Placemaking in Metro East Springfield - Creating a Landscape Framework

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PLACEMAKING
IN METRO EAST SPRINGFIELD
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Creating a Landscape Framework

Benjamin Breger • Sean Fitzsimmons • Mitchell Johnson • Tasuku Kamei • Jiarui Yu
Tia Novak • Sarah Welch Josiah Simpson • Yincheng Zhang • Dania Khlaifat • Jess Schoendorf

UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield
Department of Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning
In Collaboration with the City of Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development
Graduate Urban Design Studio Spring 2018 • Professors: Michael DiPasquale and Frank Sleegers

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Left Side: Bird’s eye view of the project area. © Google 2018
Acknowledgments

The Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, UMass Amherst, continues the successful collaboration with the Office of Planning and Economic Development of the City of Springfield in the spring of 2018. The studio is coordinated and sponsored by the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield.

This Graduate Urban Design Studio produced five tangible visions for re-imagining an overlooked district in downtown Springfield through the eyes of the landscape. For this studio it was major goal to create visions and ideas how a new community could look like. We envision a community that is inclusive and sensitive to the social and cultural context while being more economically balanced community than today. A place that provides educational services, that creates diverse small-scale business opportunities and new places to live. The framework of the landscape is a crucial element to achieve this. The landscape is how people perceive a place. Is it walkable and connected, is it safe, does it provide moments of enjoyment and relaxation in nature? Does it inspire us to come together and does it attract us with beauty? The metro east neighborhood in downtown Springfield could be a place like this.

Springfield is a city that provides educational services, economically balanced community, that creates diverse small-scale business opportunities and new places to live. The framework of the landscape is a crucial element to achieve this. We envision a community that is inclusive and sensitive to the social and cultural context while being more economically balanced community than today. A place that provides educational services, that creates diverse small-scale business opportunities and new places to live. The framework of the landscape is a crucial element to achieve this. The landscape is how people perceive a place. Is it walkable and connected, is it safe, does it provide moments of enjoyment and relaxation in nature? Does it inspire us to come together and does it attract us with beauty? The metro east neighborhood in downtown Springfield could be a place like this.

We are grateful to Mayor Dominic Sarno for his ongoing support of the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield. We sincerely thank Principal Planner Scott Hanson from the Office of Planning and Economic Development of the City of Springfield for participating and contributing their valuable comments during our studio reviews.

We would also like to thank all other stakeholders and people that attended our meetings, came to our presentations and gave feedback and support of any kind. We are truly thankful for the faculty of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning for participating and contributing their valuable comments during our studio reviews.

Finally, we thank all the students of Urban Design Studio. They were tireless and most enthusiastic. We thank them for their great work to develop and present creative ideas for the City of Springfield.

Frank Sleegers and Michael DiPasquale
Instructors and Directors UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield

Summarized Recommendations
Placemaking in Metro East Springfield - Creating a Landscape Framework provides strategies to use the landscape as a framework for rebuilding the successful collaboration with the Office of Planning and Economic Development of the City of Springfield in the spring of 2018. The studio is coordinated and sponsored through an agreement between the City of Springfield and the UMass Amherst Design Center. This Graduate Urban Design Studio produced five tangible visions for re-imagining an overlooked district in downtown Springfield.

The Landscape Framework is interwoven with cultural activities such as public art and education, new opportunities for small neighborhood commerce, future employment and possibilities for new housing. The Framework will expand urban greening and reduce heat island effects to mitigate the impact of climate change. These overlapping and simultaneous measures are proposed:

- Tangible tactile interventions on streets, facades and underutilized lots that change the perception of the landscape effectively at comparatively low cost.
- New parks that create areas for recreation and contemplation.
- Greenway promenade connections that divide the long street blocks and connect to the neighboring residential areas.
- Establishment of broad range urban agriculture activities to build community, provide food security and education.
- Collaboration with existing organizations in Springfield that are actively involved with urban agriculture: Gardening the Community (GTC), Springfield Technical Community College (STCC), Wellspring Harvest first commercial hydroponic greenhouse, UMass Extension and U Mass Permaculture.
- Walkable streets through extensive street tree plantings, widening of sidewalks, adding bicycle lanes and introducing shared multi-functional streets for community events.
- Stormwater Management through bioswales along streets, green roofs, infiltration areas in new parks, porous pavement.
- Promotion of alternative stormwater management through education and outreach.

Complementary to the Framework of the Landscape, a system of culture – art – working – living has to be established in the area. People want to connect culturally and socially. Creating a sense of place, common ownership, and connectivity are a vital part of a sustainable community. Our proposal includes:

- Complementary cultural, art, craft and education at new Maker-Spaces.
- Daycare Center and other childcare services.
- Outdoor pop-up business opportunities for food vendors such as food carts and trucks.
- Indoor pop-up business opportunities in abandoned or underutilized buildings.
- Adaptive reuse of existing architecture and infill.
- Greenway promenade connections that divide the long street blocks and connect to the neighboring residential areas.
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Studio Project Goals

Create an attractive, walkable urban neighborhood
Promote economic development
Plan for a downtown in transition
Strengthen neighborhood identity and sense of community
Foster equity and diversity

Learning Objectives

Observe and understand the urban situation
Identify assets and challenges
Develop design strategies and themes
Working with precedents as design research
Create site-responsive designs
Design at multiple scales and with changing design tools
Our project area has a rich history of the once thriving auto-related industry. The Willys Overland building that is depicted to the left was built in 1916 for the Willys-Overland Motor Company. Back in the day it was housing the sales showroom and service center for the Willys–Overland Company. Being on the National Register of Historic Places since 1983 it has been underutilized for decades. In the winter of 2017 it has been bought by a developer who will transform it into residential and restaurant spaces. This building is a prime incubator for our area and the design teams envisioned short-time interventions around the Willys Overland building to become a magnet for future revitalization in the eastern metropolitan area of Downtown.
Changes in the Urban Fabric and Urban Grain

The building masses changed radically from 1920 to 2017. While the street corridors still exist, fine-grained buildings are almost absent today. The voids of today are mostly parking lots or vacant property. There is a high demand for alternative uses.

This composite map displays the fine urban grain and the diversity uses around the "Lower Worthington Street District" from "Richards Standard Atlas of the City of Springfield and the Town of Longmeadow Massachusetts", published by the Richards Map Company, 1920. Source: https://www.mapjunction.com/index.html?id=/8233

Kimball Hotel in the early 1900’s.

Upper Lyman Street 1970's.
The demographical analysis and assessment for the Metro Center demonstrates challenges and opportunities. While poverty level and unemployment are still high today, these numbers are decreasing. The area also has only about 600 residents, including the apartments on Chestnut Street and the area around Mattoon and Salem Street (Utile Urban Design, Worthington Street District Planning Study, 2014) and is culturally diverse. For the future it is important to embrace the cultural diversity more while creating a more economically balanced community. New housing opportunities could start a positive trend in this direction.
Springfield has many new initiatives and projects that are revitalizing the area. It is not only the big projects like Union Station or the MGM Casino that make an impact. The Maker Space on Worthington Street was opened in the summer of 2016 engages and educates people from diverse backgrounds and ages. This is an intervention at relatively low cost while enriching the day-to-day culture.
Street System and Walkability

Eastern downtown is walkable because distances are short. Almost all the streetscapes need significant improvements to be more attractive and safe to pedestrians and bicyclists. The exception is Mattoon Street (3) that has a pedestrian scale and dense street-tree plantings.
The street experience in our area provides different experiences. An asset is the historic architecture. Some of it is kept well, other buildings need some care and maintenance. On Lyman Street we find a lot of underused and vacant buildings.
Zoning

Current zoning is a representation of the past not a vision of the future. In the past it was necessary to separate uses. Today most industrial uses are gone. "Industrial A" or "Business B" allows for heavy manufacturing or highway-related businesses such as auto repair shops. Existing uses that fall in this category could be still maintained. Future zoning should include more "Open Space" in the area and enlarge areas with "Business A" that allows for neighborhood-oriented commercial activities and residential uses.

Changes in the Urban Fabric and Urban Grain

Many buildings have been demolished over the last decades while some were destroyed by the 2012 gas explosion on Worthington Street. The empty lots are challenging but also create new opportunities.
The majority of the design area has impervious surfaces. The map to the left shows the high percentage of impervious areas in downtown. In our area there is an abundance of parking lots and vacant lots. These could be transformed into permeable surfaces that service urban green. Some of them could also be developed with new buildings to increase housing or create other opportunities and services.
The neighborhood has the lowest percentage of tree cover out of any in Springfield. More affluent neighborhoods like Sixteen Acres and Forest Park have a higher percentage. New parkland, forested areas and street trees are proposed.

The focus area has only two public parks: Apremont Triangle and Armoury Common. A system of smaller parks and public green space would make the area more desirable to live.
Our design process involved understanding the site through sketching and observations. We included strategies about phasing and developed a powerful short-time intervention around the Willys-Overland building that would be cost-efficient but highly communicative. Our designs were refined through design development in sections and elevations, building of sketch models and laser-cut 3-D models with 2-feet contours.
Meetings with diverse stakeholders led to a better understanding of assets, challenges and goals from different perspectives. Listening to their ideas was influential for developing the design program.

City of Springfield, Office of Planning and Economic Development - Client
- Information about current projects
- Vision for long-term planning
- Challenged sites and areas need an “asset-based” approach
- Ideas about economic & cultural development

Armoury Quadrangle Civic Association (AQCA) - an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that represents residents and businesses in the Armoury-Quadrangle Neighborhood of downtown Springfield called “Metro Center”.
- Need for active open green spaces and places for children
- Concerns about pedestrian safety
- Small food options
- Spaces to connect with neighbors

Davenport Development - real estate company, new owner of Willy’s Overland building in Springfield
- Willy’s Overland site vision
- Urban development process
- Project phasing
- Plans for placemaking

MassDevelopment - the Commonwealth’s economic development and finance authority. MassDevelopment supports “Make-It Springfield”, a storefront on Worthington Street as a pop-up “maker-space” with a drop-in bicycle repair clinic and daily workshops to revitalize Downtown
- Fast-traveling traffic and creating pedestrian safety
- Rethinking vacant lots and buildings
- Connecting existing community
- Anticipating needs of a changing community

Concerns of residents go beyond our ability to really know and understand. The group of stakeholders cannot be representative while it was beneficial for the class to respond to their comments through our design process. There is a need to address the needs of a diverse population and include equity into our thinking. Other influential components for understanding area and people were regular area visits, on-site sketching and observations.

The design program was developed through the engagement with stakeholders.
THE PROMENADE NEIGHBORHOOD
34-51
Tasuku Kamel • Josiah Simpson

UPTOWN REVITALIZING THE URBAN FABRIC
80 - 89
Dania Khlaifat • Jess Schoendorf

OVERTOWN COMMUNITY
52 - 65
Sean Fitzsimmons • Jiarui Yu • Yincheng Zhang

STATION DISTRICT
66 - 79
Benjamin Breger • Mitchell Johnson

SEED: GROWING RESILIENT COMMUNITY
90 - 99
Tia Novak • Sarah Welch
At present, 33% of this side of Metro Center is vacant lots, empty buildings, or parking areas, and 25% of the 51-acre area are streets. The vast area of open land creates the opportunity to transform the urban environment by integrating improved pedestrian corridors, green infrastructure, and environmental services early. As residential infill occurs the construction of these social and environmental amenities shall be phased in along the way and even partially financed by developers. Residential development prioritizes the reuse of existing buildings and new development on open lots for new apartment buildings that have relaxed on-site parking requirements. The full build out includes 915 new residential units 700 to 1,400 square feet each, comprised of 75% market rate and 25% of units qualifying as affordable housing. Retaining and increasing the number of residents in the neighborhood will support the commercial areas clustered around Armory Triangle and Chestnut Street, improving the quality of life and creating a draw for visitors.

Pedestrian movement is the foundation of this plan by retrofitting each street as a complete street and establishing a green way corridor through the neighborhood. The pedestrian Greenway that links to parks, quite walking streets, commercial amenities, and cultural hubs within the neighborhood and the adjacent areas of Metro Center, such as, the Union Station and the Museums. The Greenway shortens the long streets between Lyman and Pearl to create a well-lit, clear lines-of-site, and safe recreational conduit. The green way provides bonus environmental services such as generous growing space for large shade trees that reduce the neighborhood heat island effect, and integrated stormwater green infrastructure to absorb the runoff from the surrounding area (17 acres). The emphasis on pedestrian experience, connectivity, green space and outdoor programming are tactics for improving neighborhood livability, to create a desirable place to live.
Phasing

Existing Conditions

- Residential
- Commercial
- Parking
- Vacancy
- Parks
- Community space
- Tree Canopy
- Pop-up park
- Park/Green space

Phase One: Catalyze
- Residential
- Commercial
- Parking
- Vacancy
- Parks
- Community space
- Tree Canopy

Phase Two: In-fill
- Residential
- Commercial
- Parking
- Vacancy
- Parks
- Community space
- Tree Canopy

Phase Three: Sustain
- Residential
- Commercial
- Parking
- Vacancy
- Parks
- Community space
- Tree Canopy

Phasing

38

39
The Master Plan suggests four street types that build upon the historic street grid and re-imagine a new traffic organization. Improving the streetscape experience is a critical strategy for increasing the quality of life for residents from the Promenade District. The district's street typology emphasizes complete street tactics to enhance walkability and alternative modes of transportation. Complete streets more equitably share the streetscape with cars by adding bike lanes, expanding bus stop infrastructure, increasing the number of street trees and bioswales, and increasing sidewalk width. Automobile traffic is slowed by integrating tabletop speed bumps, narrowing streets, transitioning one-way streets to two-way, multiple paving materials, colors, and textures, and creating bump-outs at crosswalks.

Dwight Street as a two-way transit corridor.

Winter Street as a shared street.
The Promenade Greenway is a pedestrian walkway that connects the district’s residential neighborhoods with the commercial and cultural area near Apremont Triangle and to the wider city. The Greenway is a park, that offers residents and pedestrians many places to sit, plazas to observe and be seen, night time lighting for improved security, and clear visibility from one end of the district to the other. Walkers from Lyman Street, for example, can see the steeple of the Hispanic Baptist Church on Mattoon Street.
Laser cut chipboard models display the proposed topography for the transitional area between Pearl Street and Winter Street. The landform was developed through diverse sections, study models and CAD drawings.

The plaza at Winter Street is an integrated system combining recreation, green infrastructure, and cultural amenities.

Integrated with the Promenade Greenway is a green infrastructure network of bioswales, stormwater chambers and underground drain lines that intercept the district's runoff and infiltrate it before reaching the sewer system. Approximately 25,100 square feet are dedicated to the green infrastructure network across the neighborhood, capable of soaking up the runoff generated from a two-year storm within the catchment area.
Located in the center of the Greenway, the Promenade Park is the hub for recreational activity in the neighborhood. Its lawn area in the center provides opportunities for active recreation as well as relaxing. Along the edges of the park are ample seating and vegetation that invite the residents and visitors to get away from the busy streets and spend their time in the park. A play area and fitness area are placed near the parking lot. A large bioswale runs along the lower side of the lawn area, which collects and infiltrates overflow from the rest of the green infrastructure network in the neighborhood.
Overview of the model. The model represents the northern half of the park.

A seating area under a grove of trees, near the entrance from Taylor Street.

A path on the northeast side of the park. Landform, trees and seating borders the edge.

A path on the northwest side runs under a tunnel of tree canopy.

A view of the community center from Taylor Street. Artists could use the outdoor space, where it is highly visible from the street, to produce their artwork.

The community center embodies diverse community and cultural activities that foster interaction among people in the neighborhood. It is a complex of three buildings and outdoor spaces for gathering and artwork. Two of the buildings would be an adaptive reuse of existing buildings: one would contain art studios and gallery, and another would be used as community meeting space and a makers space. The third building will be constructed to provide services for children and their parents, such as an indoor play space and a daycare facility.
Temporary Intervention: Layered Visions

The Willy’s Overland building is boarded up like many vacant buildings along Chestnut Street and the area to the north. There are promising plans for the building, yet in the interim there is an opportunity to create light, beauty and inspire passers by with new visions for the building and neighborhood as a whole. The three boarded up windows at the corner of Chestnut and Winter Streets are replaced with bright, colorful murals, illustrated with reflective paint. Small exterior LED lights along the edge of the mural illuminate it, drawing attention both day and night. A peep slot is notched within the murals at 4'-0" provides a chance for the curious to look inside the building. The view within shows images of what the building will become and other visions for the neighborhood. Both the exterior murals and interior vision renderings are produced by Springfield artists, and Davenport Development could contribute an interior rendering image.

- Plywood sheets (10) $200
- Paints (18 colors) $300
- Reflective coating (2 gal) $80
- LED light strips (112 linear feet) $56
- 120 watt spot lights (8) $150
- ½” galvanized cable (60 feet) $40
- Hooks and nuts (12) $25
- Framed bamboo (3) $100
- Interior renderings (3) $7
- Heavy duty framing screws (1 box) $15

Total $1,020

Temporary Intervention: A Sprayed Park

The purpose of this intervention is to demonstrate our vision for the proposed park site in-between Taylor Street and Worthington Street as an public open space that provides the residents of Downtown Springfield much needed opportunities for activities and recreation. The colorful silhouettes of people, trees, and animals are designed to let people imagine different experiences that could happen on the currently vacant lot. This temporary intervention is highly visible from the street, while it is also low cost and easily implemented.

Simple tools and materials are used for this intervention.
PROJECT GOAL: Creating a mixed-use neighborhood in the Metro East District of Downtown Springfield that fosters community identity, social connections, public health, ecological health, economic stability, and sustainable urban practices.

DESIGN PROGRAM:

**Master Plan**

- **Art Square**
- **Art Park**
- **Bar & Restaurant Corner**
- **City Park**
- **Fitness Park**
- **Tot Lot**
- **Community Center Park**
- **Residents’ Park**

**Phase 1 (2018 – 2020)**
- Connect Overtown Community and Downtown
- Develop 3 Streets: Chestnut St., Dwight St., Worthington St.
- Increased Commercial Area: 50,665 sq.ft

**Phase 2 (2020 – 2022)**
- Develop Public Green System and Make the Community more Valuable
- Increased Commercial Area: 16,189 sq.ft
- Increased Housing Units: 30 units
- Increased Public Space: 93,297 sq.ft

**Phase 3 (2022 – 2024)**
- Attract Private Investment and Make a Vivid Community
- Increased Commercial area: 84,997 sq.ft
- Increased Housing Units: 181 units

**Project Goals, Phasing and Design Program**

**PROJECT GOAL:**
Creating a mixed-use neighborhood in the Metro East District of Downtown Springfield that fosters community identity, social connections, public health, ecological health, economic stability, and sustainable urban practices.

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  - Attract Private Investment and Make a Vivid Community
  - Increased Commercial area: 84,997 sq.ft
  - Increased Housing Units: 181 units
This part of the design includes a children’s playground and a triangular community center, as well as a redesign of the winter street using the concept of Tactical Urbanism. Winter Street will turn into a vibrant commercial alley with low cost interventions including a pop-up cafe, a new maker space, a day care center and other programs. The community center will be a node where people like to use public spaces to connect existing residents with future residents. People stay here and chat or use it as a meeting point. The community center can block the streets on both sides to hold festivals during special festivals and moments, and become the focal point of the entire community. The community center is located at a low point of the area, where the green space also serves as a rainwater garden to collect runoff. Two bioswales collect rainwater from the roof and the streets. The children’s playground is close to the Tot Lot location and the existing residential buildings. The Tot Lot can be used by the entire community.
The tot lot has two entrances, one to the day care center and one to Pearl Street. This park is divided into a rest space at the entrance and the activity space of the center. The activity space consists of a central open space, a sand pit, and children’s facilities. The rest space is used by passers-by and parents. The elevation of the green space is lower than the central area and designed to funnel stormwater into bioswales that are occupied with local plant species. Pearl Street’s roads and sidewalks have a 2% cross slope. During stormwater events the runoff will be conveyed to the green belt and cleansed before infiltration into the ground.

Apremont Triangle Center Park will become the central open green space of the revitalized district. The area of the triangular park has increased by one-third of its original size to expand the area of green space. The redesigned spaces are more suitable for people’s use, and facilitate pedestrian circulation on both sides of the street. Raised crosswalks enhance safety and reduce the traffic speed of the cars. American Elms in the eastern portion provide shade and create a sense of enclosure. A centrally located larger space forms a place for markets and larger gatherings. This triangular park facilitates two pedestrian-friendly crossings. They encourage entering the park from both sides.
City Garden

The City Garden is a new park in-between Taylor and Worthington Street that can be accessed from all sides. A small section is enclosed for dogs and people can meet and chat. Two other areas provide different qualities. One is enclosed with a grove of trees, the other one is open to the sun. A small building provides shelter for visitors and a small storage space for tools. A corner space provides bike racks for riders who take the new Greenway Connection. Other activities are embraced through the design: outdoor yoga, running, martial arts and skateboarding.

Fitness Park

On the northern side of the Willy Overland building, this team proposes a new residential building with 30 units. On Winter Street we propose a fitness park. The first floor of the Willy Overland Building is a maker space that provides diverse opportunities for arts and crafts. People love to run and work out while appropriate spaces lack in the area today. The Fitness Park has an engaging topography that invites to exercise and meet new people.
A series of arts and crafts studios and an art park for outside exhibitions is proposed on the corner of Lyman and Spring Street. New buildings offer studio space for artists and craftsmen. Since Springfield has a growing art scene, the establishment of the new art park satisfies people’s needs and provides unique jobs. Lyman Street is located next to the train station. Due to the noise impact of the trains, the rent for buildings and space is relatively low. This advantage makes the location a preferred and suitable choice for small factories and art studios. The outdoor art park is a large lawn with a circular walk around the big lawn. It is used for outdoor exhibitions of art works and factory products and an open market on weekends. It’s also a good place to hold events, like movie nights, concerts, neighborhood BBQ. The park is surrounded by bioswales. A rain garden at the low point collects rain from the street and rooftops. The green corridor is one of the most frequently used spaces for people and brings a flow of people to the art park.

This Green Corridor is a spacious corridor which is about 740 feet long and 55 feet wide. This green passage prohibits the use of vehicles and engages pedestrians while biking is allowed on a separate lane. It creates a safe atmosphere suitable for walking and running and improves connectivity in the district. The Green Corridor connects five major public spaces from south to north and breaks up the long city blocks in our area. These public spaces target diverse groups: community residents, artists, children, exercise enthusiasts, and workers, low-income people. This corridor links different types of residents, allowing people in the community to have more opportunities to meet each other and have more space for leisure activities. Public spaces improve the challenged housing market in Downtown and attract new investment and more people that want to live there.
Temporary Intervention: Winter Street

- Pop-up Cafe
- Overhanging Decoration
- Green Wall
- Open Street Activities
- Green Roof
- Food Truck Mural
- Overhanging Light Strings & Pergola
STATION DISTRICT
A Neighborhood Destination Adjacent to Downtown Springfield
Benjamin Breger • Mitchell Johnson
Station District is a proposal for a new mixed-use neighborhood adjacent to downtown Springfield where residents can live, work, play, and create all in a safe pedestrian-friendly neighborhood.

In close proximity to Union Station and a rich history of distribution and storage of products from all over the world, the name of this district reflects history and geography. New landscape features include Overland Plaza and Station Park, which together provide space for refuge, active recreation, and large community events. A Greenway ties together the entire site and links to the surrounding city. A phasing plan outlines how this vision can be achieved over a multi-year period. Station District will be an affordable and desirable place to live for all and a destination within a growing city.
**PROPOSAL**

1. Willy's Overland (60 units)
2. Overland Plaza
3. 20 units, Grocery, Gym
4. Greenway Connector
5. Station Park
6. Tot Lot and Dog Park
7. Daycare and Office
8. Greenway Entrance

**CONSOLIDATE AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESSES**

**REUSE VACANT BUILDINGS AS INDUSTRIAL INCUBATOR SPACE**

**PHASING PLAN**

1. Willy’s Overland (60 units)
2. Overland Plaza
3. 20 units, Grocery, Gym
4. Greenway Connector
5. Station Park
6. Tot Lot and Dog Park
7. Daycare and Office
8. Greenway Entrance

**1. 60 units and retail**
**2. 20 units and retail**
**3. Apremont Triangle Expansion**
**4. Residential Infill (150 units total)**

**CONSOLIDATE AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESSES**

**REUSE VACANT BUILDINGS AS INDUSTRIAL INCUBATOR SPACE**

**Planning and Design Framework**
Overland Plaza is a proposed community hub and gathering space surrounding the Willy’s-Overland building near downtown Springfield, MA. The space serves as both a destination and comfortable pedestrian circulation route. Winter Street is converted to a limited-car, pedestrian route and existing buildings are repurposed to serve local customers and businesses. The main landscape attraction are the Showcase gardens, managed by STCC and a local non-profit, and designed as a publicly accessible urban refuge and horticulturally productive space. Whimsical rainwater collectors highlight and celebrate water as a resource and make it available in the gardens. The Greenway provides seating and a connection between the adjacent Station Park and historic Mattoon Street. An art studio and gallery provides outdoor exhibit space for local artists. Finally, the local food system is addressed by introducing grocery, an incubator kitchen to spawn new food businesses, and of course, the Showcase Gardens.
A new building as infill for new residents and office working space is proposed at the corner of Winter Street and the new Greenway Connector.
Station Park is a one-acre park located on Worthington St in downtown Springfield. The municipal park provides a natural space for all to enjoy including shade trees, walkways, benches, a playground and dog park. A shaded loading dock trellis was incorporated into the design that highlights the history of the neighborhood while providing comfort and views of downtown Springfield. Behind the trellis exists a natural play area and a dog park. A grassy space in the middle of the park is suitable for picnics and enjoying the sun on a warm day. The park also features storm water gardens consisting of plants that absorb rainwater and naturally treat it before being carried into the storm drainage system.
Large trees provide shade at Station Park and invite for a walk along the rich perennial border.

View into Station Park from Worthington Street
"Developer-supported agriculture is especially powerful in that it can create access to land and capital, while also serving to train young farmers to grow both food and community."

For this reason we propose a community garden where locals can grow their own crops and create a sense of community through social engagement.

Studies show that access to parks and public open space:
- Increases frequency of exercise.
- Increases property value.
- Creates stable neighborhoods with strong community.

ReVITALIZE
RePROGRAM
RePURPOSE
ReCONNECT

Inclusiveness extends to reach the wall mural facing Willy’s Overland building, where different faces represent the diverse community of Uptown, and where all are invited to walk or have a bite at Willy’s Café.

The phases of the project proposal are:
- ReConnect: The first phase would work at reconnecting the neighborhood by creating a coherent set of street typologies.
- RePurpose: Repurposing existing buildings into new functions.
- ReProgram: Creating new programs/uses for vacant lands
- ReVitalize: The last phase would be the addition of necessary buildings that foster economic growth and a creative community.
Winter Street will be a pedestrian-oriented street, where people can walk safely. The street may be completely closed off by bollards certain times of the day or for events. The Willy’s Overland building will have a cafe and tables on its sidewalk, as well as tables on part of the parking lot facing it.

Taylor Street will incorporate two-way circulation for cars, while also having bike pathways on either side of the street. As seen one bike pathway is buffered away from the street by parking spaces as well as a soft edge. While the other bike pathway is a reduced speed car lane as well. Sidewalks are widened and reinforced on either side of the street.

Uptown Green Corridor will allow pedestrians and bikers to cross through the neighborhood car-free, creating a safe route for people to walk/bike/ and get together. There are raised crosswalks to ensure entrance/exit for pedestrians and bikers is at its safest.

Taylor Street
Uptown Green Corridor
Worthington Street
Winter Street

Springfield is at a very exciting time in its history. There is tremendous opportunity to redefine the city’s future through design. After establishing ReConnect, RePurpose, ReProgram, and ReVitalize, UPTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD will become more connected and legible as a whole. This is achieved through the redesign of streets that emphasize on providing opportunities for connectivity to bicyclists and pedestrians, Uptown Park that acts as a hub for social connections, and the Uptown Community Garden that allows residents to grow food while getting together.

In addition to that, the neighborhood is tied together by the new proposed buildings and the redesign of Willy’s Overland and its surroundings. By creating a more pleasant environment for the residents; through the residents’ garden, emphasizing connectivity through providing bike lanes and bus stops on Worthington Street; this part of the neighborhood becomes more livable.
Community gardens are important spaces for gathering and socializing. They are also agents of change, going beyond the scope of growing food, to establish valuable community development potential.

By proposing a community garden in Uptown, the lives of residents and participants could be positively impacted. This is achieved through a number of activities, such as: growing fresh produce that can be used by the residents, promoting social interaction within the local community, and a healthier green environment.
Uptown Park is designed to become a major gathering hub for a diverse neighborhood. In its implementation, the community would be encouraged to put their own mark on the space through artwork and input. The northern side of the park is designed to be used by the RePurposed community center building.

This park ReConnects the neighborhood by its location as a central public space within the community and as a node off the proposed Uptown green corridor. The existing conditions are an abandoned field and parking lot that will be RePurposed and graded to collect and infiltrate stormwater. The design RePrograms the space to become an inclusive public neighborhood park. It aims to ReVitalize the neighborhood by providing community events, exhibit spaces, and learning opportunities adjacent to the community center.
Community garden is one of the many ways green space can engage the community and create connections within the proposed design.
The Springfield Metro area has a rich cultural history and many existing cultural resources, but is dominated by impervious surface and disconnected by dangerous roadways. The existing tree canopy can be used to create green, pedestrian-friendly connections that promote sustainable growth and community engagement.

In the Springfield Metro area, the addition of the MGM casino and other commercial investments will change how users engage and interact with the downtown area. New jobs will mean more permanent residents, and new housing developments and other investment properties are creating exciting opportunities for an inviting, vibrant neighborhood.

This opportunity to re-imagine the Springfield Metro area also presents challenges. Although commerce is large part of revitalizing the Springfield Metro area, the site is primarily residential. The existing population varies in age, race, class, and culture, but this diversity is not always represented in decision making. Feedback from the community echoed the observed need for childcare, active recreation, food options, and dog parks, but the most intangible missing component—and arguably the most important for a sustainable community—is the ability for neighbors to connect with each other.

Despite having an established population, residents feel disconnected from their neighbors and are unsure how to make connections. In a neighborhood where outside influences are imposing major changes, a strong community foundation is necessary to ensure local knowledge informs and supports sustainable growth.

How can an opportunity to re-imagine this neighborhood balance the needs of the existing residential population and anticipate the needs of future residents? How can design accommodate the need for new commercial space and support a sustainable, healthy residential population? How can the diverse residential population be celebrated and nurtured through the creation of social space?

Creating a sense of place, common ownership, and connectivity are a vital part of a sustainable community. Embedding green space within the existing urban fabric is a proven strategy to improve community connectivity and well-being in other cities experiencing significant growth and change, like Baltimore, Maryland. Transforming streets and alleys into green corridors and vacant lots into green nodes in the eastern neighborhood of the Springfield Metro area could be a catalyst for sustainable growth this neighborhood needs.
Exploring the Potential of Tactile Interventions

In an urban environment like Springfield, simple tactile interventions can have significant impacts. Here, strategically painted pavement can calm traffic, create bike lanes, and make better bus stops.

Precedent Projects

Flexile Public Space, Baltimore, Maryland
Gardening the Community, Holyoke, MA

Analysis: Community Feedback

Tactile Urbanism: Proposed Interventions
Sketch Model of the Overlook at Bowl Park.

Vignette of Bowl Park at Willy's Overland. Students from the proposed UMass Extension Greenhouse are resting underneath a grove of birches.
The current parking lot at the Willys-Overland building is transformed into a courtyard to welcome both local residents and visitors. Ash trees create shaded seating areas with a rectilinear water feature to drown out sounds of busy traffic. The courtyard is designed to move visitors through the space, and across the street to Bowl Park.

Named after the depression created by the existing grade, Bowl Park is left largely as open space to create an opportunity for flexible community space. The park has a terraced stair and combined seating area that leads to an overlook (opposite page). The overlook doubles as a picnic area, and adjacent Alert Street is widened to facilitate food trucks.

Alert Street also hosts the proposed green houses and UMass Extension office, which will support both local agriculture and year-round community programming. The produce grown here could supply food trucks and local restaurants.

Community garden is one of the many ways green space can engage the community and create connections within the proposed design.
The project was recognized in the local press with a follow-up interview. The title “Great Ideas for Free” is misleading since our project was funded through a Federal grant led by the Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development.