

Northeast Downtown District Master Plan



City of Springfield

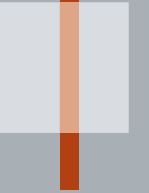
October 2021

Prepared By
Form + Place, Inc.



In conjunction with the
Office of Planning &
Economic Development





Acknowledgements



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CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

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And thank you to the numerous neighborhood stakeholders who participated via the survey, community outreach meetings and interviews.

* Note: “A New Worthington Master Plan” project was produced by Nigel Cummings, Kinjal Desai, and Olivia Ashjian James and published in the Spring 2020 Graduate Urban Design Studio book entitled “Springfield’s Legacy: A Vision for a Transformative Transit-Oriented Union Station District”

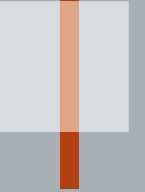


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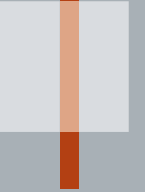


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Executive Summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The northeast section of downtown Springfield's Metro Center neighborhood is characterized by a number of historic brick buildings and warehouses, many of which record once thriving manufacturing industries that included metalworking, paper and the automobile. The initial growth of the area occurred in early to mid-1800's with the extension of the Western Railroad to Springfield, completing the link to Boston, and continued to thrive during the Civil War period due, in part, to its proximity to the Springfield Armory.

Despite numerous setbacks over the years, including the 2012 gas explosion that damaged dozens of buildings in the core of the district, the area holds tremendous potential for redevelopment as a transit-oriented neighborhood. Anchored by the recently renovated Union Station, and the potential connectivity afforded by an anticipated increase in rail service in the coming years, the district is ripe for mixed-income multi-family residential development, including an especially strong demand for market rate units. And in addition to a relatively affordable cost of living, the area benefits from being within walking distance of downtown amenities and cultural attractions, including the Springfield Museums.

Undoubtedly influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, the Northeast Downtown District Master Plan focuses on leveraging the neighborhood's assets, while outlining an implementation strategy intended to help the City of Springfield attract private investment to the area. This Master Plan builds on numerous studies produced in recent years by the University of Massachusetts Amherst and others, and starts by evaluating which recommendations remain relevant today. Key tenets found in these studies include an emphasis on the role that transit-oriented development [TOD] could play, the desire to adaptively reuse buildings of historic merit, the need for public infrastructure improvements and the goal to immediately improve the visual qualities of the district, as a means to changing the perception of blight.



Northeast Downtown District Study Area



Diagramming the new Chestnut Street corridor



Master Plan Process

The Northeast Downtown District Master Plan is the result of a collaborative effort between Form + Place, the Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development, other city departments, officials and local stakeholders, with notable insights from Allen & Major, the UMASS Amherst LA&RP program, MassDevelopment, Davenport Companies and many others.

The Master Plan process commenced in April of 2020 with a presentation summarizing study goals and the solicitation of feedback from local stakeholders, which was conducted via an online survey, due to restrictions on gatherings imposed by the pandemic. During this initial outreach effort, stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on topics including:

- The potential impact of market rate residential development
- Awareness of current development efforts, including the Willys-Overland Building
- Thoughts on the merits of converting Chestnut Street to two-way traffic
- Ideas for how to integrate more usable open space into the district
- Perceived assets and challenges in the neighborhood

This feedback was distilled in order to identify objectives and focus areas for the Master Plan study.

Throughout the spring and early summer of 2020, Form + Place, working with civil engineering firm Allen & Major, explored various alternatives for converting the Chestnut Street corridor into a two-way “Complete Street.” These studies analyzed the street section of the right-of-way from Liberty Street to State Street and considered impacts to traffic flow at key intersecting streets, particularly in the Apremont Triangle area. Feedback from Springfield’s Department of Public Works was critical in weighing the merits of these proposed infrastructure improvements. In conjunction with this analysis, Form + Place produced a series of feasibility studies, contemplating the redevelopment of key buildings along the corridor, the potential of phased infill and the long-range capacity for mixed-use transit-oriented development district wide. In addition, considerable thought was given to the revitalization of public open space, with studies looking at the enhancement of Apremont Triangle, the potential connectivity offered by a mid-block pedestrian greenway linking the Mattoon Street area to Lyman Street and the integration of a new major public park on vacant land adjacent to, and including, the site of the gas explosion.



A new two-way Chestnut Street looking north from Apremont Triangle

With input from Mayor Sarno and members of the Economic Development Subcommittee of the City Council, master plan goals were further refined and re-presented in the summer of 2021 to stakeholders, including business owners, property owners and the Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association.

Key Findings

Based on feedback received during the master planning process, the consultant team, in conjunction with City Staff, identified the following key findings:

- The district needs a vibrant mixed-use commercial spine and converting Chestnut Street into a two-way corridor holds enormous potential for unlocking redevelopment in the district. As a new gateway with direct connectivity to the downtown and the museum quadrangle, local businesses would be well-served by improved streetscapes, bike lanes and highly visible storefronts.
- With Chestnut Street already identified in Springfield's Complete Streets Priority Implementation Network Map as a targeted corridor for redesign, a Complete Streets approach would not only result in a safer, more vibrant pedestrian environment by slowing down traffic and addressing pedestrian crossings but would ensure the preservation of adequate parking needed to support local businesses.
- The district currently lacks a holistic, usable and pedestrian-friendly public realm. While Apremont Triangle is a gem with historic merit, its current size and street configuration limits accessibility, flexibility of use and the ability to effectively engage surrounding businesses in a way that would prove beneficial. Rethinking vehicular circulation could greatly enhance the functionality and experiential qualities of the Triangle.
- Given the inherently small scale of Apremont Triangle and its presumed role as a neighborhood focal point, consideration should be given to developing a larger, more flexible public open space that could accommodate necessary neighborhood amenities – a dog run, a tot lot, flexible gathering space and green space. The impact of COVID-19 has underlined the need for a variety of usable open spaces of differing character, particularly in urban downtown locations.
- Vacant and blighted land caused by the gas explosion and the abandonment of properties whose value, in general, has plummeted in recent years, should be cleaned up to improve the visual presentation of the neighborhood. Even if many parcels are not yet viable for redevelopment, their temporary reuse can strengthen bonds among community members by enhancing the neighborhood while redevelopment efforts progress.
- As with any layered urban environment, it is the secondary and tertiary connections that provide the scale and character that create attractive pedestrian environments both within a district and by tying it into neighboring areas. The idea of a north-south mid-block pedestrian greenway linking Lyman Street and the Union Station area to Apremont Triangle and the Springfield Museums holds this type of potential and should be pursued.
- While a diverse range of housing alternatives should be purposefully preserved in the surrounding area, ninety percent of downtown units receive subsidies and the core of the district is in need of market rate multi-family residential at a level of density commensurate with its TOD setting. Having a critical mass of residents with disposable income will help support local businesses and promote entrepreneurship.



- Where feasible, the historic fabric should be preserved and adaptively reused. Davenport Properties' recent redevelopment of the Willys-Overland Building into sixty apartments with ground floor commercial space is a marvelous example of the successful repositioning of an historic asset. Feasibility studies conducted by Form + Place on key parcels in the district, including the Birnie Building at Apremont Triangle and the Absorbine Jr Building on the corner of Chestnut Street and Lyman Street, reveal that there are historic properties that hold strong potential for mixed-use residential redevelopment, particularly once the district gains momentum and rents improve.
- Supporting local businesses and integrating maker spaces [i.e. Make-It Springfield], as well as places for artistic and cultural activities, should be an important component of the district. This may require the public and/or private subsidizing of key ground floor tenants that are essential to creating a lively street environment.
- While the district has a rich and diverse history, feedback suggests that it should not have a "brand" forced upon it but, rather, allow its identity to evolve over time. That said, the transit-oriented qualities inherent in its proximity to Union Station would seem to merit acknowledgment. Two potential names that emerged through the process are "The Union Station District" and "The Worthington Park District."

Outdoor dining on Apremont Triangle in the old Pearl Street right-of-way



Recommendations and Implementation

Master Plans should be considered living, evolving documents implemented over a period of years or even decades. This Master Plan for the Northeast Downtown District is part of a continuum of studies and should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure that the vision and goals outlined herein are still relevant and being appropriately executed.

The Master Plan recommends that the city prioritize the following goals for the district:

1. Convert Chestnut Street into a two-way Complete Street

As a first phase of implementation, Chestnut Street should be transformed into a two-way “Complete Street” between Liberty Street and Harrison Street, allowing it to become a mixed-use commercial “spine” for the district. In conjunction with this, the street network around Apremont Triangle should be reconfigured, closing Pearl Street on the south side of park between Bridge Street and Chestnut Street, while converting Bridge Street to two-way traffic between Pearl Street and Dwight Street. In addition, the flow of traffic on Hillman Street should be reversed to travel westbound between Chestnut Street and Dwight Street. The Springfield DPW has expressed support for these proposed changes. The opportunity to provide direct connectivity between I-291 and downtown will create obvious economic benefits for local businesses, and streetscapes will be upgraded to safely accommodate pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles. While this plan has verified the feasibility of the two-way conversion extending to State Street, it is recommended that a more in-depth analysis be undertaken.

2. Transform Apremont Triangle into a more usable open space

Investment in the public realm should also address the revitalization of existing open space, and the proposed redesign of the park at Apremont Triangle would greatly enhance a key focal point in the neighborhood. It is recommended that the streets in the Triangle be reconfigured to allow for an historically sensitive expansion of the park to provide a more flexible and usable open space. This would include the closure of Pearl Street along the south edge of the park and the conversion of Bridge Street to two-way traffic from the intersection of Pearl Street, across Chestnut Street, to Dwight Street. Particular emphasis should be given to integrating the historical monument honoring Springfield’s 104th Infantry in a celebratory location in the Triangle, as well as to recording the historical shape of the Triangle through the juxtaposition of expanded hardscape and softscape areas. These refinements should have a notable positive impact on surrounding businesses.



3. Develop a holistic public realm for the district

This Master Plan recommends a continued focus on establishing a new network of open space in the district. The development of a new centralized park with amenities, such as a tot lot and a dog run, will help provide the district with a new identity, especially as vacant lots become infilled with new development. Locating this park to the north between Taylor and Worthington Streets will distance it appropriately from Apremont Triangle and, if linked by a mid-block pedestrian “greenway” tying together the Springfield Museums area to Union Station, it will become another important node in a walkable and well-connected neighborhood.

4. Encourage market rate residential development

The 2013 Zimmerman/Volk study “Residential Market Potential, Downtown Springfield,” updated in 2019, reports that 90% of all downtown units are being subsidized in some form. The study also indicates that there is a strong demand for market rate housing in the downtown, largely fueled by younger singles and couples, and bolstered by empty nesters and retirees. While market rate housing will have many economic benefits, it is important to balance housing opportunities by integrating a reasonable mix of affordable units. Phased redevelopment should start with the adaptive reuse of buildings with historic qualities. The available layering of funding resources, including state and federal historic tax credits, make this a logical first step. An infusion of market-rate residential units will help support commercial revitalization and, as rents start to rise, some of the challenges to ground-up infill development will begin to be eased. Feasibility studies suggest that the area proximate to Chestnut Street alone could support between 500 and 600 dwelling units, with a full district build-out accommodating up to 1,500 new units.

5. Remove blight through place-making Initiatives

In addition to the public realm aspirations already enumerated in this report, short term place-making initiatives should be undertaken. An important aspect of facilitating the successful revitalization of the neighborhood is to ensure that, during the phased redevelopment period, vacant lots are cleaned up and blight is removed. The demolition of structurally unsound buildings and the interim reuse of undeveloped parcels can change not only the visual aesthetics of a neighborhood but the perception of it as being a safe place. Community gardens, recreation facilities [i.e. basketball courts] and flexible market spaces can be incorporated, even on a temporary basis and without significant investment, and can become focal points for interaction and community building. And, as evidenced by the beautiful murals found throughout the downtown, public art can have a similarly positive impact.



The proposed Worthington Park [in the distance] can provide another focal point for the district

6. Support the Vision of an Urban Lifestyle

The vision for a newly revitalized district with an influx of residents supporting a thriving mixed-use urban experience will be realized through the thoughtful integration of commercial and community-based uses. In addition to the preservation of historical building fabric and the creation of a network of redesigned streetscapes and open spaces, the district will need amenities such as a grocery store / specialty market, a community center and other family-centric services, such as pet stores, houseware stores and fitness facilities. While affordable artist space and live/work studios are common constructs considered in many emerging neighborhoods, encouraging entrepreneurs through subsidies and creating opportunities for ownership [rent to own], particularly for local business owners, should be an integral part of revitalizing Springfield's Northeast Downtown District. As a new gateway to the downtown, the neighborhood should offer a unique urban lifestyle that is safe, walkable, directly connected to the downtown core and celebrates existing cultural assets.

7. Facilitating Adaptive Reuse and Infill

The Chestnut Street corridor is anchored at either end of the district by buildings ripe for adaptive reuse. To the north, historic structures such as the Collins Building, the Absorbine Jr Building and the Mardi Gras can anchor a new gateway for those arriving by car, bus and train, while Willys-Overland, the Birnie Building and others grace the southern end at Apremont Triangle. Flexible zoning that includes development standards that encourage both adaptive reuse and new infill should be considered. This might include relief from dimensional criteria, parking and loading requirements or crafting an approach to approvals that simplifies the tiered review process. Design guidelines can be a very effective tool for cities to set expectations for architectural detailing and site design / place-making criteria at multiple scales – the district level, the block level and the building level.

The full Master Plan report provides additional details, case studies and graphics illustrating the intricacies of a redesigned Chestnut Street corridor, the character of newly proposed and revitalized public parks as well as conclusions from feasibility studies that explore the redevelopment potential [density] on key parcels in the district. The report also seeks to prioritize these recommendations into a framework that provides a roadmap for their phased implementation. Public-private partnerships can unlock many possibilities, and there are certainly numerous financial incentives and programs available to municipalities and developers alike, with many - such as MassWorks [now available through Massachusetts' Community One Stop for Growth] – seemingly ideal candidates for a context such as this.



Community space for local entrepreneurs



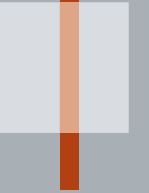
Conclusion

This Master Plan presents the case for a multi-faceted approach that emphasizes public investment in infrastructure and public realm improvements as a catalyst for stimulating private investment in mixed-use development with a substantial multi-family residential component. The district's strategic positioning as a gateway to the downtown - due to its proximity to both Union Station and the interstate highways - and its walkable connectivity to the downtown and Springfield Museums, make it a prime location for a dense urban neighborhood with expanded market-rate housing opportunities. Careful consideration must be given to avoid the negative impacts of gentrification by ensuring accommodations are made to strengthen local entrepreneurs and businesses. An immediate focus on improving the blighted landscape by contemplating the short-term reuse of vacant parcels will help improve the perception of the district and provide amenities for surrounding neighborhoods, while a phased development process unfolds. At a time when remote working has become commonplace, the retail / restaurant experience has changed and the concept of community interaction has evolved due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, a revitalized urban neighborhood with historically preserved building stock, generous public open spaces, flexible streetscapes and access to transit seems most welcome. This paradigm holds the potential to define a new urban lifestyle in Springfield's Northeast Downtown District.



Changing the perception of the district





Introduction



I.0 Introduction

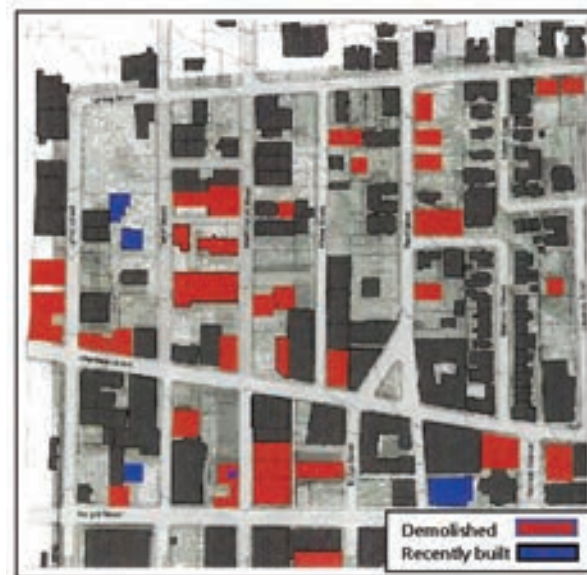
I.1 HISTORIC CONTEXT

The northeast section of downtown Springfield's Metro Center neighborhood is characterized by a number of historic brick buildings and warehouses, many of which record once thriving manufacturing industries that included metalworking, paper and the automobile. The initial growth of the area occurred in the early to mid-1800's with the extension of the Western Railroad to Springfield, completing the link to Boston, and continued to thrive during the Civil War period due, in part, to its proximity to the Springfield Armory.

Despite numerous setbacks over the years, including the 2012 gas explosion that damaged dozens of buildings in the core of the district, the area holds tremendous potential for redevelopment as a transit-oriented neighborhood. Anchored by the recently renovated Union Station, and the potential connectivity afforded by an anticipated increase in rail service in the coming years, the district is ripe for mixed-income multi-family residential development, with an especially strong demand for market rate units. And in addition to a relatively affordable cost of living, the area benefits from being within walking distance of downtown amenities and cultural attractions, including the Springfield Museums.



Willys-Overland Building in 1939 [Source: Springfield Preservation Trust website]

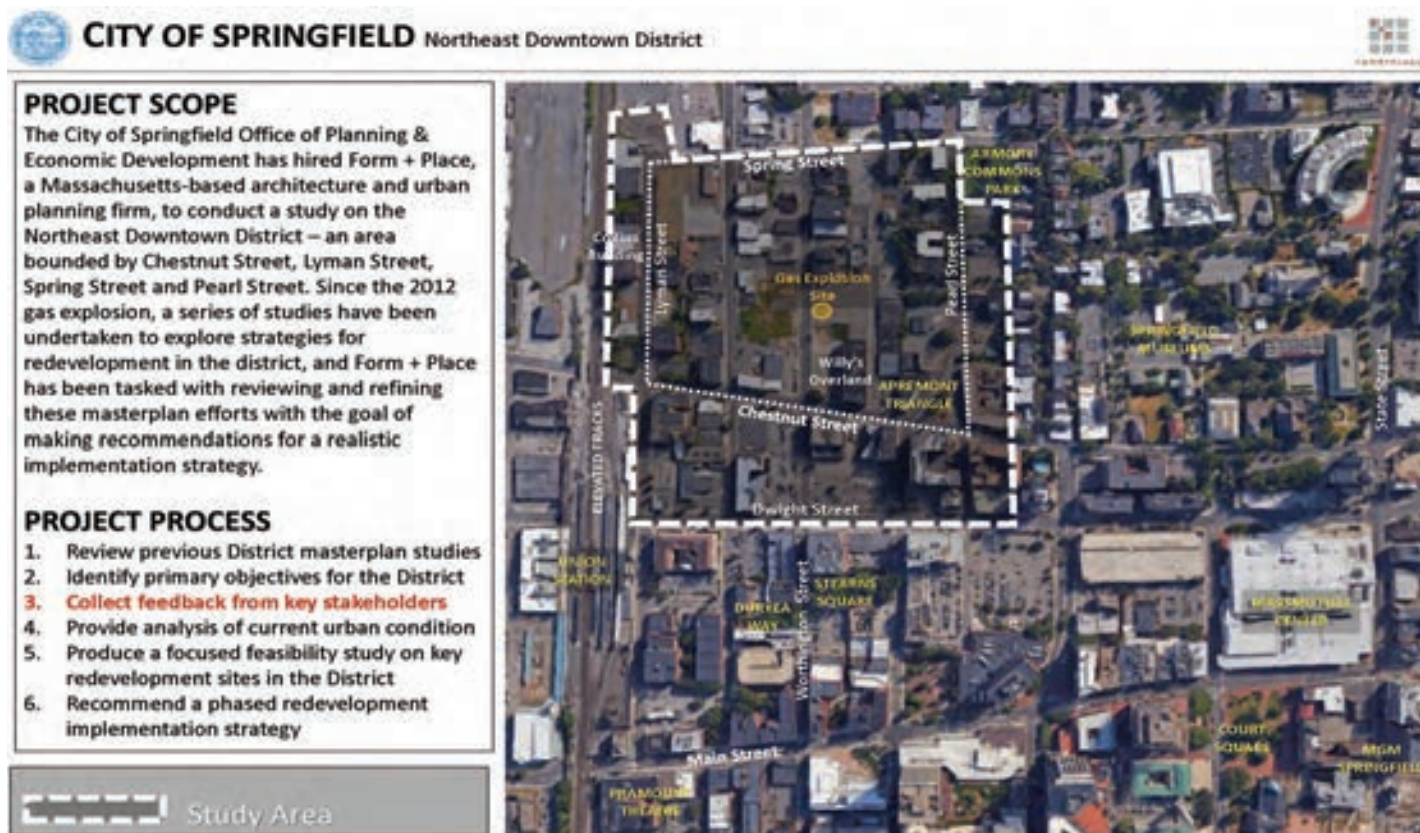


UMass LA&RP analysis: impervious surfaces and demolished urban fabric in the district [Placemaking in Metro East Springfield, 2018]



I.2 NORTHEAST DOWNTOWN DISTRICT PLANNING AREA

In its October of 2019 Request for Quotes [RFQ], the City of Springfield identified the need for planning services to produce recommendations to help implement redevelopment efforts in the Northeast Downtown District – an area defined by Lyman, Spring, Pearl and Chestnut Streets. The neighborhood consists of a mix of uses including light industrial, warehouse, residential, retail and auto, and has been challenged economically in recent years by underutilized parcels, further exasperated by damage from the 2021 gas explosion.



*Project Planning Area:
Scope and Process*

With the Chestnut Street corridor identified early on as a key to redevelopment of the district, the study area expanded slightly to include blocks lining both sides of the previously noted boundary streets. The originally specified tasks for the planning area in the RFQ, included reviewing existing conditions and recommendations from previous studies, coordinating a neighborhood outreach strategy, identifying opportunity sites, considering district branding concepts and providing a high-level analysis of existing infrastructure. A stated goal was to better understand the economic drivers and identify redevelopment goals for the area through analysis and feasibility studies.

I.3 KEY FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

This Master Plan builds on numerous studies produced in recent years, including the 2013 University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Landscape and Regional Planning [UMass LA&RP] project entitled “Home in the Heart of Springfield: The Lower Worthington Street District” and DevelopSpringfield’s 2014 Worthington Street District Planning Study, produced by Utile. In addition, the UMass LA& RP graduate studios have continued to provide analysis and visions for the surrounding downtown Springfield context.

While the current Northeast Downtown District Master Plan is undoubtedly influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, it parallels earlier studies by focusing on leveraging the neighborhood’s assets, while outlining an implementation strategy intended to help the City of Springfield attract private investment to the area. There are common tenets can be found across these studies – many of which remain relevant today:

RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

Transit-oriented development [TOD]: Take advantage of the proximity to the newly renovated multi-modal hub at Union Station. While providing affordable and mixed-income housing options can help alleviate gentrification concerns, market rate housing is critical to this area. Disposable income supports businesses, including local entrepreneurs.

ADAPTIVE REUSE

Preservation of historic building stock is desirable to incentivize. Opportunities to maintain the architectural character of the district should be taken advantage of where possible but, in some instances, there are buildings that are aesthetically pleasing which do not have the structural integrity to merit preservation. Public-private partnerships are critical to facilitating redevelopment - including site preparation and remediation - as even a layering of funding resources may not fully close the pro forma gap in areas where rents have not yet rebounded.

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

Consider public improvement projects that revitalize infrastructure in the district, including investment in existing and new public open spaces, as well as upgrades to street and sidewalk environments.

I.4 PROPOSED MASTER PLAN FOCUS AREAS

I.4

Based on preliminary feedback from the Office of Planning & Economic Development, the review of previous studies and early insights from neighborhood stakeholders, Form + Place identified four initial focus areas for the Master Plan study:

I. CHESTNUT STREET CORRIDOR

Previous studies considered the feasibility of converting Chestnut Street and Dwight Street into “Complete Streets” with two-way traffic and reconfigured sidewalks. With opportunities for adaptive reuse and, eventually, infill projects on vacant lots that line the corridor, Chestnut Street holds tremendous potential to become the mixed-use commercial “spine” that could drive redevelopment of the district.



Aerial and street views of the Chestnut Street corridor, looking south, showing the lack of a consistent street wall



2. APREMONT TRIANGLE AREA

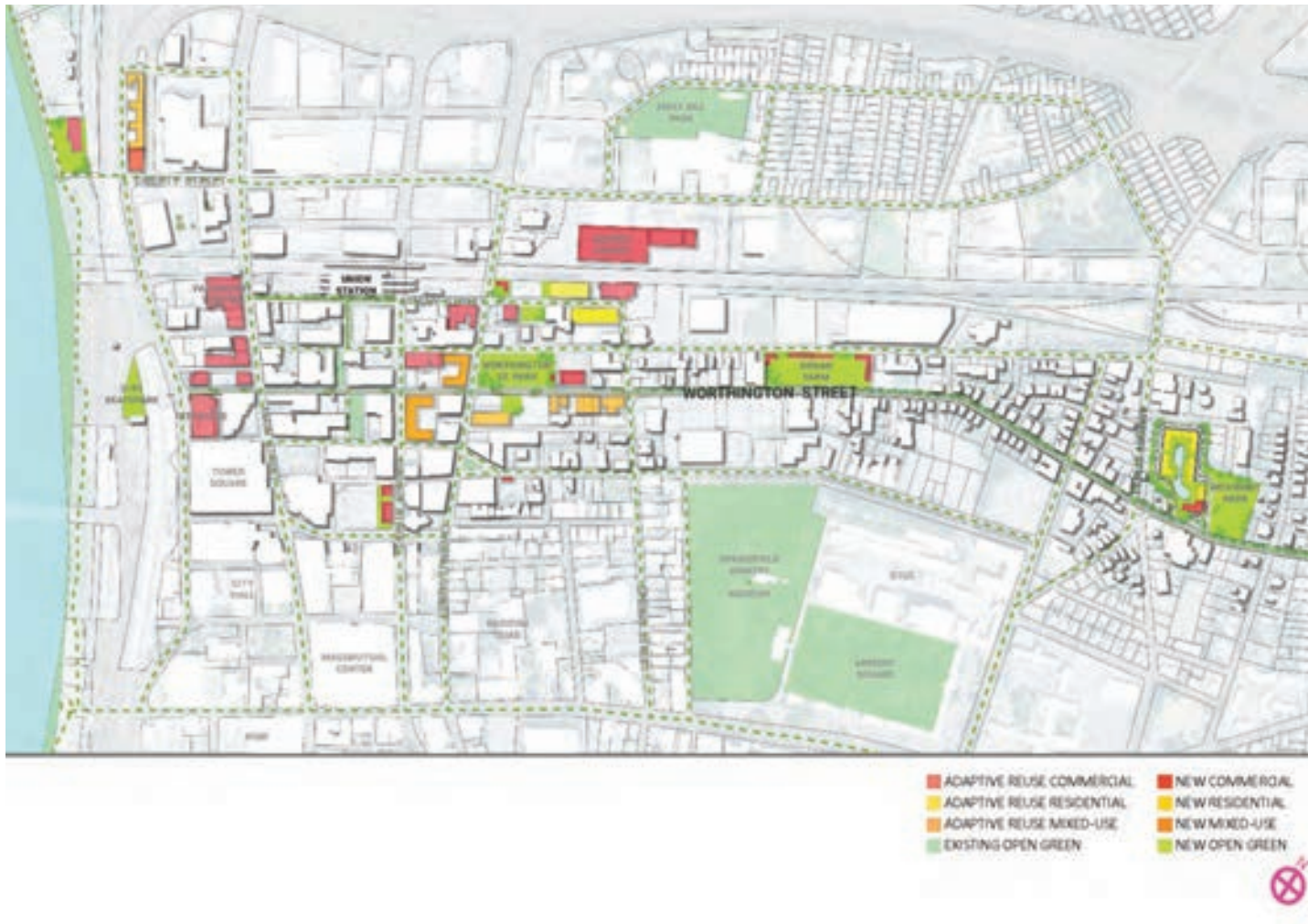
With the adaptive reuse of the Willys-Overland Building recently completed and other adjacent underutilized parcels awaiting a vision, the Apremont Triangle area could become an even more important focal point for the neighborhood. Rethinking how the open space and streets surrounding the park are configured should result in an improved public realm and a strong framework for mixed-use redevelopment, activating ground floor commercial leases.

Aerial and street views of Apremont Triangle showing a lack of emphasis on pedestrian-friendly environments



3. NEW PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORK

Urban environments consist of many overlapping layers, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and diverse open spaces that can accommodate active and passive uses are a large part of what makes an urban lifestyle desirable. A new public realm framework should consider, not only revitalizing existing public spaces, but creating new “places” and “connections.” Often, it is the secondary and tertiary pedestrian connections that define the character of an area.



UMass LA&RP graduate studio project with a network of open spaces providing connectivity along Worthington Street



4. TOD / GATEWAY SITES

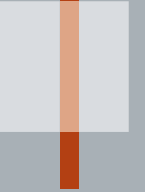
The Lyman Street corridor has numerous buildings and parcels ripe for revitalization, including the Collins Building, which is in the early stages of redevelopment, and the Absorbine Jr Building. Benefiting from proximity to Union Station, mixed-use residential development near the intersection of Lyman and Chestnut Streets could anchor the northern edge of the district and provide a new gateway to the downtown.

*A new “gateway” to the district
from the north*









Analysis + Planning Studies



2.0 ANALYSIS + PLANNING STUDIES

2.1 COMMUNITY VISIONING: OUTREACH & FEEDBACK

With the Master Plan project commencing in early 2020, during the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, it demanded a novel approach to community outreach. Feedback was solicited initially through an on-line survey, which was followed by numerous interviews and meetings held over a period of a year and a half, largely via Zoom.

ON-LINE STAKEHOLDER'S SURVEY [April 2020]

Form + Place crafted a survey with 11 questions intended to solicit current perceptions of the Northeast Downtown District. Facilitated by the Office of Planning and Economic Development, the survey was distributed electronically, together with an 8-page document summarizing a proposed process and goals for a new Master Plan study of the area.

CITY OF SPRINGFIELD Northeast Downtown District

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK PLEASE CLICK ON LINK IN EMAIL TO ACCESS ONLINE SURVEY AND PROVIDE YOUR THOUGHTS

1. What would more **market-rate residential** development [non-income subsidized units that have no rent restrictions] mean to your business and to the feel of the neighborhood?
2. With increased residential units and foot traffic in the area, would you consider **upgrading your property** or adding new uses that could benefit you and these new residents?
3. Are you aware of **current redevelopment efforts** underway at the Willy's Overland Building and the Collins Building on Lyman Street? How do you feel about these projects?
4. How would you feel about **two-way traffic on Chestnut Street** [and/or Dwight Street], as well as new sidewalks and landscaping? Do you think this would add value to your property?
5. Would the revitalization of **Apremont Triangle** – widening sidewalks, narrowing or closing a street, reconfiguring the central green space – make it a more desirable place to be? What would you like to see?
6. Would you be in favor of adding more **mid-block pedestrian connections** like Duryea Way - the walkway between Worthington and Taylor Streets?
7. Would you like to see more **usable open space** – like a new park – and, if so, what types of activities would you like to be able to do in it?
8. What are some of the greatest **assets** in the neighborhood, and immediately surrounding area, today?
9. Are you aware of the increased ridership numbers utilizing **Union Station** [CT Rail & Amtrak 110,900 (2018) & PVTA 1,300,000 (2019)]? Will this have a positive impact on the area?
10. What are some of the greatest **challenges** that the neighborhood faces today?
11. Do you have any ideas for how to **brand** or name this area?

Online Stakeholder
Survey Questions



Feedback from the on-line survey helped to refine the focus of the master planning effort by revealing both interests and concerns of local stakeholders. Based on this input, prioritization was given to analysis and feasibility studies related to potential infrastructure improvements in the district – most notably the Chestnut Street corridor and the Apremont Triangle area.

FEEDBACK FROM SURVEY

MARKET-RATE HOUSING

- Safer / More vibrant / Disposable income
- Support more density & diverse mix of housing types
- Fears of gentrification

TWO-WAY CHESTNUT

- Obvious economic development benefits
- Pedestrian-friendly; Slow down traffic
- Streetscape improvements needed [but don't lose parking]

APREMONT TRIANGLE

- Larger [connected] open space
- Support local businesses
- Explore eliminating Pearl Street [but don't lose parking]

OPEN SPACE & AMENITIES

- New park would be a huge asset
- Places for outdoor events; Amenities for residents [dogs, families, etc.]
- Promote walkability & connectivity [mews]
- Street trees

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

As preliminary technical drawings, open space concept designs and early adaptive reuse feasibility studies began to evolve, Form + Place held a series of interviews with local stakeholders including Laura Masulis of MassDevelopment and Chuck Irving of Davenport Companies, as well as other local property owners. Input from Laura Masulis, in particular, helped steer the Chestnut Street corridor

studies towards incorporating Complete Streets tenets, ensuring the integration of bike lanes through the district. These interviews also brought to the fore longer term planning goals, such as the need to accommodate a range of neighborhood amenities for an increasing number of residents as the redevelopment of the district progressed. In addition, recommendations included balancing the clear need for market rate housing with the impacts of gentrification - a reminder to provide mixed-income residential opportunities as well as support for local entrepreneurs and businesses.

FEEDBACK FROM INTERVIEWS

PUBLIC SPACES:

- Strong support for new and/or revitalized green spaces
- Consider interim uses [basketball courts, outdoor market space / kiosks, community gardens]
- Consider funding mechanisms like Parking Benefits District [HDIP, TIF, etc.]

COMPLETE STREETS:

- Bike lanes [preference for dedicated lanes]
- Sidewalk improvements / Accessibility

NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES:

- Grocery + specialty food & beverage
- Family-friendly recreation / entertainment
- Pet store, grooming, daycare, dog park
- Physical fitness / Health: gym, yoga, studios, community center
- Hardware / Housewares

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT:

- Market-rate is key / Balance benefits with gentrification concerns
- Mixed-income / workforce housing too
- Consider developer contributions to district improvements in exchange for tax abatements

ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURS:

- Create opportunities for ownership [rent to own]
- Food manufacturing
- Artist workspace / Live-work [Birnie Bldg.]

BRANDING THE DISTRICT:

- Historical influences vs. current vibe
- Avoid perception that developer driven



MEETINGS WITH CITY OFFICIALS, BOARDS AND STAFF

Concurrent with ongoing community outreach efforts, the Form + Place team met regularly with staff from the Office of Planning & Economic Development to distill feedback and refine master plan goals. This included targeted meetings with other city departments and officials:

- Department of Public Works [July 2020, June 2021]
- Mayor Sarno [July 2020]
- City Council, Economic Development Sub-Committee [September 2020, October 2021]
- Department of Parks & Recreation [July 2020, June 2021]
- Springfield Business Improvement District [June 2021]

These meetings provided opportunities for technical review of proposed roadway and open space designs, as well as consideration of the broader context that the Master Plan occupied in relation to other ongoing city initiatives.



Informal Stakeholder Discussion

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS VIA ZOOM

From September of 2020 through August of 2021, a series of community meetings were advertised and held via Zoom. These included two meetings organized by the Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association [AQCA] as well as meetings with local property owners and business owners in the Apremont Triangle / Chestnut Street corridor area. Feedback from participants, including representatives from the Springfield Museums and the Springfield Preservation Trust, led to refined feasibility studies for both the Chestnut Street right-of-way [possible extension of the two-way corridor to Edwards Street] and the park in Apremont Triangle [redesign to record the historical shape to the park and consider the appropriate placement of the monument to Springfield's 104th infantry]. The final presentation of the revised master plan to community stakeholders in August of 2021 elicited favorable feedback from all participants.

2.2 DOWNTOWN PLANNING CONTEXT

2.2

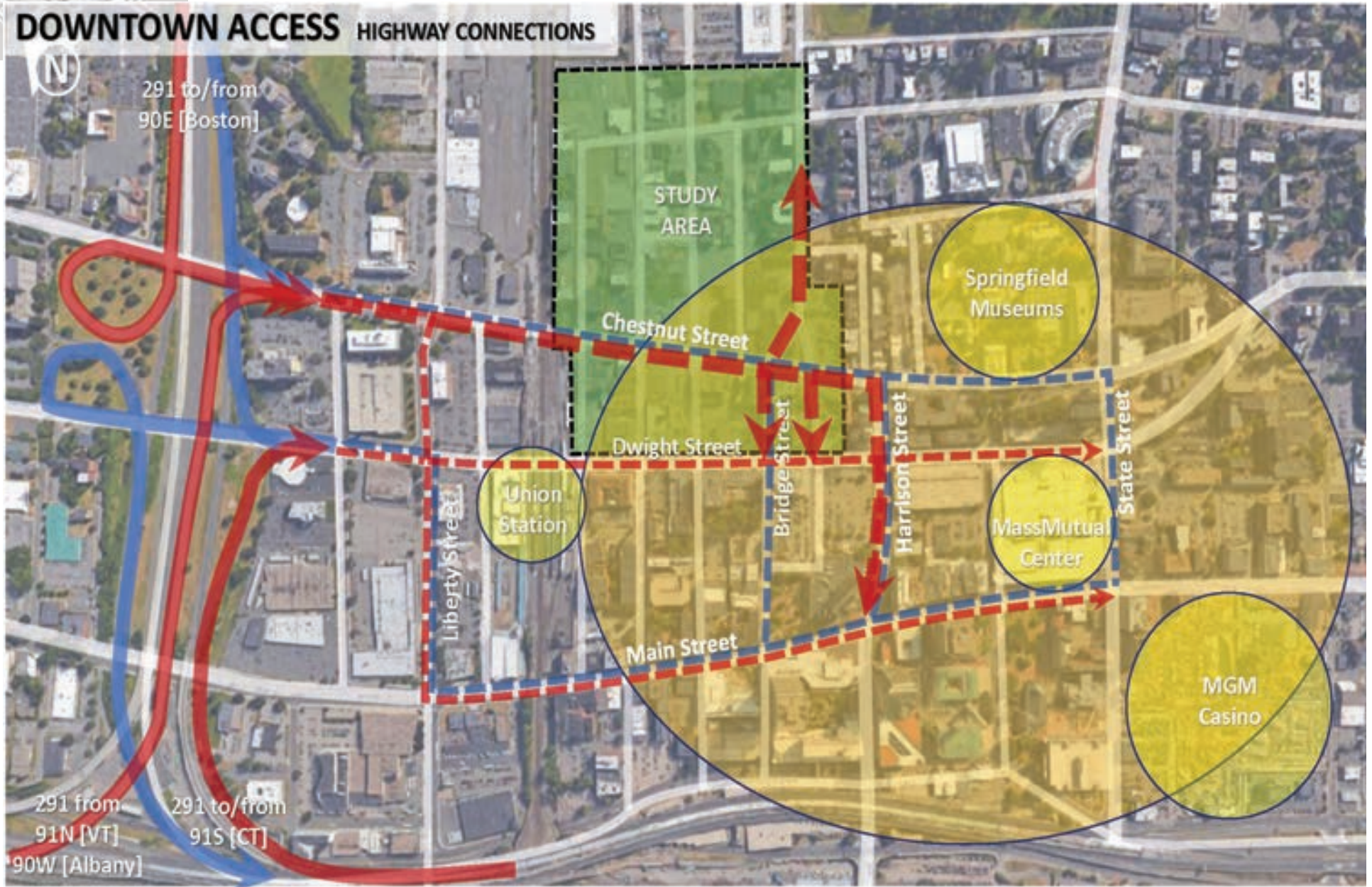


Downtown aerial showing original study area

The Northeast Downtown District [study area] is ideally situated within walking distance of numerous downtown attractions including the Connecticut Riverfront. The neighborhood is immediately bordered by the Springfield Museums to the south and Union Station to the north. The Chestnut Street corridor, if redesigned to accommodate two-way traffic could become a gateway to the city and a primary conduit to the downtown, given the direct connection it would afford from I-291, with its links to I-91 and the Mass Pike.



Diagram showing study area, adjacent downtown attractions and proposed vehicular circulation patterns



While the district has had its challenges in recent years, there are numerous assets in the surrounding planning context that make it an attractive canvas for redevelopment:

ASSETS

- Transit-oriented development context, proximate to the newly renovated multi-modal Union Station
- A walkable urban neighborhood close to downtown restaurants, amenities and attractions
- Diverse demographics with a rich cultural mix
- Easy access to cultural venues including the Springfield Museums
- Historical building stock that adds character to the neighborhood; Nearby historical sites and landmarks
- Apremont Triangle – an historical open space that is a focal point for the community; Nearby public parks including Armory Square and Stearns Square
- Chestnut Street right-of-way: opportunity to implement Complete Streets to create more pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and mitigate traffic flow, while improving connectivity to the surrounding highway network
- Strong demand for downtown market rate housing [per Zimmerman/Volk September study (updated in 2019)]
- Strong advocacy: local community groups / organizations, such as the Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association and the Springfield Business Improvement District [SBID]

CHALLENGES

- Physically blighted landscape, due in part to the 2012 gas explosion
- District in need of infrastructure improvements
- District in need of urban infill to provide continuity to streetscapes
- Current perception of how safe it is in the district and surrounding downtown areas
- Historical perception of adjacent area as an adult entertainment district
- Barriers to redevelopment including low property values and rents, site acquisition, demolition and clean-up costs
- Parking requirements for redevelopment [should consider urban TOD context and shared parking flexibility]
- Lack of market rate housing
- Lack of amenities in the district



*City of Springfield Complete Streets Map
[Springfield Complete Streets
Implementation Guide]*

CHESTNUT STREET CORRIDOR Integrating Complete Streets Principles



Downtown Two-way



Neighborhood Main Street



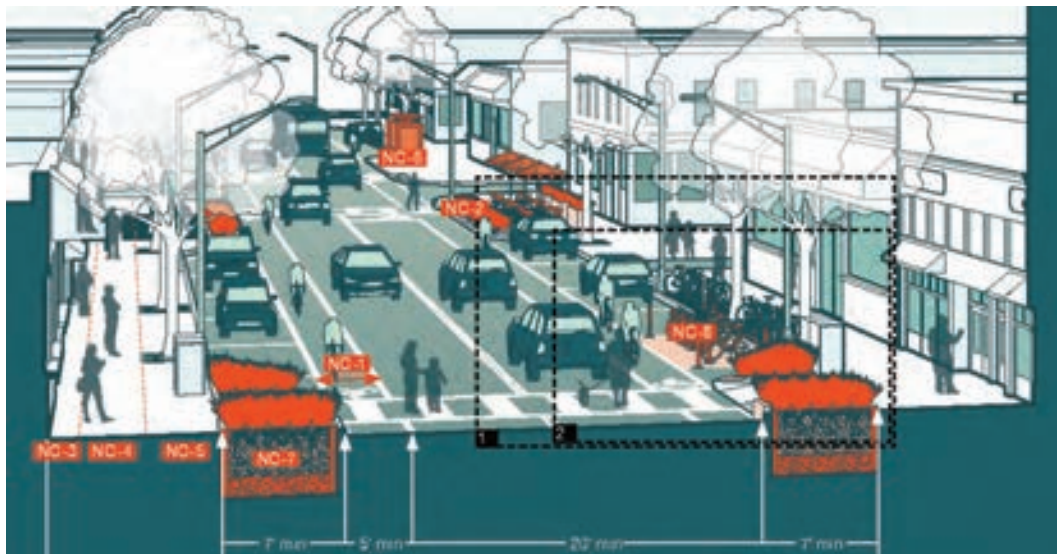
2.3 FEASIBILITY STUDIES

CHESTNUT STREET CORRIDOR

Numerous planning studies in recent years have contemplated the merits of converting both Chestnut Street and Dwight Street into two-way corridors and it is more evident than ever that Chestnut Street, in particular, could play a key role in the revitalization of the Northeast Downtown District. With a direct link from Interstate 291 and the Mass Pike, a two-way Chestnut Street would provide an alternate route into the downtown, offering direct connections to the Springfield Museums and Mass Mutual Center.

The Chestnut Street right-of-way has the potential to integrate Complete Street guidelines, with two-way traffic, dedicated bike lanes and a redesigned pedestrian environment, as recommended in Springfield's Complete Streets Implementation Guide. Form + Place and Allen & Major produced a series of analytical drawings studying the transformation of the right-of-way from Liberty Street to State Street and concluded that an implementable Phase I project would be to extend a two-way corridor just past Apremont Triangle to Harrison Street. South of Harrison Street, towards State Street, the street section narrows considerably and, while feasible to continue a two-way corridor, a more in-depth study is merited.

In addition to the technical aspects of redesigning the Chestnut Street right-of-way, and key intersecting streets, our study looked closely at the role the corridor could play as a mixed-use commercial spine that serves to anchor redevelopment in the district. Feasibility studies explored the adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings along the corridor as well as the impact that infill development could have on creating a more holistic urban environment. When layered with a revitalized open space network, it is evident that Chestnut Street holds one of the keys to unlocking private investment in the area.



*Neighborhood Connector Street
[Springfield Complete Streets
Implementation Guide]*



Chestnut Street Two-way Conversion Analysis

Allen & Major's technical analysis of the Chestnut Street corridor included four distinct studies:

Scheme I:

Two-way Chestnut Street from Liberty Street to State Street; Close Pearl Street at Apremont Triangle and convert Bridge Street to two-way east of Chestnut Street

Analysis:

This initial study explored the dimensional qualities of the Chestnut Street right-of-way from the rather generous 60' wide street section at the north end of the corridor, between Worthington Street and Lyman Street, to the narrow 48' wide section between Harrison Street and State Street, near the Springfield Museums. In addition, this study analyzed the intersection at Chestnut Street and Bridge Street, testing the viability of turning radii to ensure adequate access for emergency vehicles could be accommodated, essential to the potential closing of Pearl Street at Apremont Triangle.



Corridor
Diagram



Initial 60' wide Chestnut Street two-way corridor right-of-way Diagrams



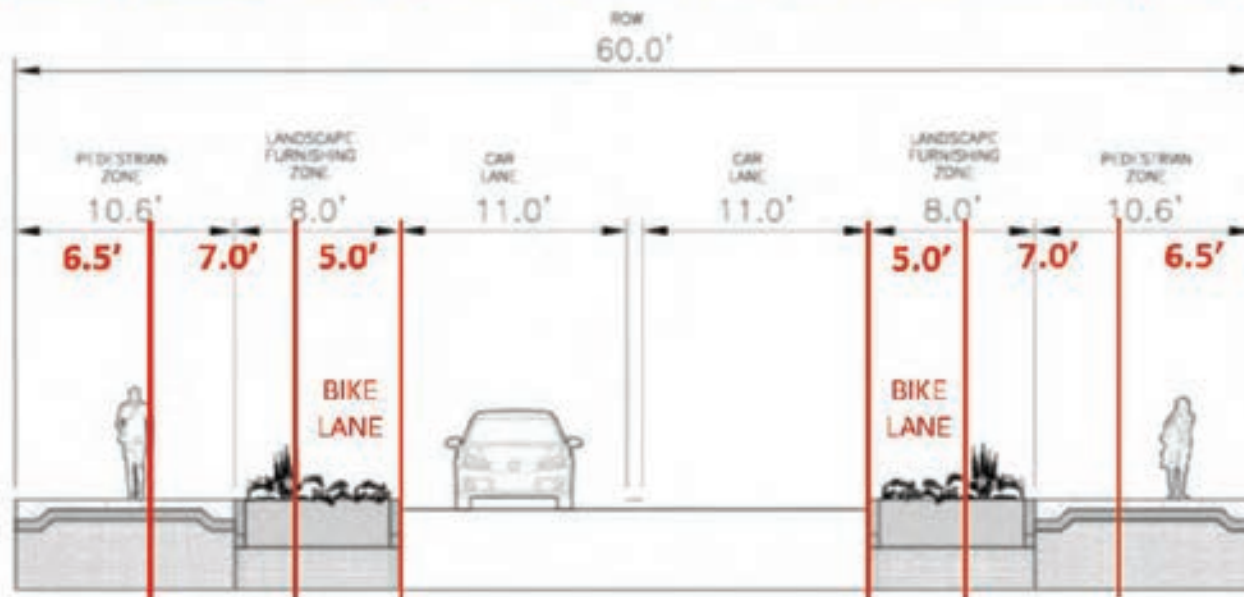
Scheme 2:

Integrate bike lanes on Chestnut Street; Two-way from Liberty Street to Harrison Street; Chestnut Street one-way northbound from State Street to Harrison with bike lane; Extend two-way Bridge Street from Apremont Triangle to Dwight Street and change Hillman Street to flow westbound from Chestnut to Dwight

Analysis:

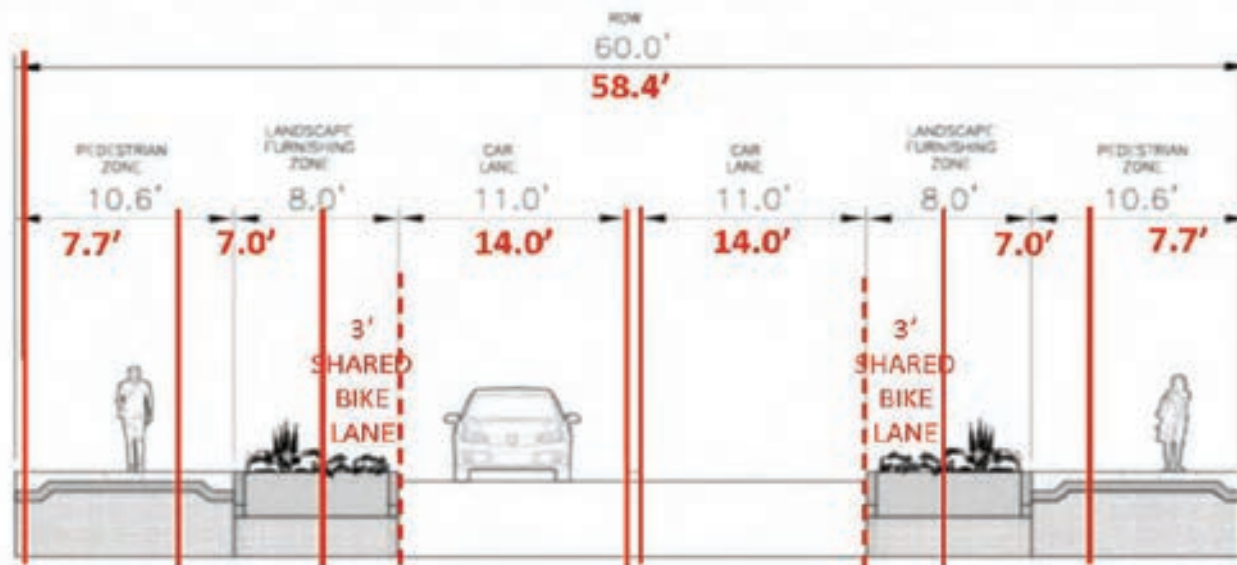
These more refined street improvement plans incorporated a Complete Streets approach to the right-of-way, integrating bike lanes for the length of the corridor. At the north end, an ideal street section was achieved with two-way travel lanes, dedicated bike lanes in both directions, landscape / urban furniture zones and pedestrian zones along the building storefronts. With the street section tightening in the Apremont Triangle area, shared bike lanes were utilized to maintain adequate width for pedestrian zones. The right-of-way narrows further to the south of Harrison Street, and it was determined that the two-way should terminate in favor of a one-way northbound section from State Street to Harrison. This ensured ample room for a northbound bike lane, a bus drop-off / pick-up area for the museums and reasonable sidewalk widths. With two-way traffic ending at Harrison Street, this study explored the merits of extending a two-way Bridge Street to Dwight Street and the conversion of Hillman Street to a westbound flow. These design adjustments were reviewed by the DPW and it was felt that this would help the flow of traffic in the Apremont Triangle area and eliminate the need for another signalized intersection at Chestnut and Hillman.

*Revised 60' wide two-way corridor
right-of-way integrating northbound and
southbound bike lanes (opposite page)*

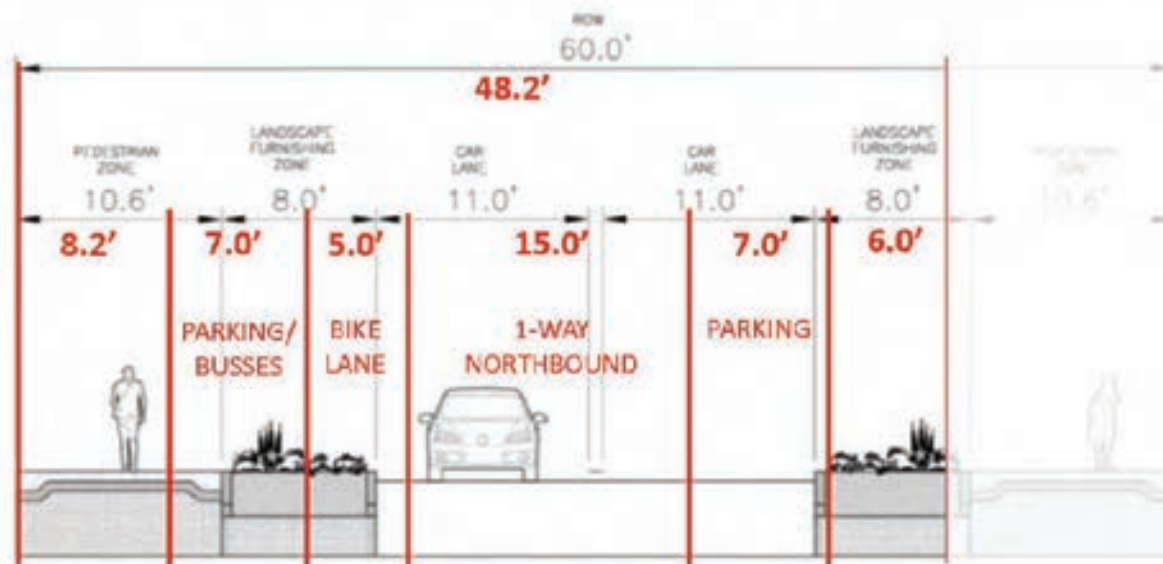




Transition to shared bike lanes as corridor right-of-way narrows south of Apremont Triangle



Transition to one-way northbound as corridor narrows to 48' wide south of Harrison Street



Northeast Downtown District Master Plan



*Redesign of intersecting streets in
Apremont Triangle area*



Winter Street to Hillman Street

ROADWAY DESIGN FEATURES:

- **Bridge Street:** 2-way from Chestnut Street to Pearl Street
Close Pearl Street at Apremont Triangle
- **Bridge Street:** 2-way from Chestnut Street to Dwight Street
- **Hillman Street:** Reverse flow so 1-way westbound from Chestnut Street to Dwight Street; Signal at Chestnut Street & Hillman Street removed
- **Chestnut Street:** Dedicated bike lane becomes shared bike lane from Hillman Street to Harrison Street





Scheme 3:

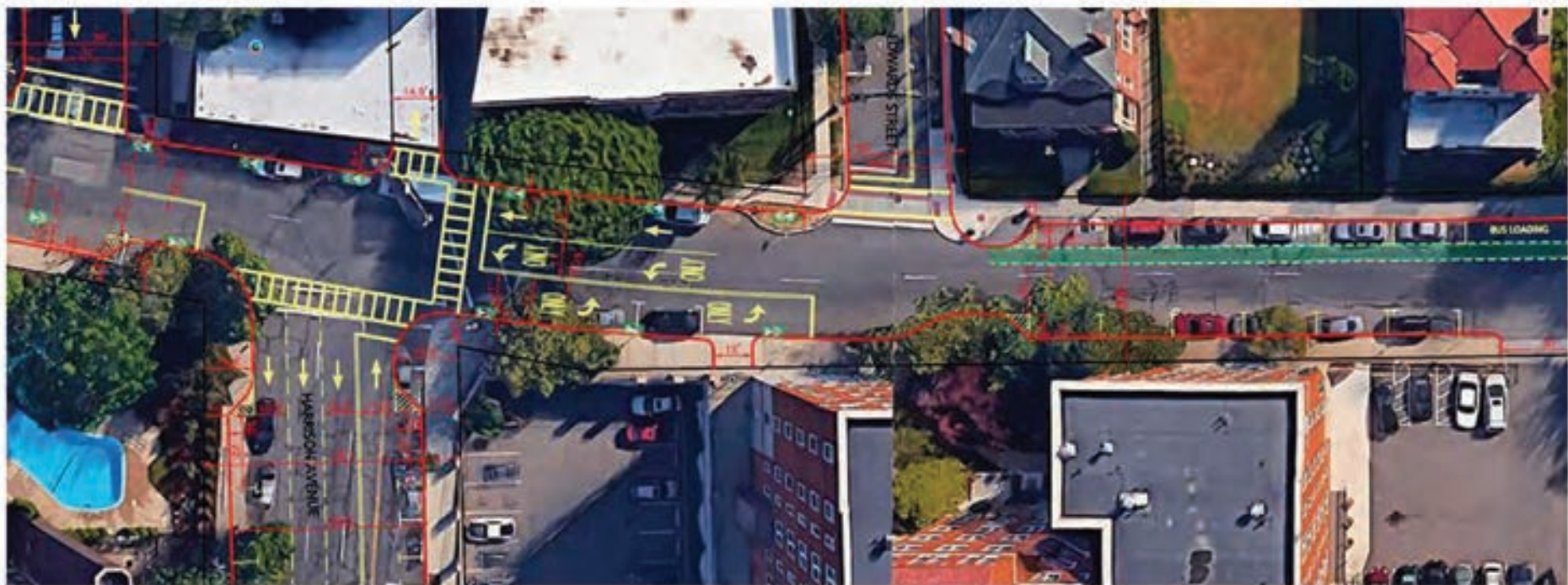
Two-way Chestnut Street from Liberty Street past Harrison Street to Edwards Street; One-way northbound from State Street to Harrison with bike lane

Analysis:

Based on feedback from a stakeholder's meeting, the concept of extending a two-way Chestnut Street to Edwards Street, allowing for a left turn and direct connection to the Springfield Museums, was explored. This study revealed that there would likely be complications with terminating the two-way corridor at this location. Though a full traffic study would be needed to verify the impacts, it was felt that the queuing length between Harrison and Edwards required for the necessary left turn at Edwards could present challenges. In addition, the left turn at Edwards [all traffic] created a point of conflict with northbound vehicular and bike traffic that could require a stop sign or signalization. Furthermore, traffic proceeding to the south past Harrison Street would be forced to turn left onto Edwards Street, thus requiring a circuitous connection up to Elliot Street and then on to State Street for those looking to find their way downtown.



*Springfield Museums entry
at Edwards Street*



CHESTNUT STREET & EDWARDS STREET INTERSECTION:

- **Queuing lengths:** Need traffic study to verify adequate space for left turns off Chestnut onto Harrison and Edwards
- **Left turn onto Edwards:** Without a signal, creates a point of conflict; Stop sign and stop bar help; Could also add speed table on Chestnut
- **Bike lane:** Point of conflict for bike lane headed north on Chestnut with cars turning left off Chestnut onto Edwards



Scheme 4:

Two-way Chestnut Street from Liberty Street to State Street; Bike lane ends at Edwards Street;
Preliminary study of turning lanes at Chestnut & State intersection

Analysis:

This final variation on the Chestnut Street right-of-way study was charged with providing a preliminary analysis of the feasibility of the Chestnut Street – State Street intersection, should the two-way corridor be extended all the way from Liberty Street to State Street. The study revealed that a left turn lane off Chestnut onto State could be accommodated with some reworking of the sidewalks at the intersection and the omission of a couple of parking spaces. There was also ample street width on State Street to provide a left turn lane onto Chestnut, heading northbound. The current northbound Maple Street configuration did not appear to create any conflicts with the proposed redesign but a reworking of the signals would certainly be necessary. As discussed before, the narrow street section between Harrison Street and State Street is not adequate to accommodate even shared bike lanes so it was felt that bike lane connectivity to the downtown could be routed onto Harrison Street.

Two-way corridor extends to State Street; turning lanes integrated at intersection (opposite page)



Harrison to Edwards to Museum Bus Loading

CHALLENGES

- No bike lane between Edwards & State [48' R.O.W.]
- Lose some parking at south end of Chestnut to accommodate turning lane onto State
- Eliminates sidewalk bump-outs at Chestnut & State for turning lane
- Signalization at Chestnut/State/Maple needs to be reworked & coordinated with future Dwight & garage redesign



Museum Bus Loading to State / Maple intersection



This series of technical studies of the Chestnut Street corridor concluded that, while a two-way conversion from Liberty Street to State Street is feasible, an implementable Phase I approach would be to end two-way traffic at Harrison Street. This would by no means preclude the future extension of the two-way corridor to State Street but would allow for further analysis of the right-of-way in areas where the street section narrows considerably. It also would allow for a more in-depth study of the Chestnut Street - State Street intersection, including the impact to signalization along State Street and the potential for the future conversion of Dwight Street to a two-way corridor. At the time of this study, the Civic Center garage was also in the process of being renovated, which could further impact traffic flows in the area.

The proposed redesign of the Chestnut Street corridor, as well as the intersecting streets in the Apremont Triangle area, was fully vetted with Springfield's Department of Public Works, who expressed their support for the plan.

Urban Design Analysis

From an urban design perspective, the conversion of Chestnut Street to a two-way Complete Street would have significant benefits for the district. Research has shown that narrower street sections that incorporate parallel parking, dedicated bike lanes, redesigned pedestrian crosswalks and other characteristics of Complete Streets, result in reduced vehicle speeds, improved circulation patterns and a safer, more vibrant pedestrian experience. The vision for an enhanced corridor - for vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians alike - anticipates greater visual exposure for storefronts, supporting retail and restaurant uses that will backfill underutilized ground floor lease spaces. This is already transpiring with the recent opening of Overland Lofts in the historic Willys-Overland building, where three new lease spaces on the ground floor along the Chestnut Street frontage are poised to activate the street.

New ground-up mixed-use buildings that infill vacant lots along the corridor will also contribute to a revitalized corridor by providing continuity of storefronts that could extend from Apremont Triangle to the Union Station area. The Complete Streets model will allow room for outdoor dining / retailing, the integration of urban furniture, bicycle racks and new lighting and paving, all while preserving on-street parking that businesses value.

A vision for Chestnut Street as a Complete Street with continuous storefronts (opposite page)





APREMONT TRIANGLE

The historic Apremont Triangle has a long and storied history that is still evident in the 2-story Harris-Green Building, a 1920's Rolls Royce showroom, and the 2-story Birnie Building, a 1930's Pontiac showroom, that flank the park today to the north and south. Just across Chestnut Street, the 10-story Kimball Towers Condominium, former home to the luxurious Hotel Kimball, visually anchors the Triangle. In addition, the park is home to an historical monument honoring the heroism of members of Springfield's 104th Infantry who fought against the Germans in World War I in Apremont, France.

While its human scale and historic overtones give Apremont Triangle an appealing aura, the park and surrounding streetscapes are lacking both in terms of their functionality and aesthetics.

As such, the Triangle has been the subject of several urban design studies that have sought to downplay the influence of vehicular circulation, enhance connectivity of the park to surrounding storefronts and contemplate strategies for creating a more flexible and usable open space. The 2013 UMass Amherst study "Revitalization of the Lower Worthington Street District" explored the possibility of closing Bridge Street to traffic in favor of creating a paved civic plaza. Subsequently, in a 2014 Develop

*The monument to Springfield's 104th
infantry; Vehicular movements dominate
pedestrian environments*



Springfield study, Utile proposed a series of coordinated public improvements that included widening sidewalk zones, adding urban amenities and narrowing vehicular travel lanes. In both instances, there was an effort to increase connectivity to the park by improving and expanding pedestrian environments.

Form + Place's current study proposes a unique approach to increasing the programmable open space area of the Triangle by re-imagining the Pearl Street right-of-way, while being careful to record the historic characteristics of the park. Careful consideration was given to the larger urban context to ensure that vehicular circulation patterns provided the necessary connectivity to downtown for emergency vehicles, as well as neighborhood residents and businesses.

The following series of sketches, and associated narratives, show the evolution of an open space concept that was fully vetted over a year and a half, taking into account feedback from City officials, the Office of Planning and Economic Development, the Springfield Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Public Works, as well as various neighborhood stakeholder groups.

Initial Urban Diagrams

The idea of closing Pearl Street to vehicular traffic grew out of an interest in creating a larger more usable open space and the expectation that directly connecting the Triangle to the network of neighborhood sidewalks would make it more accessible to pedestrians and create opportunities for outdoor dining. These initial sketches also contemplated the future use of the Birnie Building, exploring the potential of ground floor spaces on the park and ensuring access to adequate public and private parking could be maintained.





Scheme A considered the possibility that emergency vehicle access may still be required to pass through the former Pearl Street right-of-way by utilizing an area of specialty paving, adjacent to the green space, that could provide opportunities for flexible use, including outdoor markets and events [Note: the need to accommodate emergency vehicles was later dismissed upon further analysis of vehicular circulation patterns, turning radii, etc]. Scheme C provided an alternative approach to the redesign of the Triangle, relying on pedestrian-scaled pathways, a centrally located focal point for gathering on axis with the Birnie Building's arched underpass and a new plaza area at the Chestnut Street corner. This scheme sought to maximize the "green" area by expanding the open space of the Triangle to the south into the former Pearl Street right-of-way. In both concepts, a new pedestrian island was designed to accommodate the acute right turn off Chestnut Street onto Bridge Street, heading east. Crosswalks were integrated on all sides of the Triangle, providing safe pedestrian connectivity to surrounding storefronts.

Input was received from Frank Slegers, from the UMass Amherst Department of Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning, who noted that the expanded park footprint held tremendous potential to accommodate a range of activities and community events. His recommendations for refining the design included adding flexible, movable seating options, game tables, imaginative lighting, as well as richly textured surfaces and robust plantings that would not impact the use of the park. The importance of developing community programming to ensure active use of the park was also underlined.

In a letter received in November of 2020, the Springfield Preservation Trust expressed concern that the proposed renovations to Apremont Triangle were not being respectful of the "historical integrity" of the park. The letter specifically expressed concern regarding enlarging the park, changing its shape and seemingly not paying homage to its historic purpose. With this input, as well as feedback from the Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association and other neighborhood stakeholders, Form + Place initiated a thorough redesign and refinement of the open space concept. Three new park designs were explored and reviewed by members of relevant City departments.



Original rendering of expanded Apremont Triangle



Scheme I:

With the goal of recording the original footprint of the historic triangle, this concept proposes preserving the granite curbing as a palimpsest of an earlier time. In addition to an expanded green space, a series of pedestrian paths, linked to crosswalks, are configured to celebrate the mature tree in the heart of the park, and provide connectivity to storefronts surrounding the Triangle. A small pedestrian plaza anchors the southwest corner of the Triangle, offering a ceremonial location for the monument along the Chestnut Street frontage.



Aerial looking southeast



Aerial looking northeast



Aerial plan collage



Street view at Chestnut



Scheme 2:

This open space concept uses a similar approach to representing the original Triangle by preserving remnants of the original granite curbing. The generous green space at the core of this park design has the flexibility to accommodate larger gatherings and events and focuses on a paved stage area defined by a trellis that provides a visual edge along Chestnut Street. An allee of trees line the new walkway in front of the Birnie Building, connecting the plaza at Chestnut Street – an ideal location for outdoor dining – to the circle at the east end of the park which has specialty paving and the relocated historical monument as its focal point.



Aerial looking southeast



Aerial looking northeast



Aerial plan collage



Street view looking west



Scheme 3:

The third concept provides an even more literal recording of the original Triangle, maintaining the original brick sidewalks and curbing and preserving the historical monument in its current location. Rather than occupying a busy intersection, the monument is now integrated into a generous urban plaza that infills the old Pearl Street right-of-way at Chestnut Street. This scheme maintains all the original brick sidewalks in the area and provides an expanded linear green space that ties together two gathering spaces articulated with specialty paving.



Aerial looking southeast



Aerial looking northeast



Aerial plan collage



Street view at Chestnut



After an onsite review of these proposed concepts by Patrick Sullivan, the Director of Springfield's Department of Parks and Recreation, they were presented to stakeholders at a community meeting hosted by the Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association in late August of 2021. Feedback received during the meeting, and subsequently, was unanimously favorable. This included comments from Kira Holmes of the Springfield Preservation Trust, who stated that all three schemes successfully addressed concerns about maintaining the "historical integrity" of the park while noting that keeping the monument in Apremont Triangle was of paramount importance. Other comments received spoke favorably of enlarging the park, eliminating Pearl Street, purposefully positioning the monument in a ceremonial location in the park [in the middle or on the plaza at Chestnut Street], and providing an outdoor stage area for events. One comment, received by email, noted that these types of infrastructure improvements will go a long way towards encouraging the relocation of businesses to the area.

While a revitalized park at Apremont Triangle, taken together with improvements to Chestnut Street, can certainly offer a much-needed focal point for the neighborhood, it should be considered as part of a larger holistic vision for the district – a vision that includes many layers of infrastructure and open space improvements designed to stimulate private investment in redevelopment opportunities.

DISTRICT-WIDE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

As previously posited, the appeal of pursuing redevelopment opportunities in the Northeast Downtown District would be greatly enhanced by, not only improvements to streetscapes but, the expansion of usable open space. A vibrant Apremont Triangle can continue to be a hub for social and cultural activity in the area but, with a potentially significant amount of new residential density possible in this urban transit-oriented development neighborhood, there are other amenities that will need to be accommodated.

Downtown Springfield has a diverse collection of pocket parks and squares, including Stearns Square and Armoury Park, both of which border the district. The potential future infill of vacant lots with residential uses will merit places for families to gather, kids to play and dogs to be walked. As part of its district-wide vision, Form + Place explored the possibility of accommodating a new public park in the block between Worthington Street and Taylor Street, east of Chestnut Street on the site of the 2012 gas explosion. The site, consisting of several vacant lots, was purposefully chosen for its central location in the district and with the hope that it would become a catalyst for private development on the surrounding blocks.



The Green



The conceptual design for the 1.34-acre “Worthington Park” includes a large, programmable lawn area, as well as an adjacent fenced-in tot lot and dog run. The location of the park would tie in nicely with an ongoing planning initiative to create a pedestrian greenway through the neighborhood. Bisecting the long city blocks that run from Chestnut Street to Spring Street, the greenway is envisioned as a 15 to 20-foot wide landscaped pathway connecting from Lyman Street and the Union Station area, through the district, utilizing the Alert Street right-of-way and some private lands, to Mattoon Street and the Springfield Museums to the south. Like Duryea Way, and its relationship to Stearns Square, these mid-block pedestrian-only passageways offer walkable environments that bring character, human scale and connectivity to neighborhoods.

Investment in a new neighborhood park could go a long way towards creating a new identity for the Northeast Downtown District. As one stakeholder noted, if a new park is presumed to be a medium-term goal, there is still much that can be done, even with limited public-private investment, to change perceptions of the area in the short term by cleaning up, and making more aesthetically pleasing, the many vacant and blighted parcels in the area. Whether simply “greening” open lots or repurposing them for a period of time for recreational uses [basketball courts, etc.], community gardens or outdoor market venues, these improvements can help build a stronger sense of community.



Tot Lot



Site plan of proposed
Worthington Park



Urban park precedents



Dog Run

Aerial view of proposed
Worthington Park



CHESTNUT STREET CORRIDOR: FEASIBILITY STUDIES

PHASED REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES – ADAPTIVE REUSE & INFILL

While the Northeast Downtown District Master Plan focuses to a large extent on infrastructure improvements along the Chestnut Street corridor and in Apremont Triangle, there were a series of development feasibility studies conducted early in the planning process to test both the mixed-use potential and capacity for residential density district wide. The district is home to numerous historic buildings that are ripe for adaptive reuse, provided that the right public-private funding equation can be identified. The conversion of the Willys-Overland building by Davenport Companies into a mixed-use, loft-style residential project with 60 market rate apartments is a prime example of this, bringing new life to the Chestnut Street corridor in the Apremont Triangle area. Davenport is also exploring the adaptive reuse of the Collin's Building on Lyman Street.

Form + Place conducted feasibility studies on the “Absorbine Jr.” buildings at the corner of Chestnut Street and Lyman Street, as well as the Birnie Building, on the south side of Apremont Triangle, to understand the potential mix of uses, including residential units, that each building could accommodate, while preserving their historic qualities.

Absorbine Jr. Block

The Absorbine Jr. block holds a particularly prominent location at the north end of Chestnut Street and will be one of the first buildings encountered when entering the district on a two-way Chestnut Street. The buildings are not only a “gateway” to the district when connecting from I-291 but are also proximate to Union Station, making them an ideal mixed-use site. The ground floor along the Chestnut Street frontage consists of highly articulated storefronts which, if refurbished, could bring a great deal of life to the streetscape. The feasibility study revealed that the existing 4-story buildings could accommodate up to 50 residential units – a mix of studio, 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom apartments - and, while not benefitting from the most efficient floor plates due to building depths, could also house a mix of commercial uses totaling 15,000-20,000 square feet. Some indoor parking could be accommodated in the associated 1-story structures accessed off Taylor Street.

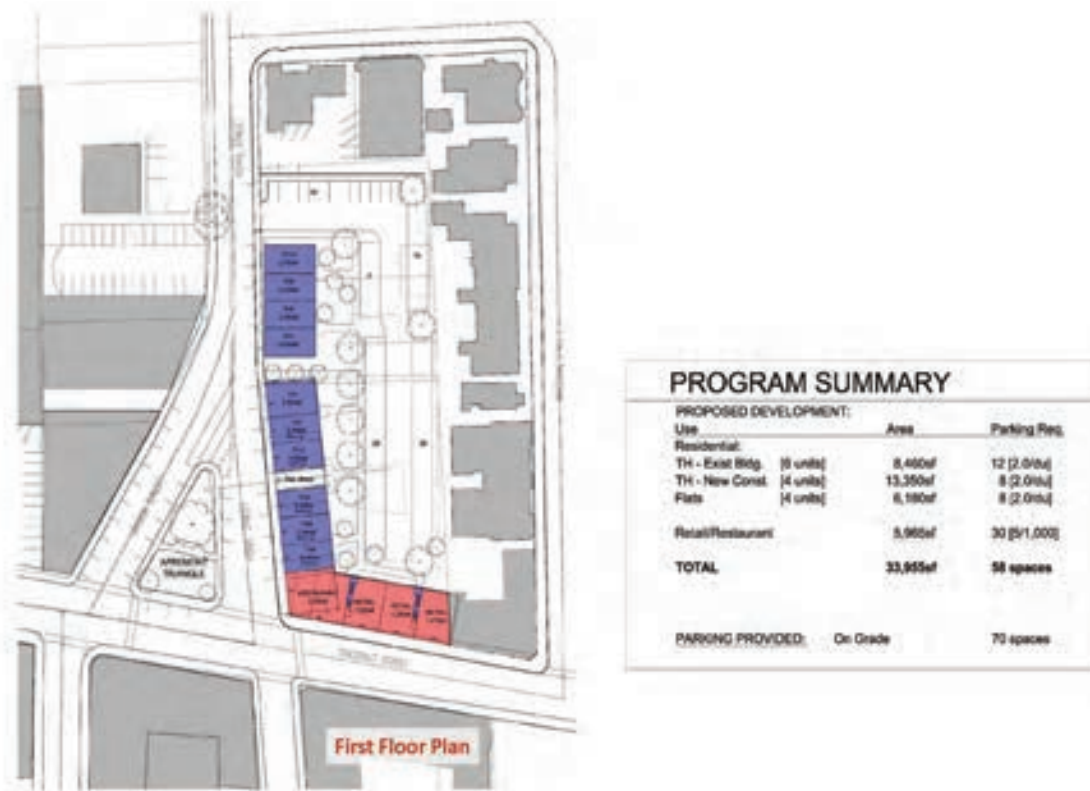


Aerial view of Absorbine Jr. Block

Birnie Building

The Birnie Building, fronting directly onto Apremont Triangle, was analyzed for adaptive reuse due to its location in the heart of the district. The historic qualities of the former Pontiac showroom building and its positioning between Apremont Triangle and Mattoon Street, suggest that maintaining its two-story massing is logical. It was posited that ground floor lease spaces should be maintained along Chestnut Street, but that the Apremont frontage could be treated in a variety of ways, depending on how the building's relationship to an expanded park was articulated. While one obvious approach to reuse would be to put office space on the second floor, above retail / restaurant uses, this study explored an alternative strategy of providing two-level townhomes that utilize the existing façade bay structure. The preservation of the two-level “liner” building and its street facades seemed paramount from a historical perspective, whereas the one-story structures on the rear part of the site seemed to merit reconsideration.

The resulting feasibility study proposed utilizing the area behind the street-front building for parking and, with the potential addition of a few new townhouses on the adjacent city-owned parcel, yielded 14 units [townhouses and flats], plus approximately 6,000sf of commercial/retail space. While not a huge unit count, this type of adaptive reuse project, together with future infill efforts, were seen as a unique collective opportunity to rebuild the residential density in the area.



Feasibility study: Birnie Building and adjacent parcel



Chestnut Street Infill and Completing the District Build-out

Building on these selected adaptive reuse feasibility studies, a series of diagrams were produced to test both the mixed-use capacity of the Chestnut Street corridor, and then the entire district. A Phase I master plan, utilizing multi-family buildings up to six stories in height, per current zoning, yielded approximately 550 residential units. The multi-family prototypes utilized assumed a ground floor with limited units to allow for commercial or amenity space, depending on the building's siting. The total number of units doubled to over 1,000 as the district was infilled with a mix of multi-family and townhouse typologies. While the focus continued to be on exploring residential density, a full build-out version of the district master plan also considered the integration of a community center, structured parking and other essential amenities such as a grocery store and pharmacy. Though an alternative plan with more multi-family and fewer townhouses was not explored in depth, it was estimated that the district could accommodate up to approximately 1,500 dwelling units, even without changes to the current zoning height limitation.



*Proposed Chestnut
Street ground floor
commercial plan*

PHASE I MASTER PLAN DIAGRAM

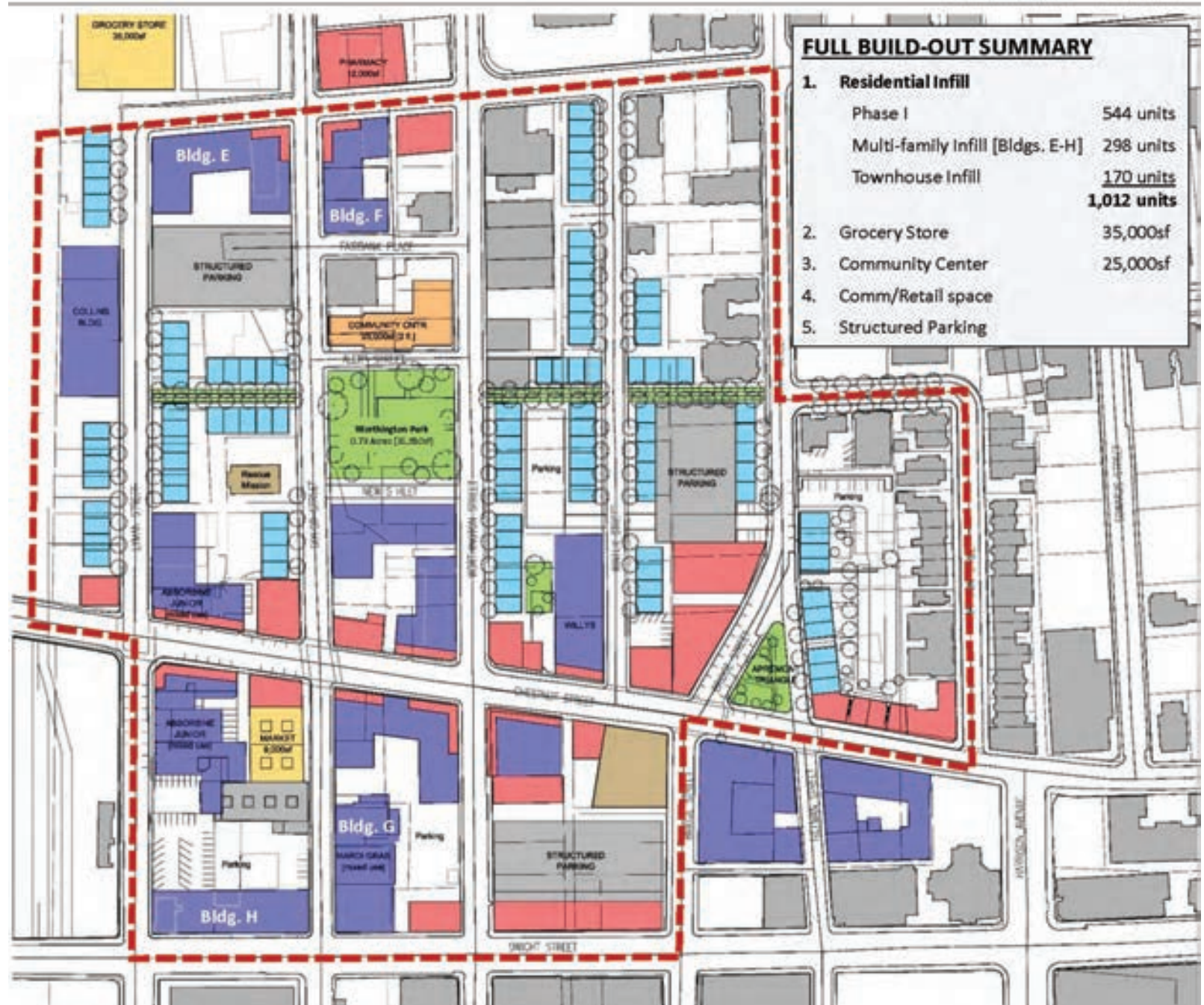
Chestnut Street Corridor Infill



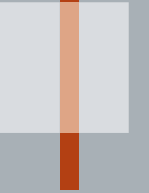


PHASE II MASTER PLAN DIAGRAM

Full District Build-out







Master Plan Recommendations + Implementation



3.0 MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLAN

This Master Plan presents the case for a multi-faceted approach that emphasizes public investment in infrastructure and public realm improvements as a catalyst for stimulating private investment in mixed-use development with a substantial multi-family residential component. The district's strategic positioning as a gateway to the downtown - due to its proximity to both Union Station and the interstate highways - and its walkable connectivity to the downtown and Springfield Museums, make it a prime location for a dense urban neighborhood with expanded market-rate housing opportunities. Careful consideration must be given to avoid the negative impacts of gentrification by ensuring accommodations are made to strengthen local entrepreneurs and businesses. An immediate focus on improving a blighted landscape by contemplating the short-term reuse of vacant parcels will help improve the perception of the district and provide amenities for surrounding neighborhoods, while a phased development process unfolds. At a time when remote working has become commonplace, the retail / restaurant experience has changed and the concept of community interaction has evolved due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, a revitalized urban neighborhood with historically preserved building stock, generous public open spaces, flexible streetscapes and access to transit seems most welcome. This paradigm holds the potential to define a new urban lifestyle in Springfield's Northeast Downtown District.

To achieve this, it is recommended that the city prioritize the following goals for the district:

I. Convert Chestnut Street into a two-way Complete Street

As a first phase of implementation, Chestnut Street should be transformed into a two-way corridor between Liberty Street and Harrison Street. In conjunction with this, the street network around Apremont Triangle should be reconfigured, closing Pearl Street on the south side of park between Bridge Street and Chestnut Street, while converting Bridge Street to two-way traffic between Pearl Street and Dwight Street. In addition, the flow of traffic on Hillman Street should be reversed to travel westbound between Chestnut Street and Dwight Street. The Springfield DPW has expressed support for these proposed changes. Redesigning the Chestnut Street right-of-way by utilizing



Complete Streets principles will allow it to become a mixed-use commercial “spine” for the district. The opportunity to provide direct connectivity between I-291 and downtown will create obvious economic benefits for local businesses, and streetscapes will be upgraded to safely accommodate pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles. While this plan has determined that the two-way conversion could be extended to State Street, it is recommended that a more in-depth analysis be undertaken. A subsequent study should explore the impacts to the design of the right-of-way as Chestnut Street narrows to the south and analyze the design and signalization requirements of intersections along State Street, including considering the merits of converting Dwight Street to two-way traffic.

2. Transform Apremont Triangle into a more usable open space

Investment in the public realm should also address the revitalization of existing open space, and the proposed redesign of the park at Apremont Triangle would greatly enhance a key focal point in the neighborhood. It is recommended that the streets in the Triangle be reconfigured to allow for a historically sensitive expansion of the park to provide a more flexible and usable open space. This would include the closure of Pearl Street along the south edge of the park and the conversion of Bridge Street to two-way traffic from the intersection of Pearl Street, across Chestnut Street, to Dwight Street. As part of this reconfiguration of vehicular movements, pedestrian connectivity to storefronts surrounding the park should be considered, with crosswalks tying into the new park design. Particular emphasis should be given to integrating the monument to Springfield’s 104th Infantry in a celebratory location in the Triangle. In addition to efforts to record the historical shape of the Triangle, the juxtaposition of expanded hardscape and softscape areas should make Apremont Triangle the gem of the neighborhood. Scheme 2, generated during the redesign effort, addresses all of these goals by providing the most flexible open green space – fronting on a stage area along Chestnut Street – while creating a small usable urban plaza, a dedicated centralized space for the monument and important pedestrian connections to surrounding storefronts.

3. Develop a holistic public realm for the district

This Master Plan recommends a continued focus on establishing a new network of open space in the district. The development of a new central park with amenities, such as a tot lot and a dog run, will help provide the district with a new identity, especially as vacant lots become infilled with new development. Locating this park to the north between Taylor and Worthington Streets will space it appropriately from Apremont Triangle and, if connected to a mid-block pedestrian “greenway” linking the Springfield Museums area to Union Station, it will be another node in, what will be, a walkable and well-connected neighborhood.

3. Encourage market rate residential development

The 2013 Zimmerman/Volk study Residential Market Potential, Downtown Springfield, updated in 2019, reports that 90% of all downtown units are being subsidized in some form. The study also indicates that there is a strong demand for market rate housing in the downtown, largely fueled by younger singles and couples, and bolstered by empty nesters and retirees. While market rate housing has many benefits, including the associated disposable income of its residents, it is important to balance housing opportunities by integrating a reasonable mix of affordable units. Phased redevelopment should start with the adaptive reuse of buildings with historic qualities. This is happening today with the opening of the Overland Lofts in the Willys-Overland Building. There are numerous candidates for repositioning in the district, including the Collins Building, the Absorbine Jr. building, the Mardi Gras and the Birnie Building, just to name a few. The available layering of funding resources, including state and federal historic tax credits, make this a logical first step. An infusion of market rate residential units will help support commercial revitalization and, as rents start to rise, some of the challenges to ground-up infill development will begin to be eased. Feasibility studies suggest that the area proximate to Chestnut Street alone could support between 500 and 600 dwelling units, with a full district build-out accommodating up to 1,500 new units.

4. Remove blight through place-making Initiatives

In addition to the public realm aspirations already enumerated in this report, short term place-making initiatives should be undertaken. An important aspect of facilitating the successful revitalization of the neighborhood is to ensure that, during the period of phased redevelopment, vacant lots are cleaned up and blight is removed. The demolition of structurally unsound buildings and the interim reuse of undeveloped parcels can change not only the visual aesthetics of a neighborhood but the perception of it as being a safe place. Community gardens, recreation facilities [i.e. basketball courts] and flexible market spaces can be incorporated, even on a temporary basis and without significant investment, and can become focal points for interaction and community building. And, as evidenced by the beautiful murals found throughout the downtown, public art can have a similarly positive impact.

5. Strengthening Local Businesses and Supporting the Vision of an Urban Lifestyle

The vision for a newly revitalized district with an influx of residents supporting a thriving mixed-use urban experience will be realized through the thoughtful integration of commercial and community-based uses. In addition to the preservation of historical building fabric and the revitalization of a network of streetscapes and open spaces, the district will need amenities such as a grocery store /



specialty market, a community center and other family-centric services, such as pet stores, houseware stores and fitness facilities. While affordable artist space and live/work studios are common constructs considered in many emerging neighborhoods, encouraging entrepreneurs through subsidies and creating opportunities for ownership [rent to own], particularly for local business owners, should be an integral part of revitalizing Springfield's Northeast Downtown District. The efforts made by Davenport Companies to provide a vibrant mixed-use environment at Willys Overland have included offering Bumpy's – a local natural and organic food store - 3 years of free rent in a key 3,500 square foot ground-floor space that will help anchor their redevelopment. Other entities that do light manufacturing, perhaps with public-facing components, such as coffee roasting, or establishments that provide services, including pet grooming, fitness facilities, family-friendly entertainment [bowling] or wine & cheese shops will be important to accommodate when rounding out the district. As a new gateway to the downtown, the neighborhood should offer a unique urban lifestyle that is safe, walkable, directly connected to the downtown core and celebrates existing cultural assets.

6. Facilitating Adaptive Reuse and Infill

The Chestnut Street corridor is anchored at either end of the district by buildings ripe for adaptive reuse. To the north, historic structures such as the Collins Building, the Absorbine Jr Building and the Mardi Gras can anchor a new gateway for those arriving by car, bus and train, while Willys Overland, the Birnie Building and others grace the southern end at Apremont Triangle. Flexible zoning that includes development standards for both adaptive reuse and new infill should be considered. This might include relief from dimensional criteria, parking and loading requirements or crafting an approach to approvals that simplifies the tiered review process. Design guidelines can be a very effective tool for cities to set expectations for architectural detailing and site design / place-making criteria at multiple scales – the district level, the block level and the building level.

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3.2 SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS

SHORTER TERM

- Pursue funding for Phase I improvements to Chestnut Street corridor and Apremont Triangle area
- Finalize design and execute Phase I improvements to Chestnut Street, Bridge Street and Hillman Street following Complete Streets guidelines
- Finalize design and execute improvements to the park in Apremont Triangle base on the closure of the Pearl Street R.O.W. on the south side of the park
- Continue to assemble land for a mid-block pedestrian “greenway” through the district
- Work with landowners to clean up vacant and blighted lots, and consider their short-term reuse for community benefit
- Study the design of the new “gateway” into the district, including the underpass on Chestnut Street to the north of Lyman Street and connectivity to Union Station along the edge of the elevated tracks

LONGER TERM

- Analyze the extension of a two-way Chestnut Street to State Street, including consideration of converting Dwight Street to two-way and coordinating impacts to signalization on State Street
- Work with local businesses and developers to analyze potential adjustments to zoning – shared parking standards, increased density, flexible dimensional criteria, expedited permitting and sustainable design goals - to incentivize the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and infill of vacant lots
- Pursue land acquisition, and site preparation tasks, associated with establishing a new major park in the district [Worthington Street area] that can accommodate public amenities including a tot lot and a dog run
- Continue to identify priority development sites for multi-family residential and think creatively about how to facilitate public-private partnerships [site preparation, grants to support the integration ground floor mixed-use and/or community space, etc.]
- Contemplate strategies for integrating adequate parking into the district as infill development progresses and surface lots diminish
- Identify preferred locations for significant neighborhood commercial uses – grocery, pharmacy, etc. – as well as community / cultural venues



3.3 IMPLEMENTATION + RESOURCES

Federal, State and Local Resources

In January of 2021, Massachusetts launched the “Community One Stop for Growth” online portal, offering a joint application process for applicants, including municipalities, to access multiple state level grant programs. The state bills One Stop as a streamlined process that simplifies the application for resources to help communities prepare for growth, attract private investment or unlock a catalyzing project. The new methodology is intended to not only provide communities with easier access to the state’s tools but allow the state to have a more holistic understanding of a community’s housing and economic development goals [<https://www.mass.gov/guides/community-one-stop-for-growth>]. The application portal allows simultaneous access to multiple grant programs offered by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development [EOHED], the Department of Housing and Community Development [DHCD] and MassDevelopment.

All grant programs under the Community One Stop for Growth umbrella fall under a specific “Development Continuum.” These can range from “Site Preparation,” which provides funding for land acquisition, demolition or brownfields site assessment and remediation, to “Infrastructure [horizontal]” which is characterized as supporting improvements to public land and infrastructure that leverages and supports private investment in the community. The “Site Preparation” continuum includes programs such as Site Readiness and Brownfields whereas the “Infrastructure [horizontal]” continuum is where the MassWorks program is now accessed.

In addition, the United States Economic Development Association [EDA], under the American Rescue Plan, was allocated \$3 billion in supplemental funding to assist communities to accelerate economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and, in general, to build more resilient local economies. EDA funds are intended to provide larger, more transformational investments that are flexible and designed to support community-led economic development [<https://eda.gov/funding-opportunities/>].

There are many other programs and constructs that municipalities can turn to, ranging from District Improvement Financing [DIF] to Urban Renewal, that can be utilized when the right set of circumstances are present. DIF is a locally-enacted tool that enables a municipality to identify and capture incremental tax revenues from new private investment in a specific area and direct them toward public improvement and economic development projects [<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/technical-assistance/district-improvement-financing>]. Urban Renewal is administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development’s [DHCD] Office of

Sustainable Communities and is a tool to assist communities to revitalize disinvested and underutilized neighborhoods and redevelop substandard, decadent, and blighted open areas [<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/urban-renewal-ur>]. Urban renewal can facilitate land acquisition and disposition, as well as tasks such as site preparation and public improvements, but it can only be utilized if specific findings are made, including that the project area could not be redeveloped without public involvement. While this Master Plan focuses in large part on recommendations for public infrastructure improvements, the ultimate goal is to identify initiatives that will stimulate private investment in the redevelopment of a denser transit-oriented downtown neighborhood. The layering of funds necessary to make private development profitable continues to be a complex puzzle, especially in areas where rents are still relatively low. The current success by the Davenport Companies in the adaptive reuse of the Willys-Overland Building shows one approach to overcoming the challenges of this equation.



Willys-Overland Building in 1939 [Source Springfield Preservation Trust website]



Willys-Overland Building in 2019



*Rendering of Overland Lofts in the
Willys-Overland Building
[Courtesy of Davenport Companies]*

Case Study: Overland Lofts in the Willys-Overland Building

In a recent conversation, Chuck Irving, partner at Davenport Companies, summarized the resources that they were able to tap into to achieve a successful development. He explained that Davenport utilized the EOHED Housing Development Incentive Program [HDIP] which offers tax incentives for qualifying projects in Gateway Cities. They were also able to take advantage of Federal and State level historic tax credits. The MHC Mass Historical Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program offers tax credits for costs associated with certified rehab expenditures for buildings that are, or are eligible to be, listed on the national Register of Historic Places. In addition, Davenport worked closely with a local financial institution that had the insight to understand the development opportunity.

A fifth resource layered into the equation was the Opportunity Zone program [<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/frequently-asked-opportunity-zone-questions>]. With the Willys-Overland site contained within one of the designated census tracts included on the Massachusetts Opportunity Zone map, the project was eligible for the associated tax incentives, including the temporary deferral of capital gains, a step-up in basis and, most importantly according to Mr. Irving, a permanent exemption from taxation on gains if the property is held for a 10-year period. While there were other resources in the mix, including Brownfields funds, these five were the most important pieces of the equation.

Since the Overland Lofts are market rate apartments, there were other programs frequently used by developers in the area, such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits [LIHTC] and MassHousing loans, that were not utilized in this instance.

The redevelopment of the Willys-Overland Building is a huge success story and should be a model for the adaptive reuse of historic structures in the district that are essential to preserve in order to maintain the historic character of downtown Springfield. In addition to 60 new residential units, the Overland Lofts project incorporated three commercial leases – including a favorite local specialty market - at the ground floor along the Chestnut Street frontage, which will certainly contribute to the vibrancy of the corridor as rehabilitation and infill projects emerge and begin to provide the link between Apremont Triangle and Union Station area that is visualized in the current Master Plan.