

Council Members,

I wanted to share an idea that came out of a recent conversation and aligns closely with themes discussed at the CNU conference I attended—specifically, the concept of incremental development. This approach encourages small, strategic steps to activate spaces while long-term plans continue to evolve.

Last week, I had a productive meeting with Ray Caldwell from the Community Foundation about the Town's vision for the empty lot along the St. Joseph River on Main Street. I shared our current progress—cleaning up easements and preparing an RFP—and during the discussion, Ray asked a simple but powerful question: "*Why isn't the Town using this space now?*" I left that meeting inspired to explore ways we could begin to bring life to this area. One idea I'd like to present for your consideration is this: what if we leased the old Lavender Patch building, located on that riverfront lot, for a short-term, low-barrier retail use?

While the space doesn't yet have a formal name, I believe it holds real potential as a future anchor for downtown activity. This could also be an opportunity to explore naming options that reflect the Town's identity—something like The Bristol Landing, The B-Lot, Pirates Cove, or River Commons—but for now, I want to focus on how we might activate the space.

For example, we could approach a business like Rise & Roll or Vanilla Bean Creamery to gauge interest in a one-year lease. They wouldn't need a full kitchen—just a space to distribute their products. The lease could be structured to cover utilities, or possibly more. This kind of temporary activation could serve as a test case, helping us learn what works, spark community interest, and build momentum for the broader redevelopment effort.

While I understand the RDC cannot lease property directly, perhaps a transfer to the Town could make this feasible. Even if the property sells within the year, a short-term use could bring visibility and energy to the site. And if the business does well, they might become a long-term tenant as development progresses - bringing long-term value to the Town!

More than just a business venture, this is a way to engage the community. Imagine a small retail shop with outdoor seating overlooking the river—perhaps alongside a Saturday morning farmers market in that same space. It would allow residents and visitors to experience our vision for walkability, vibrancy, and economic opportunity—before the final plans are even built.

I'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback on this idea. I'm genuinely excited about what this downtown riverfront space could become—even now in its early state—and how a small, intentional step like this could set the stage for bigger things.