Project overview
In the early 1900s, Union Station was a hub of activity in Shelburne Falls, with train service to NYC and Boston.
In late 1800s, trolley service was added. Tracks came across the trolley bridge—now known as the Bridge of Flowers—and traveled up Depot Street.

Passengers and cargo could travel to Colrain in 37 minutes.
The Rail Yard
In a bird’s-eye view from the north
By 1927, the trolley had shut down: too much debt.

By 1960, the only trains carried freight through town, without stopping.

Union Station was burned down in 1973, as part of a training exercise for firefighters.
Community brings project to fore

- Shelburne Falls residents want a better parking lot—one that feels more connected to the rest of town
- Franklin Regional Council of Governments offers advice and expertise.
- FRCOG collaborates with others:
  - Town of Buckland
  - Town of Shelburne
  - The Shelburne Falls Partnership
  - Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association
- FRCOG asks the Conway School to help develop some ideas.
What is the Conway School?

- 10-month master’s degree program, started in 1972 in Conway, MA. (Now in Easthampton)
- The concept: small classes (18), real projects, real clients. Quite different from traditional design school.
- Students take on three projects during the program in fall, winter and spring. Each project results in a formal presentation and a printed set of recommendations and plans.
- The Rail Yard is a project from fall 2017.
- Students come from all over the country, with a range of backgrounds.
- About me: from Vermont, but raised in Wisconsin. Work history includes 15 years in landscape design, primarily as a weed-puller and hole-digger.

the Conway School

Graduate Program in Sustainable Landscape Planning + Design
Goals

Community says
• Add space for ART
• BLOCK VIEW of railroad
• CLEAN UP junk
• Reduce RUNOFF
• Enhance WAY-FINDING
• Create a GATHERING AREA
• Provide public REST ROOMS
• Accommodate BUS PARKING
• Add more LIGHTING
• Make a PLAYGROUND
• Add BIKE RACKS

Project goals
• Create a DESTINATION
  Give people a reason to come to the Rail Yard.
• Reinforce LINKS
  Make the Rail Yard an integral part of Shelburne Falls.
• Reduce RUNOFF
  Prevent stormwater from washing pollution into the Deerfield River.

“Any way to get the train not to blow its horn?”

“Showcase ‘found art’ from railroad, farm and industry.”

“Yes to lights, but not shining in my window!”

“How about a nature playground?”

“I’m concerned about landscape upkeep.”
Before design, there is **ANALYSIS**. 
**LOTS** of analysis.
The Rail Yard is close to everything—yet disconnected

Trolley Museum and Art Garden
3-minute walk from the Rail Yard
- Museum: Restored 1896 trolley car
- Art Garden: Community-supported art-making space

The Rail Yard
In a bird’s-eye view from the north

Deerfield River

Residential neighborhood

Which way?
The Trolley Museum and the Art Garden lack clear way-finding signs. Open, disorganized space makes it unclear that there is more to see here.
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Deerfield River, Salmon Falls and the Potholes
10-minute walk
Views of waterfall and “potholes” formed by post-glacial water flow and stones.

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Missed opportunity
Steep slope (48%) separates restaurant from parking area; diners park in unmarked spaces along Depot Street. Visitors approaching the lot on Ashfield Street are likely to miss it.
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1-minute walk

**Blue Rock Restaurant**
3-minute walk
Entrance on Depot Street

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Arrival zone is complex; path to lot is not always clear to new visitors.
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  - Shopping, restaurants, galleries
  - Candlepin bowling

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Bridge of Flowers
5-minute walk
- Pedestrian-only bridge, originally built as a trolley bridge
- Overflowing with flowering plants
- Draws 35,000 visitors a year

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Broken link
The Bridge of Flowers and village center remain visually cut off from the lot.
Existing conditions

Half-acre lot offers ample parking and a great view

- Main entrance is easy to miss
- Two types of paving: asphalt and gravel.
- "Can I park here? Should I?"
- Best view in town. Well, ONE of the best views. There are so many!
- Second entrance on Depot Street

DePOT STREET
ASHFIELD STREET

Asphalt
Gravel
Trolley tracks

Blue Rock restaurant
Salmon Falls Art gallery

Salmon Falls Art gallery
Blue Rock restaurant

Second entrance on Depot Street
Traffic flow is irregular, unpredictable

- The main entrance is narrow and congested, constrained by train and trolley lines.
- This could cause bottlenecks, especially at the entrance off Ashfield Street.
Traffic flow is irregular, unpredictable

- Parking is abundant, but there is no place to sit or gather.
- A meeting point could link visitors to walkable destinations in the village.
Space at the southeast end of lot is not used for parking, but the town stores gravel here.

Not welcoming.

“Nothing further to see here.”
Several times a day, trains rumble through on the Pan Am Railway, which runs along the southwest edge of the lot.
Traffic flow is irregular, unpredictable

- Although there is a sidewalk on one side of Ashfield Street, pedestrians often share the same space with vehicles.
- In the winter, it sometimes goes unplowed.
When it rains, stormwater runoff pours—into the river

- In a typical summer rainstorm (1-inch per hour), runoff from the half-acre lot can total 15,400 gallons, as represented by the two tanks.
- The two tanks show runoff generated by the asphalt (left) and gravel sections of the lot.
- Runoff from parking areas contains pollutants.
- Some of the runoff will flow into the Deerfield River
Runoff

How water flows across the site

The far end of the parking lot has no storm drains, so runoff flows off the lot onto Depot Street.
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- Runoff from this slope flows onto the rail bed, which could contain creosote and other chemicals.
- Two storm drains take runoff from about half of the lot. The outflow for both basins is the Deerfield River.
- The area that’s downslope from the lot could infiltrate runoff, but vegetation is sparse and the bank is steep (30 to 45%). The area is shaded for most of the day, so new plants would need to be shade-tolerant.
Design process begins with ‘WHAT IF?’
Design exploration | What if?

Design process begins with ‘WHAT IF?’

... we keep it simple?

• Two small bump-outs provide gathering space.

• A bioswale runs along the southwest edge to filter runoff from the railway and the parking lot.

Community requests

New public restroom

Places to display art.
Design exploration | What if?

Design process begins with ‘WHAT IF?’

... there’s a park and public art?

- Staircase links restaurant on Depot Street with the Rail Yard.
- Viewing platforms!
- Sidewalk spans the entire lot.
- Bioswale filters runoff.
- Porous asphalt filters even more runoff.
- Park offers gathering space, platforms for sculptures, and a public restroom.
Design exploration | What if?

Design process begins with ‘WHAT IF?’

... the trolley returns to town?

Reroute the trolley down Depot Street, the same route it traveled back in the 1920s.

With trolley tracks out, there’s space for a gathering area and path on the crest of the bank.

Bioswale filters runoff.

New public restroom, a community request.

Sidewalk spans the entire lot; continues southeast to the Trolley Museum and the Art Garden.
Reality check: What would it take to bring the trolley back?

What if the tracks were re-laid and passengers could ride down Depot Street again?
What if visitors to the Bridge of Flowers could ride the restored No. 10 car up to the Trolley Museum, the Art Garden, and the Salmon Falls Gallery?

Is it POSSIBLE or PIE-IN-THE-SKY?
Trolley?

Not right now, but not out of the question

Here’s what town planners (and other visionaries) will need to consider:

- Who pays? It will cost money. Rough estimates for design and implementation exceed $15 million.
- Who will operate and maintain the trolley? The village? Franklin County?
- What about liability issues?
- Any precedents? Have other towns restored trolley service?
- Can funding be secured through historical preservation grants?
THE DESIGNS
**Trolley Plaza rejuvenates historic junction**

But the trolley rides on rubber—not rails.

A **trolley bus** circulates between the Rail Yard and other key locations in town. A welcome sign at the arrival zone orients visitors to Shelburne Falls.

Arriving at the trolley plaza, looking northeast. On summer weekends, the restored No. 10 trolley takes riders to the Trolley Museum.

Arriving at the trolley plaza, looking northeast. On summer weekends, the restored No. 10 trolley takes riders to the Trolley Museum.
Trolley Plaza rejuvenates historic junction

But the trolley rides on rubber—not rails

A sidewalk allows pedestrians to move safely along the parking lot, which has room for 30 cars in addition to three ADA-accessible spaces.

A plant-filled bioswale takes runoff from the lot and adjacent areas. Overflow connects to the town stormwater system.
Bioswale? What’s that?

- To some, a bioswale looks like a ditch with weeds growing in it.
- **ITS PURPOSE:** collect stormwater runoff and channel it into the ground.
- **WHY IS THIS GOOD?** A bioswale keeps polluted runoff out of waterways. It helps prevent erosion and recharges the groundwater.
- Can you make it so it doesn’t look like a weedy ditch? **YES!**
Two abundantly planted “bump-outs” filter runoff and offer benches with great views of the river, the village and the surrounding mountains.

Central “bump-out” includes a public restroom, a top request from the community.

Central “bump-out”
- Benches (2)
- Rest room: Waterless toilet works without plumbing; ADA accessible
- No curbs, so runoff can flow into planted area

Plants
A. Hawthorn trees (2) (Crataegus spp.)
B. Little bluestem grass (Schizachyrium scoparium)
C. Sweetfern (Comptonia peregrina)
D. Bush honeysuckle (Diervilla lonicera)
**Bump-out? What’s that?**

- An area where the curb juts out into the roadway or parking area.

- Often used to enhance pedestrian safety by reducing the distance to cross the street.

- In the Rail Yard, bump-outs serve another purpose: Openings in the curb capture stormwater runoff from the parking lot and the sidewalk.

- Instead of flowing into storm drains, runoff is filtered into the soil.
Looking toward the Trolley Museum.
No plumbing, no problem

- A public restroom is one of the most-requested additions to the Rail Yard.
- Because there is no plumbing, a composting toilet might be a good option.
- Composting toilets are permitted in Massachusetts under a wide range of applications.
- Some of them look quite nice. They’re not just “outhouses.”

Special considerations

- Many models require an underground area that’s accessible for maintenance.
- Routine care can be done by the town—or by a service provider.
- “Vault-style” toilets are less expensive to install, but would require regular clean-outs from a service provider.
Peninsula bump-out
- Benches (3)
- Lawn area with pedestal for sculpture
- No curbs, so runoff can flow into planted area

Plants
A  Hawthorn trees (2) (*Crataegus* spp.)
B  Little bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
C  Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
D  Bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*)

Looking toward the Salmon Falls Art Gallery
Back Green
- Benches (2)
- Platform for sculpture

Plants
A Oak trees (3) (*Quercus* spp.)
B Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)

Backdrop planting marks the end of the lot and a transition to the Trolley Museum and the Art Garden.
“Treehouse” decks show off river views

Small park provides a place to gather

Viewing platforms and a stairway link the Rail Yard to Depot Street and the Blue Rock Restaurant. Where possible, openings in the platforms allow trees to grow through.

Because the platform matches the grade of the parking area, more visitors will have access at the top level.
A “treehouse” platform, with stairs that go from Depot Street to the Rail Yard parking area.
**Tree planters** extend into the parking lot to create shade and break up the long expanse of pavement. Raised curbs protect the vegetation—which consists of salt-tolerant trees and grasses—but curb cuts allow stormwater to flow through. The parking lot has room for 30 cars—in addition to three ADA-accessible spaces.

A plant-filled **bioswale** filters runoff from the lot and adjacent areas. Overflow connects to the town stormwater system.

Tree planting areas have a raised curb with a cut on the end to accept runoff. Dense under-planting will keep out weeds. No mowing required.
At far end of the Rail Yard, a park offers a public restroom, as well as space for gatherings and play. Trees break up the view of the adjacent railway.

Low-growing shrubs and perennials stabilize steep slopes and help filter runoff without blocking views.

A sidewalk links visitors from the Salmon Falls Gallery to the neighboring Art Garden and the Trolley Museum.
If you could cut a slice through the plan, here’s what it might look like.
Putting more “park” in parking

Arriving at the park from the end of the parking lot, looking southeast.

Park Detail
- Benches
- Picnic tables
- Lawn area with pedestals for sculpture
- Restroom
- Path to the Art Garden and the Trolley Museum

Plants
A  Pin oak trees (3) (*Quercus palustris*)
B  Little bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
C  Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
D  American hornbeam trees (2)

Putting more “park” in parking
THE PLANTS
Hard-working plants heal, protect, and beautify

- Plants in the Rail Yard must earn their keep by being durable, functional, and beautiful.
- There is no dedicated town gardener, so the plants will need to survive with minimal help.
- During the first two seasons, the town will need to allocate about three hours every two weeks during the summer.
- After the first two years, it’s likely that the plants will thrive with monthly care during the growing season.

Heal

*In the BIOSWALE*

- To ensure that the bioswale doesn’t look like a weedy ditch, choose a limited list of plants to add order without making it look “designed.”
- Plant densely so weeds don’t overtake the new plants.
- Bonus: Choose plants that attract pollinators.
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Protect

*On the STEEP BANK*

- Existing mature trees include red maple, white oak, and Scotch pine. Plant new trees to ensure a lasting canopy.
- Undergrowth is sparse. More plants are needed to stabilize the bank.
- Plants should not block the view of Shelburne Falls.
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** Beautify**

*In GATHERING SPACES*

- Add shade whenever possible. The Rail Yard can be a hot, sunny space, especially in the summer.
- Choose durable plants that thrive in existing conditions with minimal care.
- Whenever possible, use native species.
Thank you