



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

Revitalization of the Lower Worthington Street District (Springfield, MA)

Item Type	article;article
Authors	Allen, Karl S;Berube, Mark D;Bosen, Calliope E;Lewis, Gregory Robert;Mello, Alexander Casey;Michniewicz, Caitlin Anne;Rosa, John Armando;Spencer, Sarah;Wasserman, Stacy E
Download date	2025-08-26 04:13:07
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/31963



Fall 2013 MRP Planning Studio - Home in the Heart of Springfield: the Lower Worthington Street District



Executive Summary

In a section of the downtown Metro Center in Springfield, Massachusetts, among the historic brick buildings and warehouses to the east of Main Street, residents were used to seeing the flashing lights of passing fire trucks. But, on November 23, 2012, the day after Thanksgiving, emergency personnel and workers from Columbia Gas barely escaped the Scores Gentlemen's Club on Worthington Street before a massive explosion obliterated the building and sent out a shockwave that damaged 62 other buildings, including 150 residential units. No one lost their life, but 21 people were injured. In short, it was one more disaster in a downtown recently visited by a tornado and consistently challenged by urban decline.



Our Studio Team was tasked to deliver well-researched suggestions for initial strategies that could revive this area into a 24-hour, trendy, market-rate neighborhood that would attract young professionals seeking both residential amenities and a walkable, urban lifestyle. Also, important to the authors of this report are methods to preserve diversity and include the current residents within aspects of our approaches, specifically to provide opportunities to join in the economic benefits of revitalization and to avoid the typical trade-off of displacement as growth increases. The boundaries of the study area, which we branded the Lower Worthington Street District (LWSD), are Main Street, Lyman Street (along the railroad tracks), Spring Street, Matoon Street, and Bridge Street (see Figure 1, left).

The LWSD was once one of Springfield's most vibrant centers of retail, wholesale, manufacturing, and innovation with many globally important inventions such as the gasoline-powered automobile. Since the closing of businesses due to suburban competition, downward industrial trends, and traffic congestion, the LWSD now contains underutilized buildings, empty storefronts, and low-fund-

ed infrastructure. Still, there are some bright spots insofar as the healthy night-life, including fine restaurants and live entertainment.

We found three important barriers to be aware of when planning for the redevelopment of the LWSD. First, the property values are currently too low to justify profitable investments in newly constructed, market-rate condominiums. Second, there is a pervasively negative public perception of the crime in Springfield's downtown, almost entirely held by those living outside the City, and it could prove difficult to dispel. Last, there exists a "chicken and egg" startup conundrum where a lack of small-scale amenities, such as coffee shops, corner grocers, and boutiques, hinders the number of potential new residents just as much as their presence would attract them.

Conversely, there are three key advantages held by the LWSD that can be exploited. Most importantly, Zimmerman Volk Associates, Inc. very recently released a residential market analysis of downtown Springfield and concluded there is a strong demand for market-rate housing. Next, there exists a large stock of existing historic buildings to be converted into

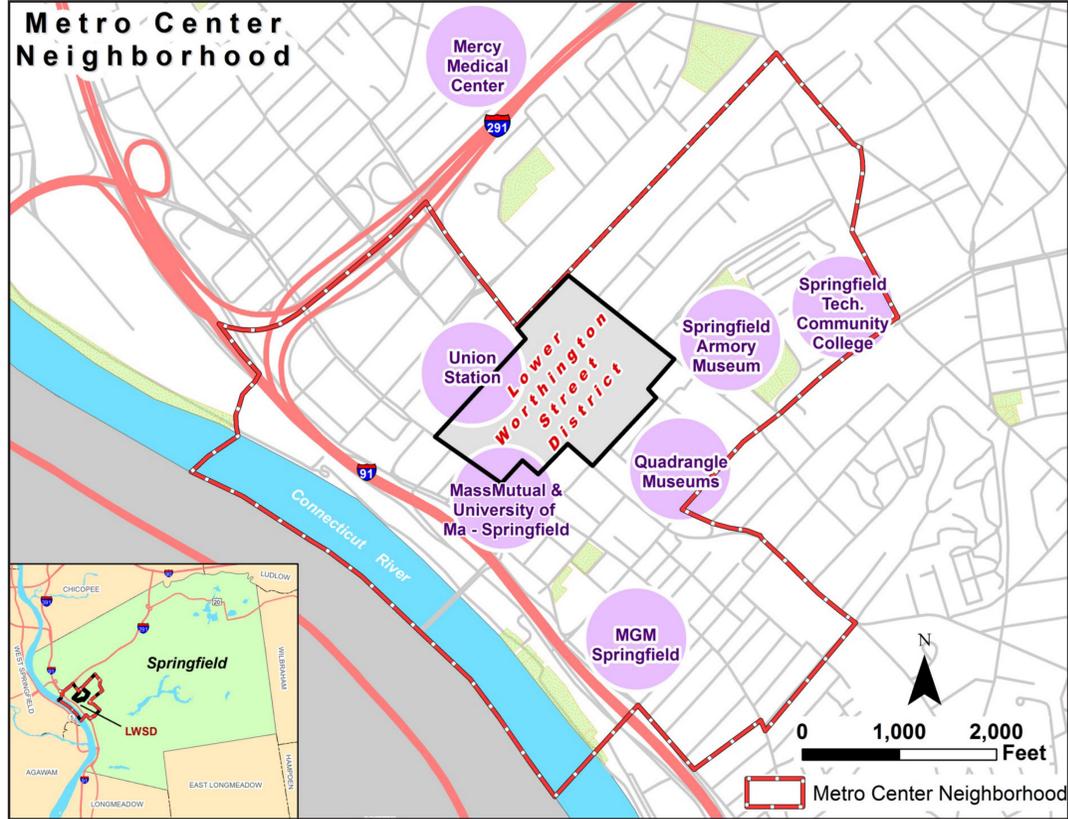
loft-style units, which would play into the central competitive advantage of cities over the suburbs: authenticity. Finally, the downtown is anticipating major investments by outside entities: the rehabilitation of Union Station into a commuter transit hub creating TOD opportunities, the location of a satellite campus of the University of Massachusetts with its young residents and customers, and the arrival of an MGM casino that will bring thousands of visitors and world-class entertainment.

The Studio Team kept these factors in focus when creating a strategy and timeline for redeveloping the LWSD. To bridge the gap in construction costs and low selling prices, we propose that the City coordinate with private developers to make possible the adaptive reuse of many of the vacant or underutilized former factories, warehouses and showrooms in the district. We present our suggestions in three phases: the first outlining the regulatory and incentive tactics that can foster private interest, the second designating specific areas well-suited for reuse, and the third allowing for new buildings with the assumption that previous activities sufficiently raised property values. To provide backup and wisdom

to our findings, our research included academic literature on subjects related to urban revitalization, case studies of successful cities, and many interviews with extremely welcoming and helpful people of Springfield. We demonstrate our results, in priority development sites, with highly specific suggestions for what we consider the best opportunities in the LWSD, including market-rate residential, indoor markets, storefront shops, an industrial job center, and public space.

We believe that our findings describe a vision for the LWSD, with its unique and historic identity marketed as the "new" neighborhood to live, work, and play in, while outlining starting points that can be explored by Utile, Inc. Architecture + Planning, a design firm selected by DevelopSpringfield for their expertise in complex urban problems, to make this revitalization a reality. Further research for this studio, were it to continue, would include the creation of a pro forma that analyzes market conditions, improvement costs, and potential impact of public incentives. As a team, our group was thrilled to take the first look at a dynamic neighborhood with incredible potential to return to greatness, and we are excited to witness its success.

The Location



The Plan



Plan Contents

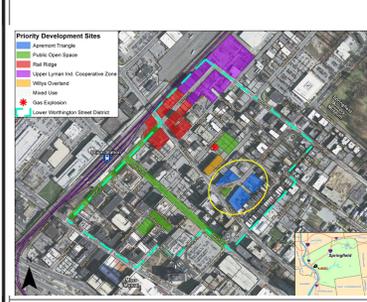
- Analysis of District
 - History
 - Neighborhood Profile
 - Lynch Analysis
 - Connectivity and Transit
 - Parking
 - Public Perception
- Review of Literature
 - Downtown Revitalization
 - Housing
 - Retail
 - Industry & Employment
 - Public & Green Space
- Current Policy
 - Zoning
 - Tax Base and Land Use
 - Adult Entertainment Uses
- Site Redevelopment Overview
 - Housing
 - Commercial
 - Industrial and Job Creation
- Priority Development Sites
 - Apremont Triangle
 - Rail Ridge
 - Willys Overland Building
 - Upper Lyman Cooperative Zone
 - Lyman Arcade
 - Dwight Street Greenway
 - Community Gardens at Lower Worthington
 - Stearns Square Extension
- Financial Incentives
- Policy Recommendations

The Strategy

- ### Phased Implementation
- Phase One: Preparatory work (Now- 2017)**
 - Assess financial and regulatory barriers to redevelopment. Assemble incentive packages.
 - Phase Two: Adaptive Reuse (2017-2025)**
 - Initial redevelopment of existing buildings for market-rate lofts and retail amenities.
 - Phase Three: New Development (2025-)**
 - Increased activity from Phase Two raises property values to close the profit gap and spurs new development.



Priority Development Sites



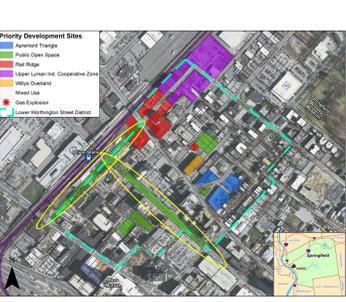
Apremont Triangle

The Apremont Triangle is a prominent triangle located on the northern edge of Chestnut Street where Bridge and Pearl Streets intersect. A report commissioned by the Urban Land Institute identifies the Apremont Triangle as a priority project site that could serve as a neighborhood retail hub for Mattoon Street, Kimball Tower, and Pearl Street residents. Recent planning trends indicate that cities have been shifting towards creating more public spaces that are safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

Our Studio Team thinks that Apremont Triangle has potential to be converted into a civic plaza with Bridge St used exclusively for pedestrians. A new civic plaza can take advantage of the existing green space, street configuration, architectural details, and retail storefronts to enhance the vibrancy and cultivate the character of the neighborhood.

Kelly Clifton of Portland State University found that pedestrians and bicyclists spend more money in neighborhood retail establishments compared to motorists. Renowned city planner, William H. Whyte, has studied urban spaces and suggests that people prefer movable chairs in order to face a preferred direction when sitting. Tables could also complement movable chairs to give people the option of enjoying a meal in the civic plaza, ideally from a future food service establishment at Apremont Triangle.

Additionally, we have identified a local site as an ideal location for a micro loft housing development. These small and minimal units will be attractive to STCC students and urban dwellers seeking low cost living.



Dwight Street Greenway & Lyman Arcade

Dwight Street is a major one-way thoroughfare through the heart of the Metro Center neighborhood. It is a seventy-foot wide public road which does not appear to be necessary to support the actual traffic volumes, though a detailed traffic study is required.

Our proposal is to reserve Dwight Street for pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit. The length of the road in the study area, and perhaps beyond, would be converted to a greenway with substantial tree plantings, separated infrastructure for each use, and rain gardens to assist in storm-water management. Having a landscaped access route from Union Station to the downtown core and casino site would enhance the travel experience for commuters and visitors arriving at Union Station. It would also provide a natural gateway to the new cultural district.

Lyman Street is currently an underused minor connecting street between Main Street and Chestnut Street. It is bordered by the granite retaining wall for the train tracks to the northwest. With the redevelopment of Union Station on the opposite side of the tracks, the primary entrance to Amtrak will no longer be on Lyman Street, removing much of what little traffic uses the street. The goal for redeveloping the area is to provide Lyman Street with a use that will make it the gateway between the revitalized Union Station and downtown Springfield. The proposed development at Lyman Street is to provide a covered arcade enclosing the area from Main Street to Dwight Street encompassing the sidewalks and street area. Arcades such as this provide an upscale pedestrian shopping experience sheltered from the weather. It could become a prime location for restaurants with outdoor seating.



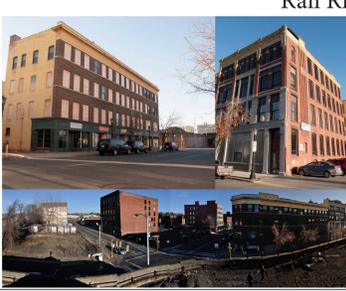
Public Spaces

Our studio team proposes to construct a community garden located in a city owned parking lot adjacent to the blast site. This lot spans 170 feet between Winter Street and Worthington Street and is approximately 160 feet long. The area is currently zoned industrial and the uses by right are community gardens, farmers markets, parks, and outdoor sales and storage.

The purpose of this site plan is to create a functional urban community garden. This garden will be vast in size in order to cater to the wants and needs for surrounding residents. We hope to create an educational space for neighboring school and church groups as well. This space should feel welcoming for all residents, encouraging people to work with the earth. The community garden will not only contribute to the social vitality to the neighborhood but also reduce

the amount of impervious pavement. Overall it will create awareness of some best management practices throughout the neighborhood and the need for storm water management.

Stearns Square is a current park area that is used frequently throughout the summer months. While it hosts weekly events during the warm season, there is great potential for increased use year round. The Studio Team envisions a vibrant park for this area, which connects people to art and activity space. We would like to add a public art wall and by extending the park to include the adjacent parking lot, we would encourage the addition of activity features such as a basketball court and swings. We would also suggest that space be left open for playing and picnicking.



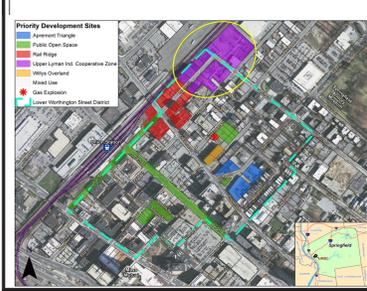
Rail Ridge

The intersection of Lyman and Chestnut Street is essentially a mixed-use, four-corner, mini-neighborhood waiting to happen. Historic buildings, open spaces and easy accessibility, with the urban backdrop of the elevated rail line, combine for the potential of lofts, parks and ground floor retail and restaurants. Such a development with high visibility can showcase in one glance what the LWSD can offer and encourage similar layouts around other key intersections in the neighborhood. Off-street parking, bright sunshine for gardening and an abundance of empty brick wall space ready for public art round out this future "spot".

The LWSD needs a starting point for its objective to turn the neighborhood into one that attracts a younger, professional and creative set that can contribute to its future amenities. This particular site offers both

existing buildings and empty spaces with which to redesign a lifestyle destination for new residents, focused on one intersection by the railroad. With the rehabilitation of Union Station one block away, this site is suitable for the consideration of transit-oriented development.

One of the most important aspects of beginning a priority focus on Rail Ridge is to assess the challenges and impediments to development. Part of this is contacting the owners of the properties to evaluate their intentions, financial abilities and potential interest in either redeveloping or transferring the property. Due to the possibility of temporary public acquisition being necessary to spark the site's initial momentum, Springfield may wish to establish partnerships in advance with private entities interested in the project.



Upper Lyman Cooperative Center

The Upper Lyman Cooperative Zone is located on the northern most portion of Lyman Street (Figure 46). The area currently consists of a mix of large vacant lots and underutilized buildings that are in poor physical condition. Nine land parcels on Lyman and Taylor Streets have been identified as priority sites for future industrial development in this area.

The Upper Lyman Cooperative Zone is intended to serve as a downtown Springfield community economic development catalyst. The primary goal of industrial development in this area is to provide living-wage jobs for local residents and to enhance existing city industries and tax revenues. The secondary goal of this Cooperative Zone is to maintain local socio-economic diversity by alleviating poverty and the potential for future displacement through the creation of more

stable area job opportunities. Political and financial support are most likely required to initiate industrial development, but Upper Lyman Cooperative Zone businesses are ultimately expected to maintain financial stability and profit.

The rehabilitation of the former EF Collins and Sons Power Company Building, and the construction of a cooperatively owned for-profit industrial greenhouse on the 2.5-acre former Daigle's Auto property will serve as the centerpiece for job creation and economic stabilization for the Lower Worthington Street District. The Rebuilding Exchange in Chicago, IL and the Green City Growers Cooperative in Cleveland, OH are positive examples of how Springfield can successfully incorporate these types of stable job centers into a long-term vision for LWSD industrial development.



Willys Overland Block

The Willys Overland Block stretches from Chestnut to Winter Street within the LWSD. The four story building was constructed in 1916 as a sales and service facility for the Willys Overland Motor Company. Willys Overland was one of the manufacturers that established Springfield as a city of cars alongside other prominent dealers like Rolls Royce and Pontiac.

Willys Overland Springfield has a twin building located in Detroit, MI that has been converted to lofts and retail space. Keeping with the city's desire to attract young professionals from in and around Springfield to live in the LWSD, and with the results of a survey we circulated indicating that lofts are the preferred housing type for this demographic, we are proposing that Willys Overland Springfield be redeveloped in accordance with this model.

Our proposal for Willys Overland Springfield is for a similar mixed use project. We feel that, at minimum, the two upper floors can be converted into trendy, market rate lofts, while the lower levels can be used for retail space that the LWSD is in need of.

After exploring the standing zoning code for the proposed redevelopment and considering the uses that would make us want to live in a building, our Studio Team has settled on a mixed use that incorporates approximately 20 loft-style units, a public gym, and a ground floor market retail space that sells produce from the adjacent community garden (see the section on Public Spaces), other fresh prepared foods, and basic grocery needs: Willys Market and the Overland Lofts.