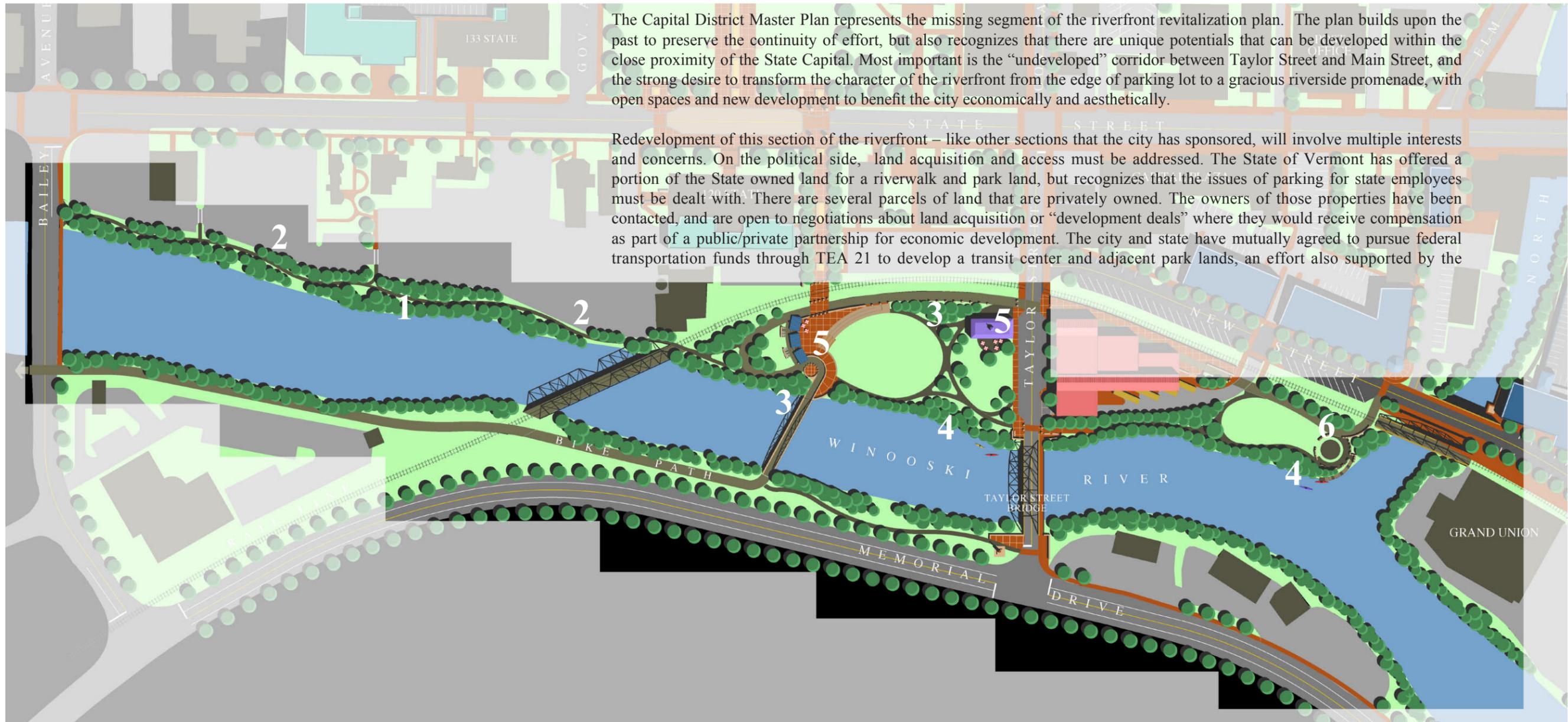


# Winooski River Greenway

## The River and the City: transformation of a corridor

Whereas in the past, the Winooski River served as an industrial conduit, the waterpower, and waste disposal system for the city, recent years see a more complementary relationship. The river is now seen as a positive attraction, where clean water and an attractive riverbank is an essential element of the city's future economy and quality of life.

For almost 10 years, the city has been actively engaged in the planning and implementation of a riverfront improvement plan. River corridor improvements have been included in the City Master Plans, and separate design and planning efforts have resulted in construction of the Winooski West and Winooski East Bikepaths and improvement districts. The city-sponsored Montpelier Rivers Report and the River Visions plan have served as the inspiration for planning efforts, and helped to articulate the community's sentiments about the past, present and future for the river corridors in Montpelier.



The Capital District Master Plan represents the missing segment of the riverfront revitalization plan. The plan builds upon the past to preserve the continuity of effort, but also recognizes that there are unique potentials that can be developed within the close proximity of the State Capital. Most important is the “undeveloped” corridor between Taylor Street and Main Street, and the strong desire to transform the character of the riverfront from the edge of parking lot to a gracious riverside promenade, with open spaces and new development to benefit the city economically and aesthetically.

Redevelopment of this section of the riverfront – like other sections that the city has sponsored, will involve multiple interests and concerns. On the political side, land acquisition and access must be addressed. The State of Vermont has offered a portion of the State owned land for a riverwalk and park land, but recognizes that the issues of parking for state employees must be dealt with. There are several parcels of land that are privately owned. The owners of those properties have been contacted, and are open to negotiations about land acquisition or “development deals” where they would receive compensation as part of a public/private partnership for economic development. The city and state have mutually agreed to pursue federal transportation funds through TEA 21 to develop a transit center and adjacent park lands, an effort also supported by the

## Winooski River Greenway Design Features

### 1. Walking Trail connection from Bikepath bridge to Bailey Avenue

This path extends the bikepath connection with a more rustic walking path to complete a riverfront trail system across the Capital Complex.

### 2. Reorganization of state parking areas to improve aesthetics and pedestrian circulation

Parking spaces are redefined and pedestrian access is improved as part of the trail project and cross paths from parking areas to the State Street area run through the existing spaces between state buildings. Where appropriate, small park and yards areas are created to screen parking areas and reinforce the historic character of State Street.

### 3. Refinements to the Winooski West – Winooski East Bikepath corridor

The massive concrete bridge landing needs to be enhanced to be more attractive and to integrate with the nearby park area. The existing path location from the steel bridge to Taylor Street is retained, and the bikepath is relocated to the north where it can interface with the transit center on the east side of Taylor Street.

### 4. A linked series of public parks

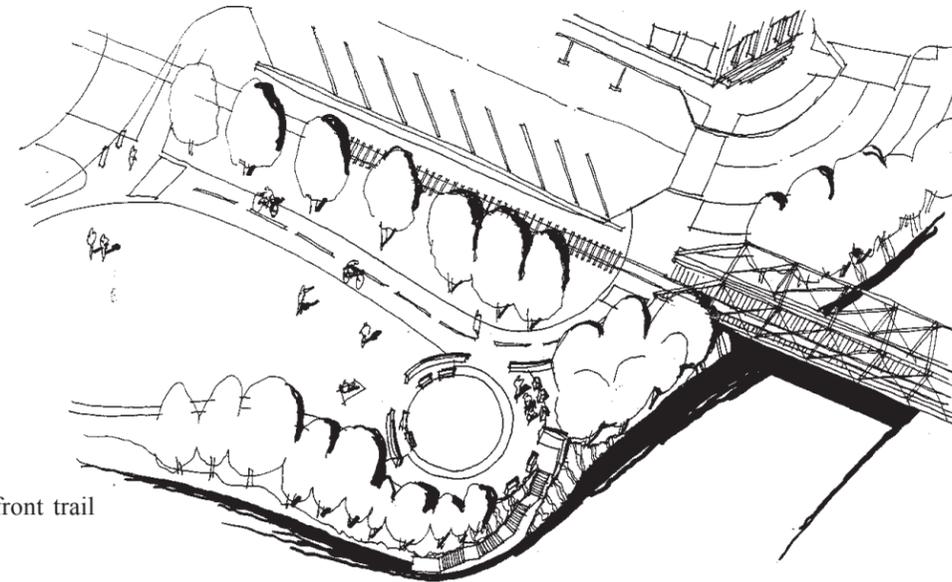
Following the river is a series of park spaces ranging from open grassy spaces to a paved urban promenade and café /overlook near Taylor Street. Larger open spaces are provided both east and west of Taylor Street.

### 5. Complementary recreation facilities for residents and visitors

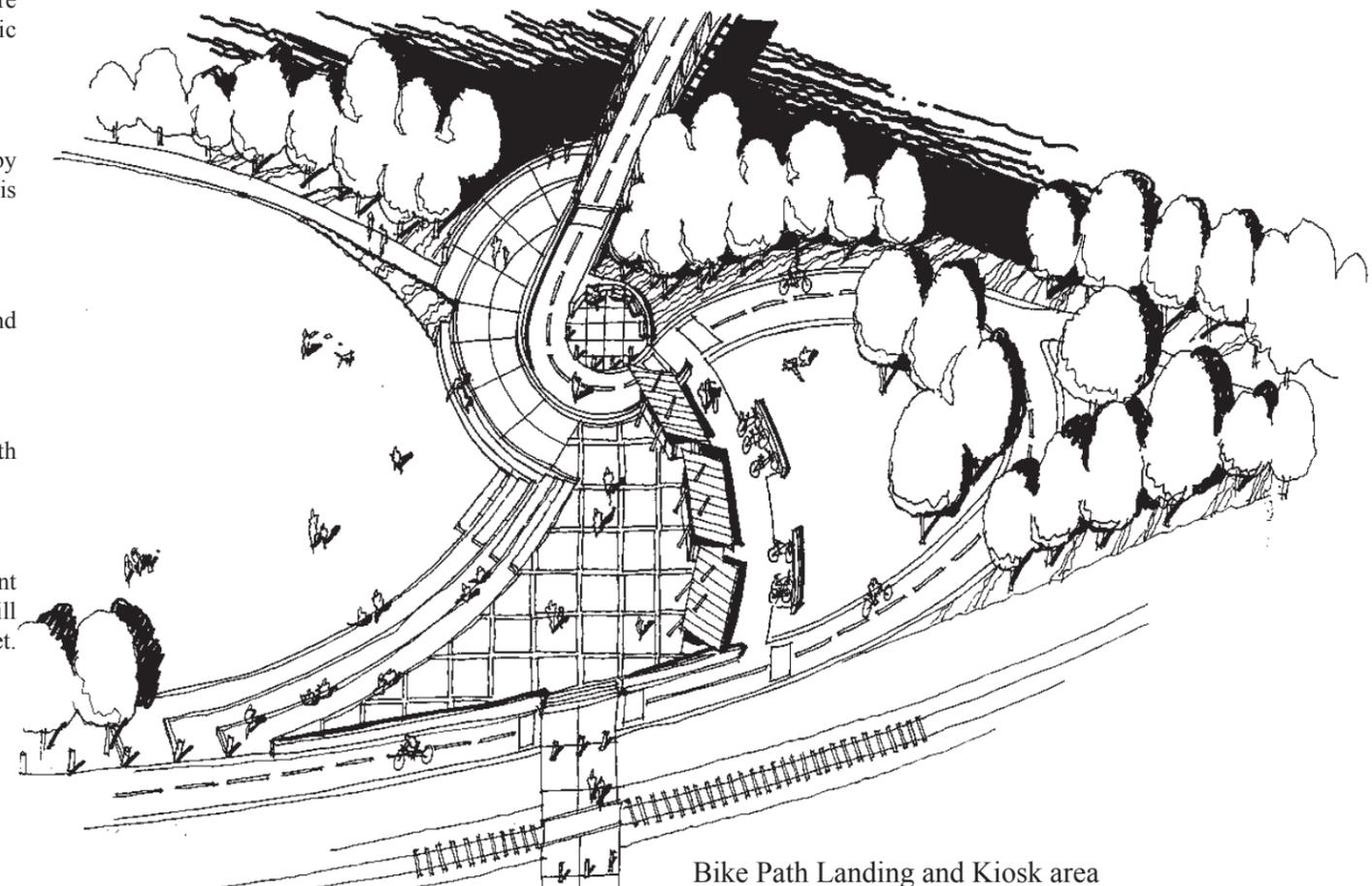
A visitor kiosk structure and the relocated Rail Baggage Building can provide bike rental and café' space with direct access to the bikepath system and Capital Complex.

### 6. Bikepath connection from Taylor Street to Main Street

This section of the Winooski Bikepath connects from Taylor Street and the transit center to the riverfront park at the convergence of the North Branch and Stevens Branch. The crossing of the North Branch will be on a combined bike/automobile bridge as part of the new street connection to Barre Street/ Main Street.



Park area at the Confluence of the North Branch



Bike Path Landing and Kiosk area

### **River Conservation issues:**

Coordination between the planning process and the Montpelier Conservation Commission was central in the planning for the riverfront improvements. In October of 1998, the Montpelier Conservation Commission affirmed the following principles for the City State Commission Master Plan for the Capital District:

- Create a riverside park
- Ensure a continuous green belt along the river that has trees and shrubs and is wide enough to include a walking/bike path and benches
- Include small parks for picnicking and family recreation along the path as well as an overall layout that reflects the vitality of the city
- The path should connect with other pedestrian and bicycle paths and access roads
- Provide access points for people to walk down to the water
- Encourage four - season usage

Celebrate and draw attention to the river through

- Historical markers
- Educational exhibits
- Displayed art
- Facilities for music and other cultural events

Maintain the ecological function of the river bank

- Utilize natural landscaping,
- Place shade trees along the river edge,
- Provide habitat for wildlife, and
- Stabilize and restore the stream bank.
- Ensure a balance between natural vegetation and landscaped sections.
- Utilize the greenbelt as a filtration system for stormwater runoff from the adjacent paved areas.

All of these themes for river corridor planning are not mutually exclusive, and a diversified riverfront plan would allow some of each element to exist: to create a river corridor with complementary areas of ecological, aesthetic, and recreational opportunities.

The final plan preserves both natural riverbanks, historic stone retaining walls that have bordered developed edges, and where appropriate, enhances those features as part of an overall river corridor plan. The simple act of removing several acres of parking with its damaging erosion and runoff and substituting impervious surfaces with park land, grass and trees will improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the corridor. Properly planned pathways and a promenade will allow residents and visitors to walk along the river, appreciating the river as current conditions do not allow. Areas for recreation and activities compatible with a scenic riverwalk have also been accommodated, along with sites where visitors can descend from the higher elevation riverwalk to the water's edge. It is hoped that the end result will be a positive demonstration of the values of river corridor planning and urban design.

### **River interpretation themes**

There is a strong desire to tell the role of the river in the evolution of Montpelier, and to integrate river interpretation themes in an overall plan for riverfront amenities. Some of the interpretive signage, environmental sculpture, and display themes might include:

- Explanations of riverbank restorative efforts.
- A living river: Natural communities.
- Fish and wildlife habitats.
- The working river: industry in Montpelier

### **The Greenway as a destination for regional trails around central Vermont**

Montpelier's central location in the state coincides with linkages between the Winooski river corridor and other recreational corridors in Central Vermont. There are many existing and planned trails in the Montpelier area, as well as linkages from the river corridors to other local trails in Montpelier and other nearby towns. Some of these trails include, for example:

#### **The Cross Vermont Trail**

A planned trail that follows the old Wells River – Montpelier RR line. Planned as a multiuse trail, there are several segments of this trail already in place, including one from Groton to Marshfield, Plainfield and East Montpelier. The trail is being planned with assistance of the Rivers and Trails Program of the National Park Service and the State of Vermont, and in cooperation with East Montpelier Trails, Inc. and local snowmobile clubs. The VAOT hired a Cross VT Trail project coordinator in 1999 to support ongoing trail development.

#### **The Central Vermont Bikepath**

This is a planned four - town bike path project being planned under the leadership of the Central VT Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). The path originates as part of the Winooski West and Winooski East Pathways and follows the Washington County RR (WCRR) line east towards Berlin, through Barre City and to Barre Town. The path segments from Montpelier to the Ames Plaza in Berlin have been funded by the VTrans, and the Barre City pathway segment is currently ranked #1 in regional priority with the CVRPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The City of Barre and Barre Granite Center and Heritage Museum are cooperating on future planning efforts.

#### **North Branch Greenway**

As a part of the Montpelier Rivers Study, the concept of a walking route along the North Branch is planned to extend from the Lane Shops to the Wrightsville Dam. This route would follow some of the city's most remote and interesting natural areas, to the site of the new VINS Center, North Branch Park the Elm Street Recreation fields, and eventually to Hubbard Park to the west and to the East Montpelier Trails network to the east and south. This system will ultimately link the downtown to the city's extensive park network. The downtown connection segment from the Lane Shops to the convergence of the Steven's Branch and the North Branch is perhaps the most difficult to accomplish. The initial phase from State Street to Langdon Street has been supported by the city.

#### **Statehouse Trail**

A new trail is being planned in partnership with the State of Vermont and the City of Montpelier to ascend the hill behind the Capitol, linking to Hubbard Park.

#### **East Montpelier Trails**

East Montpelier Trails, Inc., a non-profit organization, maintains a network of trails that bring together recreational users of many types. A system of trails is already in place for skiing, walking, snowmobiles, and other uses.

#### **Canoe/kayak access along the Winooski River**

The Winooski River is a popular boating corridor, and below Montpelier the river is very passable for recreational paddlers and families. While there are no current locations where paddlers can put into the river near the downtown, below the last dam west of Main Street, in the same area as the greenway, entry to the river could be an exciting new river oriented use.



Looking upriver from the Bailey Avenue Bridge

