



# Old Hill Neighborhood Investment Plan 2023-2033

*City of Springfield and the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, Residents, local Businesses, Organizations, and other Stakeholders*



*Goal: To enhance and inform the delivery of municipal services and the investment of municipal, state, federal and private funding, and other resources in the Old Hill neighborhood through collaborative planning and implementation between residents, including resident businesses and organizations, and other stakeholders and city departments.*



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**Acknowledgements**

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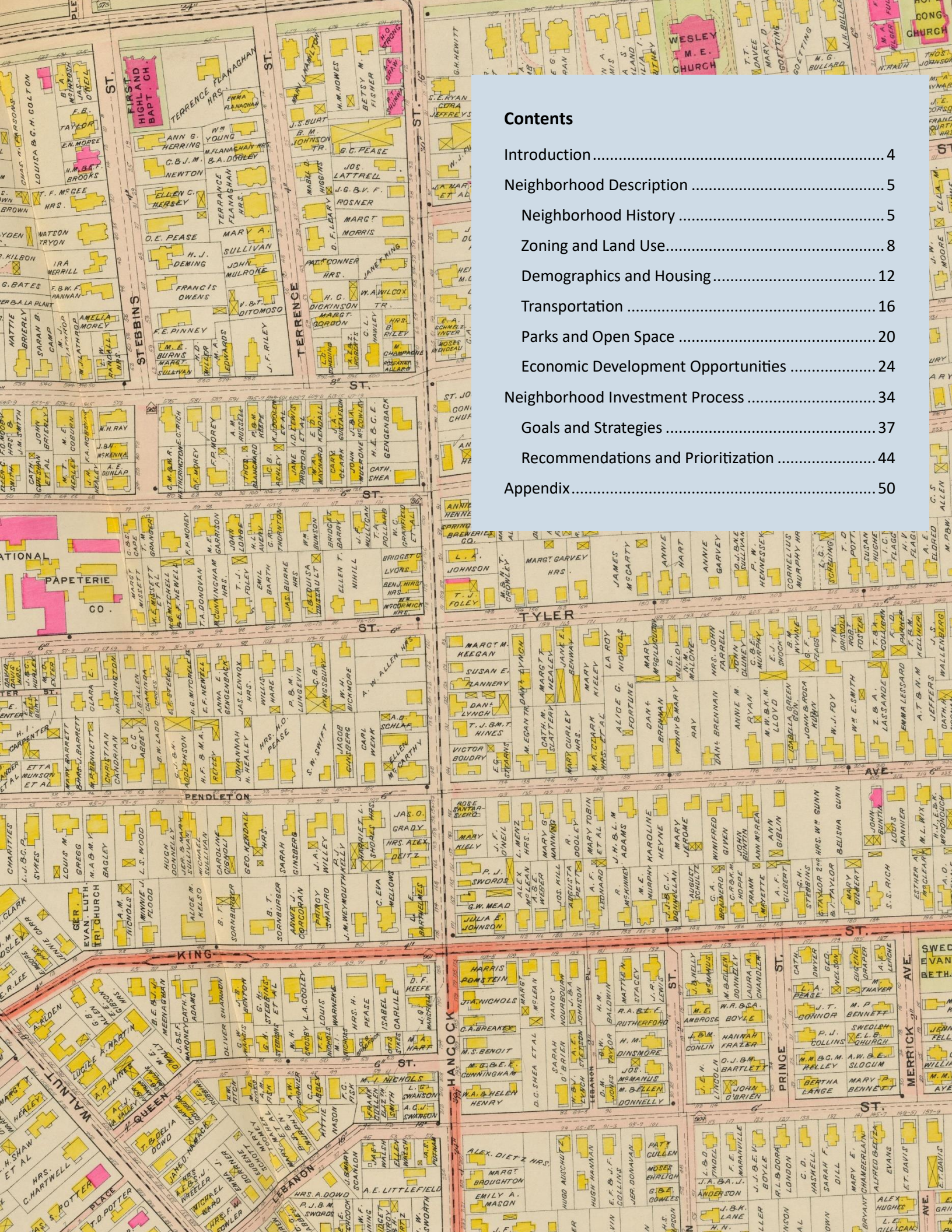
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Way Finders Community Building and Engagement for resident, community-based organization, and small business engagement

ARPA funding language





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## Introduction/Executive Summary





# Old Hill Neighborhood History



### Population Growth

Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, Springfield had a relatively small population of colonial settlers, and there was little development to the east of Main Street. However, this began to change in the early 1800s thanks to the Armory, which drew large numbers of skilled laborers to Springfield. Many of these workers settled in what would become the Old Hill neighborhood, because of its location between the Armory's two main facilities.

To the north, just outside of the neighborhood boundaries, was the main campus of the Armory. This was primarily used for assembly and storage, but the site lacked water power, so most of the heavy, energy-intensive manufacturing occurred along the Mill River, at what became known as the Watershops. Initially these were a series of small shops at three different waterfalls, but in 1857 they were

consolidated into a single facility that still stands at 1 Allen Street, at the southern end of the neighborhood. The Watershops were a mile from the main Armory, and the facilities were linked by Walnut Street, which forms the western boundary of Old Hill.

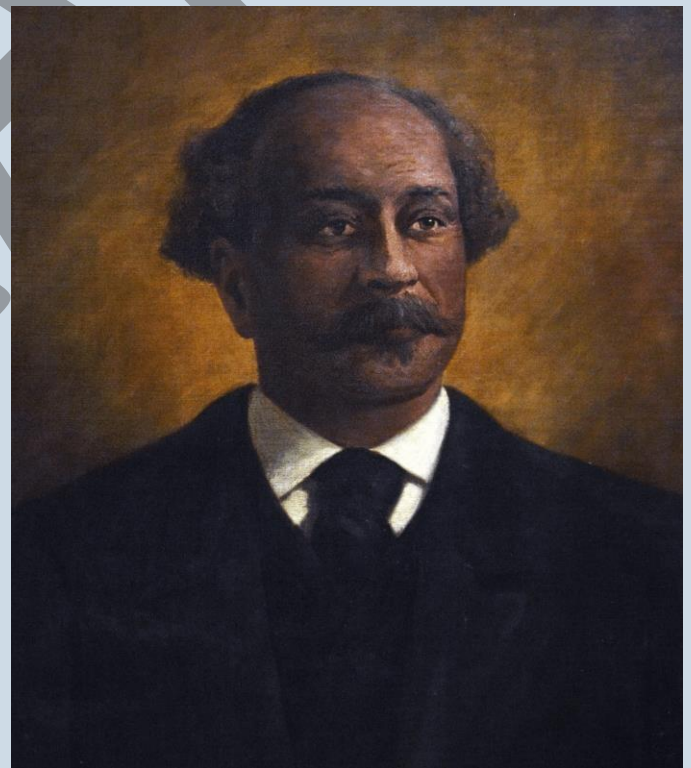
### Development of an African American Community

Most of the early residential development in Old Hill was along Walnut and Hickory Streets, but by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the neighborhood had its own street grid, with rectangular blocks that were primarily lined with single-family homes. Among the early real estate investors in this area was Primus Mason, an African American businessman who lived just outside of the neighborhood on the north side of State Street. He owned a significant amount of land in the area, including the site of the present-day Mason Square, which was named in his honor.



*The Armory Watershops facility, seen looking across Allen Street from Ruth Eliabeth Park*

Previous page: *Detail of 1851 map of Springfield, showing the Old Hill neighborhood. Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center.*



*Nineteenth century portrait of Primus Mason by an unknown artist*



Aside from Primus Mason, there were other African American families that lived in the Mason Square area during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their numbers were initially small, but by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the community saw significant growth. This was a part of the broader Great Migration, when African Americans in the segregated south began moving to northern cities for greater economic opportunity.

#### Community Leaders and Advocates

During this time, perhaps the most influential cultural institution in the Old Hill neighborhood was St. John's Congregational Church, which was established on Quincy Street in 1890 before moving to a new building at the corner of Hancock and Union Streets in 1911. For many years, the church was led by the Rev. William N. DeBerry. In addition to his role as a spiritual leader, he was also a strong social and political advocate for the city's African American community, including working to overcome institutional racism and other barriers to social mobility.



*St. John's Congregational Church, photographed around 1938-1939. Springfield Preservation Trust.*

Another notable Old Hill resident during this period was Alexander Hughes. He was born into slavery in Virginia in 1857, and as an adult he migrated to Springfield. In 1888 he began working for MassMutual, where he eventually

became the manager of the company's shipping department. He owned a house on Monson Avenue, and in 1912 Booker T. Washington had lunch there with Hughes and Rev. DeBerry during a visit to Springfield.

Another notable former resident is Roderick L. Ireland, who grew up in a house on Terrence Street. He went on to become the state's first African American justice on the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1997, and from 2010 to 2014 he served as the court's chief justice.

#### A Neighborhood in Transition

Over the years, the Old Hill neighborhood has continued to play an important role in the city's African American community, with nearly one-third of all residents identifying as African American. The neighborhood's diverse population has also expanded to include a significant number of Hispanic residents, with over half of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino.

In more recent years, the neighborhood has faced challenges such as poverty, low homeownership rates, and a significant number of vacant properties. Many of these issues were exacerbated by the June 1, 2011 tornado, which caused severe damage in the southern part of the neighborhood.

Nonetheless, Old Hill has continued to be resilient in the face of these challenges, and the neighborhood has good opportunities for continued growth while also celebrating its long history.

One result of the 2011 tornado was the funding of a neighborhood plan in 2015, which built upon the previous 2004 neighborhood plan. Since then, many of the recommendations from these two plans have been implemented, and the unfinished recommendations are carried forward into this ten-year neighborhood investment plan.





# **Old Hill Zoning and Land Use**



### Neighborhood Boundaries

The Old Hill neighborhood is defined by State Street to the north, the former Highland Branch railroad right-of-way to the east, the Watershops Pond to the south, and Walnut Street to the west.

### Residential Zoning

Most of the Old Hill neighborhood is zoned for Residence B, which allows for medium-density development, typically single-family and two-family dwellings. In addition, there are several scattered parcels of Residence C, which allows for higher-density multi-family dwellings such as apartment complexes.

### Business Zoning

Most of the business zoning in the neighborhood is along the periphery. To the north, State Street is primarily zoned for Business A. The properties here currently have a variety of uses, including apartment buildings, religious institutions, healthcare and childcare providers, and a mix of different types of businesses.

This area includes Mason Square, which is formed by the intersection of State Street, Wilbraham Road, and Eastern Avenue. The southern side of the square is anchored by pedestrian-oriented commercial development, and the area presents opportunities for further investments to make this area a focal point of the Mason Square neighborhoods.

Aside from State Street, most of the other business and commercial zoning is along Walnut and Hancock Streets. This area primarily consists of small local businesses, but there are also many parcels that are vacant or underutilized. As such, these streets could benefit from redevelopment, in order to strengthen



*Residence B development on King Street*



*Residence C apartment complex on Eastern Avenue*



*Pedestrian-oriented businesses on Ben Swan Way at Mason Square*



the economy of the neighborhood and expand the types of goods and services that are available to residents.

One site in particular that has strong potential for future development is the business/commercial area near the new roundabout at Six Corners. This intersection was recently reconstructed to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety, so this area is a good candidate for continued investment to attract and retain businesses that will meet the needs of residents in both the Old Hill and the Maple-High/Six Corners neighborhoods.



A mix of (L-R) Business A, Residence B, and Commercial A zoning on Eastern Avenue



The former Armory Watershops, now used by various light industrial tenants

Industrial Zoning

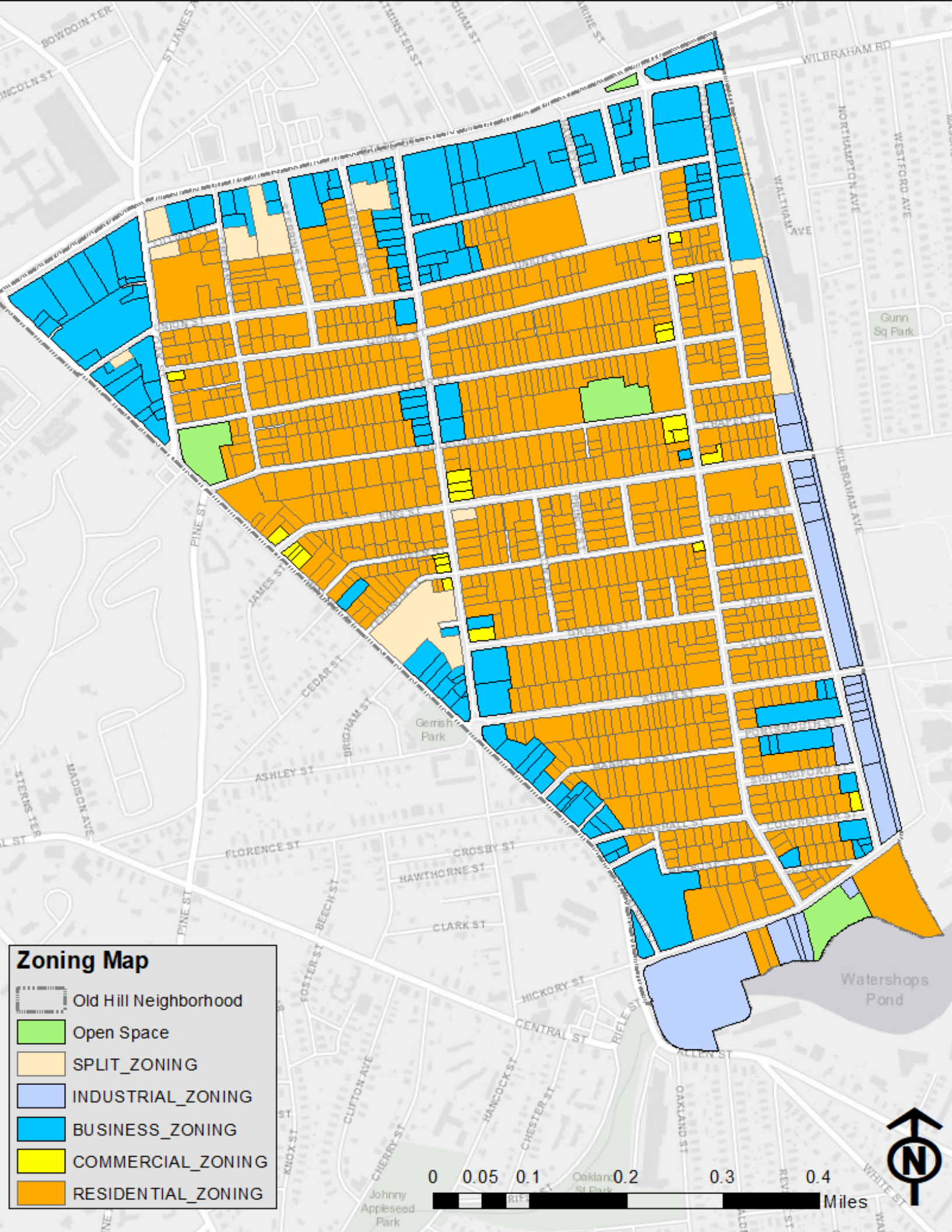
All of the industrial zoning in Old Hill is along the eastern and southern edges of the neighborhood, primarily along the former Highland Branch railroad. However, much of this land is either vacant or has been repurposed for non-industrial use. The only significant industrial site in the neighborhood is the Watershops site. There, the former Armory buildings house a variety of commercial and light industrial tenants.

Springfield College

The land use within Old Hill also includes a portion of the Springfield College campus. Although primarily located in the Upper Hill neighborhood, the campus extends into the southeastern corner of Old Hill. This proximity provides opportunities for continued partnerships between the college, the city, and the neighborhood.

Summary of Old Hill Zoning Districts	
District	Description
Residence A	Low density residential, primarily single-family detached
Residence B	Medium density residential, primarily single-family and two-family
Residence C	Single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings
Commercial A	Small scale retail and service convenience type commercial establishments.
Business A	Main Street and pedestrian oriented shopping districts with residential allowed.
Business B	Highway-oriented automotive and service business activities.
Industrial A	Full range of industrial and business uses compatible with a major urban center.






**Zoning Map**

- Old Hill Neighborhood
- Open Space
- SPLIT\_ZONING
- INDUSTRIAL\_ZONING
- BUSINESS\_ZONING
- COMMERCIAL\_ZONING
- RESIDENTIAL\_ZONING



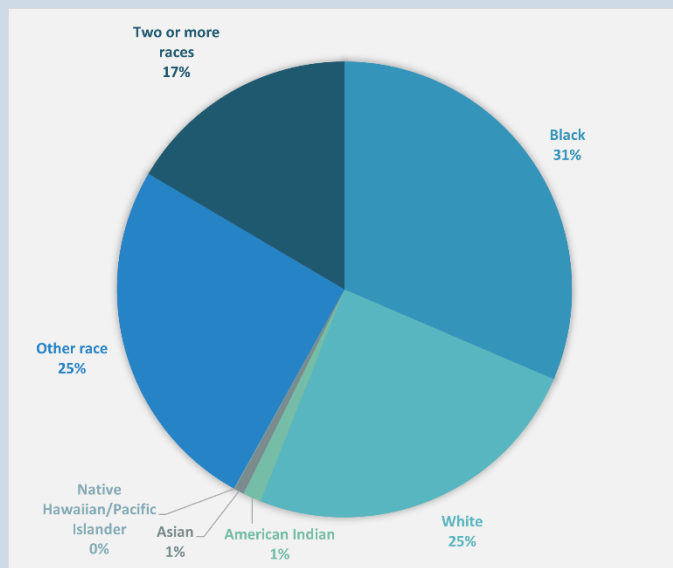


# **Old Hill Demographics and Housing**

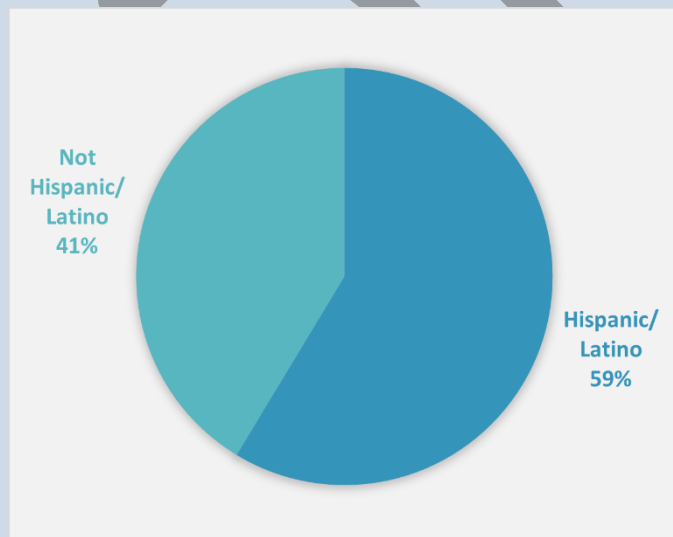


### Demographic Overview

As of 2020, the Old Hill neighborhood had a population of 4,351 residents, or approximately three percent of the city's population. Of this population, 31% identify as African American, 25% identify as white, and 44% identify as other races, including people of multiple races. The population is 59% Hispanic of any race. The age distribution of the population is 26% children under 18 years old, 68% people of working age, and 6% people of retirement age or older.



Racial composition of the Old Hill neighborhood, 2020 U.S. Census

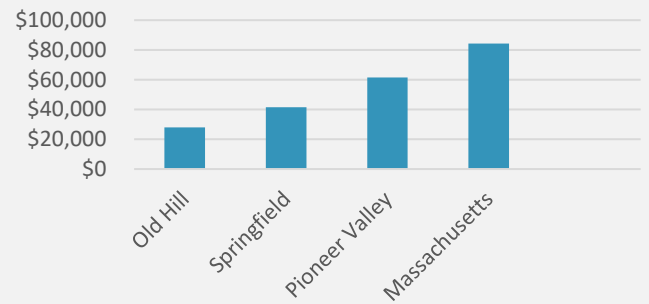


Hispanic/Latino ethnicity in Old Hill, 2020 U.S. Census

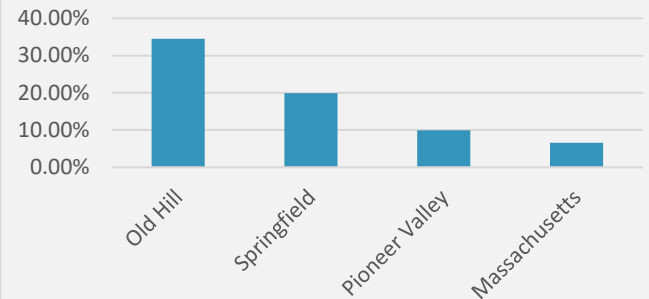
### Economic Security

Compared to other neighborhoods in the city, Old Hill consistently ranks low in many economic factors. The median household income in is \$28,015, while the citywide median is \$41,571. Overall, 34.5% of Old Hill residents live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line, compared to the citywide rate of 19.9%.

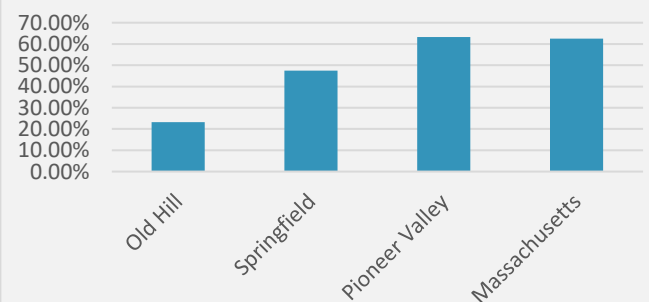
#### Median household income (2020)



#### Poverty rates (2020)



#### Homeownership rates (2020)





		Old Hill	Springfield	Pioneer Valley	Massachusetts
Children and youth	Babies born with low birth weight	12.3%	11.1%	9.1%	7.6%
	Child poverty	45.5%	36.2%	20.8%	12.2%
Education	Preschool enrollment	27.5%	60.1%	53.6%	58.0%
	Attainment of higher education	14.0%	19.0%	32.6%	44.5%
Health	Premature mortality (per 1,000)	4.3	4.0	3.3	2.7
Economic security	Median household income	\$28,015	\$41,571	\$61,569	\$84,385
	Income inequality (Gini index)	0.49	0.48	0.47	0.48
	Poverty	34.5%	19.9%	9.9%	6.6%
	Elderly poverty	29.8%	13.7%	10.1%	8.9%
	Unemployment	34.5%	10.5%	6.7%	5.7%
	Labor force participation	53.9%	57.6%	61.4%	67.2%
Housing	Housing cost burden	68.9%	45.4%	34.9%	34.5%
	Homeownership rates	23.2%	47.4%	63.2%	62.5%
Transportation	Low-carbon commuters	19.7%	17.6%	14.1%	22.4%
	Average commute time (minutes)	21.1	21.1	23.1	30.0

Much more information is available in the [Springfield Data Atlas](#)

### Housing

Although much of the neighborhood's housing stock consists of single-family and two-family homes, the homeownership rate is only 23.2%, which is less than half of the citywide average of 47.4%. The neighborhood also has a very limited number of subsidized housing units, with an estimated 169 out of 1,505 units in Old Hill. This is the fourth-lowest number of subsidized units in any neighborhood in the city, and the only neighborhoods with fewer (East Forest Park, East Springfield, and Boston Road) all have high rates of homeownership.

The low homeownership rate, combined with the scarcity of subsidized housing, likely contributes to the fact that, out of the 17 city neighborhoods, Old Hill has the highest percentage of residents who are burdened by housing costs. Residents are considered to be housing cost burdened if they pay more than 30% of their income towards either rent or homeownership, and 68.9% of Old Hill residents meet those criteria. These housing

costs include maintenance, which can be a large expense in neighborhoods such as Old Hill, where much of the existing housing stock dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such homes tend to require more upkeep than newer ones, and often have added expenses related to health and safety hazards such as lead paint, asbestos, and outdated electrical systems.

Neighborhood Council members report hearing from long-time renters in their neighborhoods that these individuals and families are experiencing dramatically higher and more frequent rent increases as the homes they live in are sold and re-sold by absentee landlords. Renters report to their Neighborhood Councils that the landlords are not making improvements to the property but still increase the rent. With adequate support, these long-time renters might be able to purchase the homes, thereby stabilizing their own housing costs and achieving the Neighborhood Councils and the city's goal of increasing home ownership in these neighborhoods.



Residents throughout the Mason Square and Maple-High/Six Corners areas have indicated that housing is a high priority, in particular assistance for the maintenance of existing owner-occupied homes. There are currently a number of different housing programs and initiatives that are available to Springfield residents. However, because this has

these programs are being utilized and which neighborhoods primarily benefit from them. Part of the motivation for the city's decision to invest ARPA funds in the Targeted Neighborhood Investment planning process is to build capacity of residents and their neighborhood councils to make use of these resources.

### Existing Housing Programs and Initiatives

#### Homeowner Emergency Repair Program

This program provides funding for income-eligible owner-occupants for a single item emergency repair. Homeowners are eligible to apply if there is an immediate threat to the health and safety of the occupants, or to the structural integrity of the building. This can include emergency repairs to the roof, porch, electrical/mechanical systems, plumbing, and foundation, along with other urgent code-related issues. Applicants can be from any neighborhood in the city, and those who are selected for this program receive a 0% interest deferred-payment loan. This is forgiven over the course of five years, provided that the homeowner continues to reside at the property.

#### City of Springfield Exterior Home Repair Program

This program is available to income-eligible homeowners in any city neighborhood. It funds up to \$40,000 in exterior repairs, such as roofs, windows, porches, siding, and painting. As with the Emergency Repair Program, the city will provide recipients with a 0% interest deferred-payment loan that will be forgiven over five years.

#### City of Springfield Healthy Homes Program

This program provides funding for remediating health issues such as lead paint and asthma triggers. Eligibility is determined based on income, and also based on census tract. All of the census tracts in Old Hill are designated as Qualified Census Tracts. As with the other two city programs, funding is provided in the form of a 0% interest deferred-payment loan that is forgiven after five years.

#### Heating Emergency Assistance Retrofit Tasks Weatherization Assistance Program (HEARTWAP)

HEARTWAP is coordinated by the Valley Opportunity Council (VOC) and the Office of Housing, and it provides emergency repairs and replacements of heating systems for income-eligible renters and homeowners in the city. VOC also provides heating assistance to income-eligible residents.

#### City of Springfield Down Payment Assistance Program

Most of these programs are only open to homeowners, but Old Hill has one of the lowest homeownership rates in the city, which means that only a small percentage of neighborhood residents are able to access these funding sources. In an effort to expand homeownership rates citywide, there are several

programs that are available to first-time homebuyers, including the City of Springfield Down Payment Assistance Program.

This is available to first-time homebuyers in Springfield who meet income eligibility and other program requirements, and it provides up to \$4,000 towards a down payment and closing costs. As with the city's other programs, homebuyers receive this as an interest-free loan, which is forgiven over the course of five years, provided that the house remains their primary residence.

#### Buy Springfield Now

This ongoing initiative is a collaboration between the city, nonprofits, and private sector partners. Participants in this program receive discounts from lenders, realtors, attorneys, and home inspectors as part of their homebuying process.

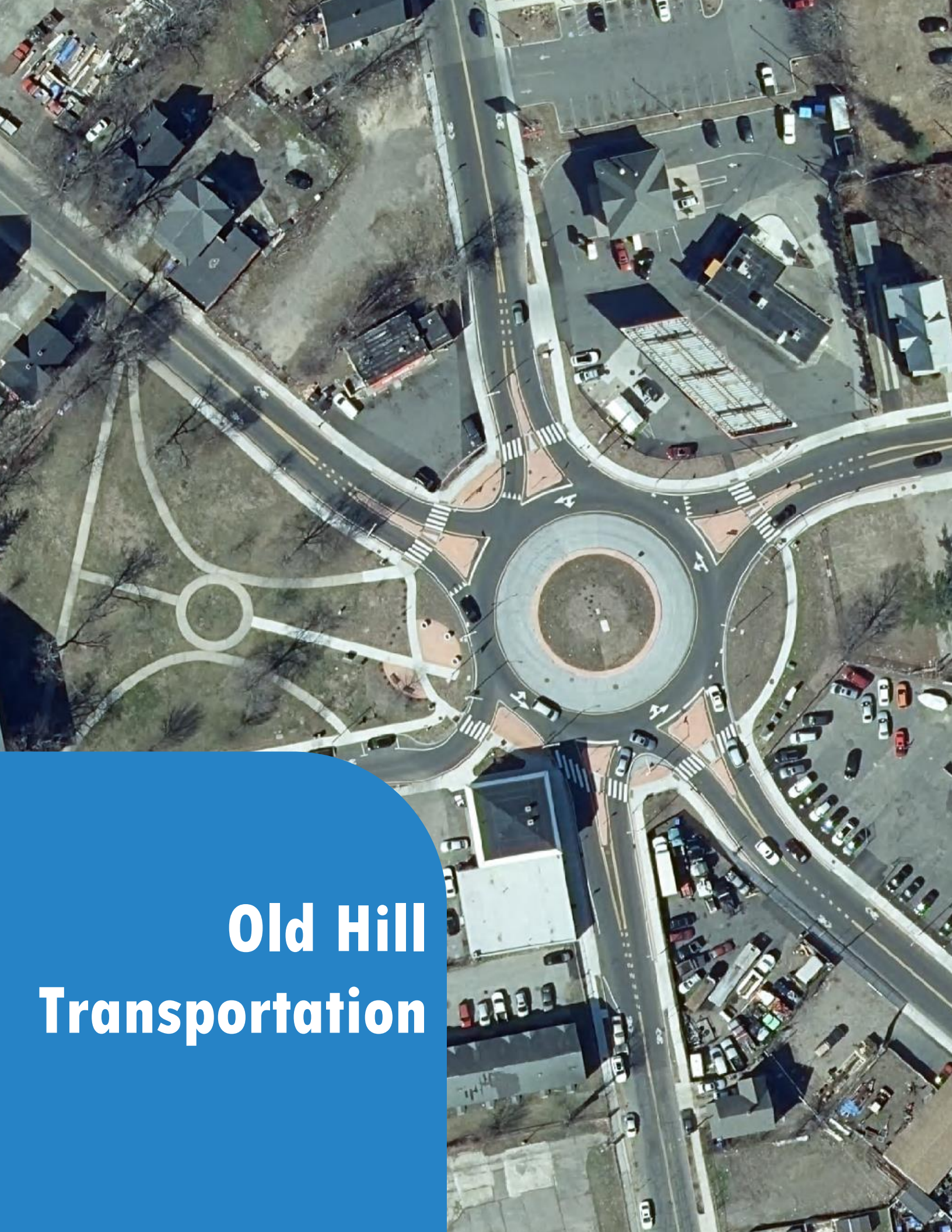
#### Other Housing Partners

Aside from these city-managed programs, there are a number of community development corporations and community-based organizations that provide housing support and assistance in the Mason Square neighborhoods. These include Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services, Revitalize CDC, and Way Finders.

#### Energy Efficiency

In addition to the challenges of simply maintaining and rehabilitating the older homes in the Old Hill neighborhood, homeowners may also be challenged by the added cost of the need to transition away from fossil fuel-based energy sources. This is part of a broader effort to reduce Green House Gas emissions, as the city of Springfield and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are committed to net zero energy by 2050. The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center and the MA Department of Energy Resources, along with the federal government, recognize the importance of incentivizing homeowners to invest in energy-efficient upgrades and incorporate renewable energy sources to reduce carbon emissions. Collaboration among residents, local organizations, and city, state and federal resources will be important as the neighborhood implements comprehensive strategies that foster a greener, more resilient Old Hill community for generations to come.





# Old Hill Transportation



### Street Grid

The streets in Old Hill are generally laid out on a rectangular grid with the exception of Walnut Street, which passes diagonally across this grid. The blocks are not perfectly identical in size, but most measure about 1,400 feet from east to west, and about 35 feet from north to south. This means that there are significantly more east-west streets than north-south streets. As a result, the few north-south streets (Walnut Street, Hancock Street, and Eastern Avenue) tend to see heavy traffic, with

significant commercial development, while most of the east-west streets are residential side streets.

### Roadway Improvements

As mentioned earlier, the Old Hill neighborhood has come together to develop neighborhood plans, in 2004 and then again after the 2011 tornado. The plans have proven useful in identifying pressing issues and bringing resources to the neighborhood to act on priority concerns, particularly regarding transportation.

Since the 2004 plan was published, there have been a number of transportation-related improvements in Old Hill. State Street was completely reconstructed, including new pavement, sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping, and decorative streetlights.

On Walnut Street, the street was repaved and new sidewalks were installed, featuring brick edging and decorative lighting. Subsequent work along Walnut Street included construction of the Six Corners roundabout. This project, which was completed in 2020, replaced a complex signalized intersection that had previously ranked as a high crash location.

In the southern part of the neighborhood, Hickory Street was widened, repaved, and had a new sidewalk installed as part of a larger project in the Maple-High/Six Corners neighborhood to realign Central and Hickory Streets.



*Roundabout at Six Corners, facing northeast*



*Roadway improvements on Hickory Street, with the Armory Watershops on the right*

Previous page: 2021 aerial view of the Six Corners roundabout. Source: MassGIS



### Public Transportation

The Old Hill neighborhood is well-served by public transportation. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) provides bus service to the region, and there are several bus routes in Old Hill. In the northern part of the neighborhood, multiple routes provide frequent service along State Street. There is also a bus route on Walnut Street, along with a route that passes through the center of Old Hill, along Hancock and King Streets. There are 38 individual bus stops in Old Hill, with two sheltered bus stops along State Street. This is an area for potential growth, as residents have expressed a desire for new shelters as well as improvements to existing ones.

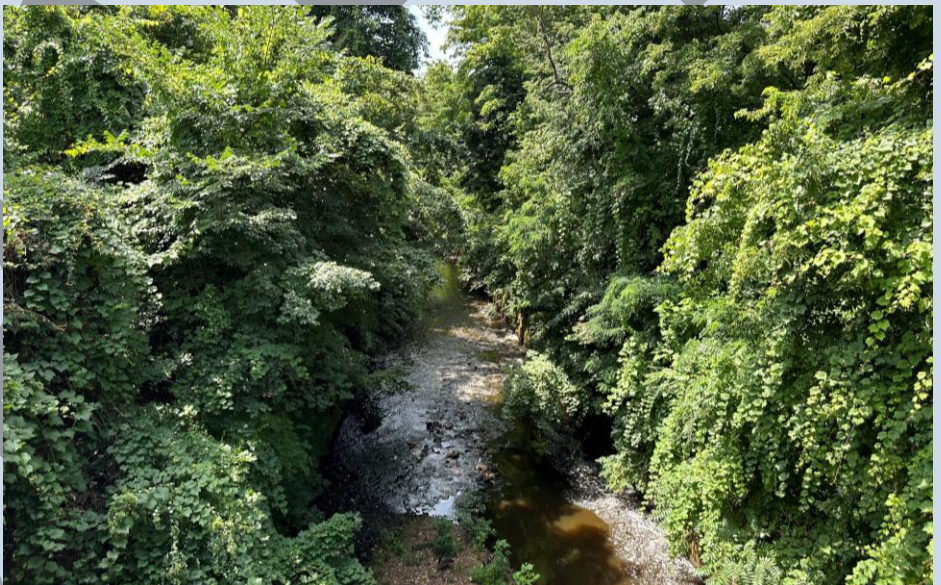
### Bicycle and Pedestrian Opportunities

There is currently no bicycle infrastructure in the neighborhood, aside from a bike share station at the Mason Square library. However, there are several proposed projects that could expand cycling opportunities in Old Hill. One is the Mill River Greenway, a multi-use trail that would start in the southwestern corner of the neighborhood and follow alongside the Mill River, linking Old Hill to the Connecticut Riverwalk and Greenway.

The other is the Highland Rail Trail, which would follow the former railroad right-of-way at the eastern end of the neighborhood and link with the proposed McKnight Community Trail to the north. This trail would also have the



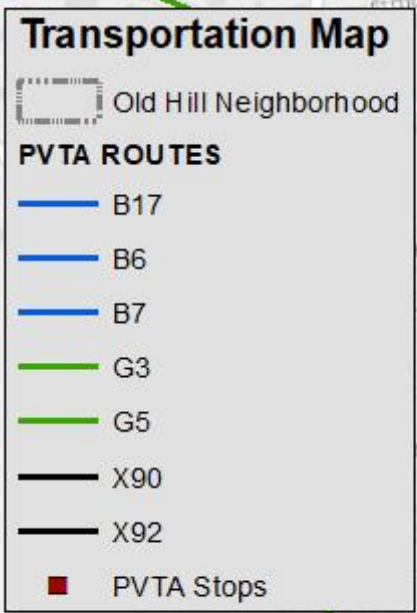
*The Highland Division Railroad right-of-way, facing north from Hickory Street at the Springfield College campus.*



*Looking downstream along the Mill River from Allen Street at the southwestern corner of the Old Hill neighborhood*

potential to be extended south through the city and into East Longmeadow.









# **Old Hill Parks and Open Space**



### Neighborhood Parks

The Old Hill neighborhood has a total of 7.12 acres of public open space, which is the smallest amount for any neighborhood in the city. This is equivalent to just under 3% of the total land area of Old Hill. The open space land includes four parks with playgrounds: Barrows Park in the northwest part of the neighborhood, the DeBerry-Swan Elementary School playground in the northeast, Donna Blake Park on Pendleton Avenue, and Harriet Tubman Park at the southern end of the neighborhood on Hickory Street. Also included in the neighborhood's open space is Mason Square, which is used for passive recreation.

### Other Adjacent Parks

Although the total amount of open space in the neighborhood itself is small, there are several other parks that are located just outside the neighborhood boundaries, and are within close proximity to many Old Hill residents. These include the newly-renovated 5.94-acre Ruth Elizabeth Park on Walnut Street, along with the new Samuel Bolden Park on Wilbraham Avenue.

### Legacy Trail

Most of the parks in and around the Old Hill neighborhood are linked by the Legacy Trail, a 2.3-mile walking route along the neighborhood's sidewalks. Each park on the route includes interpretive signage to highlight the history of the neighborhood, including the story behind the parks and their namesakes.

### Existing Conditions

Site visits, which were conducted in summer 2023 as part of this neighborhood planning



*Playground equipment at Harriet Tubman Park*



*Ruth Elizabeth Park, which is located directly adjacent to the Old Hill neighborhood on the west side of Walnut Street.*

process, noted maintenance concerns at some of these parks, including vandalism and graffiti on the playground equipment at Harriet Tubman and Barrows Parks. In addition, the playground area at Harriet Tubman Park was overgrown with grass and weeds, and there was a badly damaged section of the chain link fence between the playground and the adjacent Watershops Pond, rendering it an ineffective safety barrier for children.

*Previous page: The entrance to Harriet Tubman Park on Hickory Street*





*Open space area at the center of Mason Square*



*Playground at Barrows Park, showing significant vandalism and graffiti*

### Environmental Justice

Based on the 2020 census, the Old Hill neighborhood is considered to be an environmental justice population, as defined by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). The EEA defines an environmental justice population as a census block group that meets at least one of four criteria relating to median household income, minority population, and limited English proficiency. The EEA considers such

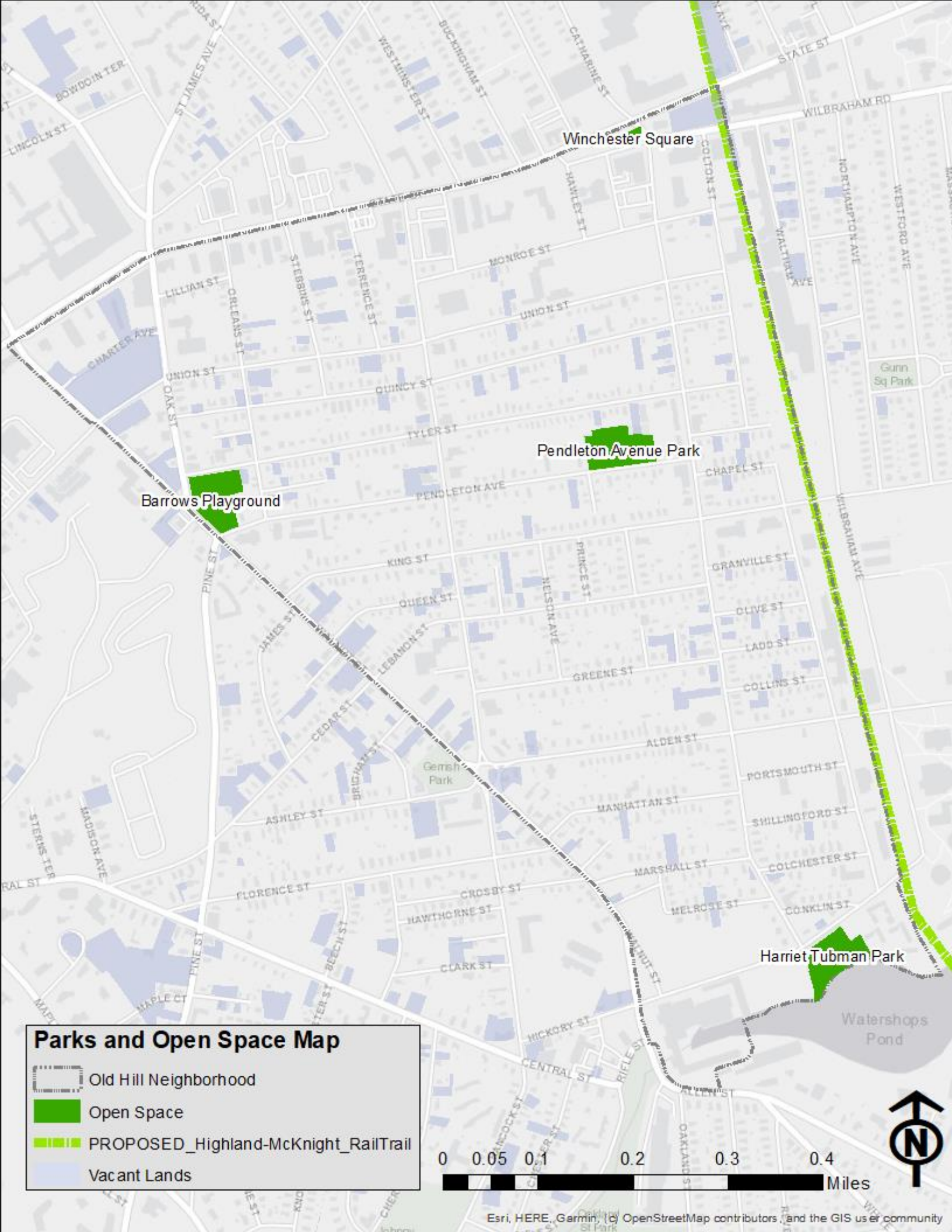
groups to be most at risk of being unaware of or unable to participate in environmental decision-making, or to benefit from environmental resources. Of the five census block groups that are located in the neighborhood, four meet the criteria based on both income and percentage of minority residents, and the fifth census block also meets the criteria based on English proficiency.

### Justice40 Initiative

Because the Old Hill neighborhood is an environmental justice population, it could benefit from federal programs through the new Justice40 Initiative, which seeks to support disadvantaged communities that have historically been marginalized and underserved. Under this initiative, environmental justice communities are eligible for federal funding to support investments in any of the following areas: climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and the development of critical clean water and wastewater

infrastructure. As this is a new initiative, it is important for both the Old Hill Neighborhood Council and the city to assess ways in which the neighborhood could benefit from such investments.





### Parks and Open Space Map

- Old Hill Neighborhood
- Open Space
- PROPOSED\_Highland-McKnight\_RailTrail
- Vacant Lands

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles





# Old Hill Economic Development Opportunities



## Economic Development Opportunities

As part of this neighborhood investment planning process, a number of potential economic development concerns, ideas, and opportunities in Old Hill emerged through resident surveys, community engagement events, meetings with stakeholders and city staff, and review of existing neighborhood plan recommendations.

These ideas included potential economic development in several key sites throughout the neighborhood. Such development would not only support existing businesses, but would also encourage further investment in the neighborhood by attracting new locally-owned businesses that would meet the needs of residents.

### Ben Swan Way

In the early 2000s, the intersection of State Street and Wilbraham Road was reconstructed as part of a project that also included changes to traffic patterns. The section of Wilbraham Road on the south side of Mason Square, which had once been used for eastbound through-traffic, was narrowed and redesigned for local business access, with on-street parking on both sides of the street. By diverting through traffic away from this block, it created a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape, and also enabled easier access to Mason Square Park. Then, in 2022, the street was named Ben Swan Way, in honor of longtime state representative and civil rights activist Ben Swan, whose district office was located on this block.

The southern side of Ben Swan Way is anchored by three adjacent one-story commercial buildings that form a row of eight storefronts between Winchester Street and Eastern Avenue. The building on the



*Mason Square, with potential economic development area outlined in yellow.  
Image source: MassGIS.*

westernmost side was built in 1915, and has three storefronts. The building in the middle was constructed in 1947 and also has three storefronts, and the one furthest to the east was constructed in 1948 and has two storefronts, along with a banquet hall in the rear.





*Ben Swan Way and Mason Square*

Given its central location at the heart of the Mason Square area, this site has strong economic development potential. The surrounding area has seen significant investment in recent years, including an expansion of the Indian Motorcycle apartment complex. This project added 60 new units to the existing 139 apartments at the facility by rehabilitating a vacant former factory building and the former Winchester Park Fire Station. Another ongoing project is the rehabilitation of the former Knox Automobile factory. When completed, this project will comprise approximately 114 new apartments. Aside from these apartment projects, other recent investments in the area include the new DeBerry-Swan Elementary School, located a block to the south of Mason Square, and the new Samuel Bolden Park, located to the southeast of Mason Square on Wilbraham Avenue.

Overall, because of the large number of new apartment units in the immediate vicinity of Mason Square, it is important to promote economic development here that will meet the needs of existing and future residents. On Ben Swan Way, this could include rehabilitating or replacing the existing one-story commercial buildings with a two- or three-story mixed-use building, which could feature stores and restaurants on the ground floor and either apartments or offices on the upper floors. This could also include new storefronts on Eastern Avenue, and if this redevelopment work was to advance it would be necessary to decide how deep the building would be, and if redevelopment would change the existing footprint.



### Former MCDI Site on Wilbraham Avenue

Another location that has been identified as having potential for redevelopment is the former site of the Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MCDI) in a factory building between Wilbraham Avenue and the former railroad right-of-way. Although located in the Upper Hill neighborhood, the site is directly adjacent to Old Hill, so it could be redeveloped in a way that would serve both neighborhoods.

The MCDI building was abandoned in 2013, and in 2016 it was heavily damaged by an arson fire. The building was subsequently demolished in stages from 2020-2021, and the property is now a 2.5-acre open field directly to the north of the newly created Samuel Bolden Park.

Some existing recommendations have included proposed targeted economic development on this lot. However, based on feedback from residents and from city officials, this site does not appear to be well-suited for economic development, given its location on a side street in a residential area. Instead, this site could be considered as a potential location for a neighborhood resource center. Both Old Hill and Upper Hill residents indicated that community events and celebrations were a high priority, and a neighborhood resource center here would help to meet that need for both neighborhoods. Indeed, throughout the Mason Square area there is almost unanimous consensus on the need for more spaces for youth activities and programming. Job training and workforce development is another area of need, so a neighborhood resource center here could also be used for that purpose.



*MCDI site outlined in yellow. Photo taken prior to the demolition of the facility. Image source: MassGIS*

This site would be an ideal location for a neighborhood resource center, since it is on the border of the two neighborhoods and is next to a new park. It would also be adjacent to the proposed route of the Highland Rail Trail, which would follow the route of the abandoned railroad grade. However, one possible challenge is the fact that there is currently no direct access from Old Hill to this site. The land immediately to the west of the site is part of the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission





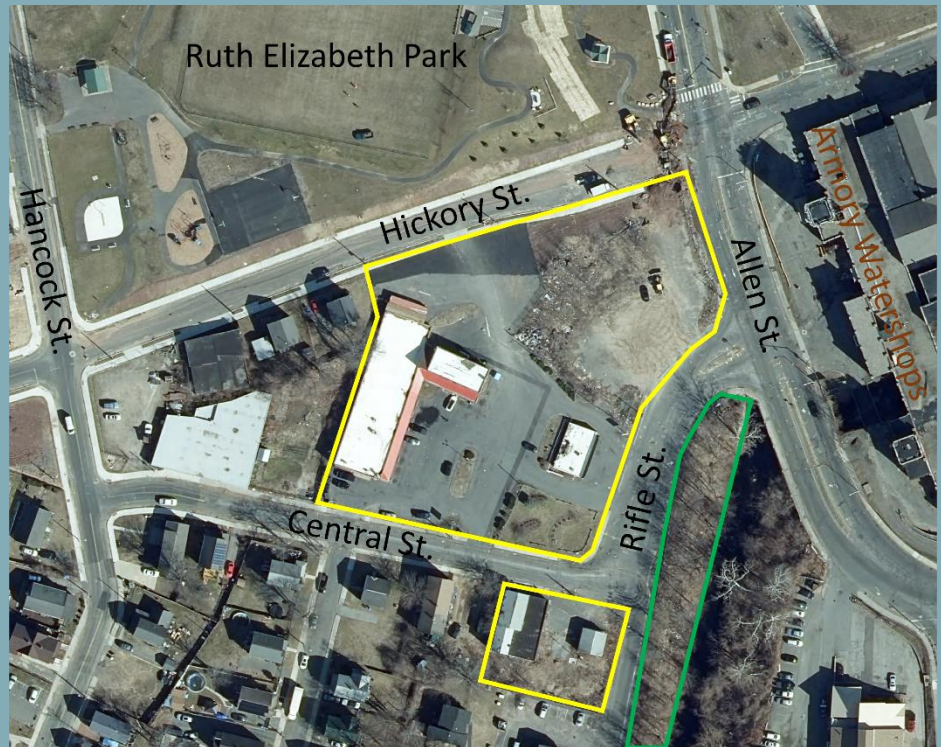
*The former MCDI site, looking north from Wilbraham Avenue near Samuel Bolden Park*

facility, and it is used for parking and storage. This would require pedestrians from Old Hill to make a lengthy detour either by way of Wilbraham Road or King Street in order to access the site, so any design work should include collaboration with Water and Sewer to explore possible options for enabling pedestrian access from Colton Street to Wilbraham Avenue.



### One Stop Plaza Area

Another area that has strong potential for further economic development is the area around the One Stop Plaza and Armory Watershops in the vicinity of Allen, Central, and Hickory Streets. Like the MCDI site, this area is mostly outside the boundaries of the Old Hill neighborhood, but it is directly adjacent to the neighborhood and is in close proximity to many Old Hill residents. The One Stop Plaza is one of the few commercial areas in this part of the neighborhood, so it is important to continue supporting existing businesses here while also encouraging further development to expand available amenities.



*One Stop Plaza area, with potential sites of economic development outlined in yellow. The site of the proposed Mill River Greenway is outlined in green. Image source: MassGIS.*

The plaza consists of an L-shaped building on the west side of the property, with six storefronts on the ground floor. As of 2023, these are occupied by two restaurants, three markets or convenience stores, and a juice shop. A portion of this building also has an upper floor, which has office space. On the eastern side of the plaza, on Rifle Street, is a smaller standalone building, which currently houses a restaurant. In total, the plaza occupies three separate lots, which have a combined area of about 1.4 acres. About two-thirds of this acreage is paved surface parking areas. Vehicles can access the plaza via entrances on Central Street, Hickory Street, and Rifle Street.

Adjacent to the plaza are several city-owned properties. At the corner of Central and Rifle

Streets is a small 0.11-acre parcel owned by the Springfield Redevelopment Authority. On the eastern side of the plaza, between Hickory, Allen, and Rifle Streets, is a larger 0.71-acre parcel, which is owned by the city. This had previously been the site of a long-vacant building, but it was damaged by the 2011 tornado and was subsequently demolished in 2015. Since then, the lot has remained vacant, but its location at a major intersection, adjacent to an established center, makes it an ideal site for concentrated economic development. Residents and other stakeholders have suggested that a small grocery store here could help to increase access to a wider variety of food, at prices that are more affordable than existing options in the area.





*Vacant city-owned land to the east of the One Stop Plaza, with the Armory Watershops in the distance.*

Other potential opportunities in this area include the Armory Watershops. This is an important historic resource in the Old Hill neighborhood, and its redevelopment would benefit all three of these neighborhoods. It had been underutilized for many years after the Armory closed, and in 1988 it was badly damaged by a chlorine fire that forced the evacuation of many area residents. It was subsequently damaged by the 2011 tornado, but in 2018 a new owner purchased the property and announced long-term plans to rehabilitate it for a mix of high-tech light manufacturing, e-commerce, storage, and office space. Because of this proximity, any economic development efforts here at One Stop Plaza should include collaboration with the Watershops owners.

Aside from the Watershops, another nearby property with redevelopment potential is 485-493 Central Street, which is across the street from One Stop Plaza. This 0.27-acre Business B parcel occupies a highly visible location at the corner of Central and Rifle Streets, but the buildings here have been vacant for many years. The property includes a historic early 19th century building that had been used as a store as early as the 1840s. Also on the property is a detached, two-vehicle garage, which is located near the Rifle Street side of the parcel. Any economic development plans here in the vicinity of One Stop Plaza should also include collaborating with the owner of this property, including a study to determine whether it would be feasible to restore the historic structure here.



Overall, this area has seen many recent investments, including improvements to Ruth Elizabeth Park, roadway improvements on Hickory and Central Streets, and the conversion of the former Elias Brookings School into apartments. Economic development here at this site would be able to further build upon those investments, and would provide a neighborhood commercial hub that would not only serve Maple-High/Six Corners, but also Old Hill and Forest Park.

Additionally, given the proximity to Springfield College, there are opportunities for collaboration with the college to attract local businesses that will meet the needs of residents as well as college students.

Economic development here in this area could also be incorporated into the proposed Mill River Greenway. There is widespread support among neighborhood residents for such a project, which would link this area to the Connecticut River. Although the exact route of this proposed greenway has not yet been determined, its eastern terminus would likely be here in the vicinity of the One Stop Plaza, although it also has the potential to be extended further east to Springfield College, where it could connect with another proposed greenway, the Highland Rail Trail.



*One Stop Plaza, seen from Central Street*



*Vacant buildings at the corner of Central and Rifle Streets.*



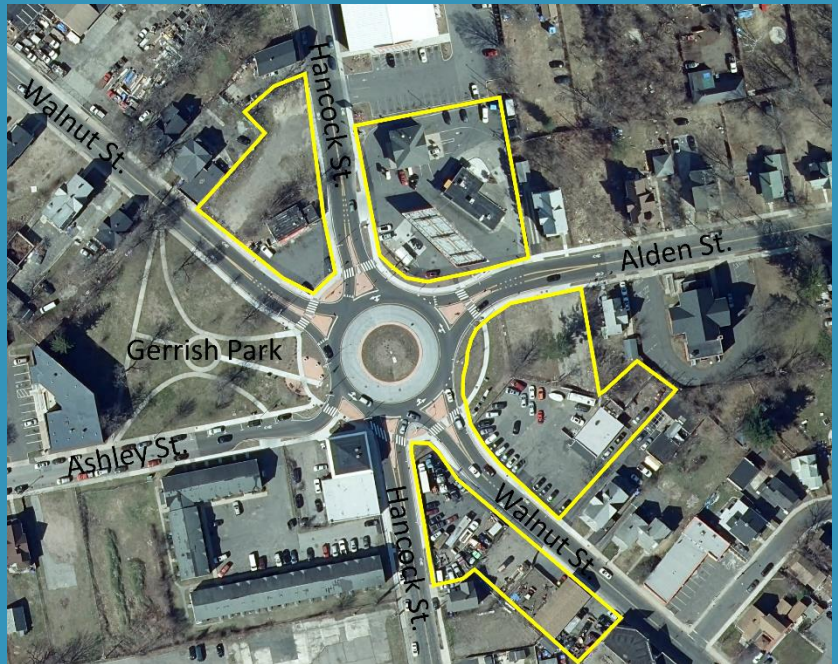
## Six Corners

As mentioned earlier in this document, one of the recently completed projects in the area was the Six Corners roundabout, which is located on the border of the Old Hill and Maple-High/Six Corners neighborhoods. This roundabout idea emerged out of earlier neighborhood planning efforts, and it replaced a complex signalized intersection that had been identified as a high crash location.

With this project now completed, it creates opportunities for expanding upon this investment by encouraging concentrated economic development in the area. Most of the parcels around and near the roundabout are zoned for either Business A and Business B, but many of these are currently vacant or have car-centric uses that are not favorable to creating a walkable, pedestrian-oriented business area.

On the western side of the intersection is Gerrish Park, a 1.07-acre park that is used primarily for passive recreation. It currently has minimal amenities: paved walking paths, several historical markers/monuments, and trash/recycling receptacles. It does not currently have any benches, so this may be a possibility to explore, in order to help promote Six Corners as a focal point of the neighborhood.

Moving clockwise from Gerrish Park is a triangular area of land between Walnut and Hancock Streets. The parcel at the point of this triangle is a 0.18-acre lot that is currently the site of a restaurant.



*Six Corners roundabout, with potential economic development areas outlined in yellow. Image source: MassGIS.*



*Facing north from the east side of the Six Corners roundabout, with Alden Street in the foreground.*

The building is set back from the roundabout, with a small parking lot in front of it. Behind this restaurant are four vacant city-owned parcels that extend from Walnut to Hancock Street and comprise a total of 0.31 acres. Because of its



current Business A zoning, and its proximity to the roundabout, this site has strong potential for economic development.

The next area of land, between Hancock and Alden Streets, is currently the site of a gas station and car wash, with a chain dollar store directly to the north of it on Hancock Street. Because the existing gas station and car wash occupies a large parcel in a highly visible location on the roundabout, it may be worthwhile to explore alternatives such as pedestrian-oriented local business development that would better support the needs of neighborhood residents.

The next corner, between Alden and Walnut Streets, had once been the site of another gas station, but much of this land was taken in order to construct the roundabout. As a result, the parcel is less than half of its original size, and is currently owned by the city. It is adjacent to two other vacant city-owned parcels on Alden Street, which total about 0.24 acres. These two lots are zoned for Residence B, but one possible option could be to explore re-zoning these for Business A and redevelop for local businesses.

To the southeast of the roundabout, both sides of Walnut Street are currently used for automobile-related purposes. On the east side of the street is a used car dealership, and on the west side is a repair shop and salvage yard. Neither use is ideal for promoting pedestrian-oriented businesses in the area, so these may be potential sites to focus on for economic redevelopment.



*Vacant land on the south side of Alden Street*



*Facing south from the Six Corners roundabout, with Walnut Street in the left and Hancock Street in the center of the scene.*

The last corner of the Six Corners roundabout is in the southwest, between Hancock and Ashley Streets. This is currently the site of a mixed-use property that has four storefronts on the ground floor and two apartments on the upper floor. This site is more pedestrian-oriented than most of the other existing buildings around the roundabout. Because of this, economic development activity here could include collaborating with property owners and existing businesses to continue to encourage and support local businesses.



# **Neighborhood Investment Process**



## Purpose

Creating a strong link between the community and the everyday work done by the city's many departments is essential for successful neighborhood planning. This plan must be an integral part of the strategic management, budgeting, and daily operations of city departments interacting with the Old Hill neighborhood. The city Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED) maintains outreach to other departments while overseeing neighborhood investment planning and implementation. As neighborhood investment plans are completed, OPED staff ensure discussion of recommendations with relevant departments as they may be incorporated into their work plans. Ongoing communication and collaboration between Neighborhood Services, the Old Hill Neighborhood Council, and all residents in the neighborhood is necessary.

In 2022, as the city and the nation emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Springfield allocated \$746,340 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to facilitate development of twelve Neighborhood Investment Plans in neighborhoods where residents experienced disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death. The city engaged the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to both update the city's Neighborhood Data Atlas and facilitate development of the plans for these 12 neighborhoods. PVPC engaged Way Finders Community Building and Engagement via a competitive procurement process to lead engagement focusing on residents, local businesses, and community-based organizations.

## Community Engagement

The community engagement process began by focusing on project kick-off and soliciting residents' thoughts on key issues for city investment, along with lifting up concerns, ideas, and issues. Phase Two shifted focus to prioritizing draft solutions identified out of Phase One input. In total, PVPC and Way Finders hosted five in-person meetings and five Zoom meetings, tabled at two community events, and administered three sets of on-line surveys, engaging an estimated 150 people in meetings with an additional 263 people completing surveys, for a total of approximately 400 people.

### *Phase 1*

The first phase of resident engagement began with two in-person Community Kick-Off Meetings in February 2023, the first at the Mason Square Library and the second at the Bay Area Neighborhood Council meeting space. The Community Kick-off events introduced

residents to the Springfield Neighborhood Investment Plan project and engaged them to identify issues, concerns, and ideas for investment in their neighborhood.

On March 9, residents participated in an on-line Wiki-mapping workshop to share locations of issues and potential solutions and see their contributions mapped in real-time. Residents could also interface directly with the Wiki-mapping portal to share their thoughts independently.

In April, an in-person Community Mapping Workshop was held which further engaged residents to identify issues, concerns and ideas for investment in their neighborhood.

In May 2023, PVPC and Way Finders worked with the local organization Stone Soul to run an in-person Community Conversation and Networking Event which specifically focused on small business owners and community-based organization engagement.



Between March 16 and June 12, an online survey, which was offered in both Spanish and English, was available for residents to complete. In total, this survey had 160 respondents. In early June 2023, PVPC and Way Finders tabled at the Springfield Neighborhood Housing Services Annual Block Party at which many people completed the survey. Understanding that some residents did not have 15 minutes to complete the full survey, PVPC and Way Finders developed a micro-survey that engaged 103 residents to indicate priority resident recommendations.

#### *Phase 2*

The prioritization process for actions to include in the Mason Square and Maple High/Six Corners plans began in June 2023 with neighborhood meetings and another round of surveys. During this phase, we hosted a series of four community meetings on zoom for residents to both prioritize top recommendations and build their capacity by learning from city department heads (or delegates) about how the city works and prioritizes action in their neighborhoods and throughout the city.

After each meeting the polls from these meetings were turned into on-line surveys and emailed to Neighborhood Councils and CBOs to engage more residents and community leaders in completing the prioritization process.

June 21 - Housing and Energy with  
Gerry McCafferty, Housing Director

June 28 - Parks and Recreation/Open  
Spaces with Pat Sullivan, Director of  
Parks, Recreation & Building  
Management

July 12 - Arts & Culture/Economic  
Development/Food Access with Tim  
Sheehan, Chief Development Officer

July 19 - Transportation with Chris  
Cignoli, DPW Director and Sandra  
Sheehan, PVTA Administrator

PVPC posted recordings of Zoom meetings and presentation slides to the Springfield Neighborhood Investment Plan webpage for residents who missed the meetings.

In late June, PVPC tabled at a Bay Area Neighborhood Council community event as an opportunity for residents to fill out polls about the topics at two of these neighborhood planning meetings.



# **Goals and Strategies**



## City Goals

The Springfield Neighborhood Investment Planning process is built upon years of planning efforts across the city. Over the past decade, city-wide planning efforts have engaged residents and stakeholders in planning for a more resilient and equitable future, often in direct response to crises such as the 2011 tornado and COVID-19 global pandemic. Within these many plans, goals for neighborhood-specific projects and programs have been integrated with broader city goals.

*City Goal #1: Improve transparency, trust, and communication between the city and the Old Hill neighborhood.*

One of the keys to fostering a strong neighborhood is to ensure that there is active and ongoing communication and collaboration between the neighborhood residents, the Neighborhood Council, and the city government. As such, it is vital to ensure that residents feel empowered to bring concerns and ideas to their local government, and also to participate in the decision-making process.

### Strategies:

- City, neighborhood council, and residents collaborate to design, create, and implement an equitable and inclusive neighborhood planning process in Old Hill, ensuring consistency with city's values of climate resilience and sustainability.
- City communicates all aspects of the Targeted Neighborhood Investment Plan update process and implementation by posting all materials on the city website-or linked to it-and providing paper copies at City Hall, Neighborhood Council offices and other locations as determined by residents and NC representatives, and to people who request them, including calendar of meetings scheduled, plan template, access to the Data Atlas and expanded GIS maps website, zoning regulations, related city plans, draft products, deliverables, notes from meetings and any other draft and final work products.
- Build the capacity of residents and the city staff to understand how each other 'works' and the forces limiting, constraining, and facilitating each group's ability to act.



*City Goal # 2: Identify, prioritize, and implement investments in the Old Hill neighborhood.*

In creating this neighborhood plan, the goal is to not only involve residents in the process of identifying and prioritizing needs in the neighborhood, but also to ensure ongoing collaboration as the city works to implement this plan over the next ten years.

**Strategies:**

- City, neighborhood council, and residents identify long-term (8+ years), short-term (6 months to 3 years), and mid-term (4 to 8 years) priority projects for neighborhood stabilization, equity, sustainability, and resiliency.
- City and Neighborhood Council collaborates to conduct work on a neighborhood level that is reflective of larger city-wide planning practices, such as ReBuild Springfield, the Urban Renewal Plan, the Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP), the Complete Streets Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, the Economic Development Plan, the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Hazard Mitigation Plan, and any other relevant plans.



## Neighborhood Goals

As part of this neighborhood investment process, a number of goals and strategies emerged for the Old Hill neighborhood. These were based on resident and stakeholder engagement, along with a review of existing neighborhood and city plans and an evaluation of current neighborhood conditions.

### *Neighborhood Goal #1: Maintain the quality of the neighborhood's housing stock.*

On the Spring 2023 resident survey conducted as part of this neighborhood planning process, Old Hill residents overwhelmingly chose housing as a top priority out of seven major categories. The housing stock in the neighborhood is primarily single-family and two-family homes.

Many of these homes date back to when the neighborhood was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but others were built more recently as infill construction. In addition, the neighborhood has a significant number of vacant parcels, which present opportunities for further development. Overall, the housing goals for the Old Hill neighborhood include maintaining and improving the existing housing stock, along with encouraging new residential construction.

#### Strategies:

- City and collaborators expand funding and/or programs to provide financial assistance for maintaining, rehabilitating, and renovating houses in the Old Hill neighborhood.
- Neighborhood Council identifies and prioritizes vacant and/or deteriorated properties for rehabilitation.
- City collaborates with Neighborhood Council to educate residents on the process for reporting and resolving code violations.
- City and Neighborhood Council explore funding sources to construct new homes for first time homebuyers on city-owned land.
- City and Neighborhood Council work with property owners to pursue infill development on vacant lots.
- City and Neighborhood Council collaborate to increase homeownership rates and support first-time homebuyers in the Old Hill.

*Neighborhood Goal #2: Expand opportunities to walk, bike, and take public transportation.*

The Old Hill neighborhood is well served by public transportation on the main roads, but it is important to ensure that residents on the side streets can safely access these bus stops. On the resident survey, respondents placed a high priority on both the walkability of the neighborhood and also on improving the experience of taking the bus, including installing new shelters. In general, Old Hill respondents placed less of a priority on biking, roadway improvements, and traffic calming measures.

**Strategies:**

- Neighborhood Council collaborates with Elias Brookings School to expand its Walking School Bus Program, and collaborates with DeBerry-Swan School to create a similar program.
- Neighborhood Council and city collaborate to identify areas with high pedestrian traffic and install benches to accommodate people with mobility difficulties.
- Neighborhood Council and city collaborate to identify high-priority areas and develop strategies to slow down cars, allow safe street crossing, and protect pedestrians and cyclists.
- Neighborhood Council identifies areas where trees and other overgrowth obstruct lines of sight at key street corners, and shares list with city to improve visibility for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists.



***Neighborhood Goal #3: Build community and pride in neighborhood***

Survey respondents from the Old Hill neighborhood indicated both a need for additional parks in the Mason Square area, along with a desire for more community events and celebrations. As there is a limited amount of parkland within the neighborhood, it is important to ensure that existing parks are well-utilized. This can help to establish a sense of place within the neighborhood, while also serving as a venue for expanded programming and events.

**Strategies:**

- City and Neighborhood Council collaborate to organize community events at Ruth Elizabeth Park.
- City and MassDOT explore the feasibility of expanding Harriet Tubman Park and connecting it to the proposed Mill River Greenway Bike Path.
- City, Neighborhood Council, and Upper Hill Residents Council explore possibility of acquiring a site for an Old Hill/Upper Hill neighborhood resource center.
- Neighborhood Council works to establish a Neighborhood Branding Program, including neighborhood logo and flag, in order to enhance feelings of pride in the neighborhood.
- Neighborhood Council promotes greater participation in the organization by publicizing its work and by holding its meetings in larger facilities.
- Neighborhood Council organizes yearly celebrations to build community spirit and connect residents with resources.
- Neighborhood Council reaches out to the three colleges in and around the neighborhood to collaborate on youth sports and other youth development programs.
- City and Neighborhood Council collaborate on developing a public outreach campaign to keep streets, sidewalks, and parking lots clean.
- Neighborhood Council identifies and collaborates with the city on removing brush, trash, and garbage from city-owned vacant lots.
- Neighborhood Council and city collaborate to identify and prioritize maintenance and safety concerns at neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

*Neighborhood Goal #4: Strengthen economy of neighborhood*

Given the amount of vacant or underutilized land in Old Hill, there are significant opportunities for strengthening the economy of the neighborhood. On the resident survey, respondents indicated that their preferences were to focus business development efforts on the Mason Square area, and also in the vicinity of the One Stop Plaza and the Armory Watershops. Respondents also indicated that the development of a full-line grocery store was a high priority for improving food access in the neighborhood.

**Strategies:**

- Office of Planning and Economic Development explores the possibility of District Improvement Financing for the Watershops area.
- City and Neighborhood Council explore the possibility of negotiating with neighborhood institutional uses to make payments in lieu of taxes.
- Office of Planning and Economic Development and Neighborhood Council reach out to local businesses to assess interest in establishing a Neighborhood Business Association.
- City and Neighborhood Council explore available funding resources, including but not limited to funds available from the Office of Neighborhood Services Neighborhood Targeted Improvement Program (NTIP) to implement low cost projects in the community.
- Office of Planning and Economic Development collaborates with property owners at 1 Allen Street to create a long-term plan for the property.
- Neighborhood Council and the city collaborate with Maple-High/Six Corners to create a plan for the redevelopment of Walnut Street.
- Neighborhood Council and city collaborate to bring a full-line grocery store to the Old Hill neighborhood.
- Targeted economic development at Ben Swan Way to create a town center setting for Old Hill and all neighborhoods of Mason Square, including considering the addition of a three-story building along Ben Swan Way with retail on the ground floor and offices/apartments on the upper floors.
- City and stakeholders collaborate to develop job training programs in the Mason Square area.



# **Recommendations and Prioritization**

## Neighborhood-Specific Recommendations

As part of this neighborhood investment process recommendations, residents of Old Hill have identified and prioritized specific areas of need for their neighborhood:

### Develop a neighborhood resource center for Old Hill and potentially for Upper Hill

Neighborhood residents have consistently placed a high priority on a neighborhood resource center. The Old Hill Neighborhood Council has an existing meeting space, but it is too small for the goals of the council. One possible solution is to collaborate with the Upper Hill Citizens Council on developing a facility that would serve the residents of both neighborhoods.

As described in the Economic Development Opportunities section, one potential location for this could be the former MCDI site on Wilbraham Avenue, adjacent to the new Samuel Bolden Park. Aside from this site, another possible site that was identified by the Neighborhood Council is the former school building at the corner of Eastern Avenue and Alden Street.

Moving forward, the two neighborhood councils should collaborate with the city to determine the feasibility of utilizing either of these sites, or if necessary, identify other possible city-owned vacant properties that could be developed into a neighborhood resource center.

### Redevelop former MCDI site in collaboration with Old Hill and Upper Hill neighborhoods

Although the former MCDI site would be an ideal location for a neighborhood resource center, this might not be the only potential use for this large vacant parcel. Old Hill residents believe that the redevelopment of this site should be a priority, and they have indicated that they want to be involved in any decision-making process involving this property.

As part of any redevelopment process at the site, Old Hill residents have also expressed an interest in collaborating with the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission, which owns an adjacent parcel to the west of the MCDI site and Samuel Bolden Park. This lot is primarily used by the commission for outdoor storage of vehicles, pipes, and other equipment, and Old Hill residents believe that it is important to reduce the visual impact of this storage area in conjunction with any redevelopment plans.



### Promote and support homeownership in the Old Hill neighborhood

Old Hill residents have indicated that housing is a high priority, especially through expanding the existing funding sources for rehabilitation and maintenance of existing homes. As described in the Housing section of this neighborhood investment plan, there are a number of existing citywide initiatives to support homeowners, but this continues to be an area of concern, especially for neighborhoods such as Old Hill that have an aging housing stock.

Aside from rehabilitation and maintenance programs, Old Hill residents have also expressed an interest in increasing the neighborhood's homeownership rate. This could include constructing new single-family homes on the many vacant parcels in the neighborhood, along with expanding existing programs to provide education and financial support for prospective first-time homebuyers.

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### District-Wide Recommendations

The four neighborhoods that make up the Mason Square district, combined with the adjacent Maple High/Six Corners neighborhood, identify both as individual neighborhoods and also as a district—especially for economic development purposes. These five neighborhoods have a collective sense of themselves, and throughout the neighborhood investment planning process several district wide recommendations emerged. These four recommendations are all supported by the five Neighborhood Councils and by the majority of residents, stakeholders, businesses and community-based organizations that participated in the plan development process.

Work with the Springfield Redevelopment Authority and the city to create and implement an urban renewal plan that will promote concentrated economic development in and around Mason Square

Because Mason Square is a major focal point for the neighborhoods in this part of the city, this would be an ideal location for further economic development. Based on resident feedback, any such urban renewal plan should include:

- Increased support for Black- and Brown-owned businesses.
- Recruitment of sit-down restaurants and other businesses to meet basic needs of all the existing residents and the many new residents at the recently developed apartment complexes.
- Recruiting a bank to the Mason Square area to improve access to financial services for residents of the district.
- Renovations and improvements of existing storefront exteriors.
- Streetscape improvements such as an increased number of waste and recycling receptacles, more shade trees, benches, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, shelters at bus stops and improved lighting.
- Vocational training programs that will expand employment opportunities for district residents and increase the pool of job candidates for local employers.
- Promoting the development of light manufacturing on industrial-zoned parcels, in order to expand job opportunities for district residents.



### Expand existing city programs that assist homebuyers and homeowners

Throughout the neighborhood investment planning process in all five of the Mason Square area neighborhoods, residents have regularly raised the issue of housing. In particular, residents believe that increasing homeownership rates and supporting existing homeowners are high priorities for these neighborhoods. As outlined earlier in this plan, there are a number of existing city programs, but many of these are limited in terms of eligibility requirements and in terms of the total number of applicants who receive funding.

Specific actions should include:

- Increasing funding for city programs that assist homeowners in maintaining, repairing, and restoring their homes.
- Increasing funding for programs and initiatives that provide education and assistance to first-time homebuyers.
- Constructing single-family homes on vacant, city-owned parcels for first-time homebuyers.

### Recruit a grocery store to expand food access in the district

Based on resident feedback, there is a need for expanded grocery options in the Mason Square area. Residents noted that the existing grocery store in the district meets some of their needs. However, they also noted that, as a relatively small grocery store serving a large population, there is no competition, and their prices seem to be higher than at full-line grocery stores outside of the district.

Resident feedback has been split between those who prefer a small, locally owned grocery store, and those who would favor a larger chain grocery store in Mason Square. Overall, though, residents are in agreement that there is a need for expanded availability of healthy food options, including fresh, affordable, culturally appropriate produce.

## Develop a multi-use trail that would link the Mason Square neighborhoods with other parts of the city

Residents throughout the Mason Square and Maple-High/Six Corners neighborhoods have generally indicated support for a multi-use trail, which could potentially utilize portions of the abandoned railroad right-of-way where feasible. Such a trail would provide expanded opportunities for exercise, while also providing an alternative transportation route for bicyclists and pedestrians. Development of this trail should include:

- Collaboration with neighborhood councils on the route of the trail
- Collaboration with abutters to address concerns related to privacy and security.
- Creation and implementation of a safety plan to ensure that residents are able to safely utilize the trail.
- Installation of trailside signage for wayfinding and to highlight the history of the Mason Square district and its residents.

## Conduct a feasibility study of the proposed Mill River Greenway

This proposed greenway was the subject of a 2010 Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning masters project by Amy C. Verel at University of Massachusetts Amherst. It would link the Old Hill and Maple-High/Six Corners neighborhoods to the Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway, and it would also have the potential to be extended to other proposed multi-use trails in the Mason Square area.

During the community engagement process of this neighborhood investment plan, residents expressed support for this proposed greenway. If this plan was to move forward, the next steps would be to:

- Identify the route of the proposed multi-use trail, with a preference for utilizing city-owned land in order to minimize land takings.
- Conduct a feasibility study to identify engineering challenges, environmental concerns, and estimated costs for constructing the greenway.



# Appendix

### Summaries of Recent City-wide Planning Efforts

Prior to the Neighborhood Investment Planning process, the City of Springfield has included neighborhood-level planning objectives as a part of several city-wide plans, projects, and programs.

#### Rebuild Springfield (2012)

The Rebuild Springfield initiative was created in response to the June 1, 2011 tornado that struck the City of Springfield and produced a four-part comprehensive planning response to the natural disaster. The Rebuild Springfield plan includes a city-wide overview and three district plans for neighborhoods directly impacted by the tornado. The Citywide planning process is organized according to the six Nexus Domains of a healthy and vibrant community. These domains include the physical, cultural, social, organizational, educational, and economic components of a community while listing twenty-one total recommendations. More neighborhood-specific recommendations and strategies are outlined in the district plans: District One (Metro Center and South End), District Two (Maple High-Six Corners, Upper Hill, Old Hill, and Forest Park), and District Three (Sixteen Acres and East Forest Park).

#### Local Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2023)

The City of Springfield's latest hazard mitigation plan presents a thorough summary of community features and risks posed by natural hazards. The planning document identifies and prioritizes forty-four total mitigation actions for the City to implement. While many of the included strategies are city-wide in scope, several features are identified as priorities within specific neighborhoods.

#### Strong, Healthy, and Just: Climate Action and Resilience Plan (2017)

Springfield's first climate action and resilience plan in name, "Strong, Healthy, and Just: Climate Action and Resilience Plan" (SHJ) was developed in 2017 to provide a path for the City of Springfield to reduce overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to enhance urban resilience. The SHJ plan builds upon over 15 years of climate action by the City and first recommends the City to conduct an analysis of the progress that had been made on previous plans and their climate-related strategies. A second priority recommendation presented is for the City to better communicate the ongoing and planned climate action and resilience work, especially in neighborhoods with high concentrations of chronically stressed residents. Additionally, the plan expands on ten recommended Action Categories with goals and strategies to reduce GHG emissions and enhance resilience.

#### Springfield Complete Streets Prioritization Plan – 2020 Update

Expanding on the 2017 Springfield Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, the latest update provides an examination of more recent data and a list of projects developed through various engagement efforts. The updated plan identifies previous priority projects that have been completed both city-wide and within individual neighborhoods. emissions and enhance resilience.



### **Local Rapid Recovery Plan (2021)**

Springfield's Local Rapid Recovery Plan was the result of the Commonwealth's Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program intended to provide every municipality in Massachusetts the opportunity to develop actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to the unique economic challenges and COVID-19 related impacts to downtowns, town centers, and commercial areas. The LRRP focuses on Springfield's Main Street Convention Center District (MSCC) in the Metro Center neighborhood. Through the LRRP process, fifteen projects were identified as priority opportunities for investing the city's initial American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

### **Open Space and Recreation Plan (2022)**

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) developed in 2022 outlines a comprehensive park and conservation land improvement program and establishes a framework for guiding city expenditures through Fiscal Year 2027. The plan establishes six broad goals that were developed through input from each City department involved in managing open space.

### **Safety Action Plan (2022)**

Collaborating with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the City created the Safety Action Plan to provide information and direction on strategies and treatments most likely to improve roadway safety performance within the city. The plan addresses citywide crash patterns and trends and systemic treatments that can be used to address those trends. The content of the plan establishes a vision and goals specific to roadway safety performance and establishes a basis for informing roadway safety performance improvements over the next three to five years. Strategies for addressing roadway safety improvements are separated into "engineering" and "non-engineering" countermeasures. Specific countermeasure locations are identified for intersections, signalized and unsignalized, along with corridors throughout the city.

### **Capital Improvement Plan, FY 2024-2028 (2023)**

The City of Springfield's annual update of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) acts as a roadmap for the acquisition, renovation, or construction of new or existing facilities and infrastructure. As part of the City of Springfield's continuing efforts to develop robust long-term strategic planning initiatives, the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for Fiscal Years 2024-2028 lists all capital improvement needs throughout the city, and the estimated cost associated with those projects. The estimated cost for all 477 projects totals \$1.3 billion, with the highest priority projects totaling \$182 million. These 18 "Grade A" projects include investments in public safety, upgrades to schools and municipal buildings, road resurfacing, city-wide systemic safety interventions and numerous projects aimed at driving economic development, while improving the safety, mobility, and the quality of life of the residents of Springfield.

### Existing Neighborhood Plans

The City of Springfield has a long history of engaging its residents through neighborhood planning efforts. In the 1980s and 1990s there were dedicated and continual efforts from City planning staff to collaborate with neighborhood councils and associations to create Neighborhood Plans. Much of the progress initiated through neighborhood planning projects was halted in the early 2000s, while the city was under receivership.

While the City regained its financial autonomy in 2009, the economic impacts of the Great Recession and the devastation caused by the 2011 tornado presented opportunities to refocus neighborhood planning in the 2010s, which centered on the redevelopment of downtown neighborhoods. In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced planning efforts to pause and pivot to supporting residents and businesses most at risk. Federal funding made available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has renewed the City's capacity and commitment to neighborhood planning.

### Old Hill Neighborhood Plan (2004)

This neighborhood plan provides an overview of existing conditions and identifies key issues to prioritize: housing and homeownership, transportation and infrastructure, open space, and neighborhood edges. Recommendations to address these issues include providing greater opportunities for homeownership, partnering with institutions in and around the neighborhood, upgrading streets to improve the aesthetics and safety of the neighborhood, and identifying funding sources from the city, state, and federal levels, along with funding from private investors.

### 2008 Revitalization Plan

A follow-up effort to the extensive work outlined in the 2012 Rebuild Springfield Plan, the Watershops District Revitalization Plan focuses on a small area within the city-wide plan's District 2 (Maple High-Six Corners, Old Hill, Upper Hill, and Forest Park), an area bounded by the Six Corners Intersection to the north, Springfield College to the east, Johnny Appleseed Park to the south, and the intersection of Pine Street and Central Street to the west. The plan envisions a future Watershops District that includes three mixed-use commercial centers with residential infill in between; new institutional and community uses; transportation and streetscaping improvements; and new alternative transportation and open space connections. The plan recommends seven "High Priority Physical Projects," five "Medium Priority Physical Projects," and 12 "Programmatic Projects."

### Old Hill Neighborhood Action Plan 2015-2020 (2015)

An update to the 2004 Neighborhood Plan, the neighborhood action plan focuses on capacity building, physical improvements, culture & community building, and public safety in Old Hill. Successes from the 2004 plan are highlighted and expanded into thirteen actions related to the four focus areas. A Framework for Action was developed to identify implementation partners, possible funding sources, proposed timeline, and evaluation criteria for each action item. Included in the Action Plan is an "Implementation Process" section describing the Old Hill Neighborhood Council's approach to achieving each action item.



#### A Plan for Springfield's Old Hill Neighborhood (2022)

The first planning document for the Old Hill Neighborhood since 2015, the draft plan was created by consultants Scott Hanson and Peter Gagliardi with the support of the Old Hill Neighborhood Council and community stakeholders. A “Vision” for the neighborhood was crafted, and three categories of recommendations were presented. “Low Hanging Fruit” are 13 identified initiatives that were ongoing or considered achievable within a 12-month period. Seven projects were identified as “Projects That Could Move Forward by 2026”. Three initiatives were identified as projects to be completed “In the Longer Range” sometime within the next decade, with two being long-held priorities to redevelop 1 Allen Street and develop a Community Center for Old Hill Neighborhood Council and other community groups.