



Upper Hill Neighborhood Investment Plan 2023-2033

City of Springfield and the Upper Hill Residents 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 Upper 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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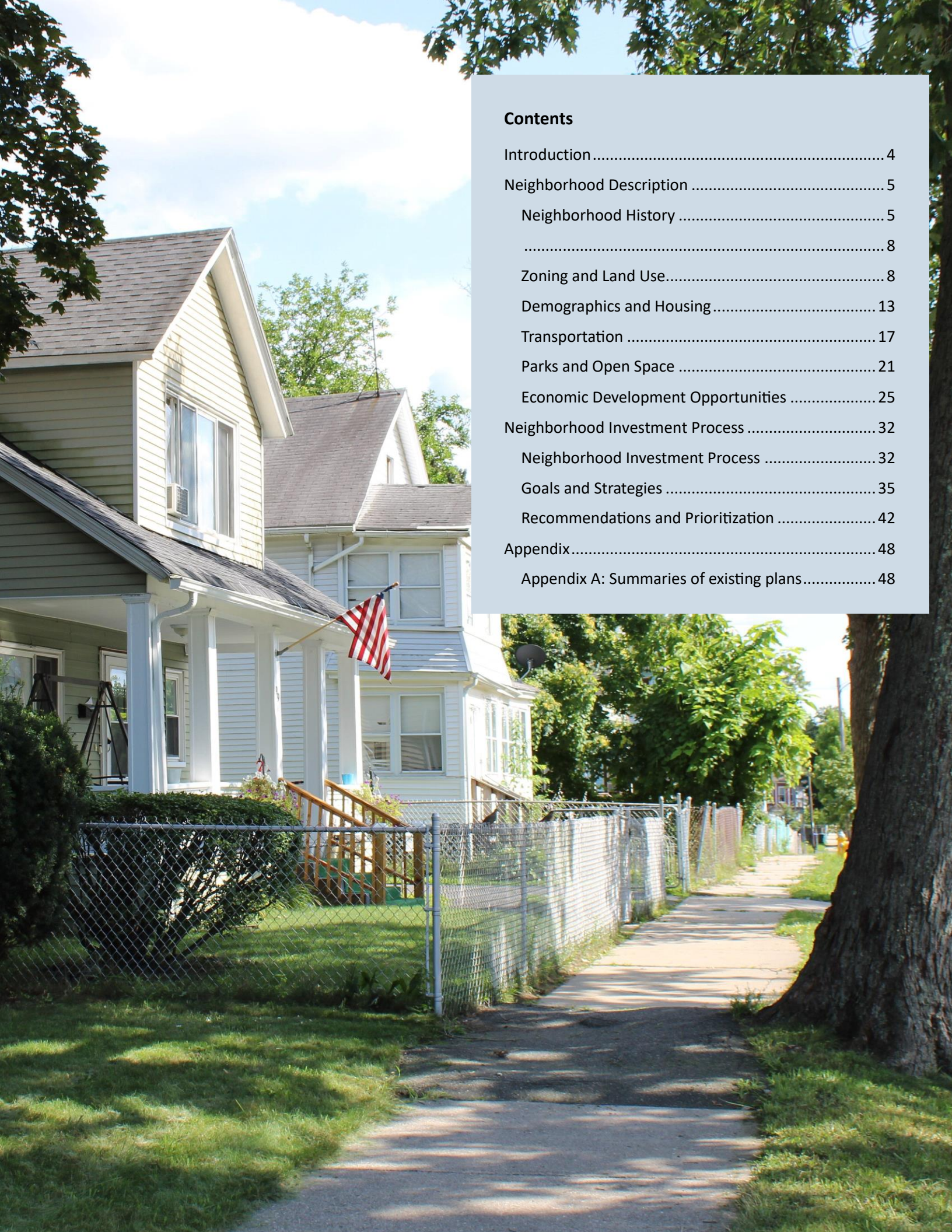
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Way Finders Community Building and Engagement for resident, community-based organization, and small business engagement

ARPA funding language

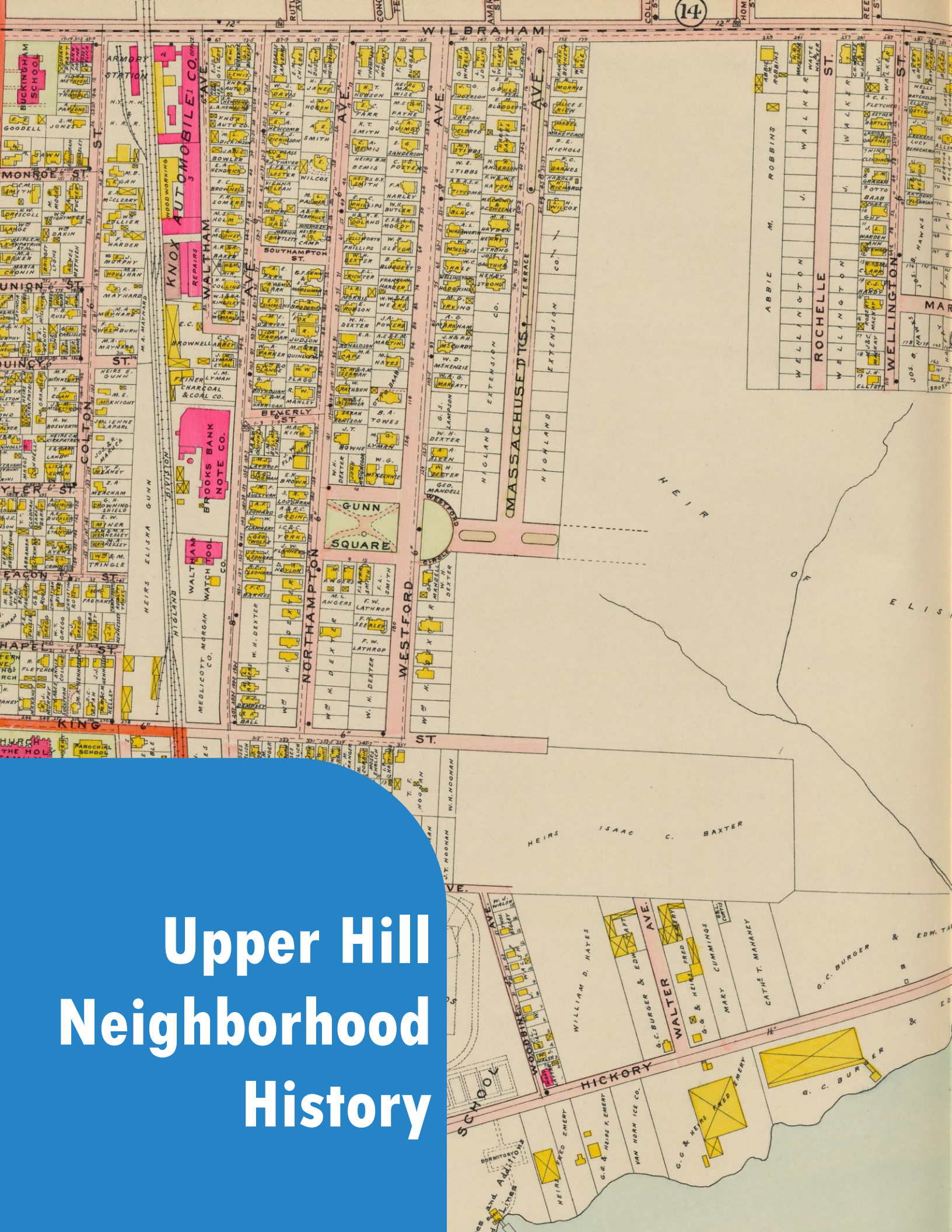


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Introduction/Executive Summary

Upper Hill Neighborhood History



Neighborhood Development

Unlike the Old Hill neighborhood, which was primarily developed in the second half of the 19th century, the Upper Hill neighborhood would remain sparsely settled until the turn of the 20th century. By this point, the city was becoming a major industrial center, and many companies began building factories along the railroad corridor on the western side of the neighborhood.

Industrial Growth

The most notable factory here in the Upper Hill neighborhood was the Hendee Manufacturing Company, which was located in the triangle of land between State Street, Wilbraham Road, and Rutland Street. Later renamed the Indian Motorcycle Company, it produced motorcycles here in the Upper Hill neighborhood until it closed in 1953. Much of the facility is still standing, and has been converted into apartments.

Another important manufacturer in the neighborhood was the Knox Automobile Company. This was one of several car manufacturers in Springfield during the early 20th century, and its factory was on the south side of Wilbraham Road, at the corner of Waltham Street. As of 2023, this building—which had been vacant for many years—is undergoing conversion into apartments.

Housing Developments

Unlike many other factory cities in New England, the companies in Springfield generally did not employ large numbers of unskilled laborers. Instead, most of the work in Springfield's factories involved precision

Previous page: Detail from Plate 15 of the 1910 city atlas, showing the Upper Hill neighborhood. Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center



Early 20th century postcard of the Indian Motorcycle factory, seen from the State Street side of the facility

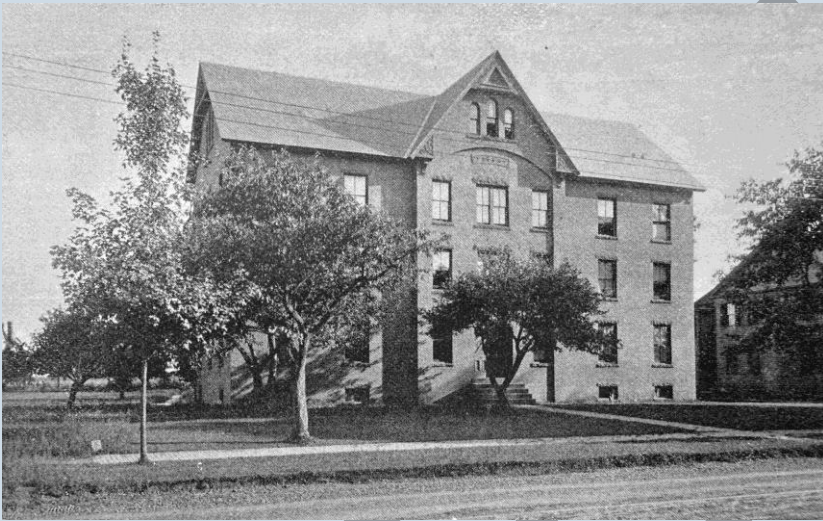


A neighborhood market at the corner of Wilbraham Road and Colonial Avenue, around 1938-1939. Springfield Preservation Trust.

manufacturing and other skilled labor, along with a variety of clerical and managerial work. As a result, the city's workers tended to be better paid and, consequently, had better housing options, in contrast to the factory tenements that often dominated other industrial cities in the region. This led to a proliferation of single-family and two-family housing in Springfield, which contributed to its nickname as the "City of Homes."

Here in the Upper Hill neighborhood, the increased demand for houses resulted in the

subdivision of the land between State Street and Alden Street. By the 1910s, new streets and house lots had been laid out here, including a public park—Gunn Square—and landscaped terraces along Massachusetts Avenue and Westford Circle. Car ownership was becoming more common by this point, and many of the houses were built with garages in the back of the lot, but residents also had access to public transportation via trolley service on State Street and on Wilbraham Road.



The French Protestant College campus in the early 1890s. Image from Picturesque Hampden (1892)



The International Y.M.C.A. Training School campus, in the early 1900s. Library of Congress, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.

Institutions of Higher Learning

The development of the land in this area also led to the establishment of two colleges in the Upper Hill neighborhood. In the northern area, between Wilbraham Road and State Street, is American International College (AIC), which was established in 1885 as the French Protestant College. The goal of the school was to meet the needs of new immigrants and their children, and over the years it continued to expand its mission to serve students from the

United States as well as abroad, inspiring the “International” part of the school’s name. Today, AIC continues to have a diverse student body, with demographics that closely match those of the surrounding community.

The other institution of higher learning in Upper Hill is Springfield College, which was also established in 1885. It began as the School for Christian Workers, and later became the International Y.M.C.A Training School, and it was originally located on the north side of Mason Square. It was there that instructor James Naismith invented the sport of basketball in 1891. However, by the mid-1890s the school had relocated to its new campus on the Watershops Pond in the southern part of the neighborhood. The school would later be renamed Springfield College, and its campus now includes most of the land in Upper Hill to the south of King Street and to the west of Middlesex Street.

An aerial photograph of a suburban neighborhood. The image shows a dense grid of streets with small, single-family houses. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a school complex with a large white circular structure, possibly a gymnasium or auditorium, and several sports fields, including a football field and a baseball field. The terrain is mostly flat with some patches of bare earth and sparse vegetation. A blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom left corner, containing the title text.

Upper Hill Zoning and Land Use

Neighborhood Boundaries

The Upper Hill neighborhood is defined by State Street, Roosevelt Avenue, and Wilbraham Road to the north, the former Highland Branch railroad right-of-way to the west, and the Watershops Pond to the south and east.

Residential Zoning

Nearly the entire neighborhood is zoned for medium-density Residence B, which allows for single-family and two-family dwellings. Most of these properties are on uniformly-sized lots that measure about 50 feet wide and about 100 feet deep. The only area in the neighborhood with lower-density Residence A zoning is in the southeastern corner, in the vicinity of Northumberland Street and Carnarvon Circle.

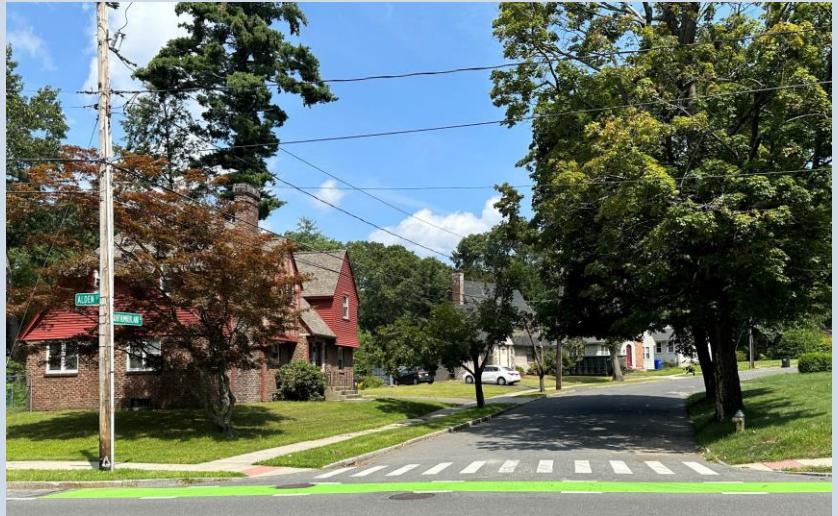
Business and Industrial Zoning

The nonresidential zoning is generally on the periphery of the neighborhood, including industrial parcels along the former railroad right-of-way and Business zoning on State Street. Otherwise, the only other Business zoning is on scattered parcels along Wilbraham Road.

Existing Development

Most of the housing stock in Upper Hill dates back to when the neighborhood was developed in the early 20th century, and it consists primarily of two-family residences, along with some single-family homes. However, the neighborhood has also seen an increase in housing units through adaptive reuse of former industrial properties. The former Indian Motorcycle factory, located in the triangle between State Street and Wilbraham Road, has since been

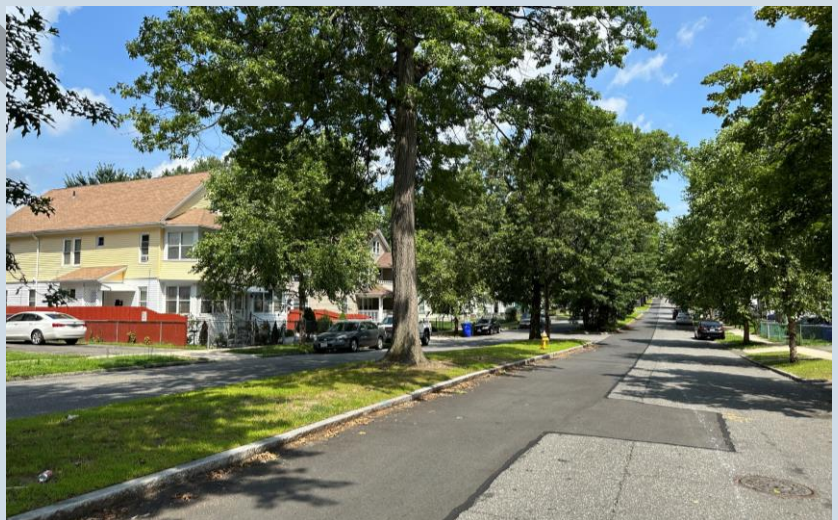
Previous page: Aerial view of the Upper Hill neighborhood, 2021. Source: MassGIS.



Low-density Residence A homes on Northumberland Street



Residence B homes on Reed Street



Residence B homes on Massachusetts Avenue



Apartments at the former Indian Motorcycle factory between State Street and Wilbraham Road



The former Knox Automobile factory, now undergoing conversion into apartments



Mix of business and residential use on Wilbraham Road

converted into apartments, and as of 2023 a similar project is underway at the former Knox Automobile factory at the corner of Wilbraham Road and Waltham Avenue. This project will add approximately 114 new apartment units to the neighborhood, and will provide further opportunities to expand restaurant and business options in the Mason Square area, in order to meet the needs of these new families.

Colleges

As mentioned in the neighborhood history section, the Upper Hill neighborhood is also home to two colleges. The main campus of American International College is in the northern part of the neighborhood, between Wilbraham Road and State Street, and Springfield College is in the southern part, along Alden Street. The proximity of these two schools presents opportunities for the city and neighborhood to partner with them to attract and support local businesses that will serve the needs of the student populations as well as the neighborhood as a whole.

Summary of Upper 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
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.



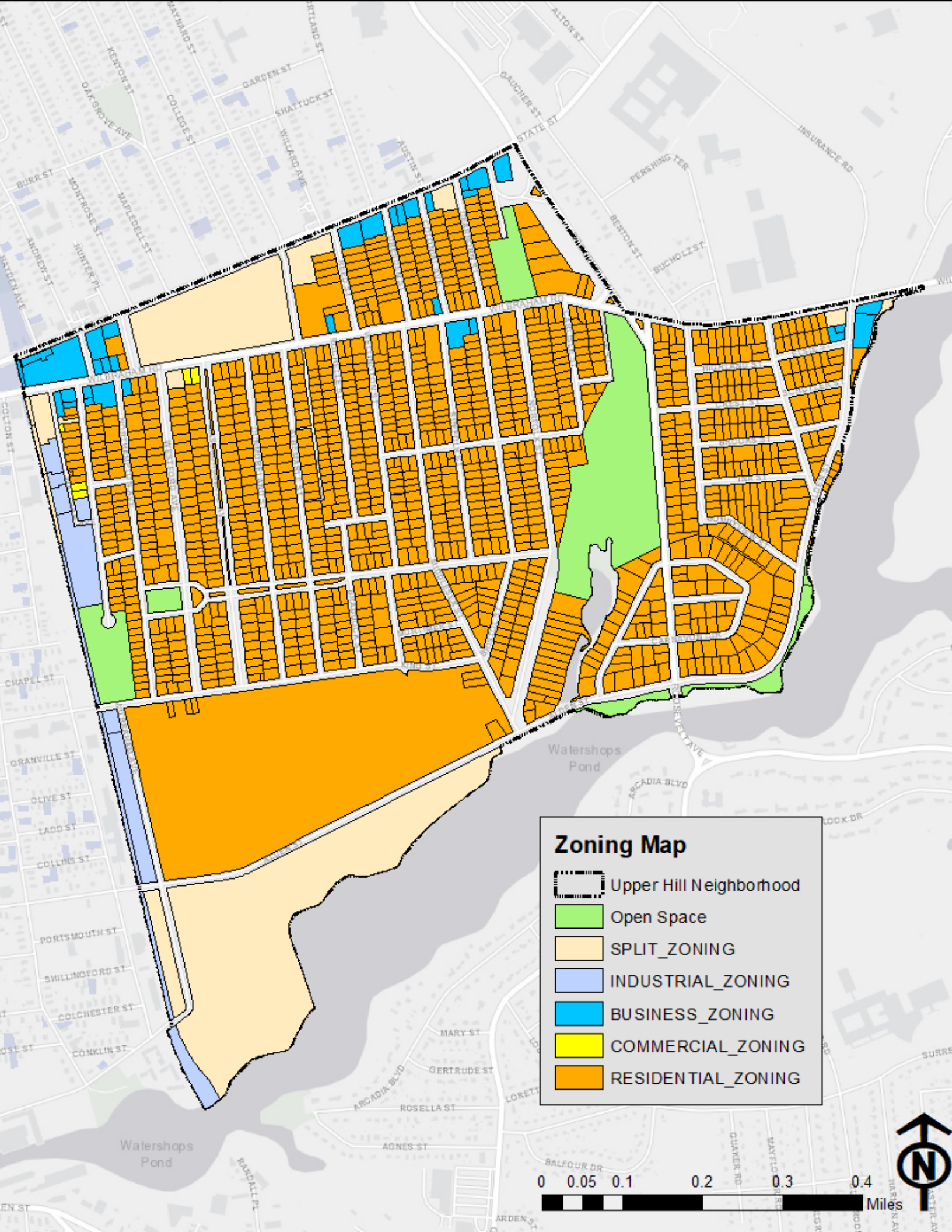
Looking north on Massachusetts Avenue from the corner of Westford Circle

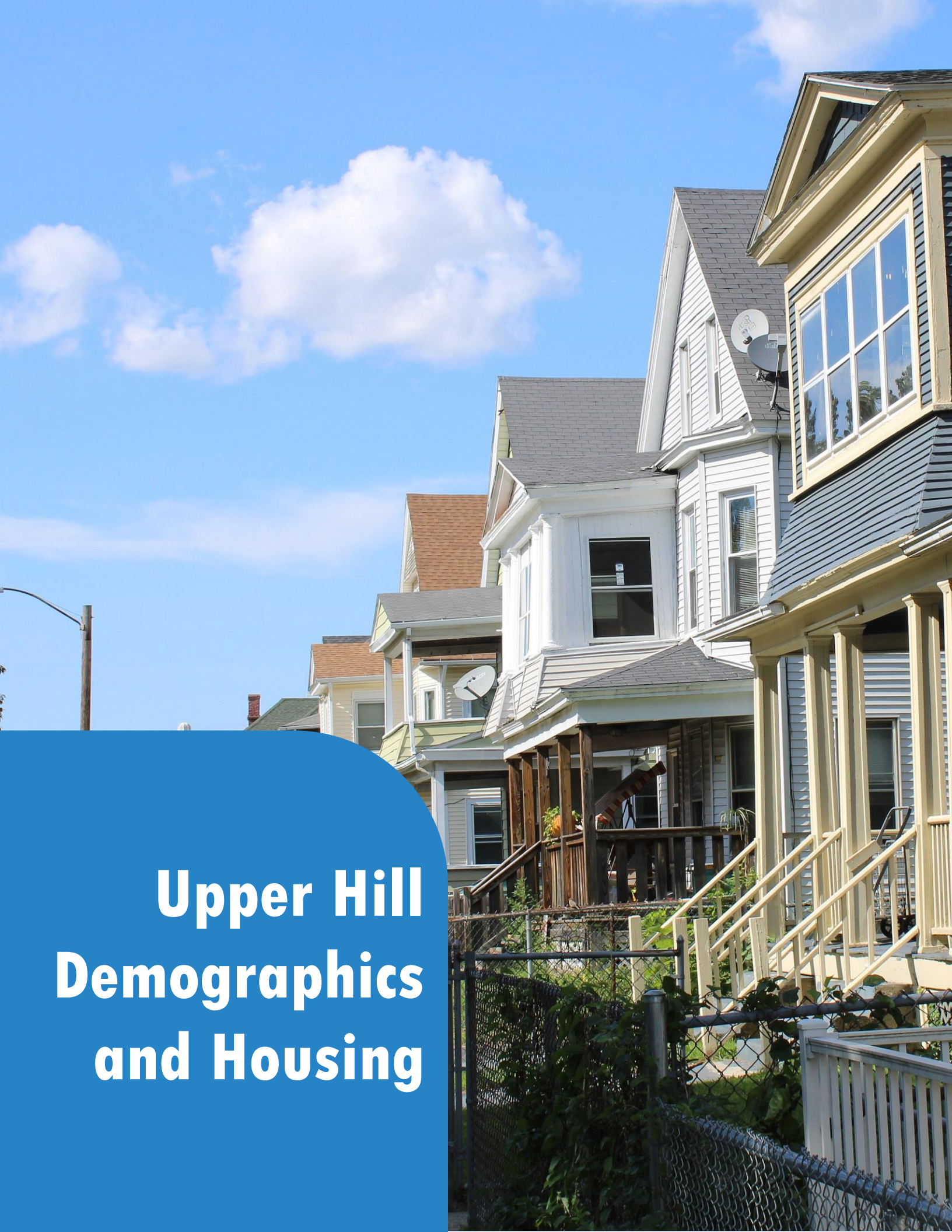


The Springfield College campus on Alden Street, near the southern end of the Upper Hill neighborhood



The American International College campus on State Street at the northern end of the Upper Hill neighborhood



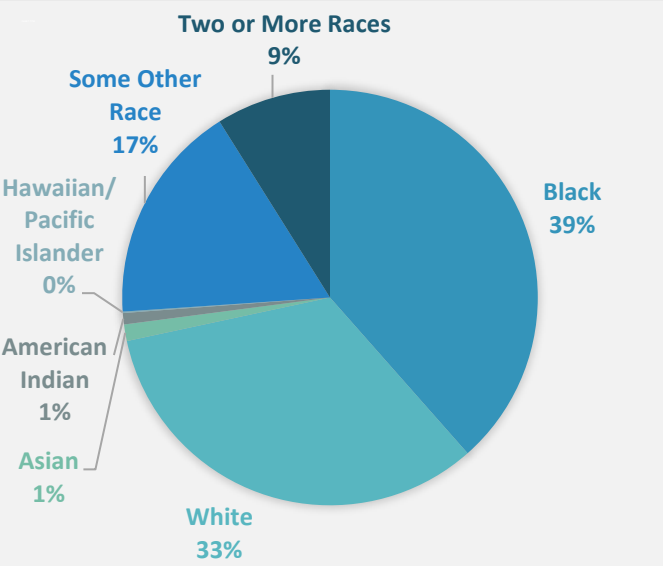
A photograph of a row of multi-story houses, likely in an urban or suburban setting. The houses are light-colored with dark roofs and have multiple windows. Some houses have satellite dishes mounted on their roofs. In the foreground, there is a chain-link fence and some greenery. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. A blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the title text.

Upper Hill Demographics and Housing

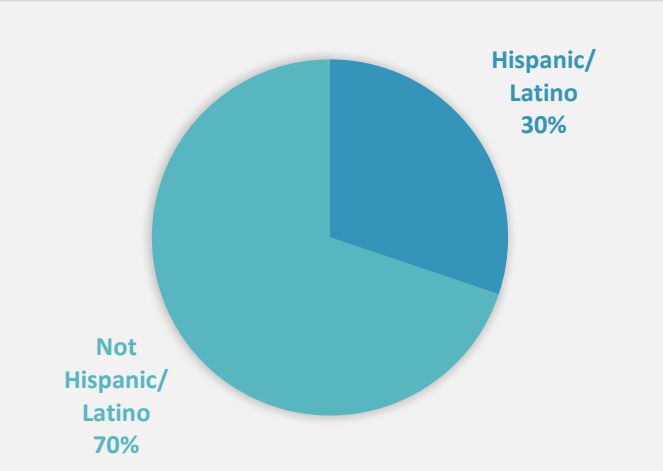
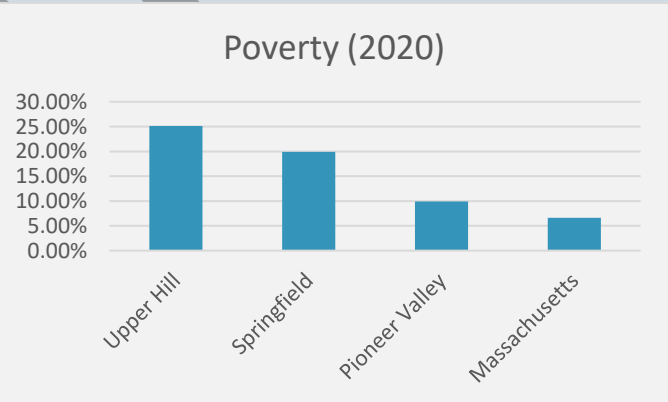
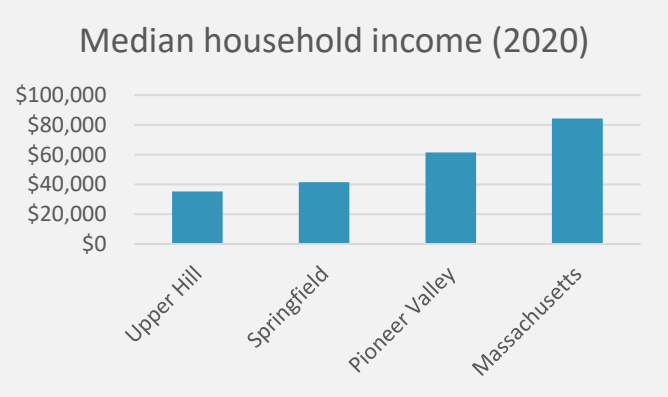
Demographic Overview

As of the 2020 census, Upper Hill had a population of 7,845, comprising about five percent of the total city population. Of these residents, 38% identify as African American, 33% identify as white, and 28% identify as other races, including people of multiple races. The population is 31 % Hispanic of any race.

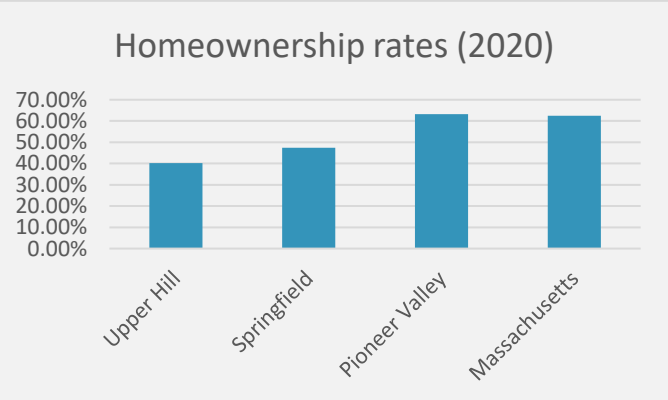
The age distribution of the population is 16% children under 18 years old, 76% people of working age, and 8% people of retirement age or older. Upper Hill has the highest percentage of working-age adults and the lowest percentage of children in any city neighborhood.



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



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



		Upper Hill	Springfield	Pioneer Valley	Massachusetts
Children and youth	Babies born with low birth weight	8.7%	11.1%	9.1%	7.6%
	Child poverty	39.9%	36.2%	20.8%	12.2%
Education	Preschool enrollment	49.0%	60.1%	53.6%	58.0%
	Attainment of higher education	17.6%	19.0%	32.6%	44.5%
Health	Premature mortality (per 1,000)	3.4	4.0	3.3	2.7
Economic security	Median household income	\$35,271	\$41,571	\$61,569	\$84,385
	Income inequality (Gini index)	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.48
	Poverty	25.1%	19.9%	9.9%	6.6%
	Elderly poverty	20.4%	13.7%	10.1%	8.9%
	Unemployment	25.1%	10.5%	6.7%	5.7%
	Labor force participation	48.6%	57.6%	61.4%	67.2%
Housing	Housing cost burden	62.8%	45.4%	34.9%	34.5%
	Homeownership rates	40.2%	47.4%	63.2%	62.5%
Transportation	Low-carbon commuters	26.1%	17.6%	14.1%	22.4%
	Average commute time (minutes)	25.3	21.1	23.1	30.0

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

Economic Security

The median household income in Upper Hill is \$35,271, compared to the citywide median of \$41,571. Overall, 25.1% of Upper Hill residents live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line, compared to the citywide rate of 19.9%. The homeownership rate is 40.2%, which is lower than the citywide average but significantly higher than the other neighborhoods in the Mason Square area.

Housing

There are an estimated 220 subsidized housing units in the neighborhood, which is the fifth-lowest number out of the city's 17 neighborhoods. This comprises only about 10% of the neighborhood's total number of housing units, and may contribute to the fact that the majority of Upper Hill residents are considered to be burdened by housing costs. Housing cost burden is defined by paying more than 30% of income toward either rent or homeownership, and 62.8% of Upper Hill residents meet these

criteria. These housing costs include maintenance, which can be a considerable expense in older neighborhoods such as Upper Hill, where most of the existing housing stock dates to the early 20th century. Such homes tend to require more upkeep than newer construction, and there are often added expenses related to health and safety hazards such as lead paint, asbestos, and outdated electrical systems.

Homeowner Assistance

Residents throughout the Mason Square area 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 consistently been identified as an area of need, the city has been examining to what extent 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 Upper 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 fewer than half of Upper Hill residents are homeowners, meaning that the majority of neighborhood residents are unable 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 Upper 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 Upper Hill community for generations to come.



Upper Hill Transportation

Major Streets and Intersections

The Upper Hill neighborhood includes three major east-to-west streets: State Street and Wilbraham Road in the northern part of the neighborhood, and Alden Street in the southern part. The only major north-to-south

street in Upper Hill is Roosevelt Avenue, which passes through the eastern part of the neighborhood.

Roosevelt Avenue passes beneath State Street, but it crosses Wilbraham Road and Alden Street at grade, which means that these

intersections tend to experience high traffic volumes. The intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Alden Street was recently reconstructed as part of a larger project to improve the nearby intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Island Pond Road, which is located across the Watershops Pond in the East Forest Park neighborhood.

As for the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Wilbraham Road, this has been an area of concern for some residents, including the lack of pedestrian crossing signals at the intersection. Because of this, existing neighborhood plans have included recommendations for a study to explore redesigning it.

Commuting Characteristics

The average commute time for residents in the Upper Hill neighborhood is 25.3 minutes, which is the longest for any neighborhood in the city. Of the Upper Hill residents who commute to work, 26.1% use an environmentally friendly mode of transportation, either by biking, walking, carpooling, or riding public transportation.



The bicycle lane, sidewalk, and crosswalk added during the recent roadway improvements on Alden Street. The dirt footpath beyond the crosswalk indicates demand for a continuation of the existing sidewalk on this side of the street.



Intersection of Wilbraham Road and Roosevelt Avenue, facing east in Wilbraham Road

Previous page: *Intersection of Wilbraham Road and Roosevelt Avenue, facing northwest*

Public Transportation

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) services the region with public bus routes and paratransit services. The Upper Hill neighborhood is served by bus routes along State Street, Wilbraham Road, and Roosevelt Avenue, in addition to a bus route that serves the central part of the neighborhood along Westford Circle. There are 40 individual bus stops in Upper Hill, including one sheltered bus stop on Wilbraham Road.



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

Bicycling Opportunities

The neighborhood has limited bicycle infrastructure. There are bicycle lanes on Roosevelt Avenue between Wilbraham Road and Alden Street, and also on the portion of Alden Street that was reconstructed as part of the Roosevelt Avenue improvements. One proposed cycling-related project 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 potential to be extended south through the city and into East Longmeadow.

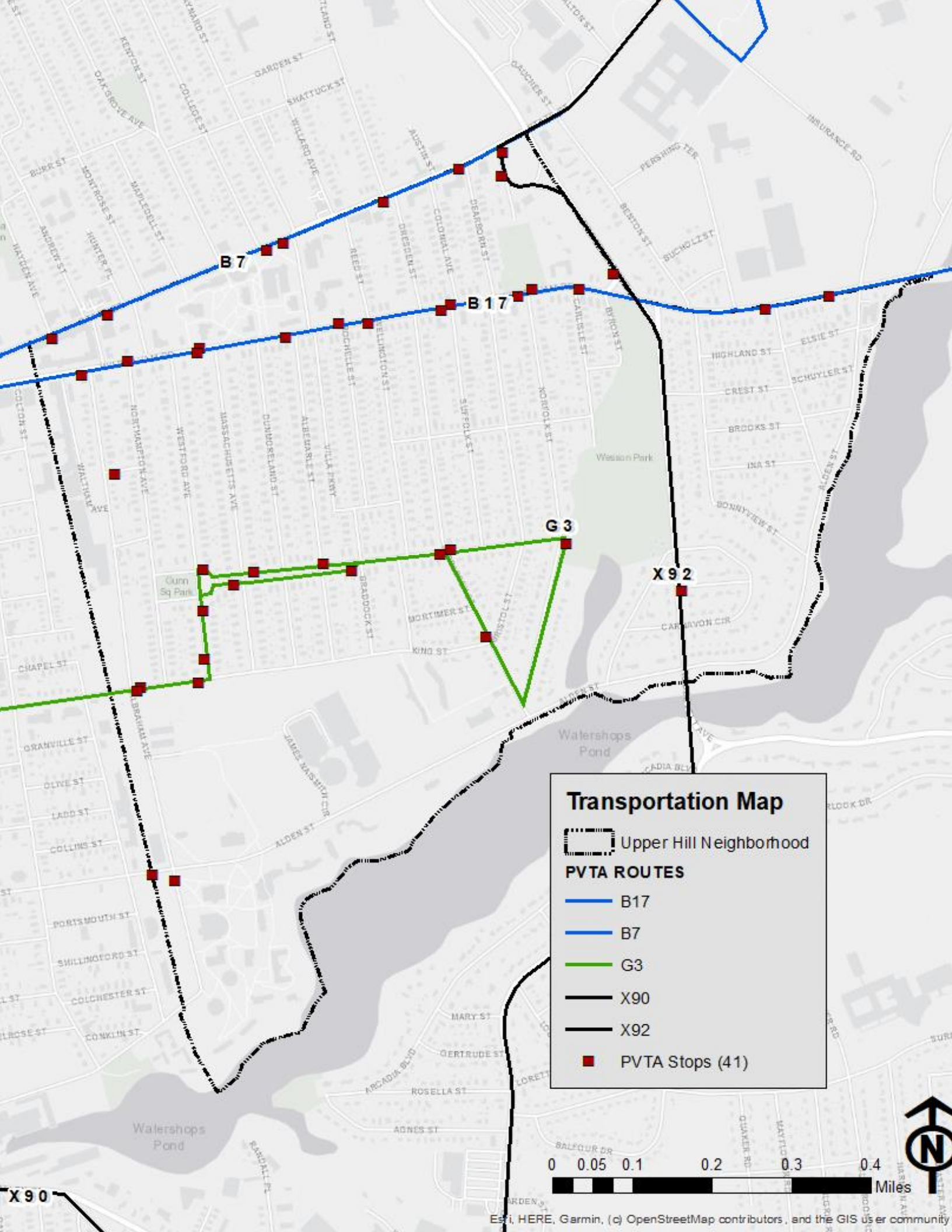


The corner of Wilbraham Road and Suffolk Street/Colonial Avenue. This intersection has frequent pedestrian crossings, yet there is only one crosswalk across Wilbraham Road, with no pedestrian signals.

Pedestrian Safety

Residents have also raised concerns regarding existing conditions for pedestrians, particularly on Wilbraham Road. One recent improvement was at the intersection of Wilbraham Road and Massachusetts Avenue. This project involved narrowing Wilbraham Road and installing a crosswalk with overhead flashing lights.

Overall, though, there is still a limited number of crosswalks on the street, with only five on the entire 0.75-mile section of Wilbraham Road in the neighborhood, including just two that are equipped with pedestrian crossing signals.



Transportation Map

Upper Hill Neighborhood

PVRTA ROUTES

B17

B7

G3

X90

X92

PVRTA Stops (41)

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles



Upper Hill Parks and Open Space



Basketball court at Adams Park on Wilbraham Road



Samuel Bolden Park, seen looking north from King Street parking lot



Playground at Gunn Square

Neighborhood Parks

The Upper Hill neighborhood has a total of 31 acres of public open space at seven different sites. Gunn Square, Homer Street Playground, and Adams Park all feature playground equipment, and Adams Park also has an outdoor basketball court and an open field. The neighborhood also has the newly-opened Samuel Bolden Park on Wilbraham Avenue. This park has playground equipment, a basketball court, along with a large open field.

Watershops Pond

Aside from these parks, the neighborhood also has a significant amount of undeveloped or underutilized parkland. The city owns 2.5 acres of land along the shore of the Watershops Pond, extending along Alden Street from Lakeside Avenue to near Middlesex Street. However, there are limited recreational facilities there, aside from a boat ramp near Bonnyview Street and several benches near Roosevelt Avenue. There is currently only a short section of sidewalk on the waterfront side of Alden Street, although there are well-worn footpaths in the grass that indicate that it sees significant pedestrian use.

Wesson Park

The single largest park in the neighborhood is the nearly 20-acre Wesson Park, which is located to the west of Roosevelt Avenue, along banks of the Carlisle Brook. It is primarily wooded, aside from a small clearing where a gun club building once stood, and it is currently undeveloped. As with other wooded areas in the city, illegal

Previous page: Carlisle Brook, looking north from Alden Street across from the Watershops Pond

dumping is a problem here, and there is a significant amount of trash and other discarded items in the park. Overall, it has strong potential for redevelopment, both to improve recreational opportunities for local residents and also to discourage illegal dumping.

Environmental Justice

Based on the 2020 census, the Upper 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 six census block groups that are located in the neighborhood, all six meet the criteria based on both income and percentage of minority residents.

Justice40 Initiative

Because the Upper 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

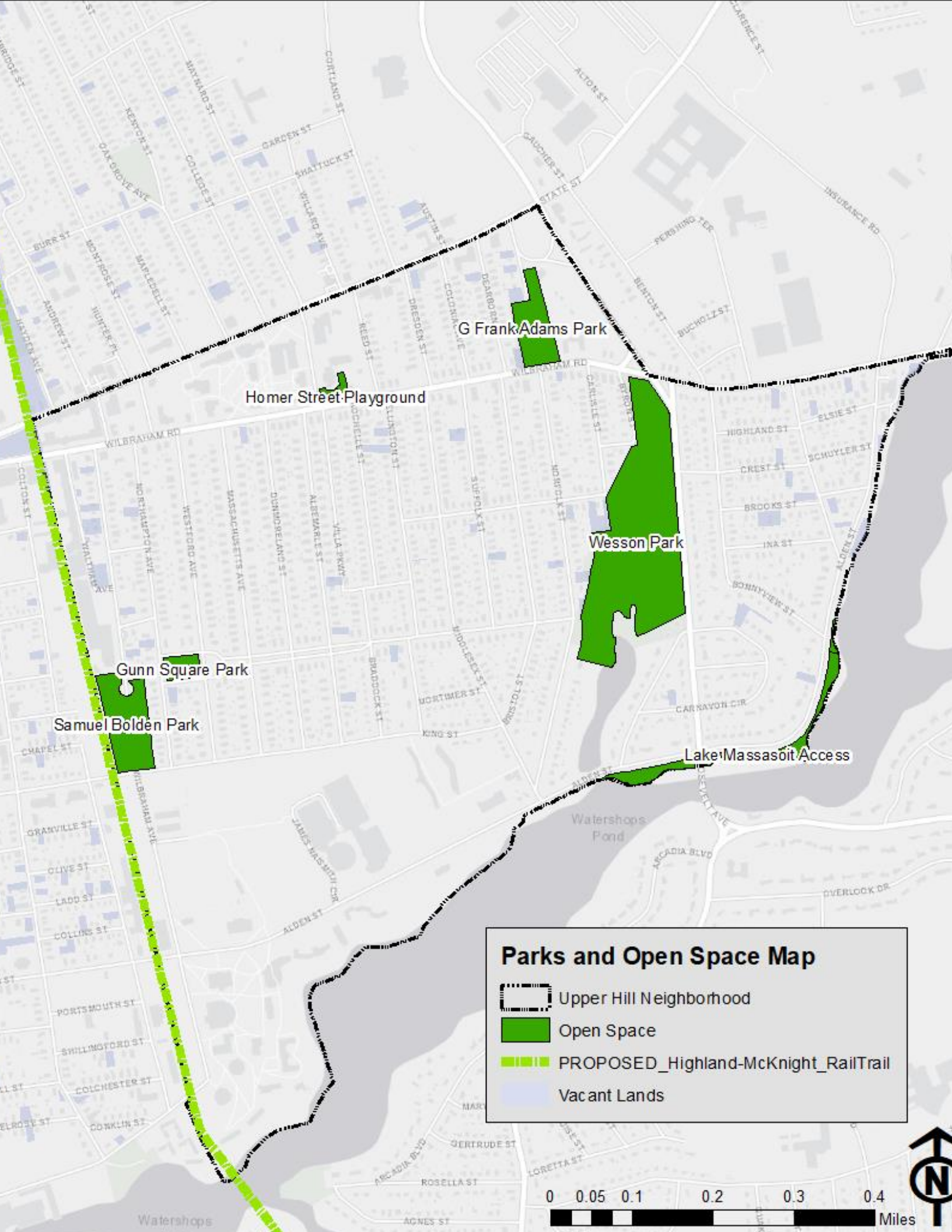


Carlisle Brook in Wesson Park, near the corner of Wilbraham Road and Roosevelt Avenue



Looking west on the Watershops Pond from near the corner of Alden and Northumberland Streets

efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy of pollution, and the development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure. As this is a new initiative, it is important for both the Upper Hill Residents Council and the city to assess ways in which the neighborhood could benefit from such investments.



Parks and Open Space Map

- Upper Hill Neighborhood
- Open Space
- PROPOSED_Highland-McKnight_RailTrail
- Vacant Lands

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles



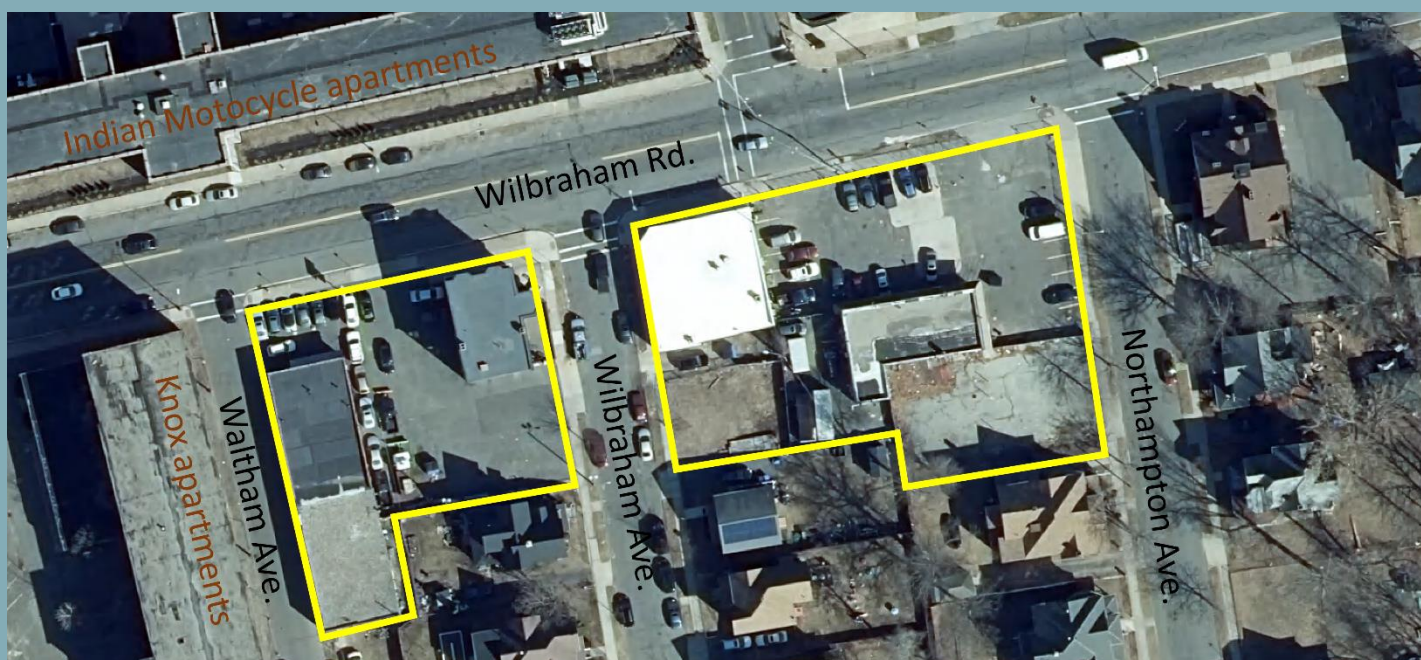


Upper Hill Economic Development Opportunities

Economic Development Opportunities

As part of this neighborhood investment planning process, a number of potential economic development concerns, ideas, and opportunities in Upper 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.



South side of Wilbraham Road, between Waltham and Northampton Avenues. Area of potential economic development outlined in yellow. Image source: MassGIS.

Wilbraham Road between Waltham Avenue and Northampton Avenue

This section of the Upper Hill neighborhood has seen significant investments in recent years. Among these was 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 include approximately 114 new apartments.

This substantial increase in new housing units in the area presents opportunities for concentrated economic development, particularly along the Wilbraham Road corridor. One potential area could be the two blocks on the south side of Wilbraham Road, between Waltham Avenue and Northampton



Wilbraham Road, facing east from Waltham Avenue

Avenue. These blocks currently have a mix of different commercial uses, including two automobile repair shops that have large surface parking lots along the sidewalk. However, given their location in the center of a growing residential area, these blocks have the potential to be redeveloped in a way that would better support a pedestrian-friendly streetscape with local businesses.

Redevelopment here could include businesses such as a family-friendly restaurant, a coffee

shop, and retail stores. It could also involve mixed-use development that would have commercial space on the ground floor, and apartments or office space on the upper floors. Overall, these businesses would be able to meet the needs of current and future residents of the neighborhood, along with students at nearby American International College, which is located just a block further to the west on the other side of Wilbraham Road.



*State Street between Reed Street and Colonial Avenue. Area of potential economic development outlined in yellow.
Image source: MassGIS.*

State Street between Reed Street and Colonial Avenue

Another area for potential economic development is on the south side of State Street, in the two blocks between Reed Street and Colonial Avenue. This site is located within the Upper Hill neighborhood, but because State Street forms the border between it and the Bay neighborhood to the north, it is in a position to serve residents of both neighborhoods. In addition, it is in close proximity to American International College, which is directly to the west of here, so the potential customer base here also includes students at the college.

The existing development on these two blocks includes a mix of different uses. At the corner of State and Reed Streets is a one-story commercial building. It was built around 1910, and it features five storefronts. It was actively used as a commercial property until 2016, when it was acquired by American International College and converted into space for its facilities and maintenance department. However, this use is not particularly conducive to creating a pedestrian-oriented business district along this corridor, so it would be beneficial to collaborate with the college in restoring this building to its original use and attracting quality local businesses that will meet the needs of residents as well as college students.



Facing east on State Street from near the corner of Reed Street.

Directly to the east of this building is a gas station, which also includes a repair shop and a convenience store. Because of the car-centric use, combined with the setback from the street, this type of use is, like the adjacent maintenance facility, not ideal for promoting pedestrian-centered business development.

Further to the east, on the other side of Dresden Street, is a surface parking lot that may be a good candidate for appropriate infill development. Beyond this parking lot, the rest of the block is occupied by two adjacent one-

story commercial buildings that were constructed in the 1920s. Collectively, these buildings have a total of six storefronts, all of which are currently occupied by commercial tenants. If this area was to be selected for redevelopment, it may be beneficial to collaborate with these property owners to rehabilitate storefront facades as needed, and also to ensure that future tenants are businesses that support the long-term goals for the neighborhood.

State Street between Reed Street and Colonial Avenue

Another site 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 community center here would help to meet that need for both neighborhoods. Indeed,



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



Former MCDI site on Wilbraham Avenue, facing north.

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 resource center here could also be used for that purpose.

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, 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.

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 Upper Hill Residents 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

Neighborhood Goals

As part of this neighborhood investment process, a number of goals and strategies emerged for the Upper 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, Upper Hill residents overwhelmingly chose housing as a top priority out of seven major categories, with more than three-quarters of respondents selecting it as their first or second priority. In general, respondents tended to prefer efforts to support maintaining and rehabilitating existing homes, rather than construction of new homes.

Strategies:

- City and collaborators expand funding and/or programs to provide financial assistance for maintaining, rehabilitating, and renovating houses in the Upper Hill neighborhood.
- Residents 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.

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

The Upper Hill neighborhood is well served by public transportation on the main roads, with most residents living no more than one block away from at least one bus route. However, it is important to ensure that residents 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, Upper Hill respondents placed less of a priority on biking, roadway improvements, and traffic calming measures.

Strategies:

- Residents Council works with city to identify and prioritize locations for new crosswalks and/or pedestrian crossing signals, especially at major intersections along Wilbraham Road.
- Residents Council works with city to identify and prioritize sidewalks that are in need of replacement.
- Residents Council works with PVRTA to prioritize locations for new bus shelters.
- City and Residents Council collaborate to explore redesigning the intersection of Wilbraham Road and Roosevelt Avenue.
- Residents Council identifies sites for additional shade trees along Wilbraham Road and other neighborhood streets, and shares recommendations with city.
- Residents Council collaborates with DPW to identify areas with high pedestrian traffic and install benches to accommodate people with mobility difficulties.

Neighborhood Goal #3: Build community and pride in neighborhood

On the resident survey, half of the respondents indicated a need for more parks in the Mason Square area, and another third of respondents indicated that there may be such a need. As noted in the neighborhood profile, the Upper Hill has a significant amount of public open space, but much of this is not currently being utilized to its full potential, so there are certainly opportunities for improving these areas for recreational use. Another area of need that has been noted in previous neighborhood plans is improving engagement and involvement with the Residents Council. This corresponds with the survey responses, which indicated a preference for prioritizing community events and celebrations in the neighborhood. By increasing involvement in the Residents Council, this will grow capacity for more events such as these.

Strategies:

- Residents Council develops strategies to increase membership of the council, recruit and train new leaders, and develop and implement resident engagement strategies.
- City and the Residents Council collaborate to create and implement a plan for the development of Wesson Park.
- City and Residents Council collaborate on redesigning the playground at Adams Park to improve accessibility.
- City and Residents Council collaborate on a plan to expand recreational opportunities on city-owned land along the Watershops Pond.
- City, Residents Council, and Old Hill Neighborhood Council explore possibility of acquiring a site for an Old Hill/Upper Hill neighborhood resource center.

Neighborhood Goal #4: Strengthen economy of neighborhood

On the resident survey, Upper Hill respondents indicated a preference for concentrated business development at Ben Swan Way, which is located just outside of the neighborhood boundaries at Mason Square. On another question regarding food access, Upper Hill residents overwhelmingly chose to prioritize a full-line grocery store. Out of five food-related options, two thirds of respondents selected this as their top priority.

Strategies:

- Residents Council and city collaborate to develop strategies for supporting existing local businesses and encouraging other businesses to invest in Upper Hill.
- Residents Council and city examine existing zoning in Upper Hill and identify areas where rezoning could help support appropriate business/commercial use.
- Residents Council and city collaborate to bring a full-line grocery store to the Mason Square area.
- Residents Council and city collaborate to prioritize concentrated business development at Ben Swan Way, and also on the block of Wilbraham Road between Waltham and Northampton Avenues, and the block of State Street between Reed Street and Colonial Avenue.
- City and Residents Council collaborate on plans to redevelop the former Homer Street School.

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 Upper 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 Upper 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, Residents Council offices and other locations as determined by residents and Residents Council 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 Upper 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 Residents 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.

Recommendations and Prioritization

Neighborhood-Specific Recommendations

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

Recommendations will be added based on resident feedback

Recommendations will be added based on resident feedback

Recommendations will be added based on resident feedback

DRAFT

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.

A Plan for Springfield's Upper Hill Neighborhood (2022)

This draft plan was created by consultants Scott Hanson and Peter Gagliardi with the support of the Upper Hill Neighborhood Council and community stakeholders. A "Vision" for the neighborhood was crafted, and three categories of recommendations were presented. The "low hanging fruit" consisted of 16 initiatives that were ongoing or considered achievable within a 12-month period. Nine projects were identified as "Projects That Could Move Forward by 2026." Four additional initiatives were identified as projects to be completed "In the Longer Range," sometime within the next decade: redesigning the intersection of Wilbraham Road and Roosevelt Avenue, replacing all streetlights in the neighborhood, increasing resident engagement with the neighborhood council, and developing Wesson Park.