



*Advocate.
Educate.
Act.*

Sustainable Saratoga
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September 12, 2014

Mr. Mark Torpey, Chair
Saratoga Springs Planning Board
City Hall
474 Broadway
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Mr. Steven Rowland, Chair
Saratoga Springs Design Review Commission
City Hall
474 Broadway
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Mr. William Moore, Chair
Saratoga Springs Zoning Board of Appeals
City Hall
474 Broadway
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

RE: PROPOSED CITY CENTER PARKING STRUCTURE

Dear Members of the Land Use Boards:

Sustainable Saratoga is a not-for-profit organization that promotes sustainable practices and the protection of natural resources through education, advocacy, and action, for the benefit of current and future generations in the Saratoga Springs area. We promote "smart growth" land use principles and procedures.

For nearly a year and a half we have been monitoring this project and urging the City Council and the City Center Authority to conduct a public review process. This is a very important project on a significant piece of public-owned land.

This is not your typical private development project that normally appears before you for site plan review. It is being constructed on public land, and the structure will eventually be turned over to the City.

Because of its uniqueness, we have been advocating:

- Greater public involvement in the planning process.
- Planning in the context of a comprehensive vision for the entire city-owned parcel.
- Compliance with existing zoning standards and guidelines.

- Consideration of creative mixed-use functions.
- Incorporation of innovative and environmentally sustainable features.

During your review of this project, we would urge you to consider the following.

1. CRITICALLY REVIEW THE PLANNING THAT HAS GONE INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROJECT.

It concerns us that planning and design of this project is nearly finished without having had significant public outreach and discussion. There have been no public meetings to discuss alternative locations, plans for the other portions of the public space or alternative programs and designs for the proposed facility.

The City Center Authority has stressed that this project is a collaboration between the City and the Authority. If this is true, then the public interest items relating to this project should be reviewed and openly discussed. From our perspective the following issues should be reviewed:

- Demand for the facility:
 - How was it determined that a structure for 500 cars was needed?
 - Was any consideration given to teaming up with other interested commercial or governmental interests in a joint venture?
- Alternative locations considered:
 - Were any other locations for a parking structure considered, such as the Hilton Hotel parking lot? Or the central portion of the big parking lot behind City Hall?
- Alternative designs considered:
 - What other facility schematic designs were considered by the City Center Authority, and why were they rejected?
- Accommodation of mixed uses:
 - Were complementary uses such as street-level commercial considered?
- Overall plan for the area:
 - How does the site selection impact any future expansion plan for the City Center facility?
 - How does the site selection impact future use of the City-owned property? Why isn't there an overall concept master plan for this property?

Attached are two alternative concepts for the site that we have drafted to begin to get some thinking started. We are not particularly favoring either of these alternatives, but just want to be sure that some alternatives were considered and evaluated.

We have also become aware of the attached three alternatives that were developed by Cardinal Direction Landscape Architecture, who gave us the following statement.

"Dedicating this property as a parking garage is a long-term urban design commitment, and one the City mustn't take lightly. Cardinal Direction Landscape Architecture permits Sustainable

Saratoga to use these three plans to help inspire public discourse and generate the best possible design option that will benefit the entire City for the long term. None of these three plans is considered the preferred solution, as that one has probably not yet been conceived. But all three do offer ideas and solutions that could be feasible. It is the responsibility of the City (the Commissioners) to consider the broad urban design and economic impacts any development on this property could have for many years to come."

The public will have far more confidence in the final design of the project if it understands the elements that went into the planning.

2. CONSIDER THE ORDINANCE RECOMMENDATION FOR LINER BUILDINGS.

Since 2003 Saratoga Springs' zoning ordinance has had a guideline that encourages liner buildings for downtown parking garages. Article 3.1.2D.1 states:

"Parking structures should be set back 50 feet from property line of all adjacent streets to reserve room for liner buildings. If no liner building is constructed in conjunction with construction of the parking structure, the yard should provide publicly accessible civic space."

Ideally, full height buildings should line the street frontage of parking structures. Ground floor commercial activity is critical. It is possible that the upper floors could have parking or residential uses. The greater the ratio of active land uses to associated parking, the more activity the downtown will have. Downtowns with higher ratios of parking tend to serve the interests of out-of-town visitors and commuters, often in lieu of land uses that would serve people who live in the city and who may prefer a walkable live-work-play environment. An example of good integration of parking is the mixed use structure at 138 High Rock Avenue. Commercial uses such as Jacobs & Anthony are on the first floor. Behind and above them is parking. Above the parking are residential uses. On the other hand, the blank rear facade of the same building on Henry St has virtually no activity and disrupts the urban fabric of downtown. The parking behind the Marketplace building at 125 Railroad Place is another good example of how to keep commercial activity along the street frontage.

Liner buildings for parking facilities are an important feature that should be taken seriously in Saratoga Springs. Small shops along the first floor frontage of the Woodlawn Avenue parking structure would have been a big asset to the downtown. They may have even stimulated the redevelopment of the block across the street. Liner buildings along both High Rock Avenue and Maple Avenue should be considered for the proposed City Center parking structure. The City could lease out the construction and management of the new commercial spaces. It is too good of an economic opportunity to miss, and there is enough land to accommodate a mix of uses. Existing retail locations on High Rock Avenue and Maple Avenue could benefit from additional economic activity, but they could become less attractive if a large new parking garage disrupts sightlines and pedestrian connections to other parts of downtown, without providing its own active uses.

If the Planning Board chooses not to require liner buildings for this parking structure, the Board should articulate why such a decision would be in the public interest.

3. CONSIDER EXTENDING ELLSWORTH JONES PLACE TO HIGH ROCK AVENUE.

The City Zoning Ordinance also states in Article 3.1.2A:

“Street networks should create blocks with a maximum perimeter of 1,200 feet in T-6 zone.”

The existing city block that this proposed parking structure will sit upon is already about 7,000 feet. This is nearly 6 times the standard and is difficult for pedestrians to navigate.

If Ellsworth Jones Place were extended as a public street to High Rock Avenue, the new block perimeter would be about 1,600 feet – slightly larger than the recommended standard. The parking structure could easily be located to the south of this new connecting road. The area to the north could temporarily remain a public surface lot or be reserved for future expansion of the City Center or other private or public development.

Shorter block lengths and a new connector road would have many advantages, including greatly improving the traffic flow to and from the City Center and making the entire neighborhood more pedestrian friendly.

The design of the new street should comply with the City’s Complete Streets policy.

If the Planning Board chooses not to require this street extension, or at least a provision for its future construction, the Board should articulate why such a decision is in the public interest.

4. MEET THE STREETScape DESIGN REQUIREMENTS FOR MAPLE AVENUE AND HIGH ROCK AVENUE.

The T-6 Guidelines in Article 3.1.2B1 says that there should be on-street parking, curbs, street trees, sidewalks and streetlights. T-6 guidelines also call for benches, trash cans and informational kiosks.

It is also important that this project streetscape along Maple Avenue accommodate the plans for the new Greenbelt Trail. The concepts for this trail were recently adopted as a policy guide by the City Council. Appropriate sidewalk and right-of-way width for this trail along Maple Avenue should be incorporated into this project.

Consideration also should be given to some preliminary plans being developed for a linear park along the High Rock Avenue right-of-way that would eventually link High Rock Park to Congress Park.

5. RECONSIDER PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE/PARKING STRUCTURE OVER MAPLE AVENUE.

National Smart Growth guidelines that are widely published state that skyways or tunnels should be avoided. The concept is that such structures rob sidewalks of pedestrian life and hurt surrounding retail businesses.

We think the proposed large encroachment of a parking structure over Maple Avenue constructed to connect the parking structure to the City Center building is not a good planning solution.

Conventioneers and other people using this parking structure should be encouraged to use the public sidewalks along the streets to get to their destination.

Many planners have described the public street as a “room with walls” – space that has defining buildings as walls, clear and open to the sky. To cover that street with a “ceiling” over that street would destroy that public space.

6. CONSIDER ACCOMMODATION OF MULTIPLE TRANSPORTATION MODES.

Over the last year and a half we have urged the City and the City Center to explore the feasibility of including multi-modal features in the project. These might include enclosed rack spaces for bicycles, charging stations for electric cars, taxi stands or calling areas for cabs, priority parking and discounts for car/van pools, a downtown car rental agency, etc. It could also be advantageous for the City Center to incorporate inter-city bus service into the facility.

7. CONSIDER INNOVATIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ELEMENTS.

This potential project presents an opportunity for the city to improve environmental conditions through the use of green infrastructure elements. Choices in building materials can substantially reduce the short-term and long-term environmental impacts of the construction. Elements such as porous pavement and subsurface infiltration can help limit stormwater impacts. The planting of large species trees, particularly if combined with improved planting areas, can further reduce stormwater impacts, shade and beautify the structure, and mitigate air quality impacts from the concentration of vehicles utilizing the lot. Cisterns could be built to collect rainwater for use in the City’s tree and flower watering programs to reduce costs and conserve resources. In addition, the top level of a parking structure is an ideal location for innovations such as small scale wind turbines, solar panels, or a planted roof. These innovative features would enhance the perception of this very public area and could make it an attraction itself.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments on this important project.

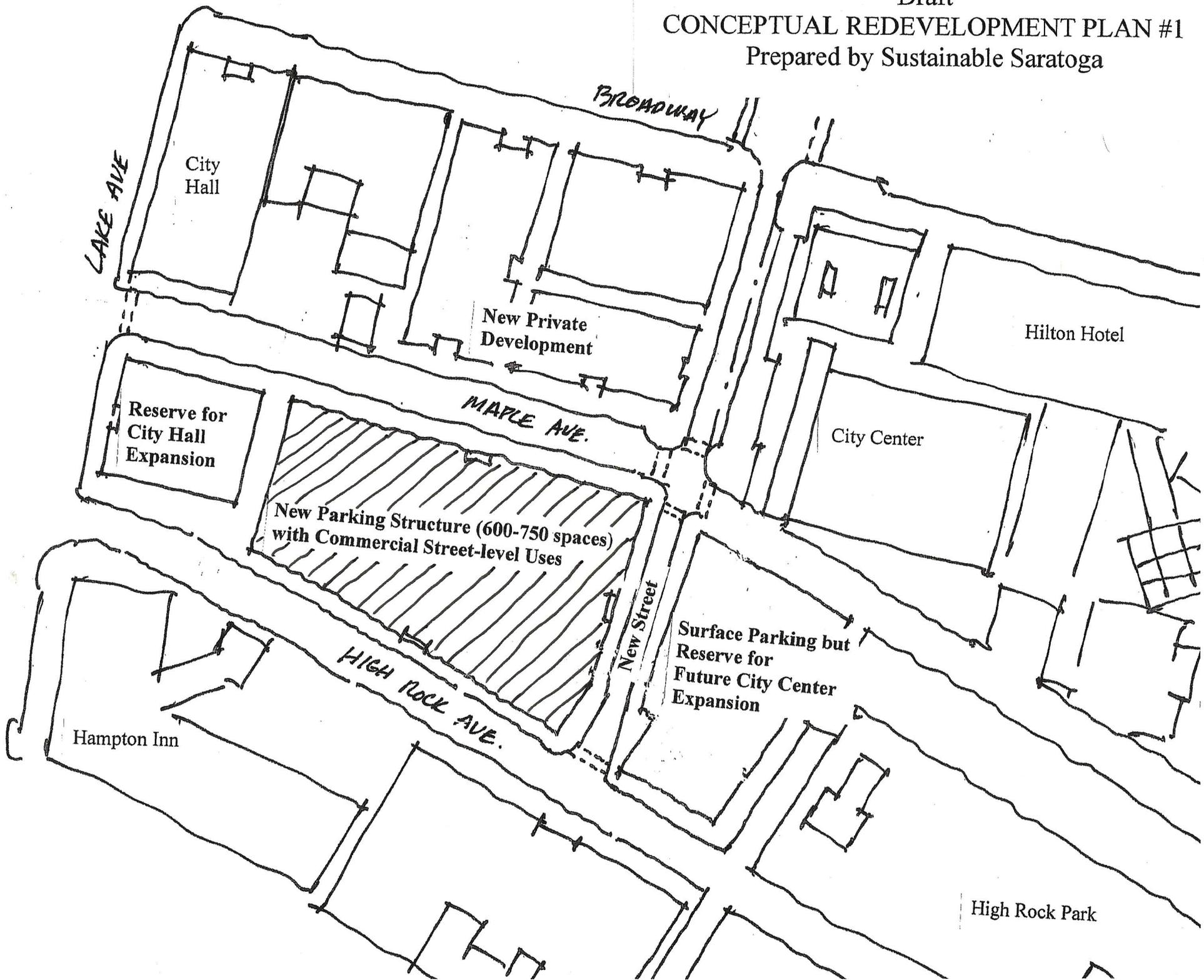
Sincerely,

Harry Moran
Chair, Board of Directors

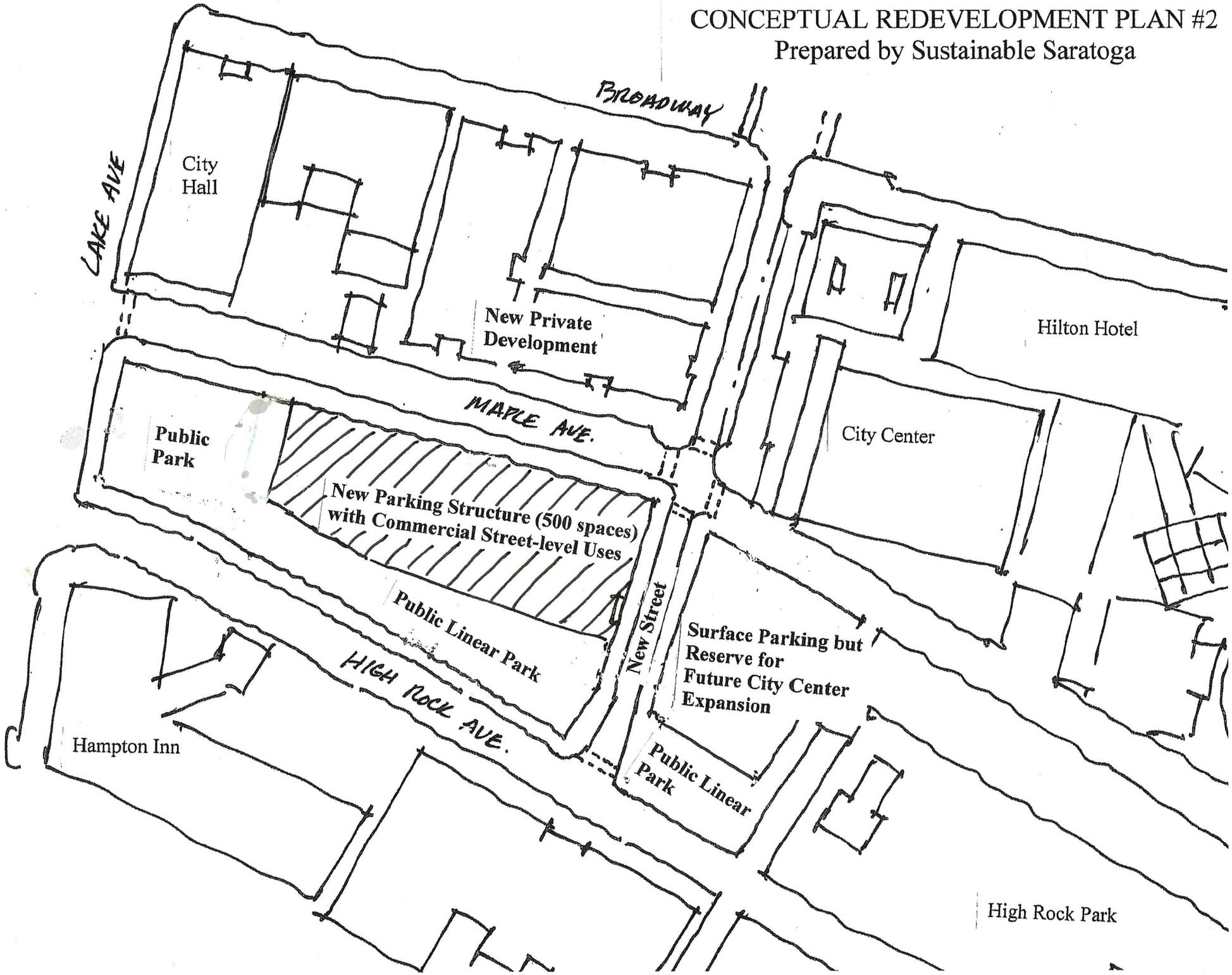
cc: Mark Baker, City Center Authority President
Mayor Yepsen
Commissioner Franck
Commissioner Madigan
Commissioner Mathiesen
Commissioner Scirocco

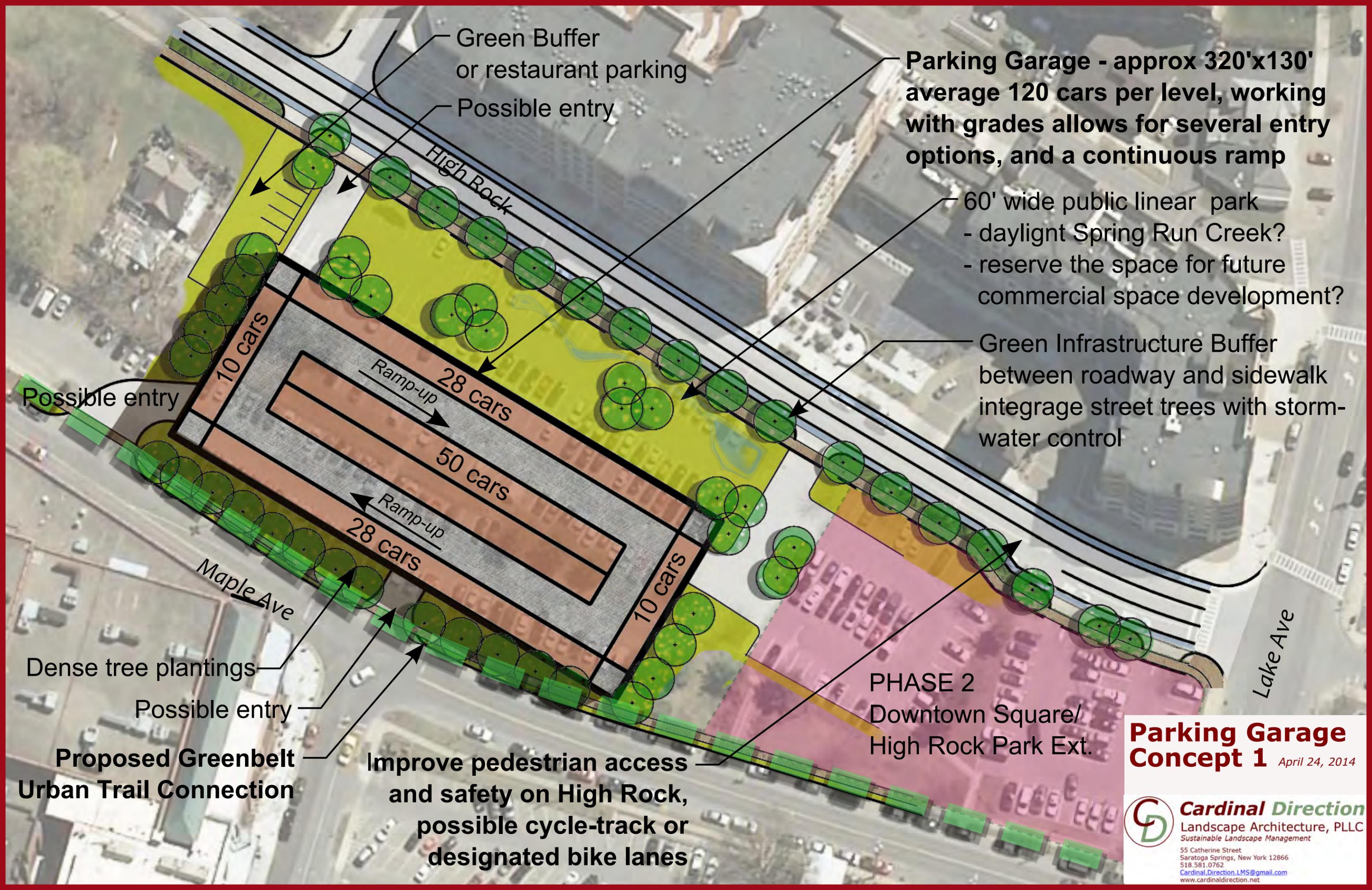
Attachments (5)

Draft
CONCEPTUAL REDEVELOPMENT PLAN #1
Prepared by Sustainable Saratoga



Draft
CONCEPTUAL REDEVELOPMENT PLAN #2
Prepared by Sustainable Saratoga





Green Buffer
or restaurant parking

Possible entry

Parking Garage - approx 320'x130'
average 120 cars per level, working
with grades allows for several entry
options, and a continuous ramp

60' wide public linear park
- daylight Spring Run Creek?
- reserve the space for future
commercial space development?

Green Infrastructure Buffer
between roadway and sidewalk
integrates street trees with storm-
water control

Possible entry

10 cars

Ramp-up

28 cars

50 cars

Ramp-up

28 cars

10 cars

Maple Ave

Dense tree plantings

Possible entry

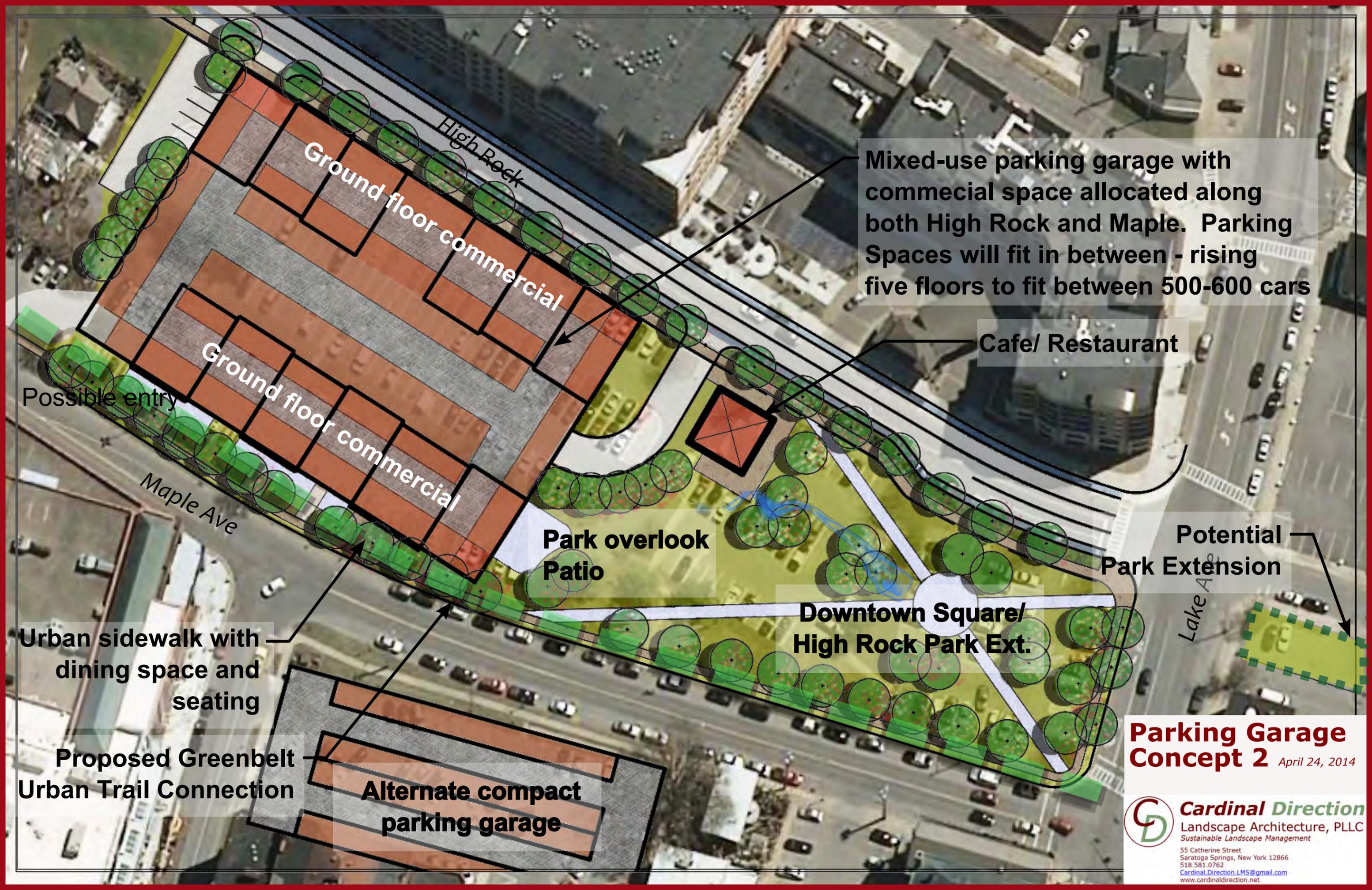
**Proposed Greenbelt
Urban Trail Connection**

**Improve pedestrian access
and safety on High Rock,
possible cycle-track or
designated bike lanes**

PHASE 2
Downtown Square/
High Rock Park Ext.

Lake Ave

**Parking Garage
Concept 1** April 24, 2014



Mixed-use parking garage with commercial space allocated along both High Rock and Maple. Parking Spaces will fit in between - rising five floors to fit between 500-600 cars

Cafe/ Restaurant

Possible entry

Ground floor commercial

Ground floor commercial

Park overlook Patio

Downtown Square/High Rock Park Ext.

Potential Park Extension

Urban sidewalk with dining space and seating

Proposed Greenbelt Urban Trail Connection

Alternate compact parking garage

Parking Garage Concept 2 April 24, 2014

**City Center parking Garage
180-190 cars per floor**

Convert existing "gray-space" to an active "Town Square". Options include

- Commercial infill
- High Rock Park Extension
- Spring Run daylighting
- Pedestrian Mall/ Plaza

**Infill along High Rock,
could be eliminated in favor
of park**

Greenbelt

**Urban in-fill development
with active street-scape
and sidewalks**

Alternate compact parking garage

**Parking Garage
Concept 3** April 24, 2014