

****** FOUR ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS: LEE, MASSACHUSETTS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY**

We here present four completely different design proposals for downtown Lee—extremely powerful "Lee-Revitalization" strategies— that are now important for townspeople to compare. These four proposals are illuminated by their similarities as well as their differences: * In SIMILARITY, all the proposals fulfill the basic objective & goal statements as outlined this study, that have a primary intention of serving (a) all local people, (b) in some degree, regional shoppers/visitors, and (c) extra/regional tourists. (General tourism is the most debated issue among the proposals). Each proposal is a strong & wholistic design, based on their own town-whole "big idea", great "sub-ideas" for six internal 'town-areas', and different (eg space, movement, structural, plant) 'town-systems'. The parts synergistically add up to a whole that is more than the sum of its parts (analogous to the way atoms add to molecules and then to organisms). As a separate issue, all proposals advocate the supplementary Riverside Traffic/truck Bypass, while #4 requires it. * In their DIFFERENCES, the four proposals offer a very full range of meaningful directions for the town to select from— dichotomized in terms of MINIMAL to MAXIMAL degree of change from "M" town" to "Tourist-town", as well as being "ROAD or RIVER focused" in that change. (We thus present both conservative and progressive-change scenarios for either the river or road— as the leading components among other changes).

++++ PROPOSED BY ALL SCHEMES: A REGIONAL TRAFFIC/TRUCK-BYPASS ROAD ON THE WEST RIVERBANK TO RID DOWNTOWN OF UNDESIRABLE TRAFFIC

All four proposals advocate the same traffic/truck bypass on the west side of the existing Housatonic river corridor (connecting West Park Street and Lower Center Street) to supplement their own downtown design. (Schemes #1 & #2 strongly suggest, # 3 very strongly suggests, and #4 requires it). Although the downtown design of each proposal internally functions to solve traffic problems, (as is crucial with or without a bypass), the bypass (in combination with internal downtown changes) is the most important way for all plans to immediately rid downtown of much undesirable traffic and trucks— while also solving the paradox of simultaneously inviting desirable visitors to whatever degree the different proposals' intend. The proposals work to encourage (with signage, views, easy access/parking, & image PR) and accomodate potential patrons who might have been eliminated from downtown by the bypass, while discouraging disruptive non-visitor type traffic.

NOTE: This riverside bypass is the only bypass scheme that would be appropriate from Lee's point of view. Any other bypass scheme, such as those of previous government studies located far from downtown-- are inappropriate for Lee because: (a) they would not selectively divert all undesirable traffic and (b) they would eliminate desirable visitors (eg spontaneous customers) because they not be or feel proximate to downtown. Since the bypass issue is involved at the federal/state levels in terms of broader regional planning and funding objectives, it's agenda is independant from the inner-downtown Lee project that this study concentrates on. ((As far as can tell at this time, the state construction of our advocated Lee riverside bypass could soon be possible, or it could be delayed indefinitely; or it could instead be located elsewhere, in a way that does or doesn't significantly effect Lee; or a bypass in any location may not happen at all. Also, the town could seek to create its own west of river bypass independently. In any case, downtown proposals should be coordinated with whatever bypass scenario occurs as wholistically as possible.

SCHEME 1: "MAKE MANY LITTLE CHANGES":

PROTECT LEE'S PRIVATE "WORKING MILLTOWN" CHARACTER BY CREATING MANY SMALLER-SCALE, IMMEDIATELY COST-EFFECTIVE, LOW-RISK IMPROVEMENTS.
(Minimal road change/ moderate river change: for minimal tourism).
(A conservative and least expensive approach).

"The premise of this scheme is that the existing infrastructure of Lee is basically fine, and in fact is ideal for a conservatively approached revitalization strategy. It therefore proposes, as most pragmatic, that Lee should not focus on grand changes but instead make many selective, smaller-scale, incremental, less expensive, detailed changes in downtown-- within the existing infrastructure. The merit of this approach is its sure practicality and limited risk, allowing ongoing flexibility in controlling change and being open to emerging opportunities, while accomodating smaller budgets over time. This scheme credits fuller validity in Lee's current socio-economic and physical structure, and intends a careful maintainance of Lee's genuine character as a more private "working mill town"-- and seeks to avoid unnecessary tourism or the superimposition of a new larger scale town-model upon it, as embraced by other proposals. (Note: The west of river traffic bypass is not required but suggested as the only way to really solve Lee's major traffic problems. This scheme's lower cost allows the town more money to be spent on the west of river bypass, if state & federal funding is limited). ((* TOTAL AESTHETIC MOTIF: many rectalinear forms of intimate to moderate scale, with subtle heirarchy of proportions to enrich the limited size of total downtown space-- harmonize with the existing manmade grid and correspond to the complexity of local users. All of this, as "man made", is in contrast to the larger "natural" Berkshire bio-geomorphic space)).

SCHEME 2: "DIVIDE AND UNITE":

REDESIGN RAILROAD & MAIN STREETS FOR ONE-WAY TRAFFIC— THUS SOLVING PEDESTRIAN/VEHICLE CONFLICTS, WHILE ALSO EXPANDING & INTEGRATING A DESIRED ACTIVITY-MIX FOR LOCALS & VISITORS: FULL, BALANCED LANDUSE. (Moderate road change/- moderate river change: for moderate tourism). (A progressive and moderate-cost approach).

"For revitalization Lee needs to simultaneously reduce disruptive traffic on Main Street, and also develop new vitality in the Railroad/Eaton Street area. This scheme proposes that the solution to BOTH problems is to extend Railroad Street at both ends, so to connect Lower Center Street with West Park Street, as a second thru-town road to supplement Main Street. Both Railroad Street and Main Street could be controlled as reciprocal one-way streets to accommodate and divide traffic volume, thus improving pedestrian space quality on Main street and the activity/economic quality on Railroad street. The traffic would be divided (diluted), but the distribution of increased economic and spatial activity-quality would make the town united. There would be a net decrease of traffic congestion on Main Street, while accommodating a desirable gross increase of activity in the town as a whole. This would give a rewarding boost in Lee's ability to draw and absorb an additional flow of desirable visitors of all kinds. (Also, either street could occasionally be shut off completely to respond to different hours, days, or seasons, or for special events). Though the supplementary west of river truck bypass is suggested, this scheme has the most tolerance for having no bypass". ((* TOTAL AESTHETIC MOTIF: Intimate-moderate scale; Romantic ribbon of oval forms of green recreational pedestrian space recall the Olmstedian 19th century (Park place has dual ovals of the common and church-walk; the river has a double-oval/corridor, and there is a smaller oval at Joes /north mill area)— in dividing contrast to the existing grid of non-recreational and hard space; these, unified as the man-made world, are in dividing contrast to nature (while feeling a reciprocal kinship with nature's bio-geomorphic forms))).

SCHEME 3 "RETURN TO THE RIVER":

CREATE A BERKSHIRE REGIONAL-ORIENTED "LEE WATERFALL PARK" TO SIMULTANEOUSLY REJUVENATE LOCAL MLLTOWN ACTIVITY WHILE DIRECTLY GENERATING A PERMENANT GENUINE CAUSE FOR LUCRATIVE TOURISM.
(Moderate road/ maximum river change for moderate to maximum tourism).
(A more progressive, higher-moderate cost approach).

"The river is the key to Lee revitalization. As the source of Lee's heritage, and yet the most neglected town element today, the river holds the most potential for inspiring Lee's future. The river is the most distinct and authentic town resource, with universal attributes essential to embrace the natural, recreational, historic, social, economic, and aesthetic values that different townspeople, regional visitors, and tourists might aspire to. Rediscovery of the river in Lee would be in a sense capturing of the entire Housatonic and Berkshire system, and thus a tapping of the regional market. This proposal therefore intends maximum focus on the river by creating a regional scale waterfall park that forms a pedestrian linkage between the west of river bypass and the Eaton/Backside area, and has exposure to create a local, regional and tourist draw. Dramatic and costly downtown road change is unnecessary. ((Note: Since the river is the genesis and sustainer of Lee through much of history, it is the underlying town-premis and entrenched essence by which all future changes— physical and behavioral, big and small, can look to determine valid order)). Waterfall River Park is to be located at the bypass where it can be seen, and easily accessed with its own on site parking parking— thus solving the paradox of luring patronizing visitors without destroying the downtown with traffic. The supplementary bypass is very strongly suggested, but its construction beyond the waterfall park access point is not immediately required. ((* TOTAL AESTHETIC MOTIF: Moderate- larger scale; Rectalinear spatial forms with axial vista/links relate to the strong, clear, purposeful industrial forms of "man-made history"— ie the agricultural fields and the industrial age grids, buildings, & tools. (These spaces are similar size and form (varying slightly), and together form a dominant trio: the south common, waterfall park and the north complex). As representing the man-made, they are in dialaetic contrast with the "natural" bio-geomorghic Berkshires they all survey— and, by engaging with the flowing river, ongoingly "return" to. Dualisms abound)).

SCHEME 4 "MAKE ONLY GRAND PLANS" :

TOTALLY ELIMINATE ALL VEHICLES FROM LOWER MAIN STREET AND OVAL PARK, TO CREATE A PEDESTRIAN-ONLY TOWN CENTER— "LEE PARK PLACE"— THAT ELEVATES LEE'S TOTAL IMAGE, SENDING A FAR REACHING "BERKSHIRE" REPUTATION TO STIMULATE A LEGENDARY DRAW OF ALL TYPE VISITORS. (Maximum road change/-moderate river change: for maximum tourism). (A radical and initially more expensive approach).

"Lee should aim for full revitalization through full tourism. To achieve this, Lee needs a total "big idea", and an "all or nothing" approach to attract and sustain tourism into the next century. It requires the most dramatic, unique, thoughtfully designed amenity-spaces possible, within the very heart of downtown, to provide a full range of activities for tourists, regional shoppers and townspeople alike. This scheme therefore intends the most extreme and economically powerful solution of all for Lee's traffic conflict and image problems: It proposes to eliminate all vehicles from South Main Street/Oval park, and replace it with a grand all-pedestrian Town Center consisting of the largest possible town common, a great tree allee, richly furnished planted courtyards, and a full court/green/walkway space-system. South Main Street traffic is instead rerouted west of downtown Lee, to hook up with the proposed west regional traffic bypass. People from there can enter downtown by crossing the river eastward to a new town-arrival in the Eaton Street Area. Undesirable traffic and trucks would instead continue along the bypass and avoid cutting through and disturbing downtown. (The west of river traffic bypass is required). This big idea would subsume all the important detailed functions and practical needs of the town— but do infinitely more: this is the proposal that can truly inspire all who enter into Lee— be it for a lifetime or an afternoon— and profoundly connect with humanity as a truly great place that stirs the soul with its artful presence and genuine events. This scheme aspires to the adage: 'Make no small plans— they have not the power to move man's mind'. ((* TOTAL AESTHETIC MOTIF: Large scale clarity; Strong full curved space defined by sweeping, grasping arc & tangent ("hook") of great trees— for "celebrated public & tourist-oriented use". (Identical size forms are repeated in a unifying tri-nodal thrust: Park Place Common, North End Common and Grand Arrival Parking. Shade/open contrast). This is in contrast to the smaller, less extroverted scale of rectilinear downtown and complement to the subtle, complex bio-geomorphic Berkshire forms that it penetrates. It presents the big dichotomies of a robust world.
