to "points west." This service does not require an extensive study of the use of the rail from Wachusett Station which would be operated at a higher cost and take a longer to ride the rails than it would be to bus commuters and day trippers to and from Wachusett Station.

⁴ Inhabitants and local officials from Athol should collaborate with LaunchSpace, Inc., a collaborative workspace or "makerspace" located at 131 West Main Street, Orange to produce trail and interpretive signs to be installed in Athol.

⁵ In the past, MRPC has allowed up to 16 hours of free, GIS services when communities apply for GIS assistance at the end of the calendar year as MRPC may allow the use of these hours for two years, combined. Athol is urged to apply for services.

9. Athol's Planning officials are developing appropriate zoning amendments in order to facilitate development in downtown Athol.

This space left intentionally blank.

2002 Urban River Visions Plan Recommendations

River Use Group

1. Keep the river wild; leave in its in natural aspect wherever possible.
2. Improve water quality, specifically addressing residual industrial pollution and storm water management.
3. Enhance the character of the riverbank by increasing vegetation in some areas and opening views in other areas.
4. Protect and open up views to the river from the downtown, including views of the waterfalls from the Starrett company parking lot behind the town hall.
5. Design bridges over the Millers River to reflect the historic character of the area and to provide pedestrian access.
6. Bring water into the downtown by providing water features such as fountains in parks.
7. Provide “outdoor classrooms” in open spaces along the river including the future Library Park; coordinate programming with the Millers River Environmental Center, local schools, the library, and the YMCA.
8. Support boating by providing access points for canoes and kayaks.
9. Create festivals to celebrate the river; sponsor other events at a future Library Park on the river.

MRPC Recommendations

River Use Group

1. MRPC concurs with the recommendation of the 2002 Millers River Urban River Vision.
2. MRPC concurs with the recommendation of the 2002 Millers River Urban River Vision.
3. See above under “Connections Group” item 2.
4. The viewshed behind the Town Hall and Library properties has been improved (2014). Local officials and stakeholders promoting the “open(ing) up (of) views to the river from the downtown” are encouraged to work with the Conservation Commission, Board of Planning and Development, and the Downtown Vitality Committee to advance this concept, if deemed appropriate.
5. More research is needed to adequately document the need for the completion of this task. A cost benefit analysis should be done once a schematic plan and cost estimate has been completed. Local officials and stakeholders promoting the “Design (and presumably the construction of) bridges over the Millers River to reflect the historic character of the area and to provide pedestrian access” are encouraged to work with the Conservation Commission, Board of Planning and Development, and the Downtown Vitality Committee to advance this concept, if deemed appropriate.
6. Research concerning the diversion of water under the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act and Wetlands Protection Bylaw should be completed to determine if the “Bring(ing of) water into the downtown by providing water features such as fountains in parks” is feasible. Mill Brook runs from the east to the west under the parking lot behind the YMCA and Athol Credit Union, Exchange Street, Hometown Bank, Lord Pond Plaza parking lot and joins the Millers River near the home located at Canal Street. Surfaces above Mill Brook could be

removed to “daylight this stream” as it is a readily available water source for water features and improve the appeal of this part of the downtown which, in its current state, is not appealing given the existing sea of pavement, weeds, and poorly maintained parking areas. (This issue is subject to a study being completed by BSC Group.)

7. A group of stakeholders, such as the Downtown Vitality Committee, should spearhead this discussion with regional school systems, the leadership of the Environmental Center, YMCA, and others.
8. The Millers River is accessible for cartop boating via the Alen E. Rich Environmental Park and Cass Meadow. Other access points could be created with the installations of boardwalks and floating docks as discussed above under “Connections Group”, item 1.
9. Retailers and service businesses (especially restaurants) need stakeholders to bring patrons to the downtown on a frequent basis. Holding multiple events throughout each year is a vital component of creating vibrancy in a downtown includes. In this case, vibrancy is defined as increasing the number of patrons in the downtown that will purchases goods and services providing the dollars needed in the cash registers of the businesses located in the CBD. Many stakeholders conduct annual events such as the River Rat Race and accompanying events each April, sidewalk sales, trick or treating in the downtown each October, and others. The largest crowds seem to occur at the annual River Rate Race where hundreds participate in the race from the downtowns of Athol to Orange and thousands of spectators gather to watch the event from the riverbanks. MRPC recommends that multiple cartop boat races be held, annually. The counsel and guidance of the existing River Rat Race organizers should be obtained to train others in race logistics so that additional small-and large-scale races may be held drawing visitors into downtown on a regular basis. The Downtown Vitality Committee should create a formal non-profit and charitable organization so that funds may obtained to fund staff and programming to coordinate events no less than monthly throughout the year.

This space left intentionally blank.

2002 Urban River Visions Plan Recommendations

Economic Opportunity Group

1. Promote rehabilitation and reuse of the LP Athol mill complex.
2. Incorporate new development in existing structures where possible; avoid sprawl and unnecessary development of greenfields.
3. Support places to eat and sleep since they are necessary to attract visitors to stay in town.
4. Promote infill development along the length of Exchange Street.
5. Construct street and landscape improvements to beautify the downtown and make it more attractive for businesses.
6. The participants in the Millers River Charrette of 2002 suggested that any future “Design (of) any bridge improvements over the Millers River to be aesthetically pleasing.” MASSDOT completed an overhaul of the bridge in 2020.
7. Participants also promoted the idea that inhabitants of the region “Support canoe rentals as a new business that will attract visitors that will attract visitors to the river.” Since the charrette, “Billy Goat Rentals” established itself as a non-powered boat rental firm in downtown Orange. This business should be promoted in downtown Athol to boost cartop river recreation.
8. Explore the feasibility of a water taxi between Athol and Orange.
9. Consider moving the start of the annual River Race to the Exchange Street bridge to bring the race and the fans closer to the downtown.
10. Promote ecotourism that takes advantage of the natural resources in and around town.
11. Start a community college program in downtown to provide educational resources beyond the high school level and to provide skills needed by local individuals.
12. Change zoning to reflect desired uses in the urban river corridor between the downtown and the river; avoid uses that might be detrimental to water quality or to neighborhood character such as repair shops in floodplains.
13. Promote the community’s strengths by marketing downtown Athol as a “Hub” or gateway to the North Quabbin region.

MRPC Recommendations

Economic Opportunity Group

1. The LP Athol mill complex is now home to MassGrow, LLC, a producer of marijuana and related products and a retail store known as The Boston Garden. The former precision tools manufacturing site will have 150+/- employees at peak production (Source, <https://www.recorder.com/an-a1-MassGrow-facility-sold-27M-34104178#:~:text=The%20MassGrow%20operation%2C%20which%20plans,the%20name%20to%20UTD%20Corporation., 4/29/20>).
2. The following reuse projects are recommended on underutilized sites: Residential or mixed-uses in the former fire station; Acquisition and demolition of the former Maroni, Teena’s, and Plotkin’s buildings combined with a reuse of all three properties into mixed uses (two of these buildings [Plotkins and Teena’s] have new owners and future redevelopment may take

place, and if it does not, then the Town needs to address future redevelopment if it is in the municipality's power to do so); Acquisition and demolition of the former gas station and conversion of this property into a combination of greenspace, walkways, and vehicle parking; Promotion of the former Athol Daily News building into commercial space(s); and, Promotion of the former Athol Daily News building into commercial space(s). Appropriate housing and commercial uses should be proposed to conform to the character of the majority of the buildings in downtown. Structural analyses and market feasibility studies for proposed uses (such as housing and of properties to be redeveloped should be completed on all subject properties). One or more property developers should be sought for these projects.

3. The community needs to define what it means by providing "Support (for) places to eat and sleep since they are necessary to attract visitors to stay in town." Will local leadership create a downtown revitalization organization as a stand-alone non-profit, provide funding to the North Central Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, hold a non-binding referendum at a local election and/or town meeting concerning how it will support the establishment of such businesses, or implement some other related action on this task? Once defined, the task needs to be implemented by the most appropriate party/(ies) and stakeholders.
4. See item 2, above.
5. The width of Exchange Street should be no greater than 36 linear feet from its intersection with Main Street to the bridge crossing the Millers River. A separate traffic study, possibly completed by the MRPC, should be completed to redesign the street so that traffic calming measures can be constructed to increase pedestrian safety, minimize curb cuts, and create additional green space in the downtown. Approximately 30% of unnecessary pavement on Exchange Street should be used to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Through a thorough redesign of this section of the street including stakeholders and local officials, a design team would be able to provide options for local review prior to implementing short- and long-term public safety improvements. Once the above measures have been implemented, this segment of the street will become more pedestrian-friendly and inviting to patrons visiting commercial establishments along the street.
6. "Design any bridge improvements over the Millers River to be aesthetically pleasing." Inhabitants input into bridge design is limited to the 25% design phase of any MassDOT project, including bridge reconstruction. Local officials are encouraged to follow up with MRPC's Transportation Department for further information.
7. "Support canoe rentals as a new business that will attract visitors that will attract visitors to the river." Is this being done? If not, MRPC recommends that the Downtown Vitality Committee speak with the leadership of the Owner of Orange and the proprietor of the boat sales and rental establishment on East River Street, adjacent to the Millers River. Cartop boating is available from Billy Goat Boats, Orange (<https://www.billygoatboats.com/>).
8. "Explore the feasibility of a water taxi between Athol and Orange." This concept is still worthy of study, but the idea could be expanded to a tourism or "party" boat."
9. Incorporate the land behind 62 Canal Street into River Rat Race Day (if this has not already been accomplished).
10. "Promote ecotourism that takes advantage of the natural resources in and around town." The installation of interpretive signage, construction of boardwalks along the Millers River, and other improvements will easily boost outside visitation to Downtown Athol.
11. "Start a community college program in downtown to provide educational resources beyond the high school level and to provide skills needed by local individuals." LaunchSpace, Inc. is forming partnerships with Mount Wachusett Community College and Greenfield Community

College to potentially expand educational programming to the North Quabbin area. This effort needs to be supported and strengthened to achieve a positive outcome.

12. “Change zoning to reflect desired uses in the urban river corridor between the downtown and the river; avoid uses that might be detrimental to water quality or to neighborhood character such as repair shops in floodplains.” Changes to downtown zoning are underway. Work has advanced concerning multiple local zoning issues.
13. Promote the community’s strengths by marketing downtown Athol as a “Hub” or gateway to the North Quabbin region.” Boston is not the only “hub” of activity. Make downtown Athol a destination for visiting the Millers River, eateries, and retail establishments.

This space left intentionally blank.

2002 Urban River Visions Plan Recommendations

Next Steps

1. Create a partnership that brings together diverse constituencies in support of riverfront renewal; from a committee of local experts and volunteers to map and survey the area's assets and resources.
2. Research land ownership and initiate discussions with landowners abutting the river and the proposed riverwalk.
3. Improve water quality in the Millers River watershed.
4. Improve boat access to the river.
5. Sponsor public events to celebrate the role of the Millers River in Athol's culture and economy, past and future; encourage participation of local artists and young people.

2002 Urban River Visions Plan Recommendations

MRPC Recommendations Continued

1. Combine onto one map, or several maps by themes, greenspace development, vehicular and pedestrian safety, parking, property redevelopment, pedestrian laneways, and other pertinent improvements not only along Exchange Street but for all, potential improvements in the downtown. Some of the recommendations from the 2002 Urban River Visions Plan have been implemented. Continue to implement recommendations under the eyes of the Downtown Vitality Committee, **Open Space and Recreation Review Committee**, Planning Office, Town Manager, Board of Selectmen, DPW, and other officials and volunteer groups.
2. Town should take the lead on redeveloping properties it takes in tax title utilizing the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC), immediately. Issue RFIs/RFR's/RFP's for abandoned property redevelopment of town owned properties. Issue RFI's for non-Town owned properties, such as the former gas station and Athol Daily News building on Exchange Street. Reach out to and involve property owners in development and publications of RFI's. Hire an Economic Development Manager or Director to take the lead on townwide economic development projects and/or provide staff support to the Department of Planning and Development and/or the EDIC.
3. Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and fund projects and programs with local funds and use those funds to pay for staff and/or leverage local funds against state and federal grants for improvements projects and programs.
4. Water Quality Monitoring. The health of the river system is studied through water quality monitoring conducted by MRWC. MRWC conducts a variety of monitoring programs to determine the condition of the rivers in the Miller basin public on recreational health and health for wildlife and the ecosystem. MassDEP occasionally monitors the water quality. MRWC studies:
 - a. Bacteria;
 - b. Benthic Macroinvertebrate;
 - c. Stream Temperatures/pH; and,
 - d. General Water Chemistry.

5. Build five, small boardwalks permanent or with floating docks should be constructed or installed. Removable docks could be placed adjacent to the Millers River in the spring and removed in the fall, each year. MRPC recommends that the five, following sites be examined for suitability (which are either already owned by the municipality, could be acquired, by the Town of Athol, or an easement(s) could be obtained by the community to promote public access:
 - a. Town Hall/Library parcels abutting the Millers River;
 - b. Police Station;
 - c. Cass Meadow;
 - d. Former “Foundry”/“Furnace Shop” site; and,
 - e. Waste Water Treatment Plant parcel.

An area events list is maintained by the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce and can be found, here: <https://www.northquabbinchamber.com/events/calendar>

Don't Build One Large Boardwalk: Build Five Small Boardwalks

According to the 2002 Urban River Vision, “The overall theme of this Plan is to increase public access to the Millers River and utilize the riversides as an attraction to this natural asset which would increase downtown visitation. An increase in visitors to the central business district would provide more, potential patrons to downtown establishments. Of equal importance, the river would be able to be used for increased boating, angling, and other riparian activities.”

The above would be consistent with the recommendations produced by the inhabitants of Athol in September 2002 when they completed an Urban River Vision Plan with assistance from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by the then-named Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (now known as the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs). Recommendations that were identified in 2002, that have not yet been implemented, and where the town could still benefit from implementing recommendations, including those listed in the tables, below.

XV. Business Improvements District

Insert information here about BIDs. The Importance of Investing in Oneself

MRPC recommends to all communities that have established central business districts to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). While many times BIDs are unpopular with local officials as the creation of a BID equates to raising taxes on owners of downtown properties,

Business Improvement Districts (BID) are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local municipality.

BIDs are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city or town governments. A special assessment, or common area fee, is levied only on property within the district. The assessments are collected and expended within the district for a range of services and/or programs, including:

- Marketing and public relations;
- Improving the downtown marketplace or city/town center;
- Capital improvements;
- Public safety enhancements; and,
- Special events.

A BID creates a stable local management structure that provides a sustainable funding source for the revitalization and long-term maintenance of downtowns and city/town centers. The goal of a BID is to improve a specific commercial area by attracting customers, clients, shoppers and other businesses.

Establishing A BID

Communities are authorized to establish BIDs under M.G.L. Chapter 40 O. A BID must be a contiguous geographic area in which at least 75% of the land is zoned or used for commercial, retail, industrial or mixed uses. A BID is established through a local petition and public hearing process. The petition must be signed by the owners of at least 60% of the real property and at least 51% of the assessed valuation of the real property within the proposed BID. The petition must also include delineation of the BID boundaries, a proposed improvement plan, budget and assessment/fee structure.

Additional information on BIDs in Massachusetts can be found here <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/business-improvement-districts-bid> while a BID manual can be accessed here <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/business-improvement-districts-bid>.

Further information and case studies, available from MassDevelopment, can be found by clicking the following link <https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/technical-assistance/business-improvement-district>.