3. STAIRS, BLUFFS, AND OVERLOOKS

As a river city situated along the bluffs, Lynchburg has a series of terraces and rock cliffs that give it a distinctive character. The proposed Upper and Lower Bluff Walks and the series of stairways throughout the downtown will capitalize on these unique features. The two Bluff Walks will parallel the hillside, with the Lower Bluff Walk taking on the character of a narrow urban street and the Upper Bluff Walk characterized by an improved landscape with long-range views out to the hills across the river and west toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. The staircases will extend the cross streets (Tenth Street, Eleventh Street, etc.) with pedestrian routes where vehicular circulation is impossible. Each staircase will exhibit a different theme that complements Monument Terrace and creates a related set of downtown elements.

3.1 Lower Bluff Walk

Between Jefferson Street and Commerce Street, a steep bluff rises up approximately 65 feet, limiting access to the broad, level riverfront area below but providing wonderful views to the river itself, the entire riverfront terrace, and the green hill beyond. Historic brick warehouses are built into the side of the bluff where they can take advantage of the upper-level access to Commerce Street and lower level access to Jefferson Street.

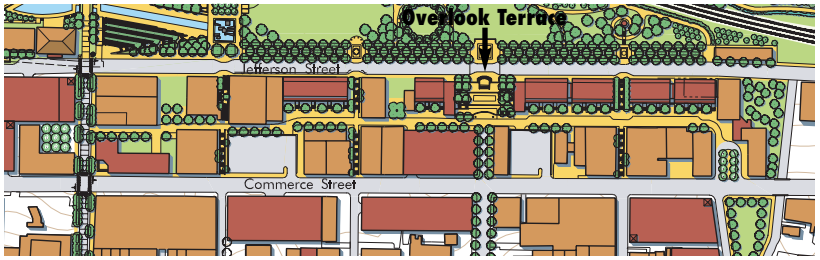
The Lower Bluff Walk will extend for one-third of a mile between the existing and new buildings on Jefferson Street and Commerce Street, creating an entirely new environment in downtown Lynchburg. This new pedestrian-scaled street will be as narrow as 15 feet and no wider than 25 feet. On either side of the Bluff Walk, brick buildings will be two to three stories, giving the space an intimate feeling. The new buildings on the north side of the walk will be two to three stories above the Bluff Walk and approximately seven stories above Jefferson Street as they face the

Lynchburg could be known as the "City of Stairs."

The Lower Bluff Walk will have a narrow, urban character.

riverfront, replicating the scale of the existing warehouse buildings.

The paving materials on the Bluff Walk will be brick and/or unit pavers that convey a sense of pedestrian scale. Some limited access by vehicles will be necessary, however, to access front doors on the north side of the Bluff Walk and to access lower-level parking areas on the south side. Lighting should be pedestrian in scale and should complement the historic warehouse buildings in this area.



Plan of Lower Bluff Walk

The Lower Bluff Walk will extend along the length of the bluff from the Ninth Street Corridor to the new hotel, park, and Welcome Center near Horseford Street. The new J. W. Ould courtyard on Ninth Street will provide a terminus on the west just as the new park and hotel will serve as a terminus on the east. Vehicular access will be primarily from the two ends because of the steep grades above and below the Bluff Walk. Twelfth Street is the only other point where vehicular access should connect between Commerce Street and the Bluff Walk. The design and signage along the Bluff Walk should discourage through-traffic, limiting vehicular access to local businesses, residents and their guests and promoting pedestrian access by many.

The dramatic Overlook Terrace at the end of Twelfth Street will be a key feature along the Lower Bluff Walk. At each cross street, a more modest set of stairs should connect between Commerce Street and the Bluff Walk, and if possible, between the Bluff Walk and the riverfront. The overall effect will be a lively pedestrian zone and a new experience for residents and visitors to Lynchburg.

Implementation Steps

- Acquire land along Lower Bluff Walk route and/or acquire access easements.
- Prepare a detailed site survey to indicate all site structures, building locations, property lines, contours, and spot grades.
- Conduct more detailed design based on the survey to determine the exact location and grading of the Bluff Walk, to detail the necessary construction techniques along the bluff, and to refine the cost estimate.

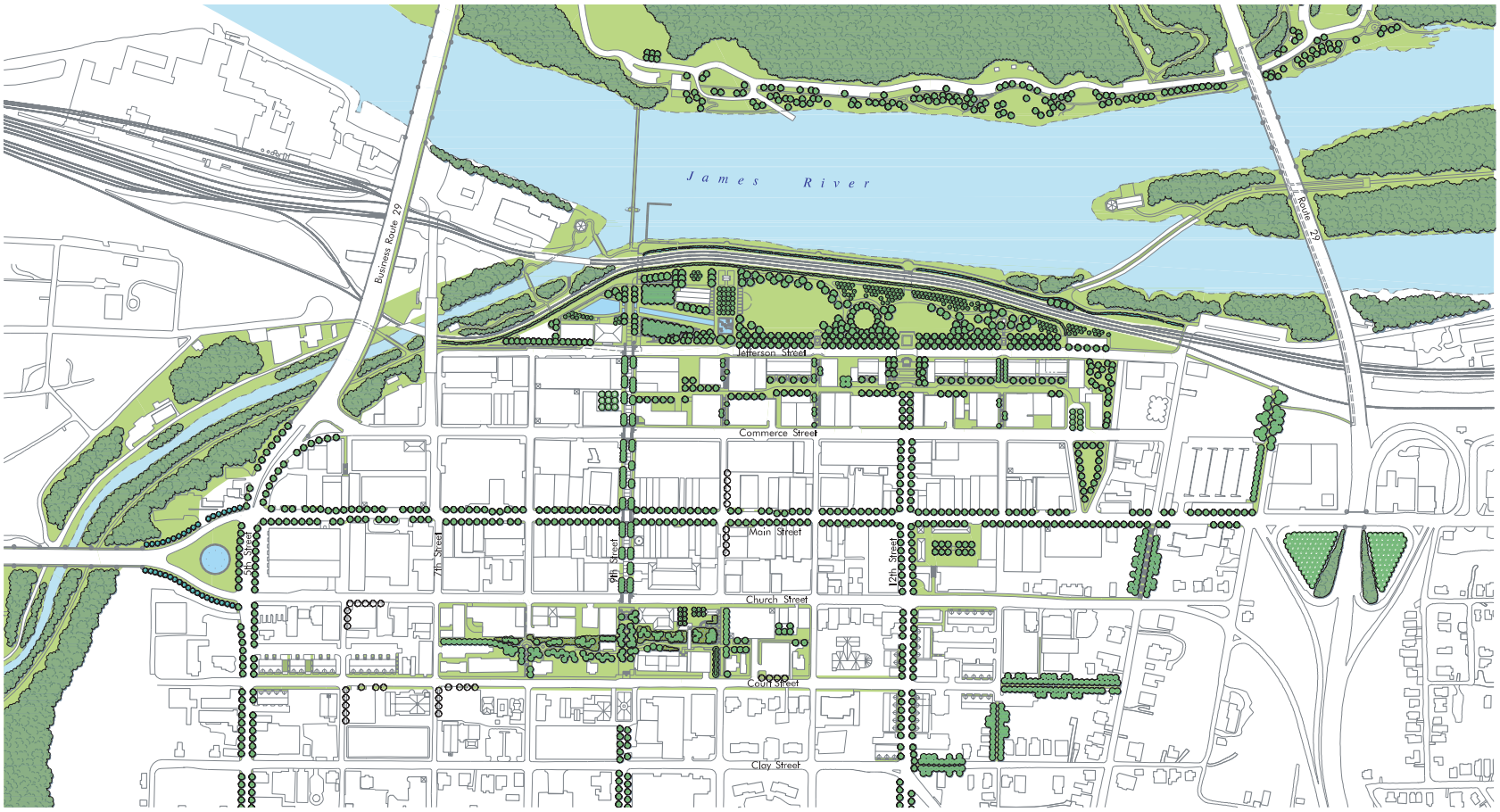


Figure 2. Open Space Framework Plan

The Upper Bluff Walk offers sweeping views.

3.2 Upper Bluff Walk

The Upper Bluff Walk parallels the Lower Bluff Walk but occupies the high ground between Church Street and Court Street. This one-quarter-mile pedestrian pathway will extend the existing Mr. Elder's Rose Garden walkway, which intersects Monument Terrace. The green and open aspect of the Upper Bluff Walk will provide a distinct contrast to the Lower Bluff, making each one a special destination. Quiet sitting areas and landscaped gardens will pick up on the theme of some of the existing character of the bluff today.

The Upper Bluff Walk will thread its way past the Unitarian Church and continue along the shoulder of the slope to Seventh Street. Overlooks and small seating areas can be incorporated into the landscape, marking key points such as the intersection with the Eighth Street stairway and special views out over the valley. One block south of the Upper Bluff Walk is the City Reservoir, which is still active. This beautiful structure still maintains its original green stone base, ornamental iron railings and sculpture. The return to exposed water and fountains would once again make this waterworks an integral part of the Court House Hill neighborhood.

Plan of Upper Bluff Walk

The pedestrian route will extend east beyond the public elevator tower to connect to the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street. Continuing on to Eleventh Street, the Bluff Walk will provide pedestrian access to the new public garage built into the hillside on Church Street.

Implementation Steps

- Acquire land along the Upper Bluff Walk and/or acquire access easements.
- Prepare a detailed site survey to indicate all site structures, building locations, property lines, contours, and spot grades.
- Conduct more detailed design based on the survey to determine the exact location and design elements of the Bluff Walk, and to refine the cost estimate.

Reservoir Adjacent to the Upper Bluff Walk

3.3 City Hall Plaza

The small courtyard (parking lot) at the foot of the City Elevator Tower offers a unique opportunity to provide necessary open space downtown, to improve the experience of using the elevator tower, and to make an important visual connection between the Courthouse Square, the Upper Bluff Walk and City Hall. This 10,000-square-foot site lies at the front door to City Hall and should be treated as a special space that reflects the importance of the City. A park at this location also will complement the unique character of the adjacent cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street.

A small white building marks the corner of Church Street and Tenth Street at the foot of the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street. This historic building should remain as a feature within the plaza and could offer ground-floor uses that complement the open space, such as a small cafe or restaurant. One alternative is to remove the brick building (925

Sketch of City Hall Plaza on Church Street Looking East

Church Street) to allow for a larger park and a direct connection to the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street. If funds are limited, the other alternative is to retain the building for use as a cafe or other public function to work in conjunction with the park. The park could feature a stepped garden, with shady seating areas and a stairway up to the cobblestone street. With either scenario, the plaza area will complement the historic City Hall building and will be enhanced by the architecture of the adjacent buildings.

The Elevator Tower is a key access element that provides an alternative to Monument Terrace for those climbing the steep slope of the Upper Bluff. The lower-level entrance to the elevator lacks significance and grace and should be redesigned as part of the plaza improvements. At some point in the future, the skin (facade) of the Elevator Tower could be replaced to integrate better with the architecture of the surrounding buildings.

This site currently accommodates approximately 21 parking spaces, which are used by the Juvenile and Domestic Court (7), City Hall visitors (7) and City Hall staff (7 behind the 927 Court Street building). Although this use is convenient, replacement spaces should be identified for the public and City staff parking to free up this special site for public use. A proposal has been made to site a multi-level parking garage on this site in order to maximize convenience for the expanding Courthouses. However, a garage will overwhelm this site, ruin the views to and from the Upper Bluff, and preclude the opportunity for open space in this key location. Alternative sites for a convenient garage serving the Courthouses and City Hall are on the other side of Tenth Street along Church Street or at the corner of Ninth and Church Streets.

Implementation Steps

- Ensure that the new parking garage is properly sited east of Tenth Street.
- Obtain a site survey.
- Remove red brick building (Alternative 1).
- Prepare design documentation for the plaza area.

3.4 Cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street

The cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street is one of Lynchburg's unique features, celebrating the history and the topography in the City. With a slope of 22%, Tenth Street connects Church Street and Court Street, and is a key feature in the overall landscape of the Upper Bluff Walk, the City Hall Plaza, and the new parking garage on the bluff between Tenth and Eleventh Street. While it may once have been used for carts, it is too steep for automobiles today. Paved with cobbles, the street has a concrete stair along its length for pedestrian use, although it is little used today. In order to become a vital link and an attractive landmark in the downtown, this cobblestone street needs stair and railing improvements as well as interpretive signage that will make the pedestrian passage more enticing.

Implementation Steps

- Obtain a survey of the Tenth Street area.
- Design the improvements to the street within the context of the City Hall Plaza and the Upper Bluff Walk, exploring different planting treatments and stair and rail detailing.

The City Hall Plaza (in foreground) will connect to the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street.

Photo of Cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street

3.5 Downtown Staircases

Lynchburg should be known as *the City of Stairs*, promoting this distinctive feature as an asset—not a liability. Throughout the downtown, there is a series of stairways climbing the hills of Lynchburg (see Figure 3). The existing stairs can be improved and new ones added to create a set of linked features related to the strong civic image of Monument Terrace and the proposed Overlook Terrace. Each staircase should be unique in its design or theme, drawing from its setting or its context, whether it is Diamond Hill, Courthouse Hill, or the different street endings on the riverfront bluff. A common signage system will provide wayfinding for pedestrians while tying the staircases together into a series of destinations that visitors might seek out. While these minor staircases will not be handicap accessible, the system of existing streets provides handicap access to the top and bottom of each of these locations.

Hidden staircases climb many of Lynchburg's hills.

The Diamond Hill Stairs currently descend from the top of Church Street straight down the hill along the axis of Washington Street, passing through an overgrown thicket and offering wonderful views of the riverfront and a sense of open space in the city. In order to make these stairs more useable as a pedestrian link in the downtown, some improvements are recommended. New stairs will be wider, with a series of landings and a continuous rail. Pedestrian lighting will call attention to this feature in the landscape and will improve safety for those using the staircase in the evening hours. Landscape planting can be informal and natural, but should maintain open views out and allow views toward the stairs from below.

Behind the YMCA, an informal passage could be transformed into a beautiful pedestrian path and staircase up to Washington Street along the axis of Court Street. This new stair will link the Diamond Hill neighborhood into the new residential area along Twelfth Street, and continue up to Courthouse Hill. The pedestrian connections up to Diamond Hill will also be enhanced by another stair climbing from the intersection of Thirteenth Street and Court Street to Clay Street. An existing stair provides the means to climb Diamond Hill along the Clay Street axis.

A number of pedestrian routes now exists between Church Street and Court Street, yet each route should be improved and enhanced. The improvements to Monument Terrace, the public elevator, and the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street have been mentioned previously. The other route that should be improved is the Eighth Street stairs (adjacent to the Allied Arts Building), and in particular, the upper segment between the Upper Bluff Walk and Court Street.

The downtown's steepest bluff rises up from the riverfront, between Jefferson Street and Commerce Street. Ninth Street, Horseford Street, and Washington Street are the primary means for pedestrians to walk between Main Street and the riverfront area. A new wooden staircase

and bicycle ramp now make it possible to walk from the foot of Eighth Street down to the riverfront and the Blackwater Creek Trail. At the foot of Twelfth Street, the Master Plan recommends a major staircase, the Overlook Terrace, which will echo the significance of Monument Terrace as a civic landmark. To supplement these access points, a series of smaller staircases is recommended at the foot of Tenth, Eleventh, and Thirteenth Streets. At the easternmost portion of the bluff, another staircase will connect the high ground at the Corporate Center site to the system of riverfront trails.

Implementation Steps

- Obtain topographic surveys of each location and conduct design studies to determine the exact length and location of each stair, and to refine costs.
- Obtain necessary ownership or easements.

Each staircase could become a unique adventure.

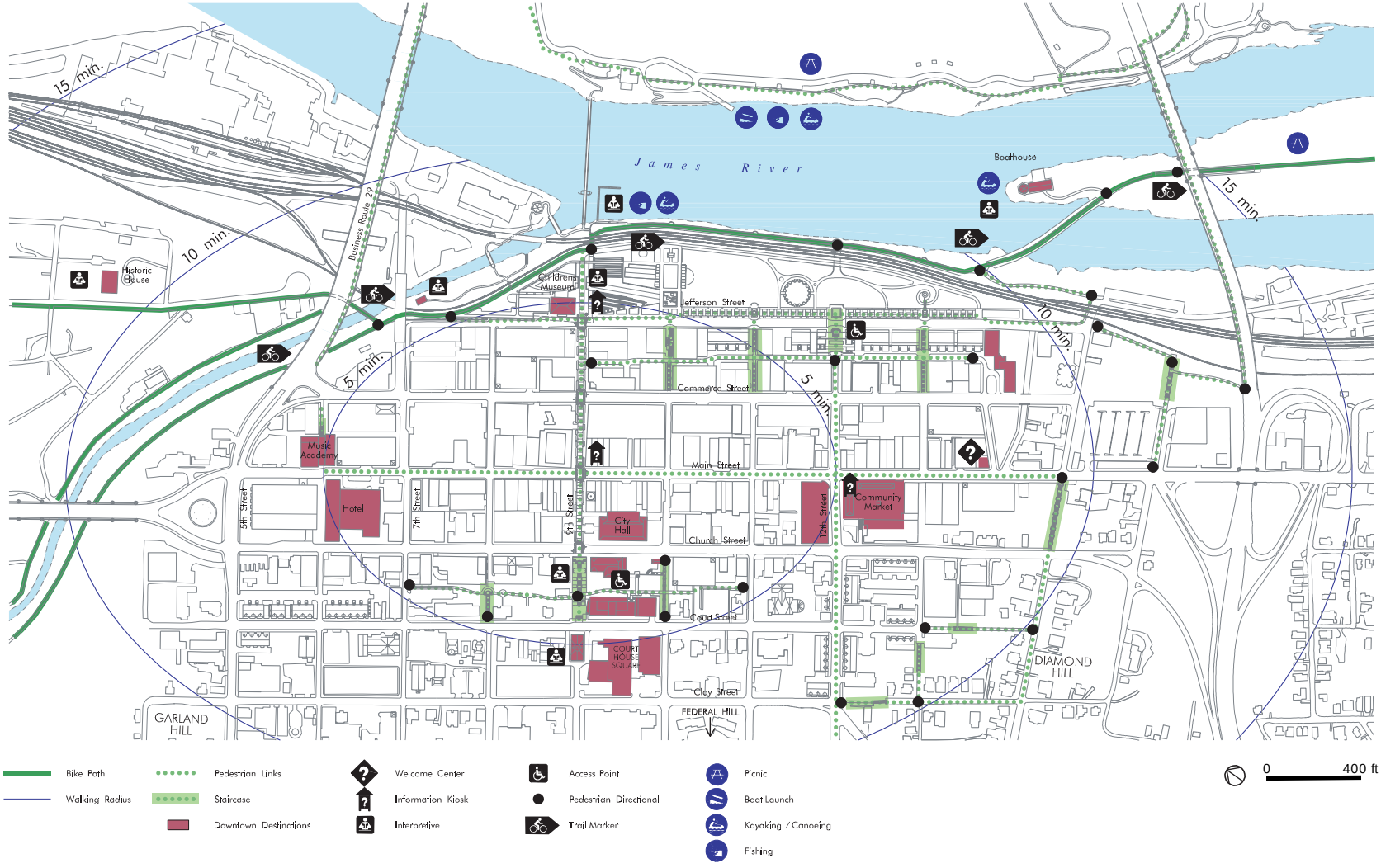


Figure 3. Pedestrian Circulation: Sign Types and Locations