EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

Comprehensive Downtown Housing & Economic Development Action Plan

RE-THINKING DOWNTOWN WESTFIELD

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

UMASS AMHERST CENTER FOR DESIGN ENGAGEMENT

AUGUST 2009
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

Comprehensive Downtown Housing & Economic Development Action Plan
Acknowledgements

This plan would not have been developed without the active participation of Westfield residents, and people who live, work and play in the city.

Thanks to everyone who took the survey, participated in a stakeholder interview, and contributed to any of the interactive workshops, focus groups or other meetings and events.

Governor Deval Patrick’s Gateway Plus Action Grant Program, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, provided funding for this planning effort with some supplemental funding provided by the District Local Technical Assistance program, also administered by DHCD.

Mayor Michael Boulanger initiated this planning process and Larry Smith, City Planner and Director of Community Development and Mark Cressotti, City Engineer staffed it.

Lisa McMahon of the Westfield Business Improvement District went above and beyond the call of duty in providing assistance to the consultant team, literally opening many doors throughout this very participatory planning process.

The Advisory Committee performed a huge amount of work, and they were ably led by their co-chairs, Ann Lentini, Director DOMUS Inc. and Daniel Hitchcock, concerned resident.

Special Thanks to Rev. Linda Shaw and the staff at the Central Baptist Church on Elm Street for the use of their facilities for our public outreach events.

Advisory Committee

Mayor Michael Boulanger
Larry Smith, City Planner
Ann Lentini, Domus Inc. (Co-Chair)
Lisa McMahon, Business Improvement District
Agma Sweeney, Westfield Spanish American Association
Bob Plasse, Westfield-On-Weekends and Westfield State College
Mark Cressotti, City Engineer
Peter Miller, City Council
Matt VanHeynigen, Planning Board

Kathy Witalisz, Realtor
Hilda Colon, Westfield Spanish American Association
Officer Dickinson, Community Policing
Lynn Boscher, Chamber of Commerce & downtown property owner
Daniel Hitchcock, Resident (Co-Chair)
John Bonavita, Tavern Restaurant
Shanna Reed, Mayor’s Office
Brent Bean, Westfield State College Government & Community Relations

Consultant Team

Lead: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission: Catherine Ratté (formerly Miller), Jayne Bernhard, Jessica Allan, Danielle Kahn, Tony Dover, Jim Scace, Chris Dunphy
University of Massachusetts Amherst / Center for Design Engagement: Professor Joseph Krupczynski, Patricia Nobre, Caitlin McKee, Michael Luft-Weissberg
Westfield State College: Professor Marijoan Bull, Professor Stephanie Kelly, Adam Bozek, Tim Verrochi
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<td>DOWNTOWN VISIONS</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even with the reality of our nation experiencing the worst housing and economic crisis since the Great Depression, work on Westfield’s Downtown District Plan was an invigorating and rewarding process for all involved. Four conditions made this planning process, and the resulting plan, extremely useful for the City of Westfield.

• **The city was ready**—a new Mayor initiated the process, key staff were eager to participate, the City Council and key boards and commissions were enthusiastic and supportive, and exciting physical projects that had been talked about for years were finally underway.

• **The business community was ready**—businesses in Westfield’s downtown had just completed their first year with a Business Improvement District (BID). BIDs are a nationally recognized tool for revitalizing downtowns and have had huge success in other states, but Massachusetts has lagged behind in BID development. Westfield is just the fourth city in the Commonwealth to create a BID.

• **The college was ready**—Westfield State College had a new President, a nationally recognized leader in building positive ‘town-gown’ relationships, who had just announced his intentions to house 1,000 students downtown and also to build a performing arts center and a bookstore downtown.

• **The residents were ready**—Citizen run groups, such as Westfield on Weekends (WOW) —which formed as a result of Westfield’s last planning process from the year 2000—have successfully brought residents and visitors downtown for concerts on the green, dinner theatre and other exciting events. Resident involvement and passion during the community engagement events was high, and demonstrated the community’s commitment to participate in downtown’s revitalization.

Thousands of residents, workers, and students in Westfield participated in this very interactive and transparent collaborative planning process. Plan developers used eleven different means to involve and engage all elements of the Westfield community.

- Advisory Committee
- Community-wide survey
- Plan web-site
- Media releases and outreach
- Stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups
- Visioning workshop
- Design workshops
- Public lecture/discussion
- Presentations to Department heads-roundtable meeting
- Westfield State College coordinating committee
A Revitalized Downtown

As the project team worked together to chart Downtown Westfield’s future, an examination of existing conditions, under-utilized assets and creative potentials revealed the unique characteristics of three downtown districts:

Core Downtown District

*Primary Characteristics: Arts, Culture and Entertainment*

This core downtown area bounded by the Columbia Greenway bridge over Elm Street and the Town Green is characterized by its potential for Arts and Entertainment. Existing venues such as the Rinnova Gallery, Piccolo’s and other downtown restaurants in this area provide an excellent context for this downtown center to thrive with cultural activity. Westfield State College’s plan to invigorate the downtown with a focus on the arts is another initiative that will shape this district’s emerging identity.

Riverfront District

*Primary Characteristics: Recreation and Neighborhood/Youth Culture*

The Great River Bridge Project will provide renewed access to one of Downtown Westfield’s under-utilized assets, the Westfield River. With the Columbia Greenway’s future development, the opportunities for passive and active recreation in a context of commercial and residential riverfront activity will be enhanced. The southern section of this district (east of Elm Street) provides a perfect counterpart to river recreation with existing youth and neighborhood oriented restaurants and bars. Additionally, commercial and residential development opportunities within underutilized existing buildings offer potential for future growth and strengthening connections to adjacent neighborhoods.

Depot Square District

*Primary Characteristics: Residential and Destination Commerce*

With the completion of the Great River Bridge project, this district will have renewed visibility. Local landmarks such as Pilgrim Candle can provide a context for additional destination commerce within this historic and walkable area. The infrastructure improvements and available land also provide an excellent environment for townhomes and multi-family residential development.

A Sustainable Model

As developers show renewed interest in the city, attracted by the walkable neighborhoods, access to active transportation (bicycling and walking), updated infrastructure and the “great bones” shining through the current under-utilized historic buildings, this plan will allow them to define their projects within these new distinct places: Arts, Culture and Entertainment; Recreation and Neighborhood/Youth Culture; and New Residential and Destination Commerce.

The objective of this planning process has been to rethink and re-imagine what a revitalized Downtown Westfield can be, and we offer this plan as a pathway towards that goal. All the pieces are in place for a downtown that is a model for sustainable development for Western Massachusetts and beyond.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RE-THINKING DOWNTOWN WESTFIELD

DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

LEGEND

- **Target Area**
- **Columbia Greenway Rail Trail**
- **River Recreation**
- **Possible Development Focus Areas**

DOWNTOWN WESTFIELD

DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS

**DEPOT SQUARE DISTRICT**
Residential and Destination Commerce

**RIVERFRONT DISTRICT [NORTH]**
Recreation

**RIVERFRONT DISTRICT [SOUTH]**
Neighborhood/Youth Culture

**CORE DOWNTOWN DISTRICT**
Arts, Culture and Entertainment

SOURCE: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

MAP: Center for Design Engagement (CDE) UMass Amherst
Project Framework

Four thematic categories have played an important role in examining the various initiatives for a revitalized downtown: LIVE, WORK, PLAY and CONNECT. “Live” initiatives involve housing strategies and the quality of life downtown; “Work” projects involve downtown economic development; “Play” proposals include projects related to recreation, arts and entertainment; and “Connect” projects involve infrastructure. These themes evolved through an examination of key recurring issues, and developed as an important organizational tool for the community-engaged efforts and for the final recommendations.

These thematic categories are not meant to segregate these important issues for downtown Westfield’s restoration—and many of the recommended initiatives incorporate more than one theme. Instead, these themes offered a framework for our discussions and a means by which the key issues could be clearly presented and explored.

Recommendations

Key recommendations detailed in the plan are listed on pages 8 and 9. It is important to note that many of these recommendations can be implemented at little or no financial cost, but with the energy and enthusiasm of willing and motivated city officials, organization directors, business people, volunteers, community organizers and active residents. Recommendations are categorized as “Organizational,” “Policy” and “Investment” initiatives. The “Organizational” projects emphasize new or re-worked organizational structures within, or between, municipal, business and community groups, while the “Policy” recommendations require action by municipal and/or state government to enact zoning or other changes that support the action plan. “Policy” and “Organizational” projects require limited or no capital, but they will take time and effort. The “Investment” projects will require public and/or private investment and capital, but with some of these projects already underway, the intention is that new projects can leverage the success of these works for future funding.
8. Promote New Construction in the Depot Square District

20. Create a Riverfront Park

7. Create a New Riverfront District

6. Support Reuse of Under-utilized Buildings and Property Along Elm Street

19. Continue Targeted and Consistent Work to Advance the Columbia Greenway

5. Encourage New Housing in the Core Downtown District

25. Streetscape and Sewer Improvements in the Gaslight District

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## LIVE AND WORK RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

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<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<td>1-2 YEARS</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;LIVE&quot; RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Promote Neighborhood Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build on existing efforts initiated by a variety of city departments, including the Community Police Unit, the Business Improvement District (BID), Westfield State College (WSC) and others to promote &quot;neighborhood building&quot; to encourage and facilitate resident involvement in their neighborhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>2. Annual Volunteer Cleanup Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish an annual city cleanup day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>3. Promote Housing Resources on City’s Website</td>
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<td>Reorganize the Department of Community Development and Planning website to more clearly profile existing housing resources.</td>
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<td>Policy</td>
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<td>4. Preserve and Protect Downtown’s Walkable Neighborhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the neighborhoods within and adjacent to the downtown, retain existing housing stock and encourage additional infill housing where opportunities are available. Make infrastructure investments to improve and ensure walkability</td>
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<td>Policy Investment</td>
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<td>5. Encourage New Housing in the Core Downtown District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage housing in commercial buildings that contain underutilized or vacant upper-story space as well as new housing through infill, including mixed-income and mixed-use, in the Core Downtown District.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Support Re-use of Under-utilized Buildings and Property Along Elm Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support new housing along Elm Street in the area north of Bartlett Street and south of the Westfield River through adaptive re-use of existing under-utilized religious and institutional buildings, rehabilitation of underutilized or vacant upper story space in existing commercial buildings, and through infill development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Create a New Riverfront District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage new construction with mixed-income and mixed-use housing along the Westfield River west of Elm Street.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Promote New Construction in the Depot Square District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage new mixed-income housing and mixed-use development through infill and adaptive reuse in the Depot Square District.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;WORK&quot; RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Establish a Downtown Westfield Economic Development Collaborative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build on existing efforts and establish a Downtown Westfield Economic Development Collaborative to combine the resources of key organizations committed to revitalizing downtown and to implement the shared vision for economic development for the downtown district that has emerged from this planning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Promote and &quot;Brand&quot; Downtown Westfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a campaign to promote and &quot;brand&quot; downtown Westfield.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>11. Develop Downtown Permitting Guidebook</td>
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<td>Develop permitting guidebook and distribute to existing downtown property owners as well as make available on City website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Investment</td>
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<td>12. Support Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage small business development in the downtown area through use of STCC Entrepreneurial Institute’s existing incubator space, technical assistance at WNEC’s Center for Advancing Entrepreneurship and emerging business support programs at Westfield State College.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Create A Design Review Board and Ordinance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adopt Design Review zoning ordinance and standards and establish a Design Review Board to examine all new downtown commercial and large residential projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Use Zoning to Encourage Downtown Growth and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enforce existing zoning in the Downtown target area, and through out the city to channel commercial growth and development downtown and to assure a diverse mix of housing available.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Promote Redevelopment of Historic Structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote adaptive reuse and restoration of historic buildings such as Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Rectory, Morgan-Way House, Foster House, Kellogg House and Whip Factory.</td>
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# Executive Summary

## Play and Connect

### Recommendations and Implementation Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Play&quot; Recommendations</strong></td>
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</table>
| Organizational | 16. Increase Arts, Entertainment and Recreational Uses Downtown  
Continue to increase use of downtown venues and open spaces for arts, entertainment and recreational events. Coordinate with Westfield State College’s plans for relocating some of their arts and entertainment activities to the downtown. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Organizational | 17. Promote Temporary Arts & Entertainment-Related Uses of Underutilized Downtown Spaces  
Develop organized programs to promote temporary arts and entertainment-related uses in vacant or underutilized lots and storefronts in the target area. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Organizational | 18. Coordinate and Disseminate Arts and Event Information  
Coordinate and disseminate information about all the great events and programs happening in Westfield’s Downtown. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Organizational Policy Investment | 19. Continue Targeted and Consistent Work to Advance the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail  
Continue to advance funding possibilities through MassHighway processes and use municipal ordinances to prevent actions that would make the proposed Rail Trail impassable/impractical. Focus city and community efforts, and leverage community support by executing a public information campaign and creating a “Friends of the Greenway” community group. |                   |           | X         |          |
| Investment | 20. Create a Riverfront Park  
Create a riverfront park connecting Whitney Park and the new parks that are part of the Great River Bridge development on existing City-owned land along the southern side of the Westfield River. |                   |           |           | X         |
| Investment | 21. Plan for Neighborhood Pocket Parks  
Pursue neighborhood pocket parks in the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. |                   | X         |           |          |
| **"Connect" Recommendations**                                                                                                                  |                   |           |           |           |          |
| Organizational Policy Investment | 22. Address Traffic Congestion on Elm Street  
Assure a safe and comfortable environment for all modes of transportation, especially pedestrians, along Elm Street. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Organizational Policy Investment | 23. Address Downtown Parking Issues  
Use information collected in planning process to address downtown parking problems, possibly including a parking garage, production of parking maps/signs, parking demand reduction strategies, and a “park once” campaign. Improve lighting, surface, and entrance/exit conditions to existing parking lots as their current condition does not encourage people to park downtown. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Policy Investment | 24. Expand Transportation Options between WSC and the Downtown  
Expand transportation options on Western Avenue between WSC and the Downtown, including bicycle lane stripping, additional signage, and continued sidewalk maintenance and construction. Increase shuttle van or bus service—perhaps in a “trolley format”—from WSC to and from the Downtown. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Investment | 25. Streetscape and Sewer Improvements in the Gaslight District  
Continue to work towards streetscape and sewer improvements in the Gaslight District (Franklin to Court, Elm to Washington). These planned (and partially funded) improvements will address the concerns regarding out of date infrastructure in the downtown. |                   | X         |           |          |
| Investment | 26. Improve Water Supply and Sewer Pipes in Downtown  
Strategize for the improvement and/or replacement of piping not addressed by the Gaslight District work described above—to assure that proposed new developments and redevelopments can move ahead. |                   |           | X         |          |
| Investment | 27. Planning, Development and Construction of Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC)  
The City should continue to partner with the PVTA and Westfield Redevelopment Authority (WRA) on this important infrastructure project that will enhance alternative transportation options to and from the downtown. |                   |           |           | X         |
| Investment | 28. Continue "Old Towne" Sidewalk Improvements  
Continue to replace pavement, streetscape, and treebelt on Maple, Morris, Sibby, and Madison Streets to stabilize and beautify neighborhoods surrounding the downtown. |                   |           |           | X         |
A VISION OF THE FUTURE: RECLAIMING THE WESTFIELD RIVERFRONT WITH HOUSING, RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES
How can these recommendations be realized and what is the impact on downtown’s visual and built environment? This is often a common question within a community regarding any downtown design process. The following examples illustrate the impact these recommendations can have in four specific downtown locations and how these projects can have a lasting impact for residents and visitors who live, work, play and connect downtown. While the recommendations within this report are outlined as individual efforts, downtown projects will likely cross thematic boundaries and knit together ideas and initiatives for their success.
RECLAIM THE RIVERFRONT

One of the keys to Westfield’s downtown revitalization is to restore and build upon access to the Westfield River. Riverfront areas historically were prime locations for industrial uses. With the national decline in manufacturing in urban area, cities and towns nationwide are reclaiming riverfront areas for more people-oriented uses.

Once the Great River Bridge project is completed, land located on both sides of the Westfield River will offer substantial opportunity for the development of mixed income and mixed-use housing along with parks and other recreational facilities. This area offers direct access to the river, the Columbia Greenway and existing and proposed riverfront parks. In addition downtown amenities and major transportation routes into and out of the city are nearby. Residential, commercial and recreational riverfront development would allow one of Westfield’s under-utilized assets to be at the center of downtown’s renewal as a vibrant, sustainable and environmental-friendly destination.
EM SREET REVITALIZATION

Elm Street is the lifeline of downtown. Throughout the design process residents expressed their concern, hopes and ideas regarding this central artery. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission is in the process of studying traffic on Elm street to identify solutions to traffic congestion and, if possible, use study results to perform ‘what if’ scenarios on ideas proposed to solve congestion, including but not limited to: traffic calming, “completing the street”, angle parking, making select streets one-way, and road “diets.”

It is also clear that a safe and comfortable environment for all modes of transportation, especially pedestrians, is a key to business and economic development in downtown. Many of this report’s recommendations seek to improve the economic conditions of the downtown district through business incubation, social programming, and community event planning that engages the street as an essential public space. In addition, encouraging the use of under-utilized buildings, adopting Design Review zoning and enforcing existing ordinances are all significant elements needed to restore Elm Street into a bustling and commercially successful “Main Street”.

This project relates to following Recommendations:
6. Support Reuse of Under-utilized Buildings and Property Along Elm Street
14. Use Zoning to Encourage Downtown Growth and Development
22. Address Traffic Congestion on Elm Street
RAIL TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The Columbia Greenway has a unique position within Westfield. This rail trail, being developed along an elevated abandoned railroad bed, will eventually become a major pedestrian and bicycle connector from the north to the south end of the downtown. While many rail trails bypass downtown cores, in Westfield the trail weaves its way through the center of the city and offers outstanding potential for passive and active recreation. This route will offer safe, speedy and convenient travel along a linear park spanning numerous roadways and the Westfield River, and connecting a number of destinations throughout the city. The realization of this important asset would move Westfield closer to its potential as a walkable, bike-friendly sustainable city.

This trail not only “knits” together the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods but also has great potential for economic development as businesses with roofs or second floors aligned with the rail trail find new and profitable uses for these spaces. These strategically placed economic stimuli would provide for new unique amenities, and increase the critical mass of people needed to support downtown economic activity.

This project relates to following Recommendations:
10. Promote and “Brand” Downtown Westfield
16. Increase Arts, Entertainment and Recreational Uses Downtown
19. Continue Targeted and Consistent Work to Advance the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail

Existing view at Rail Trail at Elm St Bridge

Proposed view at Rail Trail at Elm St Bridge
REUSE UNDERUTILIZED SPACES FOR ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A “playful” downtown is the cumulative result of viable businesses, welcoming public spaces, interesting architecture, recreational opportunities, planned and informal events, and an active arts, music and cultural scene. For the City of Westfield, achieving a playful downtown will be a multifaceted effort, and the city, local organizations, and residents are already working on many of the pieces that will help create this space.

Within the Downtown Design Workshops, using vacant storefronts and empty lots, such as the Newbury Department Store lot, played a prominent role in discussions regarding the potential for temporary recreational and arts events to activate these underutilized spaces. Such sites offer opportunities to hold arts and entertainment events, including but not limited to; outdoor theatrical productions, live concerts, movie screenings on the sides of buildings, community picnics, community art and landscape installations, and public murals. Many long-time residents remember the Newbury Department Store fondly and the current empty lot is locally known as the “Hole,” and desires to see something happen there --even if temporary-- were quite strong. Short-term use of this site is especially attractive in that it would allow for immediate change and can act as an active placeholder until a long-term profitable use is developed.