Creating Recreational Space and Food Security
City of Chicopee, Massachusetts

Executive Summary
A once booming cultural and industrial city, Chicopee has many vacant brownfields and no pedestrian access to either the Chicopee or the Connecticut rivers. The village of Chicopee Falls has a higher proportion of low-income households, youth, and aging residents than the City of Chicopee. In order to resolve these issues and increase equity for all of its residents, the City of Chicopee desires to implement a vision of sustainable economic revitalization by adaptively reusing former brownfields as destinations for active and passive recreation while also generating food insecurity and accessibility.

Our studio team, the PEACE Planners, has examined three properties that will address Chicopee's vision of sustainable economic revitalization. These properties are the Baskin Property, RiverMills South, and Delta Park. Our proposal will connect Chicopee's downtown to these potential destinations in the neighboring village of Chicopee Falls. The backbone for these three properties is the Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway, which is a multi-use trail that is currently under construction and will connect to a regional trail network from Longmeadow, MA to Holyoke, MA.

Baskin Property: Food Access
GOAL: Develop the Baskin property into a restaurant incubator, maker space, regional food market, and/or permanent farmer's market facility.

Problem: Baskin Property is a 4.6-acre site with a vacant two story 11,000 square foot brick warehouse. The warehouse is located above the Chicopee River, but has limited river access due to a flood control dyke and a steep slope. The property is located in the Village of Chicopee Falls and is across from low-income housing and south of the RiverMills Senior Center. In addition, the Village of Chicopee Falls suffers from food insecurity and accessibility.

CASE STUDIES: To understand the space requirements for the various food options, the PEACE planners looked at a number of regional food facilities. The Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center (Greenfield, MA) offers a range of new entrepreneur training programs and a fully functioning commercial kitchen. We also visited the Amherst Farmers Market, which expanded their market footprint to increase participation for Amherst farmers and food processors. The Amherst Farmers Market is also actively working to expand food access and affordability to all residents.

Recommendations: Based on site visits and a stakeholder meeting, PEACE Planners recommend that Baskin Warehouse be used to house a permanent farmer's market, a community garden and to use the warehouse as a food hub for food trucks. We also suggest developing stronger connections to existing groups in Chicopee and the region that are trying to promote local food to help make food more accessible and affordable to residents in Chicopee.

RiverMills South: Active Recreation
GOAL: To develop three scenarios for an indoor/outdoor recreational facility that will address the Chicopee's need for an active recreation facility. The three scenarios are either a public-only, private-only, or public/private partnership and will address funding, ownership, and management.

Problem: RiverMills South is a 28-acre city-owned property formerly known as the UG:

CASE STUDIES: PEACE Planners visited several locations to determine precedents. The Riverside Park in Hartford, CT and the Fore Kicks in Taunton, MA were the two most successful examples. The Riverside Park demonstrated a connection between downtown and the waterfront as well as offering public amenities such as restrooms, information displays, and drinking fountains. Fore Kicks is a privately owned sport complex with both indoor and outdoor athletic fields, representing a private investment of 20 million dollars.

Recommendations: To accomplish the development of this active recreation facility, PEACE Planners have conceptualized a strategic process for Chicopee to follow. The first step is convening a committee to identify the need by listing the facility's amenities (i.e., basketball courts, concession stands, locker room, etc.). The second step is identifying the cost for the amenities. If the projected costs outweigh the available and potential funding, then the committee must return to step one and prioritize the facility's amenities. After Chicopee has prioritized the amenities, the third step is for Chicopee to determine which scenarios to adopt (e.g., public only, private only, public-private partnership).

Delta Park: Passive Recreation
GOAL: To develop a plan for Delta Park as a passive recreational public park that serves as a waterfront destination and connects to local and multi-use trails.

CASE STUDIES: Delta Park is a vacant 24-acre site at the confluence of the Connecticut and Chicopee rivers making it prone to flooding. Most residents do not know it exists as a 1-391 and a rail line separated the park from the city. The entrance is also too small for large vehicles, creating an accessibility issue. Delta Park is also located near low-income neighborhoods with vacant facilties such as the Lyman Mill, which will be converted to artist lofts. The Park has no parking and Chicopee hopes to solve this issue in partnership with the Lyman Mill's developer.

Recommendations: PEACE Planners recommends implementing the Conway School's final design for Delta Park. The design accounts for flooding and connects the park to downtown Chicopee. The design has three phases, which can be funded separately. We have indentified the following funds for implementation: Neighborhood Stabilization Program Funds, Community Development Block Grant, state and federal funds, and public and private partnerships.

BACKGROUND
History: Chicopee, like many Massachusetts cities, has roots in an industrial past. During the late 19th century, Chicopee grew rapidly until the Great Depression and the subsequent closure of many factories. Because of WWII, Chicopee regained its manufacturing base. Due to the expansion of the Westover Airforce Base, Chicopee’s factory production steadily climbed until the mid 1970s. When the Universal Tire Company downsized in the 1970’s and finally closed in 1980, Chicopee’s jobs and population declined.

DEMOGRAPHICS: During the period of rapid industrialization of the 19th and early 20th century, Chicopee attracted Polish, Irish, and French Canadian immigrants. These groups still comprise the majority of the population. However, and in the last two decades, Chicopee has seen an increase in Hispanic residents.

PROBLEM: Despite Chicopee's ideal location at the confluence of the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers, the city has no access to either river. In addition, post-industrial economic decline has resulted in a lack of grocery stores in low-income Village of Chicopee Falls. At present, the larger grocery stores (e.g., WalMart) are located on the Chicopee Center Road between I-91 and the Chicopee River.

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Legend:

- Existing RiverMills South
- Future Kicks in Taunton, MA
- Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk, CT
- Lynch Analysis
- Delta Park
- Chicopee Falls Area
- RiverWalk
- RiverMills Site
- RiverMills South
- Chicopee Falls Area
- RiverMills South
- Baskin Property
- Lynch Analysis
- Focus Area
- Existing Delta Park
- Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk, CT
- Lynch Analysis
- Focus Area
- Median Household Income
- AND Food Access
- Problem: Chicopee Falls is a 20-acre property formerly known as the Uniroyal Factory. The Union Carbide Corporation and the Lyman Mill currently own the site. The property is located south of I-391 and the Chicopee River. The site is currently being remediated.

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