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**OLD HILL**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD**  
**ACTION PLAN**  
**2015-2020**

*Making Our Neighborhood Better*

**Prepared by a Task Force of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council under the direction of the Council with assistance provided by HAPHousing and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission funded in part by a grant from the Barr Foundation.**

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## INTRODUCTION

After the June 1, 2011 tornado **HAPHousing** secured funds from the Barr Foundation to help the Old Hill and Six Corners neighborhoods of Springfield rebuild. Funds were used to facilitate development of the Watershops District Revitalization Plan, completed in October 2013 and developed collaboratively by the Six Corners Neighborhood Council, the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, **HAPHousing** and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). In the course of developing that plan, it became clear that an update to the 2004 Old Hill Master Plan would also be timely and useful.

The City of Springfield has 17 neighborhoods and each one has a neighborhood council. Within the City of Springfield's government, neighborhood councils are supported by funding through the Community Development Department which is coordinated by the city's liaison with neighborhood councils Ed Whitley, Deputy Director of Neighborhood Services. The Community Development Department receives federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and redistributes them to local agencies which provide a variety of services (e.g., senior centers, after-school day care, homeless programs) to low and moderate income people. Those with an interest in these programs may take part in citizen-participation hearings that are held two or three times a year and advertised in the Springfield newspapers. City staff develops plans proposing how the federal community development block grant (CDBG) funds received by the City will be spent. Having an up-to-date neighborhood plan helps neighborhoods advocate for their share of these federal CDBG funds.

Neighborhood Councils are defined as: "A community organization that provides assistance to adults and youth regarding any concerns or issues in the neighborhood."

On the current website for the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, the stated purpose and goals of the Council are:

- To assist in program planning and delivery of service under the Community Development Act of 1984.
- To study and implement all factors which directly or indirectly contribute to a better quality of life for the residents living in the Old Hill Neighborhood.
- To enhance the physical environment of the neighborhood by eliminating blight and blighting influences through well-defined community action.
- To stimulate community people to return the neighborhood to an attractive state for people living in the area and perhaps attract other people as residents.  
(<http://ohnc.webplus.net/>)

With this plan update, the Old Hill Neighborhood Council affirms these stated purposes and goals and amplifies their job to be that of:

- Connecting residents with services
- Advocating for neighborhood priorities to the City

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- Commenting on proposed developments in and around the neighborhood, and
  - Communicating with and organizing the neighborhood

This plan update was developed from July 2013 to Summer 2015. The process was led by a Task Force composed of five members of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council who were appointed by the Council. In addition to seven Task Force meetings and plan updates and discussions at nine monthly meetings of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, residents participated in two community working sessions to develop this plan.

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council views this plan as a way to engage more residents in working together to improve the neighborhood.

The bulk of work to implement this plan falls on the shoulders of three entities:

- 1) the Old Hill Neighborhood Council and its committees
- 2) numerous City departments and offices, and
- 3) the non-profit organizations serving the neighborhood.

There are also many individual actions residents can take to make their neighborhood better. Some of these actions are listed in Appendix 3.



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## ACTIONS

The key actions for the Old Hill Neighborhood to undertake in the next five years fall in four categories and are as follows:

### **Capacity Building**

1. Continue to develop the capacity of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council by publicizing the work of the Council, holding community meetings in larger facilities at least once a year to update the neighborhood on implementation of the plan, and organizing committees to implement the plan through which new leaders can develop skills and new council members can be recruited.
2. Take advantage of available resources, including but not limited to funds available from the Office of Neighborhood Services Neighborhood Targeted Improvement Program (NTIP) to implement low cost projects in the community.
  - a. For example, \$10,000 was acquired in 2014 to improve the neighborhood garden on Tyler Street by installing a water line from the street and building a permanent fence.
  - b. Suggestions for the future include: purchasing a neighborhood snow blower which could be used by volunteers to clear sidewalks of people who have disabilities and/or in front of vacant properties. A snowblower and other neighborhood tools could be stored in the shed in the neighborhood garden or a new shed could be built if needed.

### **Physical Improvements**

3. Continue to rehabilitate, refurbish, and where necessary demolish, abandoned and/or poorly maintained houses. Establish five year goal for redevelopment by July 2016.
4. Develop a process for quarterly review, prioritization, and reporting of vacant/distressed properties, sections of the neighborhood with inadequate lighting (Quincy Street needs immediate attention), and other City infrastructure/maintenance concerns, to guide the City in addressing illegal dumping, and the maintenance of vacant property and to assist the city with re-development efforts.
5. Develop and implement a stream-lined process to beautify targeted vacant and/or distressed properties to improve the way the neighborhood looks and discourage illegal dumping.
6. Collaborate with Revitalize CDC to help residents remain in a safe and healthy home.

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## **Culture and Community Building**

7. Create a Neighborhood Cultural Center/gathering place where residents can gather and organize to work together to make the neighborhood better, promote the culture and history of the community and support development of community talent through activities of Stone Soul, Intercity Youth, and other groups, and support community health through outreach, health programs and healthy food.
8. Build community spirit through yearly celebrations in the neighborhood and by better connecting residents to resources. Continue to hold and enhance the annual summer Block Party on the Hill in collaboration with the Upper Hill Neighborhood Council, Springfield College and **HAP**Housing. Hold yearly celebrations such as a Halloween party, tree trimming in Mason Square, a neighborhood garden tour, and a reactivated Thanksgiving dinner in collaboration with Springfield College. Promote Toys for Tots and The Stone Soul Festival.
9. Organize an active committee to enhance and maintain the neighborhoods' community garden and work to add additional neighborhood gardens such as a rose garden or pocket park.
10. Develop a neighborhood logo and flag in an inclusive and fun manner to bring residents together and enhance feelings of pride in the neighborhood.
11. Organize neighborhood resources to promote youth development and cultural activities including reaching out to the three colleges in and around the neighborhood – STCC, AIC, and Springfield College – and Intercity Youth sports programs for collaboration and assistance.

## **Public Safety**

12. Collaborate with the Springfield Police and the Mason Square C3 initiative launching in 2015 to ensure a police presence in the neighborhood and a prompt response to resident concerns about violent crime and other illegal activity.
  - a. Appoint a neighborhood representative(s) to attend the C3 meetings, and report back to the Old Hill Neighborhood Council providing a communication channel between these meetings and the Council.
  - b. Reconsider the Neighborhood's involvement in National Night Out and other existing public safety programs which will be re-envisioned as part of the C3 initiative.
13. Promote increased reporting of all illegal and inappropriate activities in the neighborhood including illegal dumping and trespassing.

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## IMPORTANCE/BENEFIT OF PLANNING

In the 2004 Plan, the neighborhood's primary goal was to stabilize housing in the neighborhood, focusing on removing blight, increasing homeownership, and developing a large number of infill homeownership units. During the ten years that followed the completion of the plan, 150 homes were built, rehabilitated, or refurbished, despite the national recession catalyzed by the housing market crash. This significant success during unprecedented hardship proves the utility of having a plan and bringing the right players together to implement that plan. For a status update on the 2004 plan, see the Progress section of this plan.

As the physical conditions in the neighborhood continue to improve, self-perception in the neighborhood has also improved. More people feel good about the neighborhood, as documented by Resident Perception Survey conducted by **HAPHousing** in collaboration with NeighborWorks America and included in Appendix 2. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of residents surveyed said they would probably or definitely recommend living in the Old Hill neighborhood to their friends and family. This is up from 61% in 2009. Perception of the neighborhood city-wide, however, may be impeding the neighborhood's success. Perception drives attraction and retention of residents which affects home prices and neighborhood stability. For this reason, continuing to work to build neighborhood pride is a key goal for the next five years.

While the neighborhood looks a lot better than it did in 2004, there are still issues of illegal dumping, poorly maintained properties, and vacant lots. The Old Hill neighborhood is still committed to eliminating blight and improving safety in the neighborhood.

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council, commits to working on the above stated 13 ACTIONS in the next five years, and requests that the City of Springfield and non-profit organizations serving the neighborhood join them in the effort.

## LEADERSHIP

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council cannot achieve the goals and actions set out in this plan without the active involvement of neighborhood residents, the City and many non-profit collaborators. A long held goal of the Council is to increase its membership and the active involvement of neighborhood residents in neighborhood projects and community building. In order to implement this plan, enhance the capacity of the Council and develop new community leaders, the Council will create committees to address specific goals of the plan. This plan recommends the Old Hill Neighborhood Council take a leadership role in reaching out to the following list of organizations and institutions to determine how they want to work with the Council to implement this plan.

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### Proposed Implementation Partners

1. City of Springfield Offices of Housing and Planning and Economic Development and the Departments of Community Development (especially Neighborhood Services), Public Works, Buildings, Parks and Recreation, Health and Human Services, and Elder Affairs and the School and Police Departments
2. The three colleges in and around the neighborhood:
  - a. Springfield College
  - b. STCC
  - c. AIC
3. Revitalize CDC, Springfield
4. Stone Soul, Inc.
5. **HAP**Housing
6. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
7. Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity
8. Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services
9. Home City Housing
10. Gardening the Community
11. DevelopSpringfield
12. Dunbar Community Center
13. Boys and Girls Club
14. Martin Luther King Community Center
15. Square One
16. Springfield Partners for Community Action
17. Mason Square Health Task Force
18. Partners for a Healthier Community/Live Well Springfield
19. Intercity Youth

## WHERE DOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD COME TOGETHER?

Through the process of developing this plan, a key need in the neighborhood has been identified: the need for a neighborhood gathering place, where residents can come together to build a greater sense of community, organize to improve the neighborhood, promote the culture and history of the community and support development of community talent.

This plan envisions a mix of coordinated and individual actions building off one another to improve the neighborhood over time. While the Old Hill Neighborhood Council Office will remain an important meeting place for the Council and its committees, people also need an informal place to meet, to network, to share a snack together, imagine, and to do. This neighborhood gathering place is seen as an essential component of continuing the work to accomplish the broader goals in the plan.

## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Action	Lead Implementer	Implementation Partners	Possible funding source	Timeline	Evaluation
<b>Capacity Building</b>					
1. Continue to develop the capacity of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council including organizing an active committee structure and recruiting new members.	OHNC	<b>HAP</b> Housing, Springfield Office of Neighborhood Services	No additional funds necessary	ongoing	Do residents compete for seats on the Council, participate on committees & attend events?
2. Take advantage of available resources, including but not limited to funds available from the Office of Neighborhood Services Neighborhood Targeted Improvement Program (NTIP), to implement low cost projects in the neighborhood.	OHNC	<b>HAP</b> Housing, Office of Neighborhood Services	City Office of Neighborhood Services	Short-term ongoing	Did the OHNC apply every year for these funds and were they successful with their applications?
<b>Physical Improvements</b>					
3. Continue to rehabilitate, refurbish, and where necessary demolish, abandoned and/or poorly maintained houses. Establish five year goal for redevelopment by July 2016.  Revitalize CDC is committed to working on 10 blocks of 10 consecutive streets over 10 years.	<b>HAP</b> Housing will act as a catalyst with OHNC.  Revitalize CDC will continue to improve and revitalize homes in the Old Hill neighborhood.	City, PVPC, DevelopSpringfield, Springfield College, Revitalize CDC several community development organizations	State and Federal funds through City and Department of Housing and Community Development, Foundations	Short-term 7/2016  ongoing	Goal set by July 1, 2016 for properties developed or refurbished by 2020

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Im-plem-ent-er</b>	<b>Implementation Partners</b>	<b>Possible funding source</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>4.</b> Develop a process for review, prioritization and reporting of vacant/distressed properties and lighting/infrastructure issues to the City	OHNC and its Vacant Property Committee.	City (several departments)	No additional funds necessary	Set up process by 5/1/15, ongoing implementation	Is a list being submitted to the City on a regular basis and are priority issues being addressed?
<b>5.</b> Develop and implement a stream-lined process to take control of and beautify targeted vacant and/or distressed properties	OHNC	Revitalize CDC, Gardening the Community, PVPC, <b>HAP</b> Housing, City (several depts.)	City, Foundations, Private Sector	Recruit volunteers to work on first project by 7/2015	Did a small group come together to beautify a vacant lot by Jan 1, 2016?
<b>6.</b> Collaborate with Revitalize CDC to help residents remain in their homes	Revitalize CDC	<b>HAP</b> Housing	City, Private sector	Ongoing, assistance as needed	Are people able to stay in their homes?
<b>Culture and Community Building</b>					
<b>7.</b> Create a neighborhood center/gathering place.	Stone Soul, Inc.	DevelopSpringfield , Architect, Baystate Health, PVPC, OHNC, and many others.	Commonwealth of MA, Baystate Health, private sector and Foundations	Short-term 2015-2016	Does the place exist? Is it serving as a gathering place?
<b>8.</b> Build community spirit by yearly celebrations in the neighborhood such as the Block Party on the Hill, National Night Out, and other events.	OHNC, and appointed committee	Upper Hill Neighborhood Council Springfield College, <b>HAP</b> Housing, Revitalize CDC	Private sector	Ongoing annual events	Are events happening with neighborhood councils leading the effort?
<b>9.</b> Organize an active committee to enhance and maintain the neighborhoods' community garden and work to add additional neighborhood gardens such as a rose garden or pocket park.	OHNC	Residents, <b>HAP</b> Housing, Food Policy Council	Annual Neighborhood Target Improvement Program	Short-term and ongoing	Is the garden flourishing and building community among neighbors? Are other gardens developed?

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Im- plementer</b>	<b>Implementation Partners</b>	<b>Possible funding source</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>10.</b> Develop a neighborhood logo & flag in an inclusive & fun manner to bring residents together and enhance pride in the neighborhood.	OHNC	Residents	City- NTIP funds, neighborhood council support fund, private sector	Mid-term	Does the flag exist and is it flying?
<b>11.</b> Organize neighborhood resources to promote Youth Development and cultural activities. Seek collaborative assistance from the three colleges in and around the neighborhood – STCC, AIC, and Springfield College – and Intercity Youth sports programs.	Stone Soul, Inc	Springfield College, AIC, STCC, Commerce High School, Boys and Girls Club, Dunbar, Intercity Youth	Need to be re-searched	Mid-term	Is there a youth development program in place?
<b>Public Safety</b>					
<b>12.</b> Collaborate with the Springfield Police Department to ensure a police presence in the neighborhood and prompt response.	OHNC and the Mason Square C3 Initiative	Residents	No additional funds necessary	ongoing	Is there an improved police presence and decrease in response time?
<b>13.</b> Promote increased reporting of all illegal and inappropriate activities in the neighborhood including illegal dumping and trespassing.	OHNC and the Mason Square C3 Initiative	Residents, Officer Witherspoon, Vacant Property Committee	No additional funds necessary	ongoing	Are illegal dumping and trespassing being addressed?

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## IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council has determined that they need many residents to get involved to implement this plan. In 2015, the Council started recruiting volunteers to work on the 12 actions presented in this plan. Following is a start describing the implementation process for each action, sorted into the four categories: Capacity Building; Physical Improvements, Culture & Community Building, and Public Safety.

### **Capacity Building**

**1. Continue to develop the capacity of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council by publicizing the work of the Council, holding meetings in larger facilities at least once a year to update the neighborhood on implementation of the plan, and organizing committees to implement the plan through which new leaders can develop skills and new Council members can be recruited.**

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council is working very hard to improve their capacity to function effectively in their stated role to:

- Connect residents with services
- Advocate for neighborhood priorities to the City
- Comment on proposed developments in and around the neighborhood
- Organize and communicate with the neighborhood

The Council is eager to recruit emerging leaders from the community to join them in service to the neighborhood.

**2. Take advantage of available resources, including but not limited to funds available from the Office of Neighborhood Services, to implement low cost projects in the community.**

The City Neighborhood Targeted Improvement Program (NTIP) provides mini grants to Neighborhood Councils for small scale community development projects. Many of the ideas proposed by residents in the course of this plan development process are not costly, but they do require some small investment of resources. At one of the community workshops held as part of this planning process, city staff indicated that the City does not receive many requests from neighborhood councils for these funds.

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The Old Hill Neighborhood Council has had past success securing these funds. For example, \$10,000 was acquired in 2014 to improve the neighborhood garden on Tyler Street by installing a water line from the street and building a permanent fence. In 2015, the Council obtained NTIP funds to fence three vacant lots.

Suggestions for the future include: purchasing a neighborhood snow blower which could be used by volunteers to clear sidewalks for people with disabilities and/or in front of vacant properties. A snowblower and other neighborhood tools could be stored in the shed in the neighborhood garden and a new shed could be built if needed. Other projects proposed that require small-scale funding include but are not limited to: plantings for vacant lot beautification and production of the neighborhood flag.

### **Physical Improvements**

**3. Continue to rehabilitate, and where necessary demolish, abandoned and/or poorly maintained houses. Set goals with the City Office of Housing for the number of homes developed and refurbished and establish target areas for redevelopment. Establish goals for 2015-2020 by July 2016. Achieve this by re-activating the Old Hill Revitalization Collaborative which originally included HAPHousing, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services, Springfield College, and the Old Hill Neighborhood Council and expand it to include Revitalize CDC and others.**

**HAPHousing** has a long history of collaboration with the Old Hill Neighborhood Council and many other non-profit organizations in the neighborhood. **HAPHousing** and Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services (SNHS) convened the Old Hill Revitalization Collaborative following the development of the 2004 Plan and the Collaborative was very effective in bringing outside resources and energy to achieve many goals of the previous Plan.

For over two decades, Revitalize CDC has had a remarkable track record of stabilizing Springfield neighborhoods, and allowing elderly homeowners to age in place. The organization, founded in 1992, has performed critical home repairs, modifications, and rehabilitation on homes and non-profit facilities of low-income families with children, the elderly, military veterans, and people with disabilities. Revitalize CDC has made a commitment to bring hundreds of volunteers to improve the homes on one block a year on ten consecutive streets over ten years. Beginning in 2013, one block of Tyler, Pendleton and King have been addressed each year- between the cross streets of Eastern Ave and Hancock Streets.

As noted, a hallmark of the success of the 2004 Old Hill Master Plan is the success achieved with respect to rehabilitating, re-furbishing and constructing new homes in the neighborhood. 150 homes were built, rehabilitated or refurbished in the last ten years. This level of success would not have been possible without an ambitious and coordinated commitment to this goal. With this plan, the Old Hill Neighborhood Council re-commits to this goal striving to rehabili-

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tate, re-furbish and/or build additional homes by 2020. Collaborate with members of the Revitalization Collaborative including the City to establish numeric goals by July 2016.

**4. Develop a process for quarterly review, prioritization, and reporting of vacant/distressed properties, sections of the neighborhood with inadequate lighting (Quincy Street needs immediate attention), and other city infrastructure/maintenance concerns, to guide the City in the maintenance and redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties.**

This planning process has accomplished a lot with respect to documenting the current status of vacant, distressed, and abandoned properties in the neighborhood. Sixty-six properties have been inventoried. Almost one-half of the inventoried properties, 44% (29 properties) are city-owned, which is very positive news as it means that the neighborhood can easily contact the property owner to negotiate a plan to improve the property. An additional 11 properties (17%) are owned by non-profit developers and seven of these are under development. This means that maintenance issues for almost two-thirds of the distressed properties will be relatively easy to address. Slightly more than one-third of the properties (25) are owned by private individuals or institutions and one is owned by a bank.

A process of vacant lot and abandoned property identification and prioritization was implemented by the Maple High Six Corners Neighborhood Council after the tornado and continues today. Residents create a list of high-priority blighted lots and vacant buildings in the neighborhood and submit the list to City staff, allowing for prompt action on the neighborhood's most challenging sites. Given the success of this program in the adjacent neighborhood, the Director of the Office of Housing has committed to cooperating with the Old Hill Neighborhood Council in developing and acting upon a similar list in Old Hill.

It will also be helpful for the City and non-profit development organizations if the Old Hill Neighborhood Council identifies key properties the neighborhood believes should be redeveloped. Ideally, these properties will then be prioritized and factored into development plans.

This list will include ongoing concerns such as infrastructure improvements needed, e.g., sidewalk and street repair and the addition of more lighting on a street. This list is not designed to address immediate needs such as a burned out street light or a dangerous pot hole which should be reported immediately.

In summary, a committee of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council will work with the Council on an ongoing basis to develop and submit to the city:

- 1) a list of high-priority blighted lots and vacant buildings, allowing for prompt action;
- 2) a list of key properties the neighborhood believes should be redeveloped;
- 3) a list of ongoing concerns such as infrastructure improvements, e.g., sidewalk and street repair and the addition of more lighting on a street.

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**5. Develop and implement a stream-lined process to inexpensively beautify targeted vacant and/or distressed properties to improve the way the neighborhood looks and discourage illegal dumping.**

Recognizing that not all of the vacant and under-utilized properties will be able to be re-developed for housing, at least not right away, the Neighborhood is committed to working with appropriate City and non-profit officials to take control of vacant and under-utilized properties where possible and practicable. The range of temporary uses residents proposed for these lots includes but is not limited to: food gardens, flower gardens, informal play areas, sideyard expansion, street edge improvement, native plantings, rain gardens, and neighborhood pathways. The City has developed a process for residents to use vacant land for community gardens, and this process can be used as a jumping off point for these other similar uses. As the City's Community Garden Ordinance states, "Appropriate lots for community gardening can be made available based on the following criteria: a. The lot is unlikely to be developed in the foreseeable future. b. There is a water line on or near the property, and/or the buildings on-site have non-toxic roofs so that rain water catchments are safe to practice. c. The lot receives adequate sunlight between April and October. d. There is street lighting nearby." The ordinance, as well the application to develop a community garden is available for download on the City's website at: <http://www3.springfield-ma.gov/planning/466.0.html>.

Residents of the City of Cleveland, Ohio worked with their city and Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and Neighborhood Progress Inc. to develop a resource book of ideas to re-use vacant land, "Re-Imagining Cleveland==>Ideas to Action Resource Book", available at <http://www.npi-cle.org/files/2012/07/IdeastoActionResourceBook.pdf>. This Resource Book provides models of different kinds of vacant lot re-uses that Old Hill residents can use to develop their stream-lined process. It is the hope of the OHNC that at least one lot will be beautified by residents in 2015, thereby proving it is possible and establishing a record of success for subsequent groups of residents to replicate.

**6. Collaborate with Revitalize CDC to help residents remain in their homes.**

**HAP**Housing serves as the administrative agency for the Western Massachusetts Foreclosure Prevention Center, a collaborative partnership of agencies serving Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties. The center has a single mission: to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. The program provides free and confidential guidance to help address the needs of current homeowners facing possible mortgage default and foreclosure.

Revitalize CDC leverages the investments of donors, grantors and volunteers to make home repairs that stabilize neighborhoods, strengthen the tax base, and allow elderly homeowners to "age in place." The CDC performs critical repairs, modifications and rehabilitation on the homes and non-profit facilities of low-income families with children, the elderly, military veterans and people with special needs.

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## **Culture and Community Building**

**7. Create a Neighborhood Cultural Center/gathering place where residents can gather and organize to work together to make the neighborhood better, promote the culture and history of the community and support development of community talent through activities of Stone Soul and other groups, and support community health through outreach, health programs and healthy food.**

Throughout the course of this neighborhood planning process, the importance of the need for a physical gathering place for neighborhood residents emerged as a top priority for this neighborhood. At the December 3 community meetings, residents reminisced about gathering at Jinxie's and at the Bang Pool Hall. Residents believe that a neighborhood gathering place will foster inter-generational interactions, community spirit, and improved neighborhood safety, health, and quality of life.

Stone Soul, Inc. is working to realize this goal, has already secured some funding, and has received donated services from a local architect, DevelopSpringfield, and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, to launch this process. There is a property for sale at 41 Colton Street, in close proximity to Mason Square and within the Old Hill neighborhood that Stone Soul is exploring.

**8. Build community spirit through yearly celebrations in the neighborhood and by better connecting residents to resources. Continue to hold and enhance the annual summer Block Party on the Hill in collaboration with the Upper Hill Neighborhood Council, Springfield College and HAPHousing. Hold yearly celebrations such as a Halloween party, tree trimming in Mason Square, a neighborhood garden tour, and a reactivated Thanksgiving dinner in collaboration with Springfield College. Promote Toys for Tots and The Stone Soul Festival.**

The annual Block Party was started by the Old Hill Neighborhood Council in 2003, has been held every year, and has grown from an attendance under 100 to nearly 1,000. Several years ago, the Upper Hill Neighborhood Council became a co-sponsor of the event and helps to plan it each year. The event has become a tradition on the Hill and will celebrate its 12<sup>th</sup> year in 2015. Hundreds of residents enjoy good food, live music and one another's company. The Old Hill Neighborhood Council is committed to playing a leadership role in promoting this annual neighborhood celebration and working to bring hundreds of residents to the event.

**9. Organize an active committee to enhance and maintain the neighborhoods' community garden and work to add additional neighborhood gardens such as a rose garden or pocket park.**

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Residents successfully established a community garden in the Old Hill neighborhood on Tyler Street in 2014. Facing challenges such as the lack of a water line, the garden did not yield as much food as hoped. Since then, a \$10,000 NTIP grant funded a waterline and a fence. The OHNC is committed to recruiting residents to join a community gardening group that would commit to planting and maintaining plots at the Tyler Street site as well as working on item #5, the process to re-use vacant land as a means of beautifying the neighborhood and improving the economic value of people's property.

**10. Develop a neighborhood logo and flag in an inclusive and fun manner to bring residents together and enhance feelings of pride in the neighborhood.**

While the Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill created banners that still hang throughout the neighborhood, residents at the December 3 community meeting, as well as members of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, are excited about creating a neighborhood flag that represents the residents of the neighborhood and that households can proudly fly from their porches and wave in parades along with a logo they can wear on t-shirts and back-packs. The process of developing the flag will be a community-building enterprise that will also enable residents with various talents to donate their skills to serve their fellow neighborhood residents.

**11. Organize neighborhood resources to promote youth development and cultural activities including reaching out to the three colleges in and around the neighborhood – STCC, AIC and Springfield College – for collaboration and assistance.**

In the course of developing this plan, many older residents reminisced about their youth in the neighborhood in the 80s and 90s when two of the three colleges located in and around the neighborhood, AIC and Springfield College, were much more engaged in the neighborhood. People re-called summer camps, after-school tutoring with college students and mentoring initiatives. As part of the re-activation of the Old Hill Revitalization Collaborative, it is hoped that AIC and Springfield College, and to a lesser degree, STCC, will re-engage vigorously and actively with the neighborhood and its youth. Gang activity is very well documented in Springfield, and young people experience significant pressure to join gangs. Productive alternatives for youth, initiated by the colleges in the neighborhood are needed.

**Public Safety**

**12. Collaborate with the Springfield Police Department and the Mason Square C3 initiative being launched in 2015 to ensure a police presence in the neighborhood**

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**and a prompt response to resident concerns about violent crime and other illegal activity.**

Specifically, the Council will appoint a neighborhood representative to attend the C3 meetings and report back to the Council to provide a communication channel between these meetings and the Council. The Council will also reconsider the neighborhood's involvement in National Night Out and other existing programs which will be re-envisioned as part of the C3 initiative. Both in the resident perception survey conducted by HAPHousing in 2012, and at the community meetings held as part of this planning process, perceptions of the neighborhood as unsafe and under-served by the city Police Department have surfaced time and again. While it is true that residents are feeling increasingly safe in the neighborhood (55% of residents surveyed in 2012 feel the neighborhood is very safe or safe, compared to only 32% who felt that way in 2009), still almost half the residents surveyed do not feel safe.

The City has developed an innovative and nationally recognized community policing initiative in the city's North End neighborhoods, Memorial and Brightwood. The initiative is known as C3, or Counter Criminal Continuum Policing, and is a law enforcement method that is successful in reducing gang activity and drug markets within urban neighborhoods. This initiative is being expanded into the Mason Square neighborhood of Old Hill. The Old Hill Neighborhood Council will collaborate with this initiative to ensure it benefits the Old Hill Neighborhood.

**13. Promote increased reporting of all illegal and inappropriate activities in the neighborhood including illegal dumping and trespassing.**

Reporting of illegal dumping and other illegal activity is a responsibility of neighborhood residents and the Neighborhood Council. The extent of illegal dumping, while much improved in the last decade, is still enough of a burden to the whole neighborhood that it has emerged as one of the top 12 priorities for this plan and needs to be comprehensively addressed by the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, the City, and the non-profits that serve the neighborhood. As described in Physical Improvements Goal #4, the Council will develop a process of prioritizing vacant lots that are overgrown and where dumping has occurred for the City to address. The Council will encourage residents to consistently and immediately report any illegal dumping to the Ordinance Officer of the neighborhood (Officer Witherspoon). This will deter continued dumping and minimize the number of lots that become a serious problem.

As part of the City's Community Garden Ordinance, the city states: "If necessary, and if resources are available, the City will provide an initial land clearing for free on City-owned property. 1. Once the garden has been cleared by the City, gardeners are responsible for getting trash moved to a designated area at the garden site for City to collect. 2. The City will remove bulk items on city owned property, if resources are available, that get illegally dumped after the initial clearing." While this language applies only to approved community garden sites, it should inspire residents to push City officials to apply the same reasoning to all lots in the neighborhood.

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## DISTRESSED PROPERTY INVENTORY

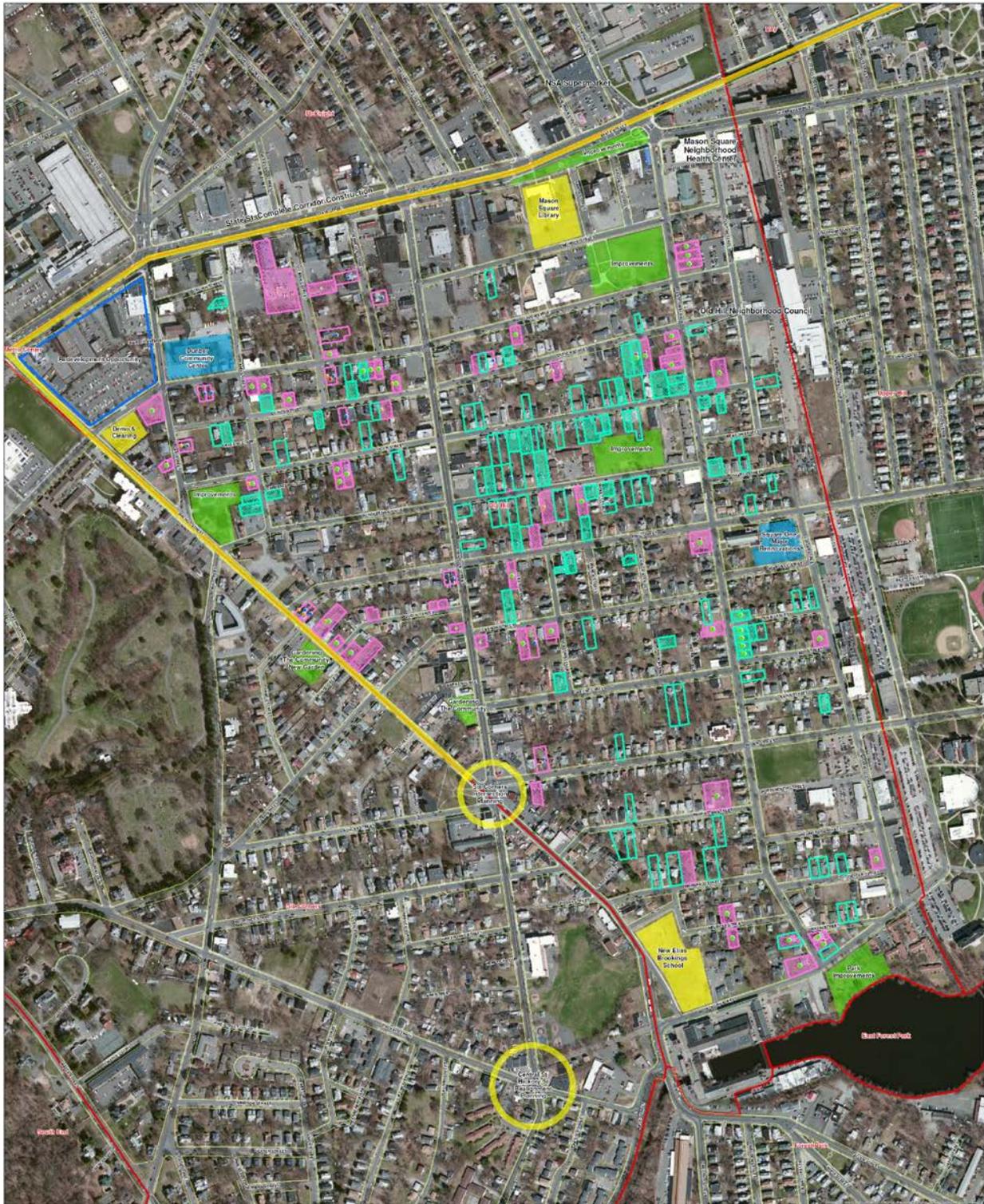
### Process

The 2014 physical assessment of vacant lots and abandoned buildings in Old Hill was undertaken by HAPHousing, over approximately 18 hours in November, 2014, and was intended as a preliminary survey of vacant or abandoned properties in the Old Hill neighborhood. This assessment resulted in an initial map and description of conditions. This map enabled problem lots to be identified and brought to the community's attention during public meetings during the formulation of the 2015-2020 Old Hill Neighborhood Action Plan. The map on the following page documents this information. It is based on best information available but ownership and conditions must be verified.

The physical assessment was undertaken on foot using a paper map and notepad. Vacant lots were identified and marked on the map using neighboring properties as waypoints to help identify them later. They were then numbered on the written map to correspond to an entry in the notepad, which described them from a 0-1 scale in terms of proper fencing, upkeep, indications of neighborhood use, and dumping, where 0 denoted no evidence of the measured category and 1 denoted full or total evidence of the measured category (0.5 was used, in some cases, to denote damaged or incomplete fencing, or areas where signs of use and dumping were hard to distinguish). Abandoned standing structures were similarly mapped and described. The same scale was used to grade dumping, structural damage, and proper boarding at the vacant site. After beginning on the perimeter streets of the Old Hill neighborhood, the map was developed by moving down side streets on a latitudinal axis. By the final count, a total of 81 vacant lots and properties were marked on the map and described on the notepad for future evaluation.

Over the course of the following week, the map was checked against the City of Springfield's online GIS and assessor's database to determine ownership and precise lot identification numbers for the vacant properties. During the course of this investigation, some vacant lots were stricken from the list of problem sites, as they were determined to be either large backyards for adjacent homes or part of the sports fields near Springfield College in the south of the neighborhood. Other vacant lots were determined to be multiple adjoining lots according to the city GIS and labeled accordingly.

# MAP--OLD HILL 2004-2014 IMPROVEMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES



**Old Hill Neighborhood  
2004 - 2014 Improvements & Opportunities**

<p><b>Rehabilitated Houses</b></p> <p><b>Project Type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: cyan;">■</span> New Construction</li> <li><span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Rehab</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vacant Properties</b></p> <p><b>Building Status</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: magenta;">■</span> Vacant Lot</li> <li><span style="color: magenta;">■</span> Vacant Building</li> </ul>	<p><b>Institutional Improvements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: blue;">■</span> Institutional Improvements</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> City Improvements</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Park Improvements</li> </ul>	<p><b>Structural Damage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: red;">●</span> Structural Damage</li> <li><span style="color: red;">●</span> Boarded Up</li> </ul> <p><b>Maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">●</span> Scene Maintenance</li> <li><span style="color: green;">●</span> Full Maintenance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Signs of Use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: purple;">●</span> Signs of Use</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">●</span> Dumping</li> </ul> <p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: yellow;">—</span> Sidewalks</li> <li><span style="color: red;">—</span> Neighborhood Boundary</li> </ul>
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DATA SOURCES:  
MassGIS, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.  
This map is based on the best available data.  
All information is subject to field verification.

## PROGRESS—WORK ACCOMPLISHED 2004-2014

The 2004 Old Hill Master Plan articulated a number of goals, issues and concerns within the neighborhood. A detailed list of the issues identified in the plan is included in Appendix 1. In sum, the neighborhood and its collaborators have been very successful in achieving their stated goals. As noted, 150 distressed properties were improved. In addition to that success, the city and non-profits working in the neighborhood tackled many of the goals articulated in the plan, including improving parks, increasing police presence, holding an annual block party and forming a broad-based coalition to bring a full-line grocery store to the neighborhood. Highlights of this success are summarized in the charts below.

<b>Housing-related Goals</b>	<b>Housing-related Status</b>
Create and/or connect programs that provide assistance for home ownership	Several homeownership training and counseling programs
Coordinated efforts of non-profit housing redevelopment institutions	Coordinated efforts of the City, the Neighborhood Council and many non-profits
Creating housing infill with the fabric of the neighborhood	Dramatically reduced blight and vacant lots
100-200 new or re-habilitated homes	150 new, re-habilitated or refurbished homes

<b>Public Safety-related Goals</b>	<b>Public Safety-related Status</b>
Create a clean, safe neighborhood initiative	The federally-funded Weed and Seed initiative contributed to improvement over a three-year period.  Sector F meetings are held each month for public safety collaboration with the neighborhood and National Night Out event is held in Mason Square each year.
	The Mason Square C3 initiative launching in 2015 holds great promise.
Provide an identifiable organization made up of citizens and City officials who support public safety and an attractive neighborhood	Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill, the Old Hill Revitalization Collaborative and the Neighborhood Council have worked closely with the City
Pinpoint problems and work quickly with City officials toward resolution	Ongoing process

<b>Expand Access to Opportunity Goals</b>	<b>Expand Access to Opportunity Status</b>
Expanded educational opportunities	Renovations and new school yard at DeBerry School
	New Brookings School
	Significant expansion and renovation of Square One
Expanded recreation opportunities	3 parks improved
Expanded job training and expanded social service opportunities	Some additional programs/more needed

<b>Streets-related Goals</b>	<b>Streets-related Status</b>
Streetscape improvements	Throughout the neighborhood
Signage and way-finding system	Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill banners
Appropriate street lighting for safety	More needed-Quincy and others
Historic street lights	Walnut Street
Sidewalks	Many improved along with new and trimmed trees
Study for Traffic Calming	Yes-at Walnut Street, State Street and Six Corners intersection

<b>Quality of Life Goals</b>	<b>Quality of Life Status</b>
Family style restaurants	Q Restaurant nearby//more needed
Grocery Store	New Grocery Store planned
Police presence	C3 has been expanded to Mason Square and specifically focused on Old Hill
Maintenance of parks	Improved
No stray dogs/cats	Improved
No trash/litter	Reduced
No dumping	Improved, but still a problem

<b>Political-related Goals</b>	<b>Political-related Status</b>
Expanded political representation of Latino community	Vice President of Neighborhood Council is Awilda Sanchez
	More involvement needed

Examples of improvements in the neighborhood facilitated by the private sector include renovations by Square One at the King Street Children’s Center and the efforts to bring a full-line grocery store to the neighborhood spear-headed by the Mason Square Health Task Force and DevelopSpringfield.

**Artists’ Rendering of planned supermarket area**



In addition to the improvements noted above, a number of City Offices and Departments have been very active in the Old Hill neighborhood in the past ten years.

**CITY IMPROVEMENTS TO OLD HILL NEIGHBORHOOD SINCE 2004**

**Streets**

- Walnut Street- paving, new sidewalks with brick edging, decorative lighting
- State Street- Complete corridor reconstruction: paving, medians, sidewalks, decorative street-lights, landscaping, traffic controls
- Significant number of street trees planted (both before and after tornado)
- Central/Hickory Street realignment project (Planning underway)
- Six Corners intersection planning study
- Demolition and lot clearing on Union Street between Oak St and Walnut St.

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## **Municipal buildings**

Mason Square library – improved and reopened  
New Brookings School – opening February 2015

## **Parks**

DeBerry Playground improvements  
Harriet Tubman Park improvements  
Improvements to green at Mason Square including birthplace of basketball sculpture garden

## **Partnering with Organizations**

**HAPHousing** -Support for Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill that included 25 organizations

Develop Springfield – Developing a full-line grocery store (intended for block at State/Walnut/Union/Oak)

Partners for a Healthier Community

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Square One

Springfield College

Participation in ReBuild Springfield Plan (post tornado rebuild plan)

Development, rehabilitation, and improvement of properties undertaken by **HAPHousing**, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services, Revitalize CDC, Home City Housing, and Springfield College

## **Regulatory Changes and Programs**

Zoning overhaul for the whole city

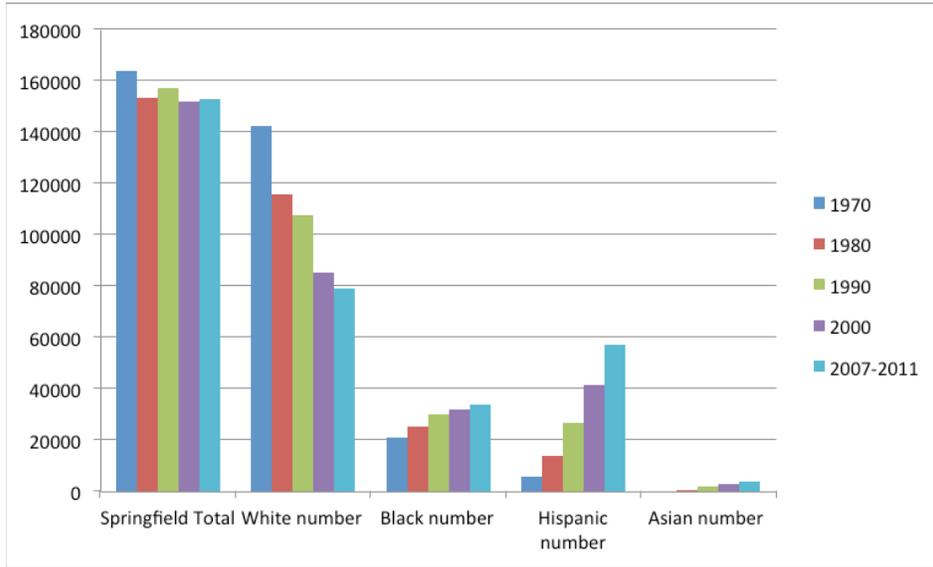
Community Garden ordinance (outcome of Food Policy Council)

City program for disposing of select lots by transferring ownership to abutters

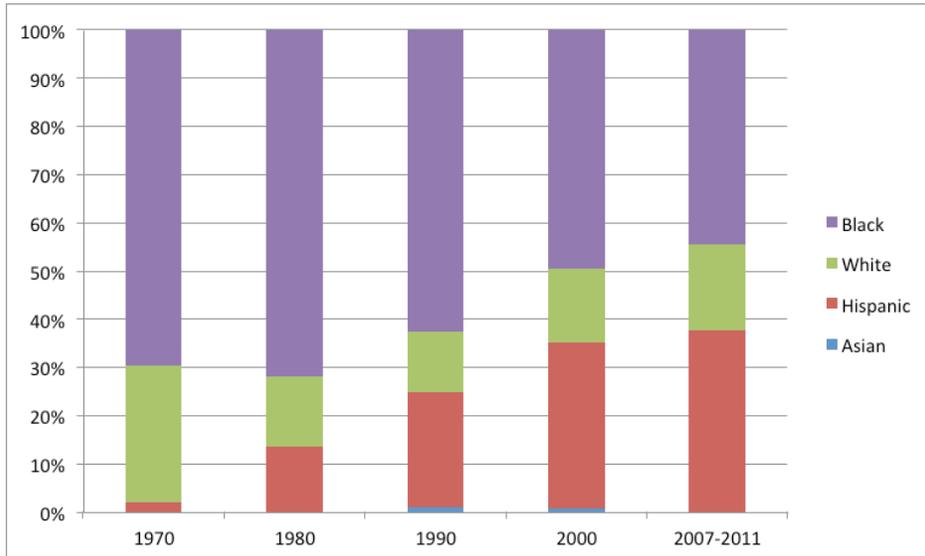
Changed the way select city lots are disposed of from auction to RFP process so that developers can acquire groups of property for redevelopment

## FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT THE OLD HILL NEIGHBORHOOD

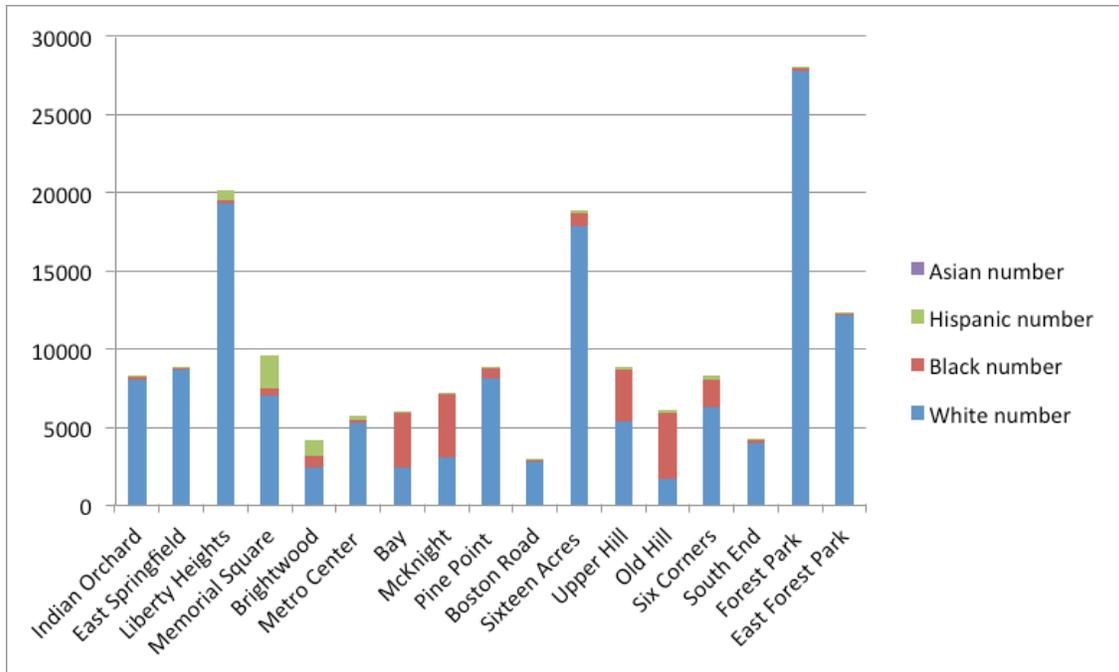
The Old Hill neighborhood is in the heart of Mason Square, Springfield's historic African American community. Mason Square is comprised of four neighborhoods, Old Hill, McKnight, Bay and Upper Hill. Just as the city's population has been transforming over the past 40 years, so has the make-up of Mason Square.



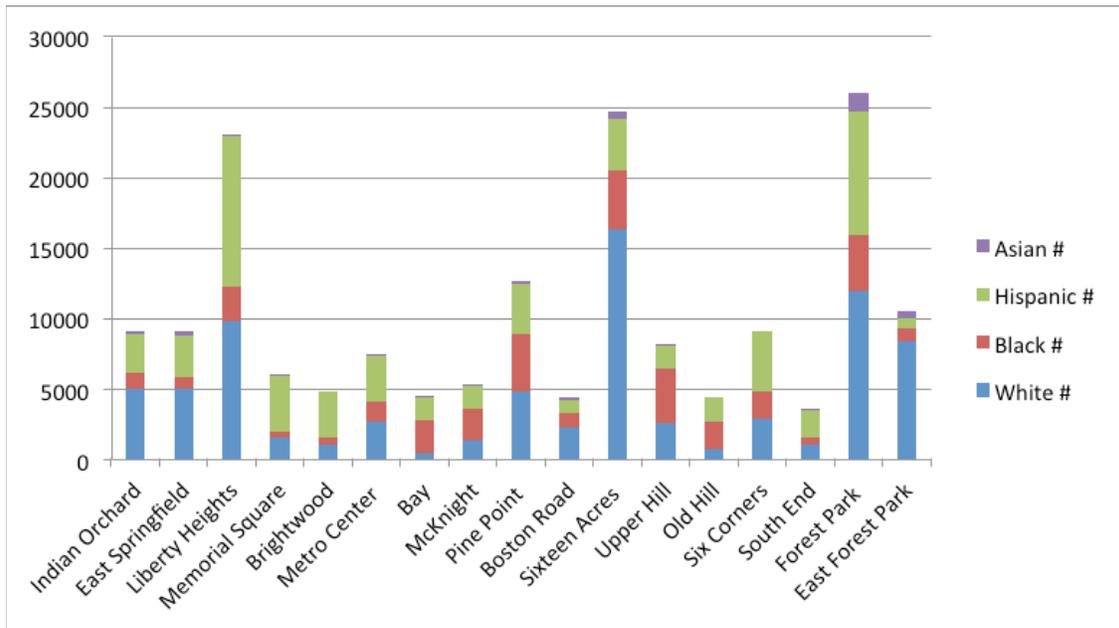
The figure above shows that overall Springfield's population has become increasingly diverse, with the white population declining by 55%, the black population increasing by 163% and the Hispanic population increasing ten-fold.



Like the city, the Old Hill neighborhood has lost population and become increasingly diverse. In the 70's and 80's the majority of residents were Black; today under 50% of residents are Black and the Hispanic population has increased from 2% in 1970 to 40% in 2011.



The chart above shows the Black population of the city of Springfield, concentrated in the Mason Square neighborhoods of Bay, McKnight, Upper Hill and Old Hill in 1970.



The chart above shows how the Black population of the city has dispersed throughout the city's 17 neighborhoods in 2011.

Aspects of the changing demographics of the Old Hill neighborhood reflect what could be seen as positive trends in the city, increasing diversity and de-segregation. However, access to opportunity, economic and educational success, as well as good health are eluding many residents of Old Hill, compared to the city as a whole and compared to other neighborhoods. In 2014 the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission created a Springfield Data Atlas, comparing each neighborhood on a variety of factors. For the full Data Atlas, go to [www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org).

Comparisons of the Old Hill neighborhood with the rest of the city reveal ongoing concerns and significant disparities.

### EDUCATION

Factors	Old Hill	City
Early education enrollment for 3-4 year olds	78.4%	41.7%
% scoring proficient or above on 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade MCAS: DeBerry School/Brookings	22%/9%	35%
High School graduation rate: Commerce	35.8%	54.9%
% population with a Bachelor's degree	6.9%	17.6%

### ECONOMIC SECURITY

Factors	Old Hill	City
Median Household Income	\$23,021	\$31,356
Poverty Rate	46.2%	33.3%
Poverty Rates for age 65+	26.4%	13.7%
Unemployment Rate	29.6%	10.9%

### HOUSING

Factors	Old Hill	City
% Home Ownership	36.1%	49.8%
Subsidized Housing	170 units	9080 units

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### CHILDREN & YOUTH

Factors	Old Hill	City
% pregnancies with adequate prenatal care	73.8%	71%
% of births to low birth-weight babies	11.3%	9.8%
Infant mortality per 1,000 births	12.5	9.2
% of births to mothers under age 18	10%	5.6%
Premature deaths/1,000	3.4	4
% students receiving free or reduced lunch: DeBerry School/Brookings	90/100%	

### TRANSPORTATION

Factors	Old Hill	City
Average commute time	18.9 minutes	21.4 minutes
% using environmentally friendly transportation	21.9%	20.8%

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## APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF GOALS AND ACTIONS IN 2004 PLAN

This is a summary of the goals and strategies included in the 2004 plan.

- Housing infill, Goal = 100-200.
- Improve lighting conditions throughout the neighborhood
- Decrease # of vacant lots and abandoned houses
- Increase Home ownership rate
- Work to prevent speculators pushing up land value and preventing residents from purchasing land/homes
- Encourage/promote responsible landlords
- Need family-style eateries or restaurants
- Improve crime statistics for this neighborhood compared to rest of city
- Improve Police presence in this neighborhood compared to rest of city
- Assure affordable homes for sale
- Work toward political representation of the Latino community
- Support the public schools in the neighborhood
- Address the problem of stray dogs and cats
- Improve maintenance in parks and open space in this neighborhood compared to the rest of the city
- Address problem of excess of trash and litter
- Work toward a neighborhood supermarket or grocery store
- Address problem of too much traffic and speeding in the neighborhood

### **Additional recommendations included in the plan:**

Improve perimeter edge conditions—to buffer the housing stock and assist in creating a separate identity for housing areas vs. commercial areas

Integrate internal spines so that neighborhood uses can be linked in a thoughtful and meaningful way

Improve land-use patterns with respect to institutions in the neighborhood (esp schools and colleges)--so they connect the fabric of the neighborhood elements

Institutions located in the neighborhood should use their improvements to help reuse areas that have been left in disrepair and introduce uses to rejuvenate the area

Institutions should introduce appropriate open space that balances size, locations and program within the context of the adjoining neighborhood

The City should work to improve streetscape conditions with a focus on safety, function and aesthetics

The City should evaluate traffic patterns so that reasonable recommendations can be made that take pressure off small-scale neighborhood streets

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The City and HAP Housing should put mechanisms in place to assist both private development and publicly assisted development with new housing starts

The City or HAP or any other entity should identify, utilize, and in some cases create, programs that provide assistance for home ownership

The City or HAP or any other entity should support the conversion of tax-delinquent properties that are obtained by the City into affordable home ownership opportunities through the well-coordinated efforts of nonprofit housing redevelopment institutions, as part of a coordinated housing strategy

Neighborhood needs a clean and safe neighborhood initiative that will provide an identifiable organization made up of citizens and City officials that supports those issues related to public safety and an attractive neighborhood and over time work with community members and the Old Hill Neighborhood Council to pin point problems and work quickly with City officials to bring resolution and conclusion

#### Institutions:

Institutions should create coordinated institutional plans that find mutual benefit among the City of Springfield, Springfield Public Schools, Old Hill Neighborhood, Upper Hill Neighborhood, Springfield College, and the broader Springfield community

The organizations listed below should pursue expanded educational, job training, social service and recreation opportunities by supporting appropriate expansion and development, including:

- Morris Professional Childcare Center
- Family Resources Center
- MCDI
- Performing Arts Center
- Leadership Development Center
- Recreation Fields parking zones

#### Infrastructure:

The city should implement a series of streetscape improvements over time to provide a more safe and attractive environment within the neighborhood

The city or some other entity should incorporate an appropriate signage and wayfinding system that provides pride to the neighborhood and assistance to visitors

The city or some other entity should implement appropriate street lighting design that provides safe light levels and adds to the overall attractiveness of the area

The city or some other entity should integrate historic “period” fixtures as a wonderful way to pay tribute to some of the past character of the Old Hill Neighborhood

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All the new sidewalks and crosswalks should be designed to meet codes and guidelines relative to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The city should perform a traffic planning study in order to understand and assess traffic impacts in and around the neighborhood and produce clear and concise recommendations for implementing appropriate traffic calming measures

Specific streets and areas identified for additional assessment:

- State Street

1. Emphasis on cars, service trucks and big parking lots
2. Physical barrier for pedestrian circulation
3. Issues with noise and air pollution
4. Poor organization of commercial uses

- Walnut Street

1. Narrow street with many pedestrian conflicts
2. Physical barrier for users into/out of neighborhood
3. Noise and air pollution
4. Not utilizing the most appropriate land uses

Neighborhood Roads including: King St., Alden St., Hancock St., and Eastern Avenue

1. Utilized as cut-through route/ by-pass regional system
2. High traffic volumes, adds to illegal activities
3. Conflicts between bus routes, cars and pedestrians
4. Vehicle speeding places pedestrians in real danger
5. Noise and air pollution

- On-Street Parking

1. Limited based on time of day
2. Narrow streets conflict with two-way traffic
3. Many sidewalks not designed for on street

### **Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill**

The Partnership for the Renewal of the Old Hill should create a formal mission statement, specific short and long term goals, agenda items and action items that can help to keep this redevelopment strategy in the community forefront for the next several years as financial opportunities become available to actually implement positive change in the neighborhood

The Partnership or some other entity should establish a Neighborhood Renewal Committee: Made of eight to ten individuals from the neighborhood, the College, the City, other organizations and businesses

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This committee should hold meetings on a monthly basis to review progress and address any and all issues that may impact the master plan and development plans

The Neighborhood Renewal Committee should establish a series of Steering Groups within the neighborhood that focus on very specific issues that impact the day-to-day quality of life in the neighborhood. Steering Group themes might include: housing, traffic, safety, business, etc.

Each Steering Group should report monthly to the Committee and add agenda items accordingly. The Steering Groups should have very direct access to stakeholders throughout the neighborhood and could bring pertinent issues to the table in a timely fashion.

The Neighborhood Renewal Committee should work with the City, State and local businesses and organizations to secure additional funding sources to study more detailed opportunities for renewal

The Neighborhood Renewal Committee should establish a process that incorporates the resources of local business enterprises

The Old Hill neighbors, the broader community and the entire City of Springfield should come together to establish a major new initiative for change based on the key recommendations called for in this master planning report

All of the following groups should be involved in the Partnership for the Renewal of Old Hill:

- The many active residents of the neighborhood and broader community at large
- The Office of the Mayor, City of Springfield
- Superintendent of Schools
- Several City departments including: the Planning Department, the School Department, Traffic Department, Housing and Neighborhood Services Department
- The Office of the President, Springfield College
- Urban League of Springfield
- Old Hill Neighborhood Council
- Local School Principals
- MCDI
- Habitat for Humanity
- Pioneer Valley Project
- HAP
- The Council of Churches of Greater Springfield
- Local Church Leaders

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## APPENDIX 2: PERCEPTION SURVEY RESULTS

In 2009 and 2012, **HAP**Housing conducted resident perception surveys in the Old Hill neighborhood following the model of success measurement implemented by NeighborWorks America. These assessments of resident opinion, organized around prompts related to safety, confidence, internal and external investment, and community interconnection, were intended to evaluate the impact of community building and engagement activities undertaken by **HAP**Housing. Volunteers were sent with a formulated questionnaire to a set of randomly-determined households in the neighborhood, where community members were asked to share their length of residency, satisfaction in living conditions, and the desire to remain in Old Hill, amongst other response categories relevant to resident perceptions of the neighborhood. A total of 110 and 151 surveys with matching questions were completed in 2009 and 2012 respectively, suggesting trends and changes in community perceptions of the neighborhood's safety, connectivity, and overall vitality in the three-year period.

Overall, Old Hill residents reported an increased sense of public and personal safety in 2012 as compared to survey results from 2009. When asked to rate the overall security of the neighborhood on a five-point scale (Very Safe, Safe, Somewhat Safe, not Very Safe, and Not at all Safe), 55% of surveyed community members evaluated Old Hill as Safe or Very Safe, as compared to 32% who answered the same in 2009. In both 2009 and 2012, residents were asked to identify the greatest threats to public safety from a list of nearly ten neighborhood challenges. In 2009, drug activity was overwhelmingly reported (91% of respondents) as a primary issue, followed by abandoned residences (84%) and other abandoned buildings (81%). Each of these categories saw decline in the number of residents identifying them as primary issues, with drug activity falling from a reporting rate of 91% to 74%, abandoned residences from 84% to 81%, and other abandoned structures from 81% to 62%. While these major obstacles to community safety were seen in decline during the target period, increases were reported in public safety hazards which less directly corresponded to major criminal or life-threatening activities – speeding violations were reported by 76% of respondents in 2009 and 78% in 2012, and strays rose from a reporting rate of 42% in 2009 to 48% in 2012. Finally, survey respondents evaluated public services related to safety with increasing confidence through the target period. 77% of respondents rated fire and emergency services as Good to Very Good in 2009, which rose to 79% by 2012. Residents were much more neutral regarding police response, with 33% and 40% rating law enforcement presence as Good or Very Good in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

A summary of the results of these surveys is presented below.

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## **Perceptions of neighborhood safety**

Safety depended on where you are/when it is: (rated in four categories: Very Safe, Somewhat Safe, Somewhat Unsafe, and Very Unsafe)

Low perception of safety walking around at night (41% somewhat safe to very safe) and in parks/playgrounds (64% somewhat safe to very safe)

Moderate perception of safety walking around the community in daytime (88% somewhat safe to very safe) and in one's home at night (82% somewhat safe to very safe)

Highest perception of safety in one's home during the day (94% somewhat safe to very safe)

Safety depended on who you are: (rated in four categories: Very Safe, Somewhat Safe, Somewhat Unsafe, and Very Unsafe)

Community residents going about their daily lives were considered safest (87% somewhat safe to very safe); children and youth in schools also relatively safe (84% somewhat safe to very safe)

Children going to and from school were thought to be at some risk (80% somewhat safe to very safe) as well as senior citizens living in the community (81% somewhat safe to very safe)

Of the five categories, children and youth playing outside were thought to be at the highest risk (75% somewhat safe to very safe)

City services (tangentially related to safety) are varied (rated Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor, and Very Poor)

Trash collection rated highest (83% very good to good), ambulance response (81% very good to good) and fire department response (79% very good to good) rated highly

Police response perceived as subpar (60% very good to good; only 15% very good)

"Other public services" perceived as very poor: 34% rate non-emergency City services as good-very good, citing snow removal as largest overall issue. 44% of respondents gave write-in explanations of their ratings; of these, 82% independently wrote in snow removal as in desperate need of attention.

## **Neighborliness:**

People feel comfortable relying on their neighbors for help with basic favors or assistance. (rated in four categories: Very Likely, Somewhat Likely, Somewhat Unlikely, and Very Unlikely)

The vast majority of respondents felt their neighbors and community would aid them in times of need. (68-80% over a range of questions from somewhat to very likely)

Many people felt as though they contributed to the neighborhood. (rated in four categories: A great deal, a fair amount, some, and a little to none)

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57% of respondents felt as though they contributed a fair-great amount

29% said they contributed some.

14% said they contributed a little to none.

Few respondents participated in community activities offered in the Watershops District over the previous year; however, a greater proportion of respondents reflected that they would be somewhat willing to consider participating in future. This suggests neighborhood activities could be made more accessible, desirable, or otherwise advertised to residents.

Most respondents never participated in any community activity of any kind over the last year (63-80%). There is greater interest expressed (60-66% somewhat interested or more) in community activities than actual participation (37%-20%).

### **Confidence:**

There is a fairly high degree of confidence in recommending the neighborhood to others (rated in four categories: Definitely Would Recommend, Probably Would Recommend, Probably Would Not Recommend, and Definitely Would Not Recommend). In the comments section, positively inclined respondents cited the quietness (and occasional safety) of the neighborhood overall; negative respondents cited crime overall.

69% of residents would recommend the neighborhood (probably-definitely); 31% would not (probably-definitely)

About half of residents (51%) would purchase a home in the Watershops district. 49% would not. There was no option in between.

For “factors behind [having] not bought a home,” personal finances were the greatest concern (included in 54% of respondents’ reasons, 68% of respondents’ primary reason)

“Other” (unrelated to crime, economy, convenience or availability) second highest answer (included in 16% of respondents’ reasons, 19% of respondents’ primary reason)

People feel as though the neighborhood has mostly stayed the same since 2011, with some indication of improvement (rated in five categories: Improved a Lot, Improved Some, Stayed the Same, Declined Some, and Declined a Lot). 52% of respondents added comments; many people pointed to tornado damage, perceptions of recovery or lack thereof, and increased or sustained crime.

39% of respondents believe that the neighborhood improved (some to a lot).

26% believe the neighborhood declined (some to a lot).

35% perceived no significant change.

There is cautious optimism about neighborhood improvement over the next three years. (rated in five categories: Improve a Lot, Improve Some, Stay the Same, Decline Some, and Decline a

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Lot) In the comments section, 60% of respondents wrote in their beliefs about neighborhood direction. There was no consensus regarding overall causes of neighborhood improvement or decline. Common comments mentioned crime and guns, desire for community interest, as well as, very simply, “hope/ hopes for improvement/ hoping it will get better.”

55% of respondents feel that the neighborhood will improve overall (some to a lot)

Greatest overall opinion is that the neighborhood will improve some (49% of respondents)

17% believe it will decline overall (some to a lot)

28% expect no significant change in three years.

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## APPENDIX 3: ACTIONS INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTS CAN TAKE

1. First time home buyers can take advantage of the City of Springfield “Buy Springfield Now” resources and the first Time Homebuyers program which provides \$3,000 toward closing costs etc.

<http://www3.springfield-ma.gov/housing/home-buyer.0.html>

2. Homeowners and renters can request a no cost home energy assessment to reduce home energy costs.



To begin, take the [Online Home Energy Assessment](#). Through this, you’ll learn if your home is a good candidate for an in-home assessment. If your profile indicates that you are a good candidate, schedule your no-cost Home Energy Assessment with a Mass Save Energy Specialist by calling 866-527-SAVE (7283). An Energy Specialist will visit to assess your home’s current energy use and provide a custom list of energy-saving recommendations for your home, and will help you develop a plan to make your home more efficient. What you should expect:

A Home Energy Assessment usually takes 1.5 to 2.5 hours

All key decision-makers should be present at the assessment

The specialist will help you develop an energy plan and explain applicable incentives

Your no-cost Home Energy Assessment includes:

- Personalized report outlining recommended energy efficiency improvements  
Installation of no-cost immediate savings measures such as compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), programmable thermostats, and water saving devices, as needed
  - Screening for eligibility for the ENERGY STAR® refrigerator rebate
  - Air Sealing and Insulation specification, if applicable
  - Infrared Testing, if applicable
  - Combustion Safety Testing
  - Learn about rebates and incentives
  - Generous weatherization rebates of 75%, up to \$2000 towards the cost of the work, and other incentives are available to qualifying Massachusetts residents.
3. Turn on your porch lights to improve safety and feelings of security
  4. Attend Neighborhood Council meetings
  5. Report all illegal activity
  6. Go to the Stone Soul Festival, the Block Party and all the other celebrations and community gatherings
  7. Involve youth in the Intercity Youth sports programs.

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THANK YOU for taking the time to review this Neighborhood Plan

The Old Hill Neighborhood Council meets the first Wednesday of the month at 6 pm  
at the OHNC offices at 99 Eastern Avenue, Springfield, MA

**Old Hill Neighborhood Council**

99 Eastern Avenue

Springfield, MA 01109

President: Barbara Gresham

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Council Email: [oldhillcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:oldhillcouncil@gmail.com)

Website: <http://ohnc.webplus.net> 1st Wednesday of the month @ 6pm