Restoring the Heart: A Community Vision for the Neighborhood of Aldenville

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<tr>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2017, 7 Peaks partnered with the City of Chicopee to create a public engagement campaign for the neighborhood of Aldenville. 7 Peaks created a brand – “Create Our Chicopee” – and promotional items with the brand and survey link. The goal of this campaign was to collect residents’ opinions and use the results of a community survey to inform planning recommendations for the neighborhood as well as guide future citywide engagement efforts. The community survey received 375 responses, including 182 Aldenville residents. These responses were used to inform three land-use proposals in the neighborhood as well as guide future citywide engagement.

The Aldenville Commons were identified by residents as being key to the once and future vibrancy of Aldenville, and are central to our land-use recommendations. First, to restore the ‘Heart’ of Aldenville, 7 Peaks recommends zoning and programmatic changes to the Aldenville Commons and surrounding area. Second, street improvements around the Aldenville Commons would increase neighborhood safety and accessibility. Finally, a proposed Field and Farm pedestrian path connects several of Aldenville’s greatest assets to allow safe walkable paths. These mitigations work together to help connect and promote Aldenville as a destination in the City, and revitalize “The Heart of Chicopee.”

Recommendations:

• Expand community programming on the Aldenville Commons
• Create a streamlined permitting system for reserving the Aldenville Commons
• Create a mixed-use zone in the area around the Aldenville Commons to encourage business redevelopment

AROUND ALDENVILLE COMMONS

SAFE STREETS THROUGH THE HEART

Field and Farm Pedestrian Path

Existing Conditions: Ray Ash Park and McKinstry Farms were identified as community-assets by the survey results. The two locations are currently not well connected, with McKinstry Farm being isolated from the Aldenville Commons, the heart of the neighborhood.

Purpose: The Field and Farm Pedestrian Path will link Ray Ash Park, McKinstry Farms, and other neighborhood assets while creating a safer environment for students and residents to traverse the neighborhood. Wayfinding and historical signage will be incorporated in order to guide users along the path, while highlighting the assets and attractions.

Recommendations:

• Create a 1.5-mile path that will link community-identified assets with wayfinding signage
• Use historical signage on the Commons to show residents what Aldenville used to look like, while providing vision for the future
• Provide students and residents with safe pedestrian routes to Chicopee Comprehensive High School and Lambert-Lavoie Elementary School

Existing Conditions: A majority of survey respondents identified streets and traffic problems as a priority for future improvements in Aldenville. Streets in Aldenville are characterized by wide travel lanes that encourage motorists’ speeding.

Purpose: The mitigation strategies proposed by 7 Peaks Planning would reduce the speed by which traffic operates in Aldenville. Improving and expanding the existing sidewalk and bicycle networks in Aldenville would increase the opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists to travel throughout the neighborhood.

Recommendations:

• Repaint crosswalks and paint temporary bump-outs to calm traffic along McKinstry Avenue and to improve pedestrian safety
• Use a Variable Message Sign to inform drivers to reduce their speed
• Conduct a Traffic Study of McKinstry Avenue to inform future safety treatments
• Install HAWK systems at high usage crosswalks for safer pedestrian passage

McKinstry Ave Proposed Uses

Existing Conditions: The Aldenville Commons and its immediate surroundings are critical to the well-being of the whole neighborhood, containing both important assets and challenges. This area developed as a distinct downtown and was once the focal point for community life and economic activity.

Purpose: 7 Peaks proposes both short-term programmatic interventions and long-term policies to help reestablish the Aldenville Commons as a destination for residents.

Recommendations:

• Create a mixed-use zone in the area around the Aldenville Commons
• Create a streamlined permitting system for reserving the Aldenville Commons
• Create a mixed-use zone in the area around the Aldenville Commons to encourage business redevelopment

Let’s Talk about Aldenville! Take the Online Survey at CreateOurChicopee.com

The Aldenville Commons to encourage business redevelopment

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7 Peaks would like to thank Lee Pouliot and Jack Benjamin (City of Chicopee), the businesses, restaurants, and organizations that displayed our promotional materials and participated in our engagement process; Jennifer Stromsten (Lewis and Stromsten Consulting LLC.), the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning; and our instructor Dr. Daniel Ramsey-Musolf.