

Suffolk/Virginia

# Olde Towne Revitalization Plan

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Prepared for  
City of Suffolk, Virginia

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## i Introduction

the initiatives plan for the Olde Towne neighborhood in downtown Suffolk is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process. The process began in 1997 when Urban Design Associates (UDA) was hired by the City to create a plan for the historic Downtown area. Since that time, the process has expanded to include plans for other parts of the City including the East Washington Street and Hall Place neighborhoods, the Civic Center, and the Fairgrounds.

Olde Towne, one of the oldest and most distinguished neighborhoods in Suffolk, was home to many of its prominent early settlers who built large homes along Pinner and Bank Streets. The neighborhood is bounded by railway tracks to the north, east and south and Main Street on the west, and was historically divided into two parts by a ravine that flowed into Shingle Creek. Although the area declined in the 1960's and 70's, its beautiful homes and historic character have attracted a new generation of homeowners who have worked hard to revitalize Olde Towne into a stable downtown neighborhood.

### Aerial Photograph from the East

*The Olde Towne neighborhood is located in the heart of downtown Suffolk between North Main Street and the industrial area on Liberty/County/Moore Street.*



**The Neighborhood Planning Process**

The physical plan for the Olde Towne neighborhood is the result of a three phase process that involved the neighborhood residents and stakeholders.

During the first phase, the design team visited the neighborhood to document and photograph the existing conditions and historic structures of the area. From the information collected, the design team drew base maps and generated a set of analysis drawings, called X-Rays®. Each X-Ray focuses on one or two key pieces of information, such as streets or buildings, and helps the design team to understand the neighborhood patterns and make informed decisions during the design process.

The second phase, and the focus of the UDA planning process, was the design charrette – an intense, multi-day design workshop held on-site with the

area residents, property owners, and workers. During the charrette process, the plan was created by the local community, with the design team facilitating the process and creating the drawings.

The Olde Towne design charrette was held November 12-15, 2001 at the Birdsong Community Center on Main Street. The charrette began with a kick-off meeting where the design team asked the participants about the neighborhood’s strengths, weaknesses, and short and long-term hopes and dreams. Participants were asked to map the area’s strengths and weaknesses using green and red dots. The design team used the answers to these questions to generate a list of design guidelines which acted as a checklist during the design process.

The final phase of the process was the refinement of the plan based on feedback received at the charrette.

**The Design Process**

*Community residents participated with the design team in a walking tour and at meetings, identifying the neighborhood’s strengths and weaknesses.*



**Assets, Liabilities, Hopes and Dreams**

**Assets/Good Things**

- Homes of the founders of Suffolk
- Diverse historic architecture styles
- Great public buildings: high school, train station, courthouse, churches
- The proposed new police station
- Walkable - easy access to Main Street
- Streets lined with diverse trees
- People - long-time residents, friendly homeowners
- Most of neighborhood feels safe
- Neighborhood watch/civic league
- High and dry (Pinner Street is a high point)
- Smell of peanuts roasting
- Sound of church bells and trains
- Cultural center - close to downtown
- Revitalized riverfront
- New/revitalized buildings: courthouse, train station, new Gardner store, Hall Place neighborhood

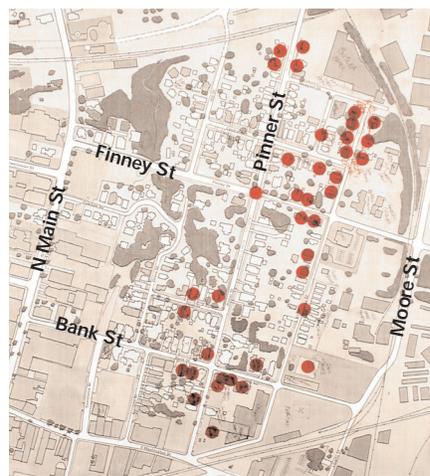
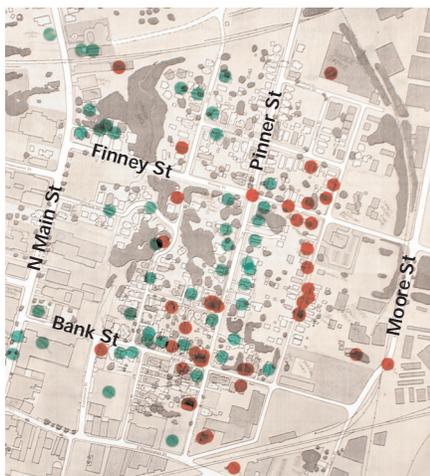
- Close to hospital
- Fire and police: close, good response time

**Liabilities/Bad Things**

- Absentee landlords/dilapidated bldgs
- Lack of homeowners (65% rental)
- Rent-by-room properties
- Drug trafficking, prostitution
- Holladay Street: rental properties, high crime, nuisance and noise
- Traffic volume and speed: over 5,400 cars/24hours on Pinner Street
- Pinner Street flyover - design encourages high-speed and regional traffic
- Timing of traffic light at Pinner & Finney
- No parks and recreation programs
- Lack of green space /walking trails
- Poor street lighting
- Train - noise and dust pollution
- Shotgun houses on Holladay & Finney

**Strengths and Weaknesses Map**

*Using the existing conditions site map residents indicated neighborhood strengths with green dots and weaknesses with red dots (left); police indicated problem areas with red dots (right).*



- Loss of businesses on Main and Washington Streets
- Surface parking lots
- No movie theaters (closest is Harbor View in northern Suffolk)
- Few restaurants

#### Hopes & Dreams

- Clean up rental properties - meet with landlords
- Attract more homeowners
- Reduce crime
- Calm traffic
- Restore historic homes
- Enforce building codes
- Enforce yard clean-up and maintenance
- Bury overhead power lines
- Install historic street lights
- Mark neighborhood entrances
- Uncover cobblestone streets
- Make Suffolk a destination - enhance tourism
- Revitalize Main and Washington Streets with restaurants and shops
- Reuse old warehouses as restaurants or shops
- Improve and expand Joyner Park with a gazebo, baseball, and soccer field
- Create neighborhood green spaces with small passive parks
- Add parking in police precinct area
- Revitalize the Red Barn area

- Add on-street parking

#### Design Principles

The input from neighborhood residents and stakeholders about the area's strengths and weaknesses were incorporated into a list of design principles to help guide the planning process.

- 1 Maintain and enhance the neighborhood's historic character
- 2 Calm traffic
- 3 Resolve absentee landlord /nuisance rental/crime problems
- 4 Mark and celebrate neighborhood boundaries and entrances
- 5 Improve streetscaping by adding sidewalks, lights, and trees and burying utilities
- 6 Enhance the street network by creating more connections
- 7 Improve connections to Main Street and Washington Street
- 8 Improve residential and commercial parking
- 9 Attract more businesses, including restaurants, coffee shops and a movie theater
- 10 Create more parks, trails, and recreation programs
- 11 Improve relationship with industrial edges
- 12 Enforce the building code

## Existing Conditions Analysis



### Street Network

The streets in Suffolk are laid out in a series of grid patterns that are interrupted and separated by railway tracks, ravines and large industrial sites. Olde Towne is well connected to Main, Washington and Pinner Streets.

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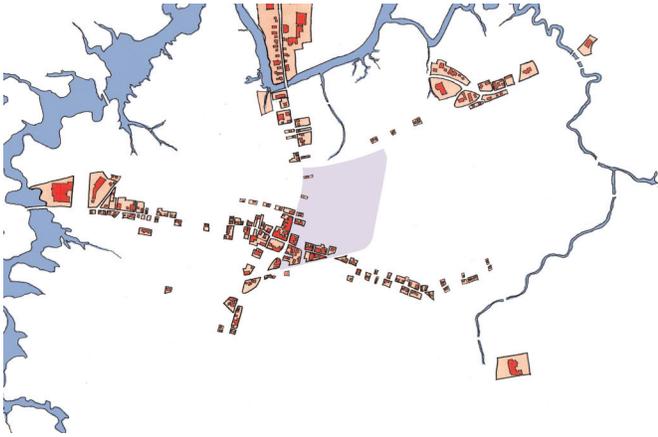
### Residential Settlement Patterns

Suffolk is made up of a number of residential neighborhoods, represented by contiguous yellow areas; the Olde Towne neighborhood is separated from the rest of the residential neighborhoods of the city.



### Parks, Institutions & Open Space

The City of Suffolk is surrounded by the Nansemond river to the north and west and Shingle Creek and the Great Dismal Swamp to the east. The Olde Towne area has very few parks.



### Commercial

The commercial areas in Suffolk are concentrated along three major corridors: Constance Road, Main Street and Washington Street. Olde Towne is adjacent to the historic Main-Washington commercial area.



### Figure/Ground

The building footprints reveal that Suffolk is made up of a series of residential neighborhoods, a dense downtown commercial core, and several industrial areas to the east of downtown.



### Industry & Rail

The city is crossed by several major railway lines, three of which act as boundaries for the Olde Towne neighborhood. Industrial uses, including Butler Paper, line the railway tracks to the north and east of Olde Towne.

## ii The Vision

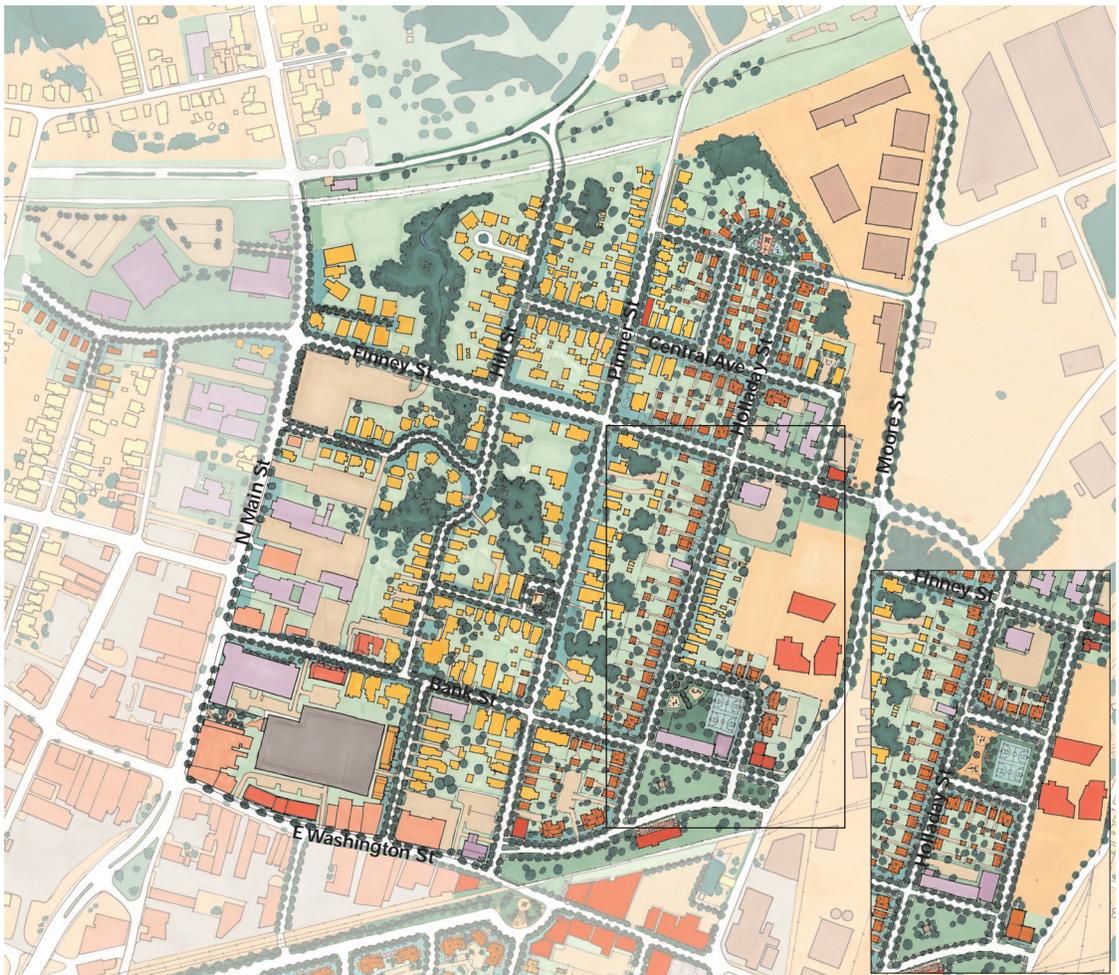
the initiatives plan for Olde Towne, as part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process, builds on the work done for the Downtown, the East Washington Street, Hall Place and Fairgrounds neighborhoods. The plan looks in detail at the Olde Towne neighborhood and proposes a number of physical design initiatives aimed at stabilizing the neighborhood boundaries, repairing distressed areas within the neighborhood, introducing some new houses based on historic Suffolk precedents, and revitalizing the commercial areas along North Main Street and East Washington Street.

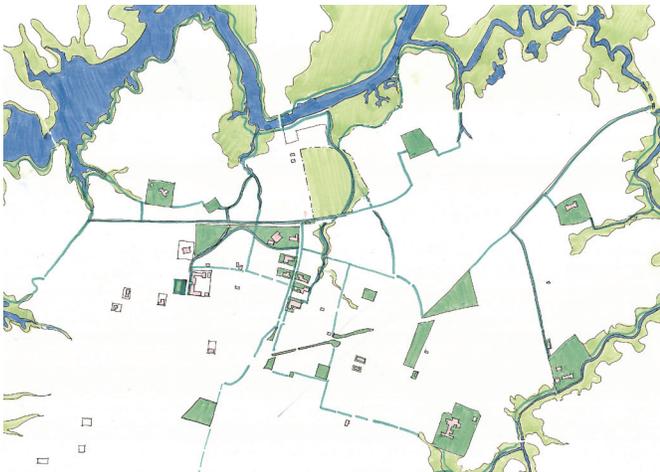
The vision begins with a frameworks plan that examines the study area in the context of downtown Suffolk. This is followed by the detailed Master Plan and descriptions of specific initiatives.



### Plans

*Existing conditions plan of the Olde Towne neighborhood (top).  
Master plan and alternative park plan (bottom).*





*The Parks & Open Space X-Ray (top) showing current parks; the Frameworks Plan (above) illustrates proposed park connections. The street hierarchy plan (right).*



**Frameworks**

The Frameworks Plan is used as a design tool to examine street and park connections between the study area and adjacent commercial, industrial and residential areas of downtown Suffolk. Many of the problems found in Suffolk neighborhoods result from the City’s inadequate street framework which forces traffic onto a few overburdened major streets. Creating new street and park connections will help the neighborhood initiatives succeed.

The street hierarchy diagram illustrates a neighborhood street hierarchy that will separate and calm regional, local and neighborhood traffic.

**Regional Streets: (red)**

- 1 Main Street
- 2 Washington Street
- 3 Liberty/County/Moore
- 4 Constance Road

**Local Streets: (black)**

- 5 Pinner Street
- 6 Finney Avenue (Factory Connector)

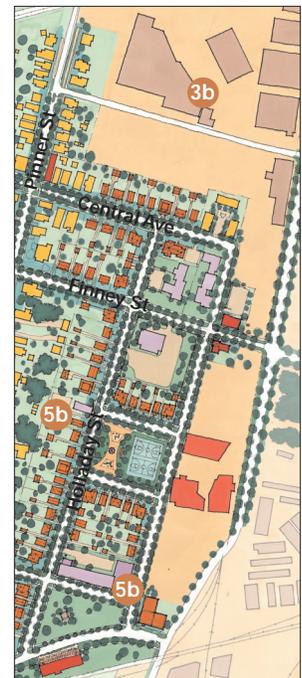
**Neighborhood Streets: (green)**

- 7 Bank Street
- 8 Holladay Street
- 9 Franklin Street
- 10 Central Avenue

**Master Plan**

The master plan for the Olde Towne neighborhood was created with extensive community input and contains the best ideas from the alternative designs created during the design charrette. Specific initiatives include the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Pinner Street gateway</li> <li>2 Newport Street and Holladay Street residential development</li> <li>3 Industrial area cleanup and residential infill</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Pearl Street and Pinner Street neighborhood square</li> <li>5 Holladay Street infill and Joyner Park</li> <li>6 Train Station Area</li> <li>7 Franklin Street mixed use area</li> <li>8 Municipal parking garage</li> <li>9 Bank Street and Grace Street improvements</li> <li>10 College Court</li> </ul> |
|---|---|



**Aerial Perspective**  
*Downtown Suffolk*  
looking south with the  
*Nansemond River* in  
the foreground as it  
existed in 1998 (left),  
and as proposed in the  
*Downtown Suffolk*  
*Plan* (right). Aerial  
view as proposed with  
the *Olde Towne* and  
*Fairgrounds Initiatives*  
(bottom)



### iii Initiatives

#### Pinner Street Gateway

*The entrance to Olde Towne from the Pinner Street railroad overpass as it exists, looking north (top); looking south (middle); and as proposed, with a new neighborhood gateway (bottom).*



the olde towne master plan provides a comprehensive vision for a revitalized neighborhood. However, in order for the plan to be successful, it is not necessary to carry out the entire plan at once; the plan consists of a series of design initiatives that can be prioritized and implemented over time. The plan should be viewed as an economic development tool that can be used by the neighborhood and the City to attract both public and private investment. The design initiatives are outlined below.

#### 1 Pinner Street Gateway

During the design charrette neighborhood residents complained that regional traffic uses Pinner Street like a highway. The Pinner Street railway overpass was constructed to relieve traffic congestion and is an important part of the City's street system. Unfortunately its design encourages high speed traffic. The plan proposes to create a gateway to the neighborhood at the intersection of Pinner and Newport Streets. The gateway will include a median and brick street pavers to calm traffic. It will also include a new neighborhood sign, street trees and historic lighting fixtures. The streetscaping can be replicated throughout the neighborhood as funding becomes available. When done in conjunction with the renovation of some of the homes along Pinner Street, this initiative will transform the image of the neighborhood.

**2 Newport Street and Holladay Street: Residential Development**

Focus groups with residents and neighborhood police officers revealed that the area around Newport, Holladay and Eugenia Streets is severely dilapidated and crime ridden. The plan calls for acquisition and demolition of all of the severely deteriorated houses in this area and replacing them with new houses modeled on Suffolk precedents.

**3 Industrial Area Cleanup and Infill**

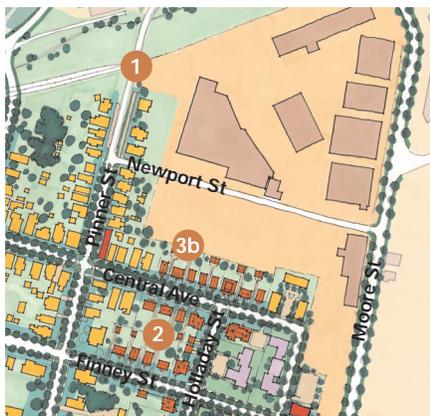
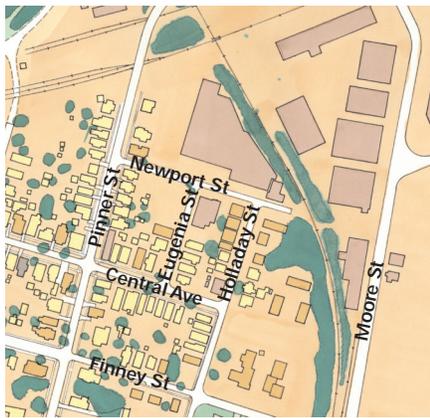
Currently, the relationship between the industrial and residential uses in the neighborhood are awkward; revitalizing this area will have a tremendous stabiliz-

ing effect on the neighborhood. It is important to provide a clear separation between the residential and industrial uses. Butler Paper company, which currently faces onto Newport Street, is perceived by the residents as nuisance, because of the trucks, blowing paper, dust, odors and nature of the paper and cardboard recycling business.

One alternative is to build new houses backing up to the industry, separated by an alley parallel to Central Avenue (3b). Butler Paper would be required to clean up its site; opening Newport Street to Moore Avenue would provide a new industrial entrance, keeping trucks out of the neighborhood.

The best solution for Olde Towne is to find an alternative location within Suffolk for the industrial uses in this area, such as the new Suffolk industrial park, and to redevelop the Butler Paper site with new housing (3a). The remaining industrial uses, which are separated from the neighborhood by a ravine and a railway line and are accessed from Moore Street, could remain.

*The northeast part of the neighborhood as it exists (top) with a mixture of residential and industrial uses. Option showing alley separating new housing from Butler Paper (below left), and option showing new residential development on the Butler Paper site (below right).*

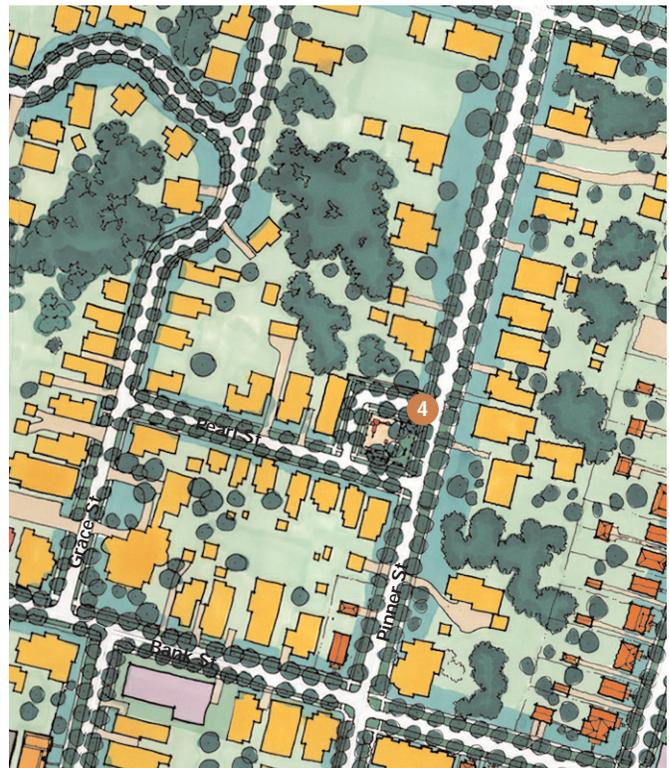
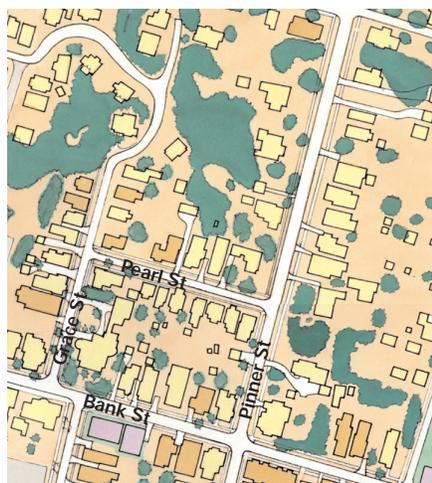


*Eye-level view looking north along Pinner Street at Pearl Street as it exists (top) and as proposed with the new corner park (middle). Existing plan (below left) and master plan (below right).*

**4 Neighborhood Square at Pearl and Pinner**

Pinner Street was historically one of the most prestigious addresses in Suffolk. The grand houses that line the street were built by many of the City’s founders. Today, the street continues to be the heart of the neighborhood, and the solid, historic houses have continued to attract new residents.

Many neighborhood residents recommended the creation of a small central square or park where neighborhood children can play and residents can meet and relax. A badly dilapidated house at the corner of Pinner and Pearl Streets provides a great central location for such a square. The plan calls for the acquisition and demolition of the house and the creation of a small, landscaped pocket park with a playground. The park will be surrounded by a narrow one-way street and faced by houses.



**5 Holladay Street Infill and Joyner Park**

Holladay Street was identified by residents and neighborhood police as a part of the neighborhood with dilapidated houses and a high incidence of crime. During the charrette, the design team created two alternative designs for this area.

The first alternative (5a) shows mostly new houses on the west side of Holladay Street and rehabilitated existing houses on the east side. The existing Joyner Park is improved with an expanded tot lot and game courts. A new street around the park would be lined with new houses.

In the second, more aggressive alternative (5b), both sides of Holladay Street

are redeveloped with new houses. In addition, a new neighborhood park is created in the center of the block to replace Joyner Park. The park, surrounded by several new streets, creates a new residential address on the east edge of the neighborhood. The new north-south street will provide a clean edge to the neighborhood and create an ideal context for the renovation of the old warehouse buildings on Moore Street.



**Joyner Park**  
*As it exists today*

**Holladay Street Revitalization**

*Option (left) showing a combination of new and revitalized houses and an improved Joyner Park; second option (right) showing new houses and a new park.*



**6 Train Station Area**

The southeast corner of the neighborhood, near the old train station, has experienced disinvestment due to the negative influence of a nuisance convenience store on East Washington Street.

Following the recommendations of charrette participants, the plan calls for the demolition of the old Helig Meyers store and warehouse, the construction of new single family houses and small apartments buildings facing Holladay Street, a new neighborhood convenience store, and renovation of the historic apartment building. The old train station, which is presently being used by the railroad company as a storage facility, is proposed to be renovated and reused as a restaurant or coffee shop. The storage yard around the railway station is to be revitalized as a landscaped park.

In addition, a new police precinct building is being constructed at the corner of Pinner and East Washington which will help to stabilize this area.



*Existing plan (above right), and master plan showing the renovated train station and park and the revitalized Helig Meyers block (right).*

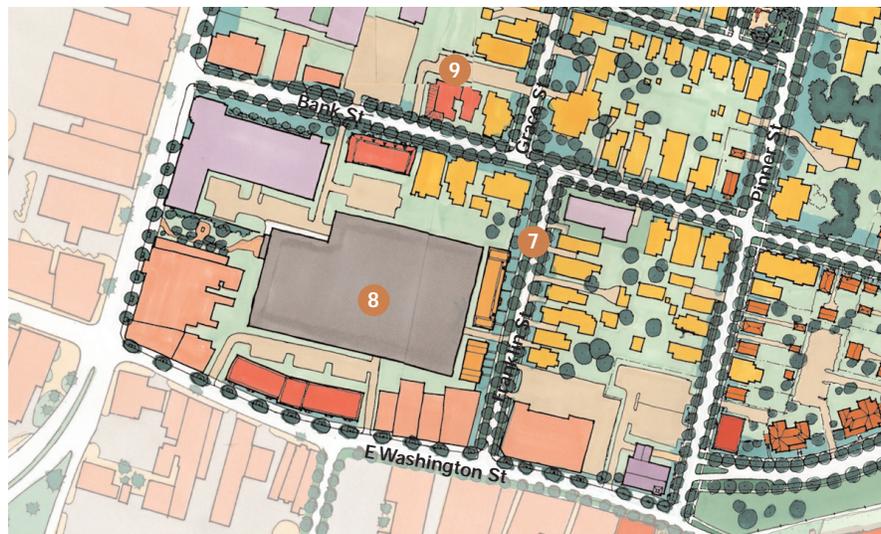
*Train Station and storage yard (left); apartment building at Bank and Pinner (below left).*

**7 Franklin Street Mixed Use Area**

Franklin Street was recently rezoned to allow for office as well as residential uses. The plan recommends new mixed-use liner buildings along the west side of Franklin Street, screening the parking behind. Streetscape improvements include uncovering the historic paving, adding historic lighting, street trees, and on-street parking.



*Master plan showing new mixed-use buildings along Franklin and Bank Streets, parking garage and renovated buildings.*



**Franklin Street**

*View looking north on Franklin Street from East Washington Street as it exists (top and middle left); and as proposed (below left).*

**8 Municipal Parking Garage**

The existing courthouse parking lot between Main Street and Franklin Street serves the courthouse well, but is not an asset for downtown Suffolk. It does not provide enough parking to encourage downtown shopping on Main Street and Washington Street. Furthermore, the lot is visible from Washington Street, creating the wrong image for a historic downtown. The charrette participants recommended the construction of a large parking structure in the center of the existing surface lot that could be surrounded by mixed use buildings on all sides to shield it from view. The garage

can be built in phases to minimize disruptions and will help to revitalize downtown retail.

**9 Bank Street and Grace Street Improvements**

Recommended improvements to Bank Street, on the north side of the proposed garage, include uncovering brick street paving, installing historic lighting, and renovating historic buildings. The Bank Street Temple and the mansion at Franklin and Bank could be renovated to serve as a restaurant and bed and breakfast.

*Historic Temple on Bank Street (left); Annis house (right).*



*Master plan showing new mixed-use buildings along Franklin and Bank Streets, parking garage and renovated buildings.*



**10 College Court**

College Court was built between 1914 and 1920 as housing for the faculty of the Suffolk Female Institute. The cluster of craftsman houses arranged around an interior court is unusual for the eastern part of the country. The college closed and after remaining empty for a number of years the houses were recently purchased by Mickey Garcia and Trevor Spiers from Preservation of Historic Suffolk, Inc. The homes are now being restored and are offered for sale. The overall plan creates an improved court

and access to parking. Because the houses face the interior court, a decorative exterior fence will be installed along Finney Avenue to provide an attractive privacy screen for the backyards.



*A historic home at College Court (above right); master plan showing renovated College Courts and streetscape improvements (right).*



## iv General Guidelines

olde towne has a rich and unique history and character. Design guidelines can set the standards by which specific projects and initiatives are measured over time. Design guidelines allow new development to occur while reinforcing and building upon the qualities of Olde Towne that residents enjoy and cherish so much. 19

### Streetscape Improvements & Entrances

The streets in Olde Towne are a great neighborhood asset; however, the original streetscaping, including the paving, lighting and trees have not been well maintained over the years. The plan recommends a systematic revitalization of the neighborhood streets as funding becomes available. Street improvements can reinforce the unique historic character of neighborhood and help calm traffic. Recommended improvements include:

- brick paving (new or uncover existing)
- street trees (prune existing, plant new)
- underground utility wires
- corner bulb-outs to calm traffic and delineate on-street parking
- Olde Towne street signs.

*The streets in Olde Towne Portsmouth (right) are a good example of how streetscape improvements can be used to revitalize a neighborhood.*



**Street**

**Improvements**

*Existing Pinner Street section (top right), proposed street section showing the revitalized streetscaping (middle right) and eye-level view showing streetscaping (bottom right).*



**Residential Development**

Infill residential development throughout Olde Towne will tie together strong areas of the neighborhood. The relationship of houses to streets and parks, including setbacks and front porches, are based on those of existing Olde Towne houses. Lot sizes and architectural character are based on traditional Suffolk neighborhoods.



**Architecture**

*Typical residential buildings (left).*

**Street Section, Elevation and Detail Plan**

*Cross section of typical new residential street (top right). Closeup street elevation (middle right) and plan (bottom right) showing the typical new houses.*

