

MERRICK & MEMORIAL



Prepared by the
Pioneer Valley
Planning Commission

Merrick and Memorial Neighborhood Study

West Springfield, MA

Phase II

Executive Summary

July 2014



Prepared in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, and the City of West Springfield. The views and opinions of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Introduction: Merrick and Memorial Neighborhoods Study

This brochure summarizes Phase II of a Transportation and Community System Preservation study for the Merrick and Memorial Neighborhoods of West Springfield, Massachusetts. This study is a multidisciplinary effort of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) and the City of West Springfield to look at how transportation and redevelopment can work together to improve the quality of life for residents and the economic vitality of businesses in these two neighborhoods.

Phase I of this study was completed in 2004 with the issuance of a Redevelopment Plan. This plan targeted several areas for economic development in the Merrick Neighborhood, including properties along Union Street, and recommended several transportation and infrastructure improvements to improve access to the CSX railyard and preserve the quality of life in surrounding residential areas.

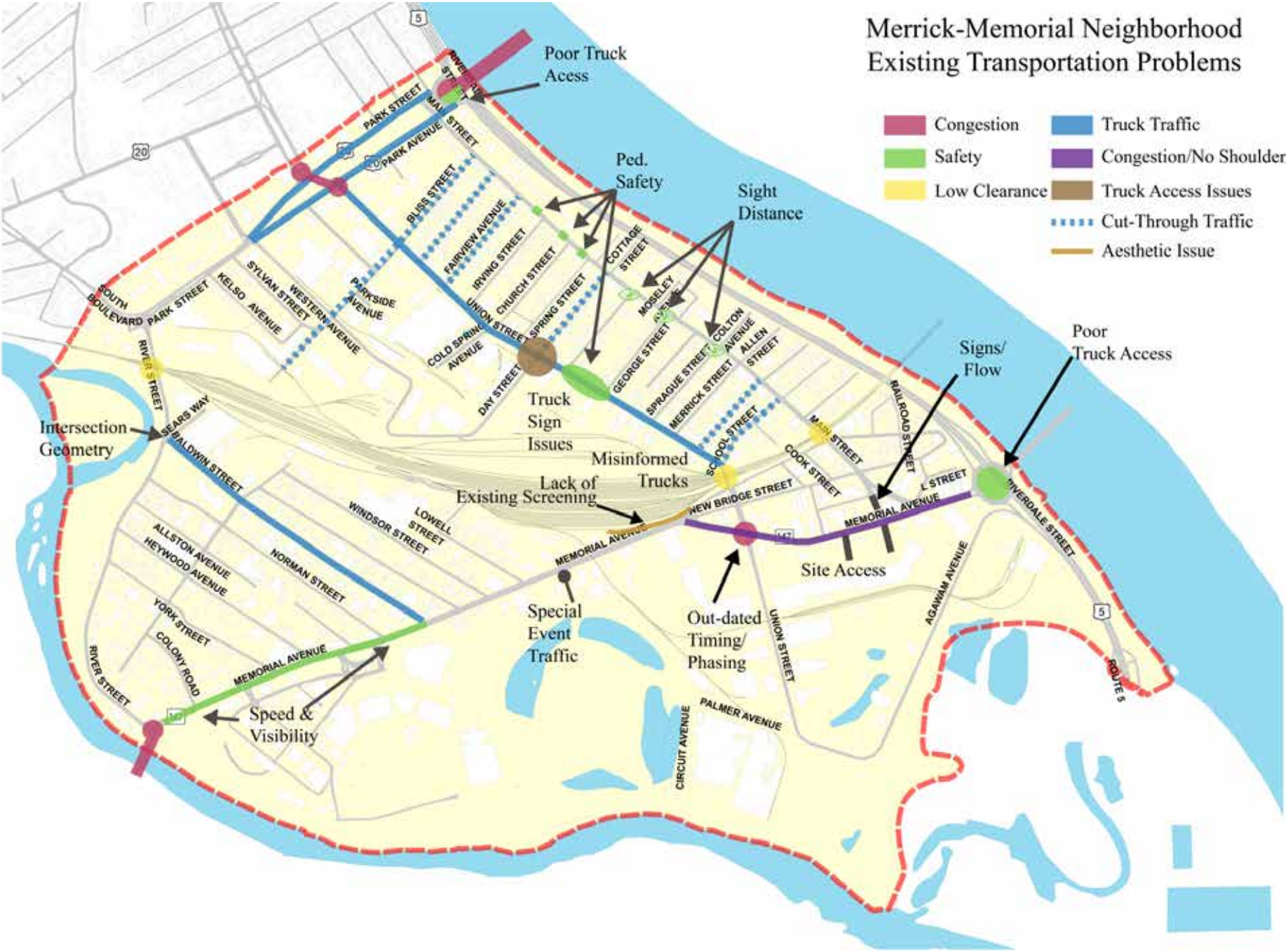
On June 1, 2011 many communities in Western Massachusetts, including West Springfield, were severely damaged by a violent EF-3 category tornado. Damage in the Merrick Neighborhood alone was \$9.5 million. This event dramatically changed conditions in the study area.

Now complete, Phase II of the study addresses the entire study area (both Merrick and Memorial Neighborhoods). It offers recommendations that are geared to improve the efficiency of the regional transportation system, increase employment and business activity, and encourage new development and redevelopment that enhances the livability and the quality of life for people who live and work in the Merrick and Memorial Neighborhoods.



The Transportation, Community, and System Preservation (TCSP) Program is a federal initiative to fund comprehensive planning and research to investigate and address the relationship between transportation, community, and system preservation through the development and implementation of strategies which improve the efficiency of the transportation system.

Merrick-Memorial Neighborhood Existing Transportation Problems



Transportation Needs: Vertical Clearance

Railroad underpasses are located on Main Street, River Street and Union Street in the study area. All three underpasses provide just 12 feet of vertical clearance. This restricts the ability of larger vehicles to enter the study area. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) recommends at least 14.5 feet of vertical clearance, with 16.5 feet preferred to allow extra clearance for roadway resurfacing and accumulations of snow and ice.

The upgrade of the Union Street Underpass is a “High Priority Project” in the current Regional Transportation Plan for the Pioneer Valley. The City of West Springfield has worked in close cooperation with MassDOT and CSX to identify possible design alternatives for increasing the vertical clearance at this location (seen at right below). This improvement would allow trucks to access the railyard and existing commercial and industrial uses without travelling on neighborhood streets.



River Street Underpass



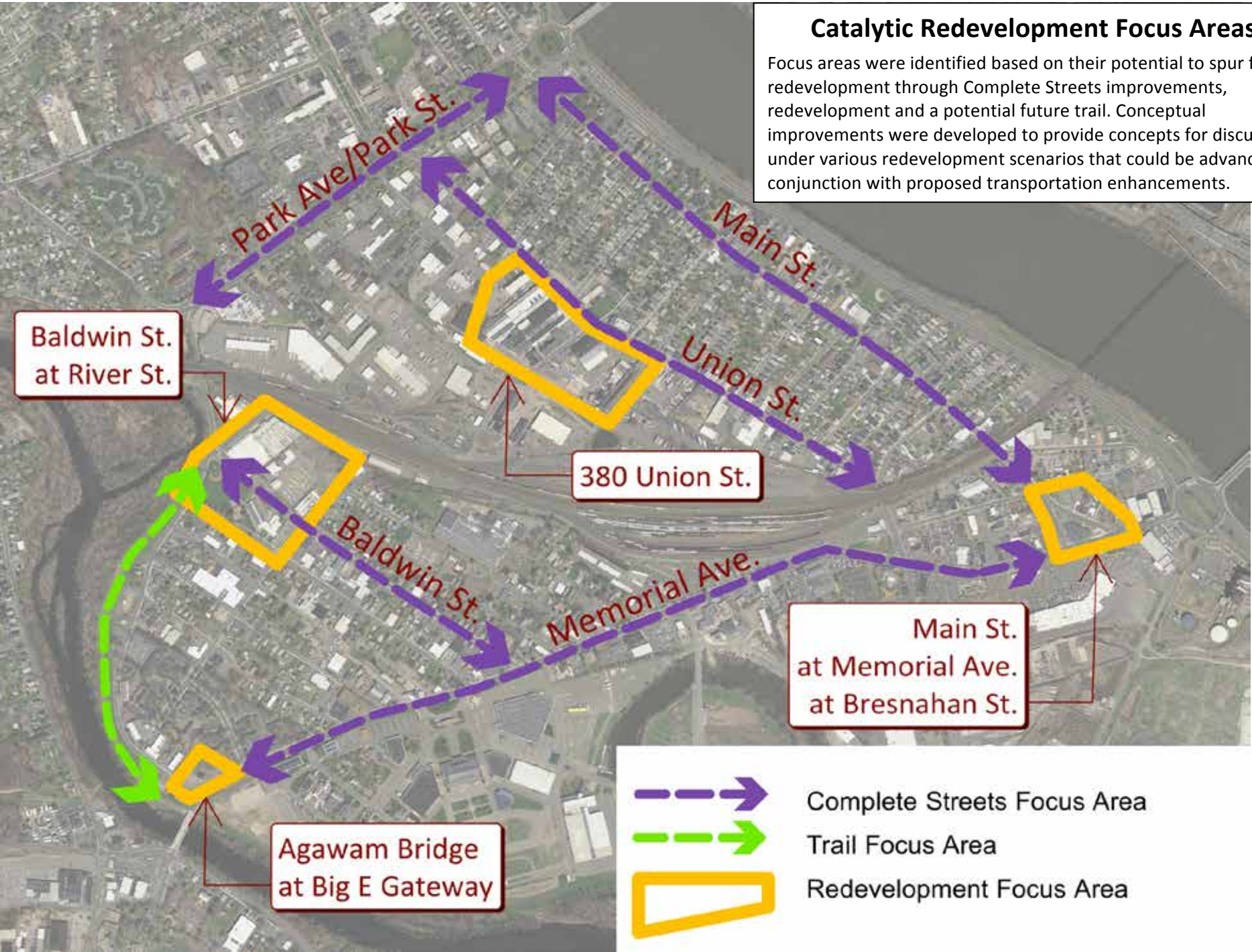
Main Street Underpass



Union Street Underpass

Catalytic Redevelopment Focus Areas

Focus areas were identified based on their potential to spur future redevelopment through Complete Streets improvements, redevelopment and a potential future trail. Conceptual improvements were developed to provide concepts for discussion under various redevelopment scenarios that could be advanced in conjunction with proposed transportation enhancements.



Complete Streets is an approach to configuring local roads to better balance the needs of all people who use a street: motor vehicle drivers, public transit riders, pedestrians, bicyclists, people with disabilities, shoppers, school children, and others. A “Complete Street” improves livability by improving public safety, increasing usable public space, and making it easier to share the street. It also creates a more welcoming environment for local businesses.



Before... Traffic lanes and parking spots are not well-marked. Pedestrians crossing the street have a hard time seeing oncoming cars... and vice versa!



After. Complete Streets improve safety for pedestrians and motorists, as well as aesthetics for neighbors.

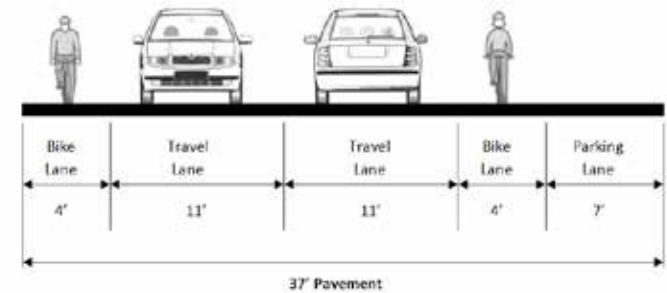
Complete Streets reflect the needs and character of the neighborhood. Elements include:

- Well-marked travel lanes
- Sidewalks
- Enhanced pedestrian crossings
- Raised medians
- Landscaping
- Transit Shelters
- Traffic Calming measures
- Bicycle Lanes

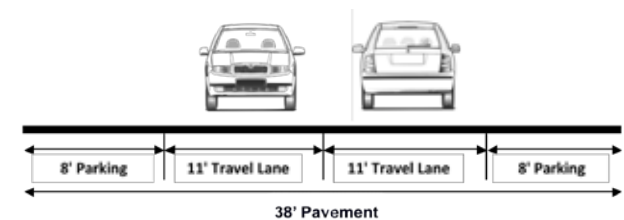
Above is a “before” and “after” illustration of how a Complete Street treatment could look on Main Street (between Church and Spring Streets). In the study area PVPC identified Main Street, Union Street, Baldwin Street and a section of Memorial Avenue as locations where Complete Streets elements would be beneficial.



Overhead view of Pedestrian Crosswalk “Bump Out” concept on Main Street (near Church St.) that shortens the distance a person must walk in the street and helps slow traffic speeds.



Example Baldwin Street Roadway Cross Section



Example Main Street Roadway Cross Section

River Street and Baldwin Street Intersection

River Street intersects with Baldwin Street and Sears Way to form a complicated four-way intersection. The unusual alignment can create confusion for vehicles on Baldwin Street and Sears Way. Pedestrians also have difficulty crossing at this location due to the extensive width of Baldwin Street. A variety of land uses including the Memorial Elementary School require a variety of transportation modes to be accommodated along Baldwin Street. Potential enhancements include:

1. Intersection geometry improvements at Baldwin/River/Sears.
2. Create sufficient employee parking for 26 Sears Way with shared parking arrangements for ballfield.
3. Bike lanes on Baldwin Street.
4. Safe Routes to Schools grant program eligibility.
5. Improve traffic and pedestrian circulation for Memorial School.
6. Study options for access to future river walk/bike path.



Conceptual Intersection Improvement at River St and Baldwin St



Existing sidewalks and school crosswalks are in poor condition.

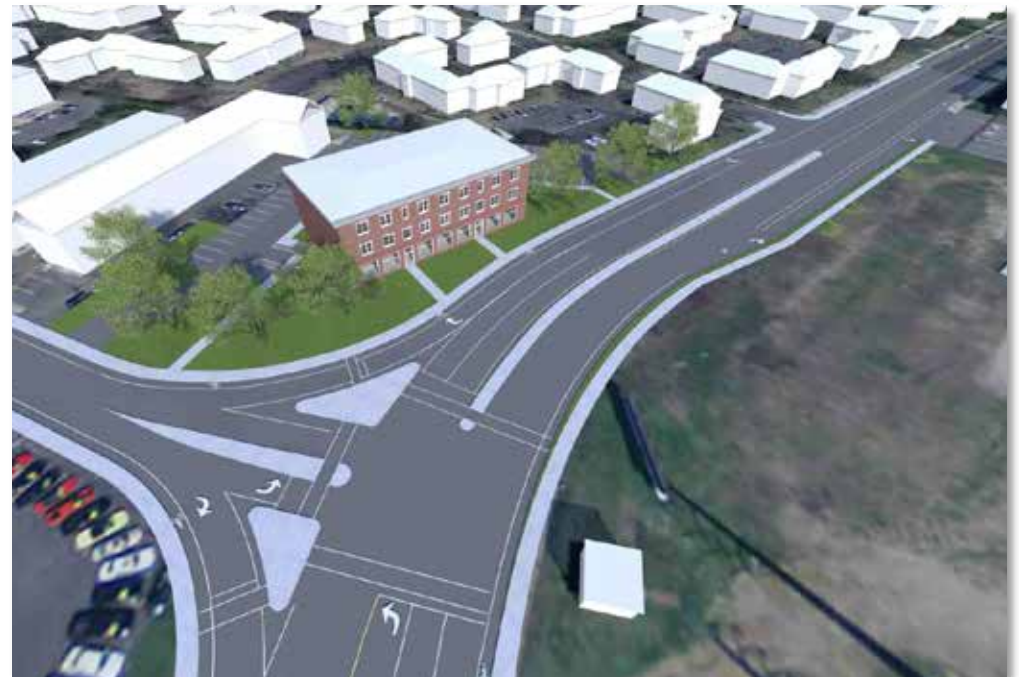
River Street and Memorial Avenue Intersection

This area is an important gateway to southwestern West Springfield and the Eastern States Exposition (“Big E”). This area connects to Agawam via an aging three-lane bridge, for which a replacement is being designed and potentially built within 5-10 years. This new bridge, as well as Big E improvements and maintenance, mean that redevelopment here would have added benefits. Major recommendations are numbered below and on the photo at right.

1. Add right turn lane on Memorial Ave eastbound for Big E Gate 1 queuing.
2. Assemble 1718 and 1672 Memorial Ave for multi-story mixed-use building.
3. Landscaping, screening, other amenities to enhance Medallion Motel.
4. Study bike/pedestrian connection from Cold Spring Ave to River St.
5. Study access to future river walk on dike (access at 166 River Street)



Poor crosswalks and numerous curb cuts degrade safety.



Here is an example of the type of building that could be built at the intersection of River Street and Memorial Avenue to promote redevelopment. The 3-story building could have up to 16 units with retail on the first floor and offices and apartments above.

A right turn lane into Big E Gate 1 is shown at upper right.



Main Street at Memorial Avenue Gateway

This area is one of the busiest commercial areas in West Springfield. But it has several wide streets with unmarked lanes that encourage speeding and confuse drivers. Today, Bresnahan Street and Main Street are “one-way” in opposite directions. Restoring two-way traffic on Bresnahan Street could help reduce travel speeds and create more on-street parking, which businesses need.

Realigning Main Street would also allow space for new sidewalks, proper pavement markings, landscaping, and enhancements. Visitors would find it easier to “park once” and do their errands on foot, thanks to improved aesthetics. In the long term, this would encourage new development that would improve the tax base.

Redevelopment Recommendations for Main Street at Memorial Avenue

1. Complete sidewalks.
2. Two-way traffic on Bresnahan St.
3. On-street parking on Bresnahan and Main Sts.
4. Realign intersection of Main St. and Bresnahan St.
5. Optimize PVTA bus stop locations.
6. Demolish 974 Main St. to create parking and redevelopment opportunity.
7. Redevelop 218 Memorial as multi-story structure allowed by proposed form-based zoning to increase square footage and tax revenue potential.
8. Adopt “Traditional Neighborhood Frontage Type” zoning to protect homes.



Existing Conditions. Lack of lane striping, curbs and crosswalks on Main Street are a safety concern for vehicles and pedestrians.



Redevelopment Concept. Narrow Main Street to create on-street parking. Install curbs and crosswalks. Realign the intersection of Main and Bresnahan to provide the opportunity to create a new development parcel and outdoor dining area. Enlarge 218 Main Street to increase taxable value.



Phase II of the Merrick and Memorial Neighborhood Study reviewed existing transportation infrastructure for two neighborhoods in West Springfield, Massachusetts. This Executive Summary identifies priority recommendations that:

- Reduce the need for costly future public infrastructure investments.
- Ensure efficient access to jobs, services and centers of trade.
- Encourage private sector development patterns in the study area that enhance the livability of the neighborhoods.
- Reduce environmental impacts of transportation through the encouragement of healthier modes of transportation.



Please visit www.pvpc.org for a copy of the complete study.



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