



CITY OF CHICOPEE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



ADOPTED
XXXX XX, 2023

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Prepared for:
City of Chicopee, Massachusetts

Prepared by:
Horsley Witten Group, Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Chicopee wishes to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to the over 4,066 City Residents, Staff, Officials, and other Stakeholders who dedicated time and talent to advancing the City's first ever adopted Comprehensive Plan: Envision Our Chicopee: 2040.

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Figure 1. Distributing yard signs in Chicopee to raise awareness about the comprehensive planning process.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

INTRODUCTION: ENVISION OUR CHICOPEE: 2040

Chicopee's first-ever city-wide comprehensive plan.

WHAT IS ENVISION OUR CHICOPEE: 2040?

A Comprehensive Plan is a shared vision for Chicopee's future and a roadmap that guides how we get there together. It helps us make the things we love about Chicopee even better and fix the things that need to be fixed. A good Comprehensive Plan is a tool that can be used frequently by City leaders, staff, boards, and committees to make decisions about:

- What new development looks like and where it happens
- How the City can protect environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites
- Prioritizing future investments in community services and infrastructure that promote fairness and equity across the city
- Better supporting local business development

Chicopee wants to be a city that prepares for the future, spends tax dollars efficiently and effectively, and leaves our community even better and stronger for future generations.

Envision 2040's Purpose

Its most important goal is to protect and enhance the things in Chicopee that make it a great place to live, both for today's residents and those of the future.

WHAT DOES ENVISION OUR CHICOPEE INCLUDE?

THINGS THAT HELPED BUILD THE PLAN

Existing Plans: We're not starting from scratch! The City has done a lot of planning over the years. Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 is built on the current planning process and other existing work to pull all the best ideas into one place.

Facts and Data: In order to have the most useful plan, we need to understand who lives in Chicopee, how old we are, where we come from, where we work, and how we get from place to place, in order to make solid decisions for our

future.

Needs and Big Ideas: Beyond the numbers, we needed to bring residents together to talk about the City's future and address our needs. From online and paper surveys, to virtual public workshops, to one-on-one conversations and small group discussions, the City received literally thousands of responses from residents like you.

This plan is meant to tell your stories and express your ideas for the future.

COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN

Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 has three volumes:

Baseline Report: The Baseline Report is a snapshot of existing conditions in Chicopee. It includes inventories of what exists today as well as projections of future needs and trends. The Baseline Report was prepared at the beginning of the planning process and completed in 2020. The purpose of the Baseline Report is to provide data and facts to help the City make decisions. If you want a "deeper dive" into the data that

informed this Plan, please refer to the Baseline Report.

Plan: What you are reading now is the main body of Envision Our Chicopee: 2040. The Plan includes the most important information to make sure everyone in the City is working toward the same goals. The document tells the story of how residents envision the City 20 years from now, discusses the key themes the community needs to address to realize that vision, and then lays out some first steps for "getting it done."

Action Plan: Getting it Done: The final volume of Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 provides greater detail on individual implementation actions. Responsible parties, such as City departments or boards and commissions, are identified along with implementation timeframes. Since Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 has a 20-year outlook, implementation actions are divided into short term (to be completed within five years), mid-term (to be completed between five and 10 years), and long-term (to be completed in 10 to 20 years) implementation periods.

starting a new program or policy, clearly define what the desired outcomes are and what should be achieved if successful.

Collect Data: Collect the data needed to justify City spending, investments, and policies. Make this data clear, consistent, easy to track, and fully accessible to the public.

Be Accountable: Use data to track outcomes of policies and programs to make sure we are achieving our goals. If there are other partners in these programs and investments, actively track their progress as well, and make sure they are adhering to any agreements that have been made. If programs, policies, and investments are not producing the desired outcomes, the City must hold itself and its partners accountable.

Act Equitably: All City departments should work to remove barriers and eliminate disparities that limit the ability of some to fulfill their potential. This involves tracking data on race, income, neighborhoods, educational attainment, public health, etc. to ensure that our policies, programs, and investments are offering fairness and increasing opportunity for all.

Mind the Future: The actions we take today will have lasting impacts for the future. The City will use the latest data on climate change to make sure that our infrastructure and buildings are located and designed to be resilient to increased storms, flooding, heat, and more. The City will also be mindful of making sustainable investments that will serve our residents for generations to come.

Innovate: The status quo will not move us forward. The City needs to be able to try new things—even if that means we sometimes fail. If we set our expectations in advance, determine the data we need to track success or failure, and hold ourselves and our partners accountable, we can explore new policies and actions, see whether or not they are doing what we want them to, and change course accordingly.

HOW WE GO ABOUT DOING IT

The bulk of this plan was developed during the COVID-19 Pandemic. There will be many lessons for Chicopee and the world from this experience, but one of them is that in this ever-changing world, strategies that make sense today may be irrelevant two years from now or even next month. The most important thing is that we stick to a common vision and strive for everything we do to be consistent with that vision. In some ways, what we do is less important than how we do it, how we keep track of our successes and failures, and how we hold ourselves accountable for staying the course. Whatever specific strategies we pursue, the City is committed to implementing them with the following in mind . . .

Set Goals: Before making any investments or

Figure 2. Chicopee Steering Committee participates in an outdoor workshop for Envision Our Chicopee: 2040.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

WHO CAN GET US THERE?

The short answer is—all of us! No one person, business, industry or institution can move the City where we want it to be—we need to tap into the energy, talent, and skills of everyone in Chicopee. If anything in this plan inspires you or upsets you, we hope you will take action. If you see a void that you can help fill, or a problem you can help solve, give it a try! No one has all the answers. Naturally, City government has a very large role in implementing this plan, which requires collaboration, particularly in changing the way decisions are made and coordinated across all levels of City government. *For more specific ideas on this topic, see the **Governing Well** chapter.*

Strong Leadership: The Mayor (from administration to administration) must lead with clear, consistent policy directives, making sure City department heads are coordinating and aligning their work, and speaking with a common voice to advocate to the Commonwealth's legislature and the U.S. Congress for necessary changes to achieve the vision of this plan. Other elected officials, of course, including City Councilors, Commonwealth Senators and Representatives, and our legislators in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, are all key partners in moving forward, as are the trusted community leaders throughout the City not associated with governmental agencies.

City as Convener: From neighborhood groups, to businesses, to arts and cultural organizations, to housing advocates, the City can play the role of convener, providing a hub for information across many topics and a place where residents, businesses, non-profits, and others can connect and work together. Public-private partnerships are needed for many of the strategies in this plan, and the City will not succeed without such collaboration.

Efficient, Coordinated City Government: Continue efforts to better coordinate City government across and within departments, making it more efficient, transparent, and customer service oriented.

Mindfulness of the Concerns and Ideas of Everyone in Chicopee: The City should strive to make sure that voices from communities not traditionally at the governance table are both heard and considered in decision making via greater representation on boards, commissions, and other positions of leadership.

Volunteerism: The strongest communities have residents who get involved. We are fortunate to live in a democracy where all our voices can be heard. But first we have to show up. Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 challenges each and every one of us to be civically engaged and participate in the life of our City.

Figure 1. Center Fresh Market.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

CHAPTER 1: COMING TOGETHER

Improving and activating the places in Chicopee where we come together as a community.

INTRODUCTION

Chicopee is a city with strong connections. Ask a resident what they love about Chicopee and why they live here, and you'll hear many stories. Not necessarily about specific places in and of themselves, but about the experiences people have when they come together in those places. Chicopee residents love the places where they can gather with their family and friends, whether that be a festival in Chicopee Center, a cookout in a park, running into a neighbor at the corner store, hosting a fundraiser at a local church or social club, or just hanging out in grandma's backyard.

Much of this plan was developed and written during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most challenging times in the City's history. It has been really hard for everyone not to have the gathering places we love, but it also reminds us of how important these places and experiences are.

Vision for Coming Together

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will work to make sure everyone has safe, convenient, and fun places and events to gather and make memories together.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the Land Use, Economic Development, Open Space & Recreation, and Historic & Cultural Resources sections of the Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report.

IMPROVING OUR NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Chicopee is a city of neighborhoods. Many families have connections to neighborhoods that go back generations. To someone from outside the city, you're from Chicopee. But when you talk with other people who live here, you're from Aldenville or Fairview or Willimansett. Chicopee is fortunate to have "centers" in most of our neighborhoods – walkable areas with shops, services, City buildings, and public spaces where people can gather and run into each other. We know that Chicopee residents love these places, but we also know these places are struggling.

Figure 2. Willimansett Center.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Cleaner, safer, and better-maintained centers.
- Revitalizing and reusing old buildings.
- Repairing and better maintaining streets and sidewalks.
- More plantings, benches, bike paths, and other public amenities.
- Better support for the local businesses and arts and cultural organizations that make our centers special and worth visiting.

CHICOPEE CENTER

Chicopee Center is a neighborhood center *and* the City's downtown, serving both the residents who live there and everyone in Chicopee. It is the home of City Hall and other municipal government buildings, as well as some of the most prominent commercial and mill buildings in the City. While all the City's centers are important, Chicopee Center as the historic, cultural, and



Figure 3. Chicopee Center.

Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

political epicenter of Chicopee is especially important. It is the place in Chicopee that everyone can identify with, and the place that defines who Chicopee is for visitors. A healthy and thriving Chicopee Center will benefit *all* of Chicopee.

Chicopee Center needs a mix of both local business development *and* cultural and community opportunities, like galleries, a community center, educational facilities, etc. The City can lay the groundwork with investments in beautification, traffic flow, signage, and bike and walkability, which can all be attractive to private investment.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Chicopee Center may be important as Chicopee's "downtown," but the other City centers of Chicopee Falls, Aldenville, Fairview, and Willimansett are important for quality of life throughout the City. Like Chicopee Center, but on a smaller scale, these centers also need a mix of healthy local businesses, community spaces, and outdoor parks and gathering spaces to be attractive for the next generation of Chicopee residents.

GETTING IT DONE

- Prioritize investments in Chicopee Center that align with this plan and equitably serve neighborhood residents, other City residents, and visitors, and then build on that success by expanding investments to the other neighborhood centers.
- Regularly budget for City investments that will make the neighborhood centers more attractive for residents, visitors, and private development, including plantings/landscaping, more public trash and recycling bins, bicycle racks, reconfiguring traffic flow and eliminating one-way streets where possible, and better connecting bike paths and sidewalks to and within neighborhood centers.
- Develop better incentives for the revitalization of old mills and other important buildings in our neighborhood centers, like the old library, the Rivoli theater, and the former Uniroyal property.
- Explore opportunities for purchasing foreclosed or other distressed or underutilized properties in or near neighborhood centers and converting them into pocket parks, plazas, or other community spaces, or making

Figure 4. Chicopee Outdoor Movie Night.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

them available for housing or economic development.

- Consider ways to address commercial vacancies, such as increasing property taxes for vacant but habitable commercial spaces or providing tax incentives for renovating or occupying vacant spaces, such as the City's existing Tax Increment Financing program.
- Install new signage and wayfinding for parking and shops. Consider banners or signage that clearly identify and celebrate each neighborhood.
- Increase the number of people living and working in each neighborhood center by revising zoning to allow for a more flexible array of uses, including but not limited to denser residential options, live-work space, maker space, co-working facilities, business incubators, artisan studios, pop-up retail and restaurants and other "revolving" spaces, roof-top uses, urban agriculture, etc.
- Continue working on the RiverMills at Chicopee Falls Vision Plan for the former Uniroyal property to serve as a neighborhood center for Chicopee Falls, with a mix of housing, businesses, and recreation that takes advantage of its river location.
- Make sure the neighborhood centers are places for all Chicopee residents, which means the people who live and shop there

*See the **Thriving Together, Promoting Health & Wellness, and Making a Home** sections for more on ensuring everyone in Chicopee has a chance to benefit from the City's progress.*

now should not be pushed out as redevelopment occurs. This takes investments in community development, social services, affordable housing, and more.

HAVING FUN TOGETHER

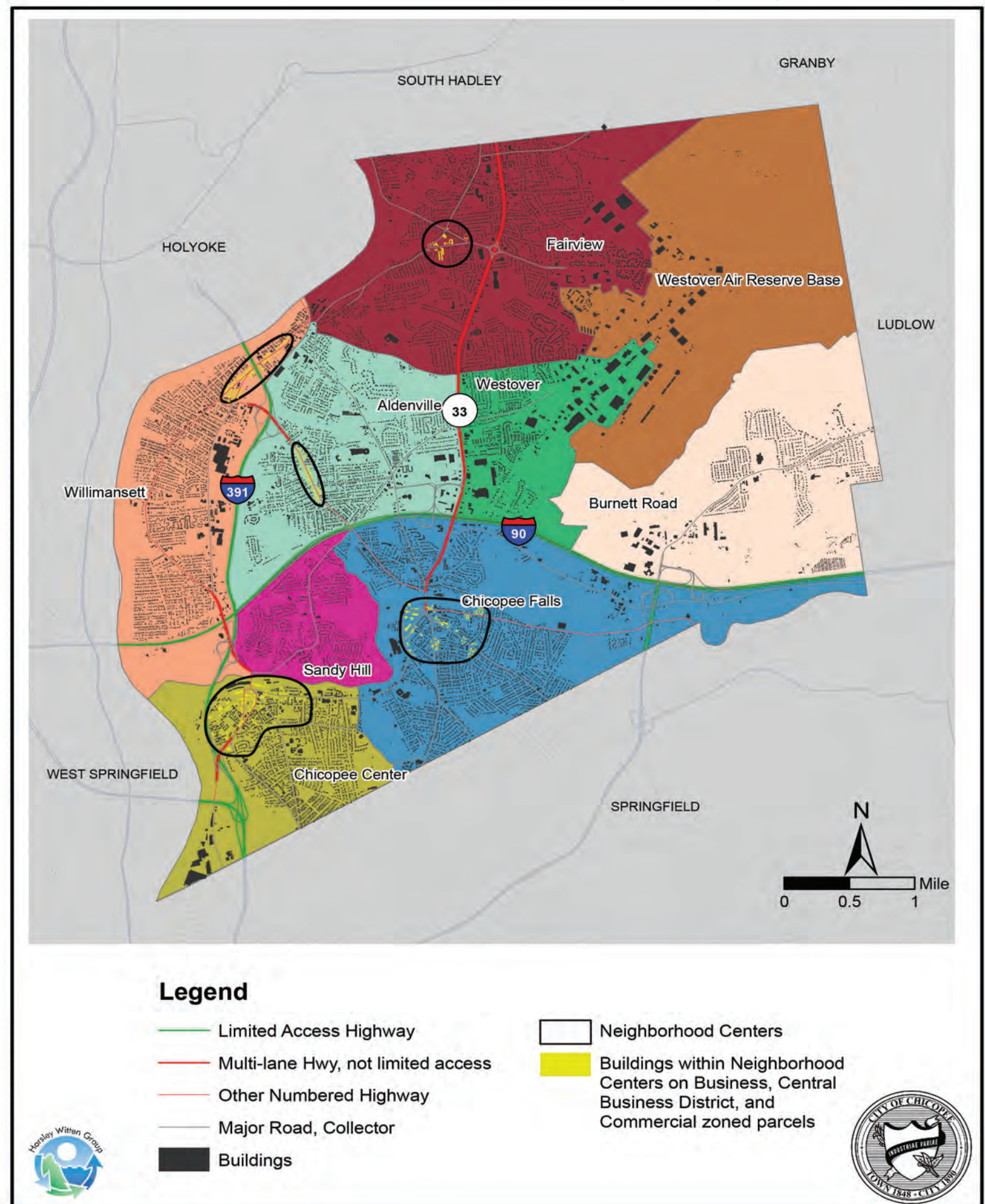
One of the things that makes Chicopee so special is its many parks and public events and activities. It's important for us to come together and have *fun* as a community. Chicopee's 2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) outlines how the City protects its open space and recreational resources and makes them even better. The OSRP is still very relevant and this plan encourages the City to continue pursuing its goals and actions.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Safety and security in Chicopee's parks, as well as on the routes people take to get to them.
- Increased cleanliness, care, and maintenance of current parks and recreation spaces.
- More parks and green spaces in the parts of Chicopee where they are lacking today.
- Parks and open spaces that are more accessible for seniors and those with disabilities.
- Increased recreational activities for children, teens, and families.
- More walking, biking, and/or multi-modal paths throughout Chicopee, particularly along our riverfronts.
- More dog-friendly parks or dog parks.

Figure 5. Chicopee Neighborhood Centers.



- Increased cultural, art, and historic events or celebrations throughout the year.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks provide spaces for people to exercise, gather with their friends and neighbors or just have fun. And recreation is specifically important for Chicopee residents - in a survey for this plan, when asked what type of business, services, and entertainment are most needed in Chicopee, the top two answers were outdoor and indoor recreation. It is important to note that recreation opportunities aren't limited to parks. For example, the Chicopee Public Library and the RiverMills Senior Center both have "backyards" where people can picnic, play, and walk, and school facilities are sometimes available for public recreation. Likewise, parks aren't always limited to City-owned land. Easements and other agreements with private property owners can help expand publicly accessible open space. The OSRP and the Baseline Report have greater detail on parks facilities and plans to maintain and improve them, but the most important themes from these plans and public feedback include:

Clean and Safe: People in Chicopee want to see cleaner parks and playgrounds. The public sees a lot of trash and vandalism in public parks, as well as pet waste that is not picked up by owners. This makes parks feel unsafe and unwelcoming. The Chicopee Parks and Recreation Department tries to be as prepared and responsive as possible, keeping staff on a regular rotation for repairs while also responding to specific complaints. Currently, the Sanitation Department is responsible for trash removal at local parks. Many parks have security cameras, but the Police Department has limited capacity to monitor the footage. *See the [Governing Well](#) section for general ideas around City responses to complaints and requests.*

Maintenance and Design: On top of cleanliness, it is important to make sure park equipment and landscaping is well-maintained and accessible to everyone, including seniors, people with disabilities, and young children. Also, all

park equipment, landscaping, and infrastructure should be designed and located in a way to make long-term use and maintenance easier. For example, when a new playground is installed, make sure it is located where it can get shade and where adults can easily keep an eye on children. Make sure it is built of durable materials, and that the Parks and Recreation Department has the tools and knowledge to keep it in good repair. This applies to other infrastructure in parks, including lighting, drainage systems, and "green infrastructure."

Preparing for More Passive Recreation: The City has very little passive recreation and conservation lands but is trying to expand on this amenity. As more passive recreation/ conservation land is identified, it also needs staff skilled in maintaining it. Current Parks and Recreation staff are very skilled at maintaining ball fields, courts, and playgrounds, but have no experience managing open space. *See the [Planning for a Sustainable Future](#) chapter for more ideas around conservation land and open space.*

Meeting Public Wants and Needs Efficiently and Effectively: The OSRP included extensive public surveys to find out what Chicopee residents like and want to see more of in their parks. With a limited budget, it is important to make sure facilities are meeting the needs of as many

Figure 6: Lincoln Grove Spray Park.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee



Figure 7: Lucy Wisniowski Park.

Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

people as possible at a reasonable cost. For example, the City has several swimming pools. These are expensive to maintain and staff and are generally open only six weeks a year. In addition, the OSRP survey found that interest in public pools is declining. It may be more effective over time to reduce the number of public pools and use those resources for other more popular facilities.

Making Connections: One of the most important themes from the OSRP is making connections between parks and recreational resources and where people live. A great park system is one where all the parts are connected. It should be easier for people to walk or bike from one park or recreational area to another and easily get to these places from their homes. *See the [Getting Around](#) chapter for more ideas on walking and biking.*

Embracing the Rivers: The Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers can play a huge role in recreation. The Chicopee Canal & RiverWalk and the Connecticut RiverWalk & Bike Path, under development now, will provide access to these rivers for walking, biking, fishing, and boating, and can also serve as "linear parks" connecting neighborhoods and other parks and recreation resources. *See the [Planning for a Sustainable](#)*

Future chapter for more information and ideas on the rivers.

Public Awareness and Care: As efficient and responsive as the City government can be, the cleanest and best-maintained public park systems in the country all have one thing in common: residents who love and protect them. Together, we can build a culture of respecting our parks, saying something when we see other people littering, and each doing our own part to make sure parks are clean and safe. City staff cannot do this alone.

PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVATING PUBLIC SPACES

A lot of great spontaneous fun can occur in parks and other public spaces, but some of the most memorable times happen during organized programming or events. From local summer camps, to concerts in the park, to the Independence Day firework display at Szot Park, programming keeps our public spaces alive and attracts residents and visitors alike. The most important themes related to programming include:

Programming for Youth: In surveys for this plan, the public expressed a clear desire for more youth programming of all kinds, to keep youth engaged after school and all summer long.

Figure 8:
Szot Park.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Youth sports, in particular, used to be a staple of Parks and Recreation Department programming, but participation has been on the decline. Many children who are seriously interested in sports join more competitive, private traveling leagues. Other children prefer not to participate in sports at all. However, there are many children in Chicopee who cannot afford to participate in private leagues and need the public programming.

Winter Programming: The Parks and Recreation Department has only one small facility of its own for indoor recreation during the winter. While facilities at school properties are technically available, public recreation uses are the lowest priority. Further, the cost of having janitors stay late to keep facilities open can be prohibitively expensive. The OSRP showed people have an interest in outdoor winter sports like ice skating and cross-country skiing. An indoor skating rink could also be helpful for the hockey teams at the two public high schools, who currently pay to practice and compete on rinks outside the City.

Festivals and Events: Chicopee residents love festivals and events and want to see more of them. The Downtown GetDown, the Independence Day firework display at Szot Park,

and other large events draw residents and visitors alike. They are good fun, but are also good business, bringing in people who spend money at shops and restaurants. The City does not have to be the only organizer of such events and can work with partners like local arts and cultural organizations, business groups, private schools and universities, and more to permit smaller festivals, gallery nights, parades, and other events year-round that celebrate the many cultures of Chicopee.

Activating Public Spaces: Permanent public art and murals or temporary, interactive “pop-up” installations are great ways to make public spaces feel welcoming, fun, and safe.

*For more on programming for seniors, see the **Promoting Health & Wellness** chapter. For more on Library programming, see the **Learning Together** chapter.*

GETTING IT DONE

- Continue to implement the Goals, Objectives, and Actions of Chicopee’s Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP).
- Explore a “Friends of the Park” system – recruit local residents to adopt parks and open spaces and work with Parks & Recreation



staff to schedule regular clean-up days.

- Continue to be proactive in budgeting for repairs and capital improvements to make sure local parks are accessible to all, modernized, and clean. Develop a master plan and maintenance plan for each park, including increased trash and recycling bins and waste collection. Prioritize investments in park facilities based on what neighborhood residents want and need and what is most cost-effective to serve the greatest number of people.
- Set targets for training Parks & Recreation staff or hiring new staff with the skills needed to maintain passive recreation, open space, and green infrastructure.
- Build on the OSRP’s goals by making sure new investments in parks are also improving connections with other parks and neighborhoods. For example, prioritize bike and walking paths, on-street bike lanes and sidewalks, and bike racks, and explore opportunities for strategically converting vacant lots or underutilized parking lots into parks to make connections where they are needed.
- Continue to make the completion and

expansion of the Chicopee Canal & RiverWalk and the Connecticut RiverWalk & Bike Path the highest priority for new park and recreation space in the City.

- Explore partnerships with other property owners in the City with land that might be appropriate for new publicly accessible parks or open space, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Elms College.
- Regularly survey the public on recreational wants and needs and build an annual schedule of recreational programs accessible for people of all abilities, including children, teens, families, adults, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- Seek ways to keep youth sports programs afloat through partnerships with local non-profits like the Boys & Girls Club and neighboring municipalities.
- The City should take a more proactive role in organizing youth sports and other activities, to make sure they are equitably distributed and accessible for youth in the neighborhoods where they live.
- Explore existing City property and other

Figure 9: A mural at the Dom Polski Narodowy (“Polish National Home”) honoring the late Fr. Łucjan Królikowski, OFM Conv.



Photo Credit: Spectrum News

Figure 10: Chicopee Downtown GetDown.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Figure 11: Seniors woodcarving activity.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

opportunities to develop additional indoor recreational space, including an ice rink, to keep residents of all ages active over the winter.

- Explore locations for outdoor winter activities such as cross-country skiing, ice skating, and sledding including at the Chicopee Golf Course, along the riverwalks, and at the grounds of the Chicopee Public Library.
- Have active events and programming (live music, entertainment, festivals, rotating gallery spaces) to keep people coming to Chicopee Center, other neighborhood centers, local parks, and facilities like the Chicopee Public Library and RiverMills Senior Center all year long, either organized by the City or in partnership with other organizations. Focus on activities appropriate for teens and youth.
- Develop a clear and consistent permitting process to allow the use of sidewalks or streets closed to traffic for business displays, outdoor dining, “pop-up” businesses and restaurants, and other active uses.
- Beautify underpasses with murals, decorations, and plantings and use these to note

the gateways of different neighborhoods and to celebrate different cultures.

- Invest in “pop-up” activities for small public spaces and parks, that can engage children and adults alike. Using temporary materials can provide interest in these areas at a low cost.
- Consider hiring a City staff person dedicated to coordinating events and programming.
- Explore increased utilization of public school facilities for public recreational programs during weekday evenings and on weekends—not only for sports and exercise but leisure activities such as music, art, and cooking classes.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Chicopee’s historic and cultural resources are a big part of what makes Chicopee Chicopee. Preserving the City’s many historic buildings, places, documents, and other materials and making sure they are accessible to the public remind us all that we share the same past as

Figure 12: Chicopee Canal and RiverWalk.



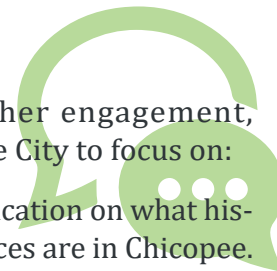
Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

well as the same future. We always have been and always will be “in this together.” Cultural resources include the arts, educational institutions, and community traditions and events. All these resources provide a sense of place in Chicopee and make it a unique and interesting place to be.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- More promotion and education on what historic and cultural resources are in Chicopee.
- More spaces dedicated to the history of Chicopee for current and future generations to learn from.
- Increased restoration, preservation, and maintenance of historic buildings and homes.
- Making historic preservation more affordable and accessible to everyone, by connecting homeowners to grants, technical assistance, and financing.



CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Chicopee is a City of immigrants. From its early days as a center of industry and mill villages, immigrants from the coast, Quebec, Poland, Italy, Portugal, and more flocked to Chicopee for jobs. As they established roots in the area, they founded churches, schools, social organizations, and other networks, many of which survive today. That spirit of immigration has continued, with more recent arrivals of Puerto Rican, Russian, Ukrainian, and Arabic-speaking descent, as well as an increase in African Americans and Asian Americans. This cultural diversity is a great asset and something the City should celebrate and be known for. Our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups, and children raised in Chicopee will have an advantage, having grown up learning how to interact with people of different backgrounds. Plus, this diversity makes Chicopee a more fun and interesting place to be.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS, PLACES, AND MATERIALS

Today, many of Chicopee’s early developments can be found in one of its four historic districts, including mills and related mill housing in the Dwight Mills and Cabotville Commons Historic

Districts. Housing constructed by some notable families can be found in the Springfield and Church Street Historic Districts. All of Chicopee’s historic structures are rich assets the City should continue to maintain and preserve for future generations. But these assets are in peril from demolition, alteration that destroys their historic integrity, vandalism, and general neglect. There are very limited resources to protect and preserve historic buildings, and there are limited organizations and entities dedicated to raising public awareness about historic preservation and advocating for more funding. The Edward Bellamy House is a prime example of this. Built in 1840 and most notable as the home of utopian author Edward Bellamy, the house and museum are an important resource for the City, but greatly in need of funding, repair, and marketing. More people in Chicopee need to be aware of the special things we have here, like the Bellamy House and so many others, so that more people will fight to protect them.

The Chicopee Public Library is a very important source for historical information, research, and documents. The Chicopee Local History Room contains yearbooks, photographs, street directories, Civil War soldiers’ records, scrapbooks

from important historical events and organizations, vital records, magazines, newspapers, and maps, as well as other artifacts and a digital archive. The Library also sponsors genealogy research and weekly classes on how to explore the archives to learn more about family members.

ARTS & CULTURE

Based on public surveys for this plan, there is near universal support for an increase in arts and cultural events and celebrations throughout the year. Attracting theaters, galleries, and performance spaces, and more informal opportunities for art and creativity makes life more fun and enriching for residents and draws visitors and economic development. Everyone wins when the local arts scene is thriving.

GETTING IT DONE



- Reactivate the Historic District Commissions for the City’s four historic districts. Ensure that they are fully appointed with five members each, and properly staffed and trained to protect the resources in their districts.
- Partner with the Chicopee Historical Society, Edward Bellamy Memorial Association,

Figure 13: Chicopee City Hall and Railroad Station postcard.



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Chicopee Public Library, the Chicopee Cultural Council, and others to raise public awareness of historic and cultural resources in Chicopee through increased signage, marketing, and promotional events.

- Support the Edward Bellamy Memorial Association to secure funds to preserve the Edward Bellamy House and expand its programming.
- Consider a Demolition Delay ordinance to put a hold on the demolition of historic structures and provide time to identify long-term preservation options.
- Explore the benefits of passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA) locally, and the potential for using funds to start a grant or revolving loan program to help owners reinvest in their historic properties. Seek other sources of grants and financing to couple with any local assistance. *See other ideas for using the Community Preservation Act in the **Making a Home** chapter.*
- Continue to evaluate zoning to ensure that historic properties have viable options for adaptive reuse.
- Continue to support public art in public

and private outdoor spaces, such as murals, sculptures, and temporary works, as well as in public buildings such as City Hall, the library, the senior center, and schools.

- Work with federal, state, and other agencies to fund the creation of public art and support for the art community in Chicopee.
- Amplify and educate residents about our City’s multitude of cultures, providing and promoting opportunities for people to dialogue and engage with folks outside of their normal social circles.
- Explore additional funding options to support the Chicopee Cultural Council.

Figure 14: Students attend Chicopee Cultural Council event.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Cultural Council

SPOTLIGHT ON: *Neighborhood Anchors*

Neighborhood anchors are places where neighbors meet to develop friendships, discuss issues, and interact with others. They are the places in Chicopee where community and a common sense of identity are developed. In short, they are the heart of what “Coming Together” is all about.

One great example of a neighborhood anchor is the Rivoli Theatre. First opened in 1927 and operated regularly until 2000, anyone over the age of 30 in Chicopee has stories to tell about the Rivoli. It was a place where everyone in the community was welcome and could enjoy a good time. It added to the fun and excitement of being in Chicopee Center.

The fact that the Rivoli has been closed for more than 20 years isn’t just “too bad” or a “sign of the times.” Chicopee Center and all of Chicopee’s neighborhood centers NEED anchors like the Rivoli. Whether the space is revived as a movie theater or an arts center or an event hall, supporting the Rivoli and other neighborhood anchors across the city should be a top priority for quality of life and economic development.

Figure 17: Rivoli Theater.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Figure 1. Chicopee City Hall.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

CHAPTER 2: GOVERNING WELL

Making sure our residents and businesses are supported by an efficient, effective, transparent, and inclusive local government.

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the issue of governing well is at the core of Envision Our Chicopee 2040. Without a well-run government, it is difficult to imagine getting most of the work done that will emerge from this document. Governance touches every chapter in the plan because projects need to be assigned, managed, funded, and evaluated. Citizens and business owners will need to be engaged far beyond the date of plan adoption in order for many programs to succeed, and many departments will need to increase capacity, and measure success against the goals this plan sets forth.

This section addresses big picture issues regarding how Chicopee's local government communicates, uses data and technology, and engages with its residents.

Vision for Governing Well

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee's local government operations will become more efficient, effective, transparent, and inclusive.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement efforts, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Raising awareness and communicating effectively to residents about all existing City services and other services in the region. There are many great resources, but a lot of people do not know about them or how to access them.
- Recruiting more young adults, women, and people of color to serve on local boards and commissions, so that City decisionmakers are more reflective of the City's diverse population.
- Actively seeking public input from a range of people reflective of the whole population (including teenagers and children)—not relying strictly on people who already know how to make their voices heard.
- Making local government more transparent—the public needs better, more regular communication with the Mayor and City Council about what decisions are being made and why.
- Improving public access to information—making it easier to find information on the City's website or find the right City employee or information over the phone.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

In a community as diverse as Chicopee, communication and engagement are critical to the successful operation of government. If residents are unaware of important decisions being made by the City, the inevitable result will be a citizenry that does not trust its leaders. Similarly, if residents do not engage with leadership about important issues, officials and staff cannot be expected to make decisions

that represent their citizens' interests. The people of Chicopee want more effective and consistent ways to communicate with City government and to hear back from them in return. Common concerns around communication are described in the subsections below.

INTERNAL CITY STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

It is very important that every City staff person understands how City government works, what other departments do, and how to get and share information with their colleagues. This will help City government work more efficiently, and better serve the public. For example, many City staff feel unsure how to direct calls or e-mails to the right people within City government. Constituents looking for assistance can get “bounced around” and easily frustrated. It is also important for different City departments to be in regular communication and coordinate their efforts. This happens now based on personal relationships or as needed. However, opportunity exists to streamline and formalize this process into a system for more consistent and efficient internal and communication.

WEBSITE AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

For most residents, business & property owners, visitors, and people looking to move to or start a business in Chicopee, the City's website is the first stop for local information. The website today has a lot of very useful information and is relatively well designed. However, there is currently no protocol for how often and when web pages are updated, which results in some pages being very well maintained and others being extremely out of date. In addition, the sheer volume of information can be a barrier for users. It is important to regularly re-evaluate the layout of the website to ensure it is geared toward how the public thinks about City government and not how the City government thinks of itself. This can be determined through resident surveys as well as web page



Figure 2. City of Chicopee website.

Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

analytics that show what content is most frequently visited.

The City also has a communications tool called “Notify Me” that allows people to sign up for e-mail or text messages with alerts about specific issues that are most important to them. For example, people can choose alerts from specific boards or committees, topics like trash pickup or parking bans, or announcements like City job openings or emergency alerts. This is a great way for people to customize the information they receive and not be inundated with unwanted messages.

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, can be used to share information broadly, get feedback from residents, and make government more transparent. However, cities and towns must make sure their online conduct is consistent with a wider range of state and federal laws, including the public records law, the open meeting law, and others. In addition, the City needs to balance the value of social media against potential pitfalls, such as managing toxic and unproductive exchanges and combatting misinformation. Chicopee should have a social media policy that addresses these various legal requirements and ensures consistent messaging and management.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH RESIDENTS

In general, there is a need for better connections, transparency, and sharing between City government and residents. This needs to be done in a way that is inclusive of non-English speakers, people with disabilities, and others who might have barriers to access (see more on this under Equitable and Inclusive Engagement below). In particular, a better system is needed to connect resident requests and questions with City responses. For example, the City currently has a Commonwealth Connect and a SeeClickFix account that allows residents to report and track non-emergency issues (such as potholes, downed trees, faulty traffic signals, etc.). These can be great tools, but only if they are properly staffed. Someone or a team of City staff must be responsible for coordinating responses and resolving issues. This builds confidence among residents that the system works, and they will be more likely to use it. Further, the City should find ways to be more proactive in communicating with residents, and not just improve ways for residents to communicate with government.

One specific way Chicopee can be more proactive in communications with residents is

expanding its public notices policies. Currently, notice for public hearings related to permits, licenses, zone changes, etc. only get sent to the property owners within 300 feet of the subject property. This can be problematic in neighborhoods with a large proportion of renters. Unless a property owner shares information with tenants, they are unlikely to learn of public hearings, and therefore lose the opportunity to participate in the process and have their voice heard.

One unfortunate trend in communications with the public has been an increasing level of uncivil discourse. Engagement both online and in person can devolve into unproductive name calling, personal attacks, threats, harassment, and the intentional spreading of misinformation. This is a problem throughout the country and is in no way unique to Chicopee. However, this lack of civility is a huge impediment to good governance and robust public engagement. Many people are turned off by such behavior and would rather tune out than try to engage. Everyone in the City wins when policy debates can be respectful, rational, and argued on the facts. There are no easy fixes for this situation, but the best elected leaders and senior City staff can do is lead by example, setting a high standard for respect and decorum in public discussions and firmly but fairly shutting down uncivil behavior.

GETTING IT DONE



- Develop a more intentional plan and structure for internal City communications, with the goal that all City employees understand what each department does, who to contact with issues or questions, and protocol for directing calls from the public.
- Formalize coordination between department heads through regular discussion about budgets, staffing, workload, and other topics to help avoid duplication of efforts and find efficiencies.
- Conduct an annual review of the City's

website to ensure that all resources available to Chicopee residents and businesses are as clear and easy to find as possible. Utilize analytics data to see which pages are used most frequently and also to see what important information is not being seen. Consider the use of focus groups with website users including residents, business owners, etc. to make sure web design is prioritizing the topics they most care about. Further, set a schedule or protocol for when and how often web pages are updated.

- Conduct an active and ongoing marketing campaign to encourage residents to sign up for the City's "Notify Me" function. Consider setting an annual target for increasing the share of City residents signed up.
- Establish a clear protocol for management of City social media accounts. This should include, at a minimum, stated goals for how social media is to be used and for what purposes, specific staff assigned to manage the accounts, a clear and efficient chain of review and approval of posts, password protection standards, records retention standards for each account, standards or "terms of use" for behavior and content that will not be tolerated (harassment, threats, obscenities, etc.) and consistent enforcement, and when and how to engage and respond to public comments and when to shut public comments off.
- Develop a citywide communication plan that identifies target populations within Chicopee, and the best means of communication to reach these populations. Include a section on Limited English Proficiency and Disability Communications, and provide training to staff, at a minimum, on how to work with an interpreter, cultural sensitivity, using "people first" language, etc. Coordinate with Chicopee Public Schools and its extensive communications network.
- Ensure that Commonwealth Connect and SeeClickFix are adequately staffed, and that staff have the authority to coordinate

responses from various City departments. Explore staff or contract services that can provide responses in non-English languages.

- Explore ways to make virtual attendance at public meetings a long-term option for members of the public, particularly City Council meetings. Develop a set of rules or protocol for virtual participation.
- Add a "Sign up to Volunteer" link prominently on the City's webpage, where residents can express their interest in volunteering for boards, commissions, committees, or at facilities like the library or senior center. Assign a staff person to coordinate volunteer efforts and connect people with the departments and facilities that need help.
- Revamp the "Good Neighbor Handbook" (or other similar publication) that lists all the various City resources available to residents. Proactively distribute this to all residential addresses every two years. Consider working with real estate agents, leasing companies, and local landlords to provide copies to new residents of Chicopee.
- Develop and maintain a clearinghouse of local non-profit organizations based in Chicopee, explaining what they do, what services they provide, and how people can get involved.
- Adopt a policy to expand notification of public hearings and other abutter notifications to all residents and property owners within 300 feet of a subject property, whether owners or renters, as well as to post a notice sign at the property.
- Develop and adopt a set of principles for civil civic engagement. These are standards that elected leaders and City staff will hold themselves to in discourse with the public, and that are expected of the public as well. Conduct training on these principles for all newly elected officials and new City staff.

EQUITABLE COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

Chicopee is a diverse community with a tremendous mix of races, cultures, ages, abilities, backgrounds, incomes, and interests. This diversity can be a major strength for Chicopee, but the leadership and decision-makers in the City do not often reflect this diversity. People of color, women, people with disabilities, low-income households, and younger people are generally underrepresented in elected and appointed positions, volunteer boards and commissions, City staff, and other aspects of civic life. Anecdotally, they are also underrepresented at community meetings and other opportunities to provide local leaders with feedback. In spite of many efforts, even the process to develop this plan struggled to get representative feedback from people of color and people under the age of 35. See the Demographics section of the Baseline Report for more information on the diversity of Chicopee's residents.

A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

When it comes to City operations, the word "inclusion" means putting strategies into practice that will increase accessibility and a feeling of welcome for individuals and groups who customarily do not participate. In a city like Chicopee, inclusive efforts will help to increase diversity in a way that better reflects the population and provides a voice for people with different backgrounds. This can apply to elected officials, city staff, voter participation, and general participation in important meetings and decision-making processes. Importantly, creating an inclusive environment requires more time and effort than many people realize and needs to be woven into the everyday operations of local government. Staff members and officials should have continual opportunities to learn about how their own behavior, existing policies, procedures, and communications can serve to discourage or preclude participation from certain groups of residents. Learning

to identify these biases and existing practices takes continuous education and dialogue, and many cities are turning to professional organizations for assistance.

EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

While it is critical for cities to look inward at their own policies and procedures to create an inclusive culture, this work must also connect outward to the broader community. Objectives for individual departments, boards, and the City as a whole to consider include:

- Being proactive about recruiting a more diverse array of residents for boards, commissions, and other civic positions, as well as City staff.
- Seeking a balance in local volunteers that more closely reflects the City’s population in terms of age, income, race/ethnicity, professional backgrounds, etc.
- Seeking this same balance for public input to local boards and commissions. Often, it is people who are “in the know” who show up and participate in public meetings or otherwise find ways to make their

opinions heard. City staff should take extra steps to make sure they are hearing from a more equitable and representative cross section of the public.

- In particular, focus on ways to engage Environmental Justice communities in the City.

To make this happen, Chicopee’s engagement of the public on critical issues will need to go well beyond the minimum legal requirements for public notices. In some instances, Chicopee already employs some effective engagement techniques, like using community television and limited social media communications. Moving forward, the City will need to consider how it can implement a more “media savvy” approach that better reflects the ways in which people access information on a daily basis.

GETTING IT DONE

- Consider hosting a series of “Making Change in Chicopee” workshops, virtually and in person. Explain the various staff and volunteer board and committee positions available in the City and what the process is for applying. Also explain how public meetings



work, and how people can attend and participate. Widely advertise these workshops throughout Chicopee, but especially focus on neighborhood groups, civic organizations, and entities that can reach underrepresented populations like people of color, women, young people, Environmental Justice communities, and those with disabilities.

- For all programs and investments made by the City, evaluate success not just on fiscal return on investment but social return on investment. Be sure to track data on race, ethnicity, age, gender, and neighborhood of residence (many of which are captured by Environmental Justice communities) and ask, “Who has benefited?” from each program and investment. Continue to invest in programs that demonstrate a positive impact on underrepresented populations and reevaluate programs that do not. Use this data to track overall improvement of quality of life for these populations compared with the City population overall, including unemployment, income, and poverty rate.
- Aspire to have the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of City staff, elected and appointed positions, and volunteer boards and commissions be reflective of the City as a whole.
- Identify classes of City positions where there exists a need for a particular linguistic background or skill to serve the client population and make it a priority to hire bi- and multi-lingual candidates for these positions.
- Explore opportunities for expanding communications in languages other than English. Translate key webpage information into the major non-English languages prevalent in Chicopee or consider an automated translation service like Google Translate. Be sure these options are prominently featured on the home page. Also consider translating key documents and outreach materials and explore options for phone services that offer real-time interpretation services.

- Provide communications accessible to those with disabilities (e.g. those with hearing or vision impairment), such as closed captioning for videos, web pages and PDFs designed to accommodate screen readers for the visually impaired, color schemes accessible to those who are color blind, etc.
- Create and maintain a list of media outlets and advertisement opportunities with organizations that reach out to a diversity of communities throughout Chicopee, to be shared with hiring managers and communications staff across City government. Use these sources to advertise, among other things, public meetings and other opportunities for public feedback.
- Conduct a diversity and cultural competency training program. For future hires, this training may be part of the standardized orientation provided to new employees. Moreover, it should be expanded as a refresher for managers and supervisors.
- Find formal ways for local high school students to play an active role in civic decision making – consider reserving student positions for certain boards and commissions.

Figure 3: Chicopee residents visit the Comprehensive Plan booth at the Downtown GetDown.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

BEST PRACTICES IN REGULATION AND MAINTENANCE

So much of what makes a city function smoothly and serve its residents well are the “nuts and bolts” of regularly maintaining existing ordinances, regulations, policies, and procedures, as well physical existing infrastructure such as roads. While sound policy can be difficult and time consuming to update, the benefits are long lasting. Further, taking the time to plan for regular maintenance can help avoid more expensive emergency repairs. It is also worth noting that even the best policies and ordinances will fail to succeed if they are not actively implemented and enforced by the appropriate city staff or de-

partment. It is important that all these things are embedded as systems.

One of the surest ways the City has to formalize and elevate policies is to include them in the City Charter. The City Charter is the foundation for all City ordinances and regulations and sets the overall direction of City governance. A City Charter Review Commission was established in 2021 with the charge of reviewing and updating the Charter. The Charter should be reviewed in light of Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 to ensure that the goals and actions of this plan are actively supported by the Charter.

MODERNIZING ORDINANCES AND REGULATIONS

Chicopee's Code of Ordinances covers a wide range of topics, from administrative issues such as the role of City Commissions, Committees, Councils, and Authorities to specific issues related to noise, yard sales, code enforcement, and zoning. In general, ordinances tend to be updated piecemeal over time when a specific issue arises. This is not at all unique to Chicopee. However, after years or decades of amendments, ordinances can become difficult to enforce consistently and may even be in conflict with one another. It is important to take stock of ordinances every five to ten years to make sure they are still accomplishing what they were meant to and are not causing unintended negative consequences.

One of the most important City ordinances related to this Plan is Chapter 275, the Zoning Ordinance. Originally adopted in 1940, the Zoning Ordinance has only received one major overhaul in eighty years, and that was in 1978. Much of Chicopee's Zoning Ordinance is designed to perpetuate mid-century development trends, such as sprawling commercial strip centers, that we now know are discriminatory, expensive, and environmentally damaging. The ordinance is behind the times on issues such as parking requirements, minimum residential lot sizes, and allowances for mixed-uses in the village cores and

more dense urban neighborhoods. It can also be confusing for the average person to read and understand. It is time for a full overhaul to ensure that Chicopee's zoning is meeting the needs and realities of people today and is easily understood and enforced.

Closely related to the Zoning Ordinance are the Subdivision Regulations and Site Plan Regulations and the Chicopee local Wetlands Bylaw overseen by the Conservation Commission. Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance will necessitate related changes to these regulations.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

The City of Chicopee has an enormous list of assets, facilities, and infrastructure elements that it must maintain. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for decision-makers to justify pro-active maintenance expenditures when budgets are tight. Further, residents and business owners are rarely aware of when facilities require maintenance until there are serious problems. Limited resources and lack of awareness can create a situation where local departments are constantly dealing with emergency repairs, making it nearly impossible to "get ahead of the game" and assume a regular maintenance schedule. Regardless, cities like Chicopee must make every effort to provide the equipment, staff, and money needed to plan proactively for facility and infrastructure maintenance. These plans should also account for the projected impacts of climate change, including increased disruptive weather events with potential damage from strong winds and flooding. While deferred maintenance may be unavoidable in some cases, it is guaranteed to increase the scope and cost of any repairs. Hoping to rely on grant programs or other contributions is a gamble that rarely pays off.

GETTING IT DONE

- Conduct a review of the City's Zoning Ordinance against the vision and goals of this Plan, and identify important areas to amend and update, both in terms of policy and format/usability. Budget for a full overhaul and rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Amend the City's Subdivision Regulations and Site Plan Regulations to be consistent with the overhauled Zoning Ordinance.
- Within the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, and Site Plan Regulations reviews, revisit roadway design requirements to ensure future roadways are not oversized and meet environmental as well as traffic flow goals.
- Adopt a "Green and Complete Streets" policy to increase nature-based infrastructure, take into account equity for all modes of transportation, and reduce the burden on hard infrastructure systems, with a long-term goal of reducing hard infrastructure maintenance costs and improving mobility and safety.
- Develop a proactive Pavement Management Plan to more efficiently and effectively manage street and sidewalk maintenance.
- Develop proactive plans for utility infrastructure maintenance, including the electric grid, the fiber network, and the City's role in managing gas and telecommunications.
- Prioritize review of unaccepted rights of way, complete the acceptance process where deemed appropriate, and ensure maximum allocation of state Chapter 90 resources.

Maintaining Roadways and Other Utilities

Roadways can be owned by private residents, the federal government, or state government. Most roads in Chicopee (and other municipalities) are owned and maintained by the City, specifically the Department of Public Works. Maintaining roads in the City is an enormous undertaking. Not only is there construction related to water mains, sewers, and storm drains, but snow removal, sanding/salting, patching, sidewalk repair, and repaving all need to occur over hundreds of miles of roadway during the course of a year, not to mention mowing and other maintenance of medians and other non-paved areas in the public right-of-way. This work involves considerable staff time, coordination with other departments, and the use of heavy-duty, specialized equipment/vehicles.

For some of these services, it is difficult for Chicopee to predict when they will be needed. However, many of these services can become routine if proper planning is done in advance. For example, best practices in roadway management show that developing and following a Pavement Management Plan can improve operations related to road maintenance and significantly cut costs. With these plans, following a proactive schedule for roadway maintenance replaces a more reactionary approach to maintenance where a municipality spends more resources on addressing complaints and making patchwork repairs.

The same considerations are true for maintenance of electric infrastructure and fiber networks for internet connectivity, as managed by Chicopee Electric Light, as well as the City's responsibilities for managing the maintenance of private utilities like gas (Eversource), cable/telecommunications (Verizon/Charter Spectrum), etc. A proactive schedule is needed for all these things.

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

Municipalities across the Commonwealth are facing shrinking budgets and rising costs. For cities like Chicopee, the sheer scope of its infrastructure, combined with the increases in public health and safety services, are creating an enormous fiscal challenge. Examples of cost challenges faced by Chicopee include (but are not limited to):

- Staff salaries are not competitive with other communities in the region and many departments find it challenging to fill positions and retain skilled employees.
- The cost of mandatory upgrades to the sewer and storm drain systems have increased significantly and, in many cases, are passed on to rate payers.
- Chicopee residents require a higher level of social service support (as discussed in other chapters of this plan) including, but not limited to, addiction support, mental health counseling, senior services, and other basic services.
- Many of Chicopee's facilities are outdated and have reached the point where significant upgrades or replacement is required.

Much of the discussion around municipal finance is about "rising costs" and how to manage them. One of the ways to help manage costs related to running a City is to consider every expenditure as an investment and ask what the City is getting in return. There are many examples of new investments that could have positive and reverberating impacts on the City.

INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Investing in modern technology can be a bumpy transition, but once these improvements are in place, they can give a significant boost to economic activity and customer service. One of the greatest technology needs facing the City today is an electronic government platform. One coordinated system is needed to

streamline and digitize the City's development review and permitting processes, internal City communications, and communications/financial transactions with the public. Whether a new business is trying to navigate the development process or a local organization is seeking a permit to close a street for a block party, there should be a one-stop-shop online to submit information and track the review process. Another serious emerging issue is cybersecurity. The City maintains sensitive data on a number of topics that could be ripe for stealing. Computer viruses and ransomware could put this data at risk and cost the City a great deal of time and money to address. Having a proactive plan to prevent and manage such technology threats is crucial.

INVESTING IN DATA

Better access to (non-personal) public data creates enormous opportunities for government to positively impact the lives of residents. It also empowers City departments to track their own success against stated goals and identify areas for improvement. In a time of unprecedented digital openness, many government organizations keep data in proprietary databases or published in cumbersome formats that make access and analysis difficult. In the past, this has prevented public entities from more effectively using information stored in databases, spreadsheets, and other tools to inform their decision making. Despite access to data, many public entities still base decisions largely on instinct. Such "gut" decision making can be costly and inefficient, resulting in:

- Slow delivery of government services.
- Misalignment between public services and resident needs.
- Difficulty in tying investments to measurable results.
- Lower levels of transparency and accountability.
- Public perception that government is broken or corrupt.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Chicopee's Geographic Information System (GIS)

GIS is a computerized mapping application that lets the user store and display data on interactive maps. While this technology is not new, it continues to evolve at a rapid pace and, used to its full potential, can revolutionize the way cities like Chicopee store data, communicate with the public, and perform essential operations. The City of Chicopee continues to invest in and develop its GIS, offering an on-line platform where residents and business owners can view a wealth of data such as parcel boundaries, street maps, zoning districts, locations for parks, and other important landmarks. As the City's GIS continues to evolve, potential applications include:

- Visualization of a Pavement Management Plan
- Location of critical facilities, including those at risk from flooding and other hazards
- Location and status of development applications
- Bus and walking routes to school
- Walking and bike trails
- Transit routes
- Compliance data for state- and federal-level permits
- Locations of various food outlets (e.g., grocery stores, farmers' market, etc.)
- Locations of important social service facilities

Figure 4: Chicopee River Walk.



Photo Credit: Kestrel Land Trust

Investments in data access, management, and analysis can improve government efficiency by streamlining processes, promoting innovation, and encouraging greater interagency cooperation.

INVESTING IN STAFF

Chicopee faces a number of challenges when considering staffing. Situated along the Connecticut River, Chicopee must draw from the same employee pool as Holyoke, Springfield, Northampton, and several other nearby communities. Each of these communities needs to fill its own positions within City Hall, at the Department of Public Works, and in the local school systems. While salary and benefits are not the only measure of how attractive a job will be, these factors are certainly at the top of the list. Chicopee therefore needs to ensure that its compensation packages are competitive in order to attract and retain the best possible candidates.

In addition to considering compensation, it is important for the City to assess where new positions could represent an important mid- to long-term investment. Examples of this type of investment include:

- **In-House Engineers.** Chicopee relies significantly on outside engineering

consultants for both planning and design work throughout the City. While this may be essential for some services, some of this work could be transferred to municipal staff if capacity were increased. Depending on the nature of the work, this transfer of project design could be much more cost-effective.

- **Grant Writer/Administrator.** Chicopee has benefitted greatly from receiving state and federal level grants across many departments. However, these grants can require considerable effort to develop and, if successful, to administer. Despite its success, Chicopee has actually fallen short of its full grant funding potential. Beyond state and federal grants, the City has not been able to make a targeted effort to pursue grants available from the private sector via non-profit organizations, foundations, and entities with programs that address specific missions. This is another untapped funding source that could support a number of City projects.
- **Economic Development Director.** As discussed in other sections of the plan, Chicopee has been piecing together an economic development strategy for decades through the efforts of different

departments. Similar to grant writing, while there have been many success stories, the City is falling short of its economic development potential because the resources have not been allocated.

In addition to new positions, the City should reevaluate staffing policies that may be limiting its ability to attract and retain talent. Communities and businesses all over the country have realized during the pandemic that having employees physically in the office for 40 hours a week isn't necessarily the most efficient or effective policy. The City can consider the following:

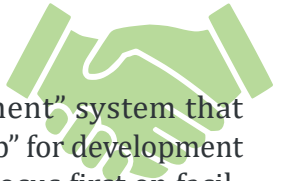
- A more flexible work from home policy, where certain positions are allowed to work from home fully or a few days a week. This may take investments in equipment that staff would keep at home.
- Investments in paid family leave, and stronger maternity/paternity leave policies to accommodate younger adults with families.
- Consistent investments in professional training and credentialing to make sure staff are building their skills and connected with the resources of their professions.
- Investing in community! City employees spend a lot of time together, and it's important to invest in social activities and team building to make sure that time is not just productive but enjoyable.

INVESTING IN FACILITIES

Chicopee has made some outstanding investments in new facilities in recent years including major renovations to the historic City Hall, renovations of several fire stations, and the development of the RiverMills Senior Center and new main Library. Looking ahead, continued investments in facilities will be critical to the effective and efficient operation of municipal services. Several fire stations, for example, are not adequate for fitting the apparatus required to service residents and business owners in

the community. Many school buildings, particularly elementary schools, are aging and out of date. As another example, DPW has several divisions performing a wide variety of responsibilities often with valuable vehicles and equipment. Offices for staff members and storage of vehicles and equipment are not centralized, which creates inefficiencies in operations and maintenance.

GETTING IT DONE



- Invest in an “e-government” system that serves as a “one-stop-shop” for development review and permitting. Focus first on facilitating economic development and special events, and then expand to all aspects of City government.
- Invest in a city-wide digital payment platform for bill/fee payment that is ‘free’ to users.
- Conduct a cybersecurity audit for all municipal functions and develop protocol to respond to cybersecurity threats, prioritizing utilities and public safety. Ensure training in all areas of emergency response for City staff.
- Conduct a data management audit across all departments within City government and explore options for creating a single platform to store and share data.
- Continue to expand the data available to be publicly accessed and mapped through the City’s online Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for increasing the City’s engineering capacity (including water system engineers) to be able to conduct more engineering work in house and rely less on consultants.
- Conduct a salary survey for jobs across City government, to make sure salaries and benefits are competitive enough with neighboring municipalities and private employers to attract and retain quality employees.

Figure 5: Chicopee Public Library.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

- Consider developing and/or hiring new grant writing and administration staff to support all City departments.
- Hire an Economic Development Director (or similar position), potentially to be housed in the Planning & Development Department.
- Review current staffing policies, and consider ways to increase work from home opportunities, family leave benefits, training and credentialing support, and social/team building among staff.
- Develop a 10-year Facilities Plan for all municipal capital improvements, including but not limited to exploring options for consolidating all or most of the City's fleet and equipment into a single storage and repair facility. Concurrently, explore options for the creation of a Municipal Facilities Management Department, potentially inclusive of the School Department.
- Explore options for consolidating all or most Department of Public Works staff into a single location.

Figure 5. Baskin Redevelopment.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

SPOTLIGHT ON: *RiverMills Development*

RiverMills is a great example of the power of long-term planning and continued investment. This area in Chicopee Falls has been the largest, most challenging and complex brownfields redevelopment effort in Chicopee's history. Throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, this was a "factory village"—an industrial powerhouse for businesses including Fisk/Uniroyal Tire that employed upwards of 7,000 people at its peak. These industries declined to the point that most factories were vacant by the 1980s.

At that time, the City started the long and difficult task of taking ownership of these properties and working on a plan for putting the land back to use for the community. This has included:

- *Getting the site listed on the Commonwealth's Brownfield Support Team Initiative, which provides financial, technical, and other state level resources to speed redevelopment.*
- *Getting Brownfield Priority Project status from MassDevelopment and managing an ongoing partnership with this state agency.*
- *Completing the RiverMills Vision Plan in 2010, which envisions a mixed-use, walkable community with expanded job and living options for residents. This plan has been instrumental in acquiring funding.*
- *Writing successful applications for US EPA Brownfield Clean Up grants from 2012 through the present. This funding was critical for removing and renovating buildings, cleaning the soil, and preparing the area for private and public development.*

The City has invested patiently and incrementally over the last 40 years in the future of this area. In the past ten years, these efforts have really started to bear fruit.

- *The Senior Center at RiverMills opened in September 2014.*
- *Plans are moving forward for the extension of the Chicopee Canal & RiverWalk, and residents can now walk along the river through this area.*
- *RiverMills Assisted Living officially opened its doors in Fall of 2019.*
- *In April 2021, the City announced the pending redevelopment of the Baskin Parcel into a brewery, office space, and a multi-sport facility.*

More is likely to happen soon as the Uniroyal site's environmental remediation nears completion. RiverMills tells an inspiring story: When the City plans, devotes staff time, invests in technical assistance, and makes strategic investments, great things will happen. Sometimes these investments have to be incremental over a long period of time due to the expense and complexity of a project, but everyone in Chicopee wins when the City has faith in a vision. This plan sets forth a number of long-term visions that will be achieved if Chicopee puts forward the same level of commitment.

Figure 1. Downtown Chicopee.



Photo Credit: Spectrum News 1

CHAPTER 3: GETTING AROUND

Making it easier to get where we need to go in and around Chicopee.

INTRODUCTION

Chicopee, as a City of neighborhoods, has the opportunity to make getting around by walking, biking, and transit easier. With more people choosing these active modes of transportation, car trips can be reduced, which in turn will help reduce overall traffic, congestion, and air pollution. Other great resources for active transportation are paths along the Connecticut and Chicopee Rivers. When completed, these biking and walking paths will be an important opportunity for recreation as well as connecting residents and visitors to different parts of the City and the region.

This plan can help Chicopee make decisions about investments in transit and better use of our streets, curbs, and sidewalks to meet future needs for getting around. For example, how can we make it easier to connect buses and bicycles? How can we continue to fight for expanded rail, bus, and ValleyBike service in Chicopee and the region? How can we plan for the future of autonomous vehicles and the ever-evolving micromobility sector (i.e. lightweight devices such as e-bikes, scooters, both personal and shared)? How can we balance curb access needs between people and freight, particularly in light of the recent increase in e-commerce and home delivery services. How can we make sure we have “complete streets” that are safe and convenient for everyone, whether you are

walking, biking or driving? The answers to these questions will make it easier for everyone to get around Chicopee.

Vision for Getting Around

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will work to make sure people of all ages and abilities can get where they need to go on foot, bicycle, transit, and in private vehicles safely and efficiently, while balancing freight and delivery access needs to ensure an efficient transportation system for people, goods, and services.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the **Transportation & Mobility** sections of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents had the following common thoughts on getting around:

- Residents want it to be easier and safer to walk in their neighborhoods and to local parks and shops.
- Most residents feel that it is easy to drive around the City and that most everything they need is very close by and accessible.
- Transportation for seniors from the Senior Center is much appreciated but could be expanded.
- Public transit needs to be expanded with easier to follow schedules. Buses don't run frequently enough and it's difficult to get to certain neighborhoods or resources, like grocery stores.
- Rail access needs to be expanded, both east-west and north-south.
- City roads need to be better maintained, including more quickly filling potholes.
- The sidewalk network in the City should be expanded and crosswalks should be made safer and more convenient.

- Residents very much want to see more bicycle infrastructure, including bike paths, bike lanes, and better signage.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Chicopee residents are known to have a strong sense of neighborhood identity. Thus, it is important to identify safe and convenient travel within each neighborhood for residents of all ages and abilities. Providing an equitable transportation network involves prioritizing the public right-of-way (ROW) to offer safe and comfortable facilities for everyone. As Figure 2 shows, the public ROW typically extends from back of sidewalk to back of sidewalk, 52-foot total in this example. The City can choose how to allocate this public space for different uses, including walkers, bikers, and tree plantings.

WALKING

As a large City with several urban centers, Chicopee has the potential to support walking as a mode of travel for daily trips; however, there are existing challenges walkers must face.

Benefits of Sidewalks

- *Improves safety—the [Federal Highway Administration](#) reports sidewalks have the potential to prevent up to 88% of fatalities caused by pedestrians walking along the roadway.*
- *Enables walking as a mode of transportation that may be replace car trips and reduce emissions*
- *Promotes physical activity and healthy lifestyles*
- *Supports local business by increasing foot traffic*
- *Increases neighborhood safety by bringing people together with their “eyes on the street”*

Figure 2. The Public Right-of-Way.



Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

These include highway underpasses, such as under I-90 (MassPike), arterial corridors such as Memorial Drive that house auto-centric development patterns, barriers to sidewalk accessibility such as overgrown vegetation and utility poles. It is also common for driveways and curb cuts to interrupt the sidewalk network on neighborhood commercial corridors such as Main Street. Ensuring that sidewalks meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements so that they are accessible for people of all ages and abilities will also ensure that they are safe and accessible for all people.

City-wide over half of the roadways (63%) in Chicopee do not have sidewalks, as seen in Figure 4.¹ The neighborhoods of Chicopee Center, Chicopee Falls, and Aldenville have strong existing sidewalk networks, while Willimansett and Fairview have less sidewalks present on their roadways. Establishing criteria for prioritizing sidewalk improvements, such as on corridors that connect residential neighborhoods to village centers (i.e. Fairview and Willimansett), around schools, and those that connect to recreational parks and trails is the first step in expanding the City's sidewalk network. This will set the City up to make targeted improvements that will have the highest

What are Sneckdowns?

Also known as a “snowy neckdown,” sneckdowns are naturally forming curb extensions created by snowfall that demonstrate unused road space that could be reallocated for walkers, bikers, or to simply slow traffic down.

See Figure 3 for an example of a sneckdown that appeared after a December 2019 storm in Chicopee Center. Can you think of an area in Chicopee where you have seen a sneckdown?

Figure 3. Sneckdown, December 2019.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Figure 4. Walking and Biking Conditions in Chicopee.

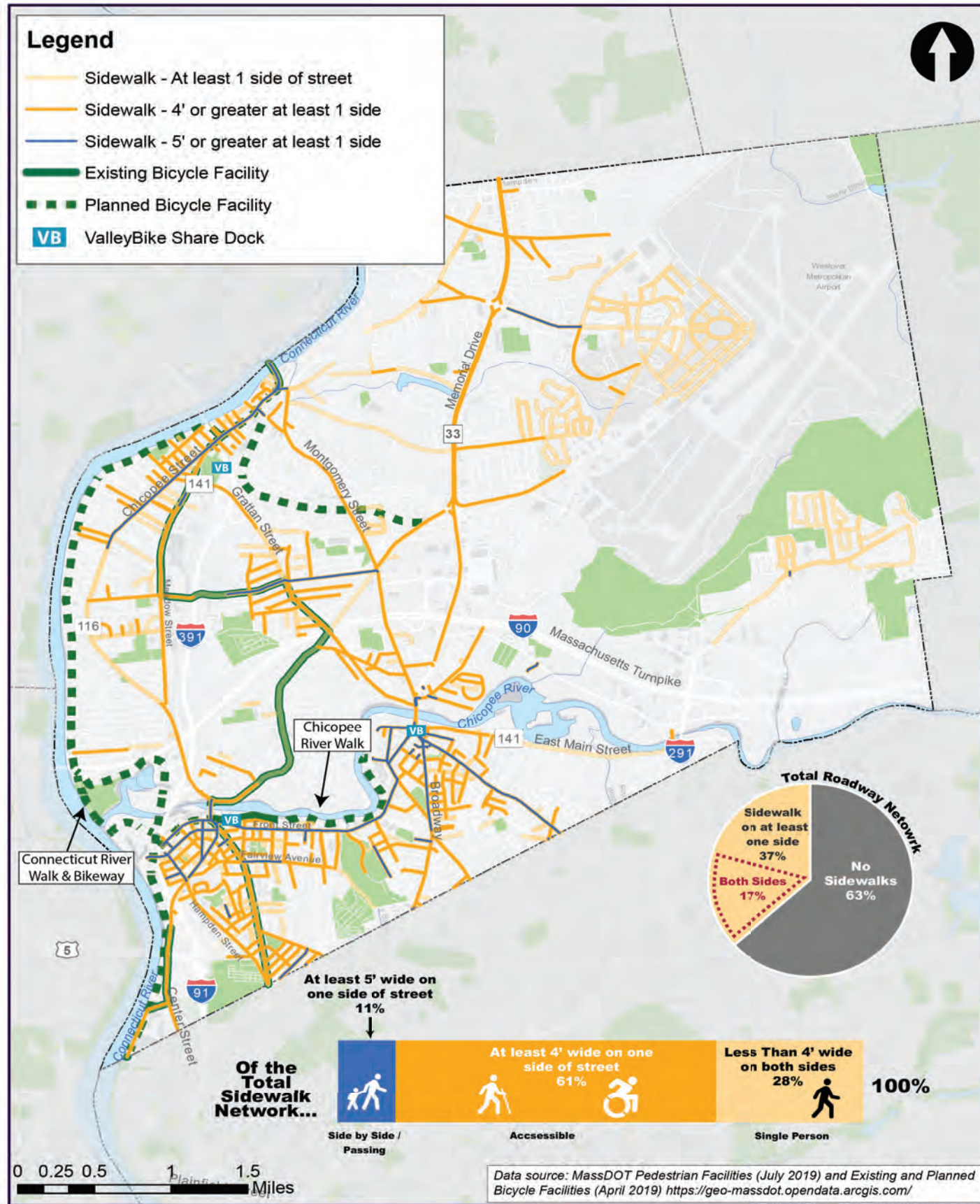


Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

potential to replace driving trips with walking trips.

Getting it Done

- Complete a City-wide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) audit to develop an inventory of sidewalk conditions and pedestrian crossing infrastructure.
- Employ low-cost/quick implementation solutions to redistribute the right-of-way to pedestrian infrastructure.
- Pursue [Safe Routes to Schools](#) programming and funding to support pedestrian infrastructure.

BIKING

Similar to walking, the community input process illustrated a desire to expand biking facilities within Chicopee's neighborhoods. The majority

of both the existing and future bicycle network in Chicopee consists of off-street cycling paths through the existing and future Chicopee Canal and RiverWalk and Connecticut RiverWalk and Bikeway projects. On street facilities are more limited, with community members expressing concern over the comfort and connectivity they provide, including the bicycle lane on Chicopee Street (Route 116) under I-391. The Center Loop, a temporary protected on-street bike lane, was installed and removed in 2021. It served as a good test case for exploring future permanent bike lane installations. However, it also provided a lesson for the City to communicate better with surrounding property and business owners throughout the process to ensure that the design is well received. Moving forward, it will also be important for the City to consider not only the presence of a bicycle facility on a roadway, but the type of facility and level of comfort it

Figure 5. Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress.

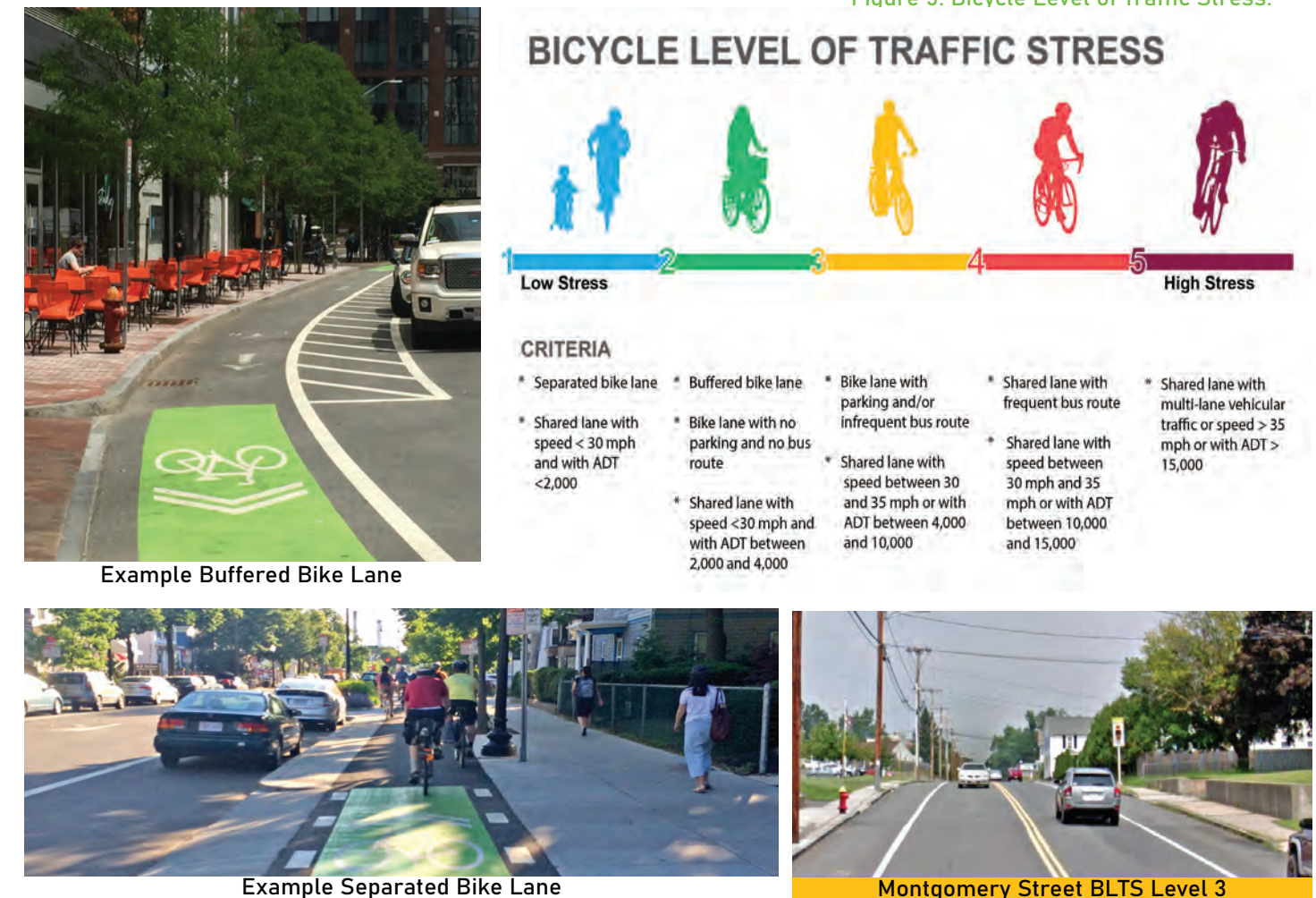


Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

Examples of Traffic Calming Measures to Improve Pedestrian Safety

Figure 6. Clockwise from top left: decorative crosswalk, temporary pedestrian refuge island with flex bollards, decoratively painted curb extension, permanent curb extension, permanent pedestrian refuge island, and raised crosswalk.



Photo Credits: Clockwise from top left - Cactx Surfaces; David Sachs; City of Seattle, WA; Coral Gables, FL; Lakewood Together; New York City Street Design Manual

provides (see recommendation under Getting it Done). Chicopee also hosts three [ValleyBike Share](#) e-bike stations (as seen in Figure 4), located in Chicopee Center, Chicopee Falls, and Willimansett.

Getting it Done

- Identify corridors with excess roadway widths and/or wide shoulders to reallocate space for bicycle facilities.
- Complete a Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (BLTS) analysis to identify warranted bicycle facilities.
- Pursue funding to complete design of the Chicopee Canal & RiverWalk and the construction of Phase II.
- Support the expansion of [ValleyBike Share](#).
 - Work with PVTa to identify priority bus stops for docking stations.
 - Work with PVPC to collect data on bike share usage.
- Install bike racks at all municipal buildings.
- Develop public materials such as posters, brochures, signage and online platforms to support awareness and education about bicycling in Chicopee.
- Identify areas of City-owned land or work with private landowners to identify opportunities to expand the bicycle network.

NEIGHBORHOOD CORRIDORS

While several neighborhoods (Chicopee Center, Chicopee Falls, and Aldenville) are comprised of a compact pedestrian-scale environments, roadways that provide entry to these neighborhoods tend to lack a sense of arrival. The existing infrastructure largely supports vehicular traffic and encourages one to travel through, rather than welcoming one to enter into a neighborhood. For example, residents note that the Aldenville neighborhood experiences a high level of cut-through vehicle traffic due to its location between Willimansett and Memorial Drive.

Additionally, many corridors that could be considered neighborhood gateways, such as Front Street and Main Street contain numerous curb cuts and driveways. Individual curb cuts for each business contributes to congestion, with vehicles entering and exiting multiple times on a roadway segment. A large number of curb cuts also create accessibility issues for walkers navigating through turning vehicles and changing sidewalk levels reducing overall safety for bicyclists and walkers.

Getting it Done

- Pursue an “Access Management” strategy on neighborhood gateway corridors.
- Develop street design guidelines.
- Support integration of walking and biking facilities through the intersection of McKinstry Avenue, Granby Road, and Montgomery Street.
- Revise the zoning code, site plan, and subdivision regulations to require and/or incentivize new/redevelopment to enhance multimodal connectivity and placemaking.
- Study potential uses for highway underpasses, including use of the areas for public art and programming or off-street parking.

CITY-WIDE CONNECTIONS

Improving the City-wide transportation network for use by all modes can help reduce the use of interstates for travel within the City. There are particular areas of the City that have particularly insular street networks with limited connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods. For example, the Burnett Road neighborhood is limited by the Westover Airport to the north and I-90 to the south; getting to other areas of the City is dependent on travel via I-90. Examining opportunities, such as informal walking or biking paths through conservation areas, are options the City should consider to improve local mobility and access. Access and safety improvements to the transportation network will contribute

Figure 5. Existing and Proposed Chicopee River Canal and RiverWalk and Connecticut RiverWalk and Bikeway.



Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc. and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

MAPC Landline Vision Plan

The MAPC Landline Vision Plan documents strategies for connecting people to places through a trail network. The Western Greenway Trail in Waltham uses foot trails through parks and conservation lands to help preserve undeveloped parcels. This greenway connects developed areas and green space, including publicly- and privately-owned land. It can be used as an example of how Chicopee can provide increased connectivity between its developed areas and open space.

Figure 6. Western Greenway Trail in Waltham.



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Area Planning Council

to creating a sense of place and cohesiveness within neighborhoods, while also facilitating the use of regional connections beyond Chicopee.

SAFETY

Data from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) [Highway Safety Improvement Program \(HSIP\)](#), illustrated in Figure 7, shows that many of the major roadways in Chicopee are often the site of vehicle HSIP crash clusters. A crash cluster is where the total number of “equivalent property damage only” crashes are within the top 5% in the region. The primary areas with safety concerns in Chicopee are:

- Memorial Drive, where two fatalities occurred and one Top 200 crash cluster (meaning it is a location with some of the highest number of crashes in the State)
- The intersection of Front Street and Route 141, the location of a fatality and a Top 200 crash cluster
- The intersection of Montgomery Street and Granby Road, the site of one fatality and 83 crashes.
- Through the public outreach process, Grattan Street at Granby Road and at McKinstry Avenue were also identified as difficult intersections for pedestrians to

cross despite existing crosswalks and pedestrian signals.

- Additionally, Chicopee Center has been identified as a priority location for pedestrian safety, with a high number of pedestrian crashes recorded in 2015 and a Walk Assessment completed in 2018.

History of One-Way Streets

Through the 20th century, reliance on the automobile increased exponentially, overwhelming the street infrastructure causing a shift in the perception and function of urban street layouts, like those in Chicopee Center. In 1964, in an effort to alleviate the bottlenecking traffic congestion of Route 116 through Chicopee Center, many of the streets in the neighborhood’s radial grid layout were changed from two-way traffic flow to one-way flows. In its time, the move from two-way to one-way was highly contentious and strongly opposed by the local business community. In 1980, the congestion issue would ultimately be solved through the construction of Interstate 391, streamlining traffic between Springfield, Chicopee, and Holyoke. However, the damage to Chicopee Center’s streetscapes and mill village character was done and has yet to heal.

Figure 7. MassDOT Recorded Crashes in Chicopee.

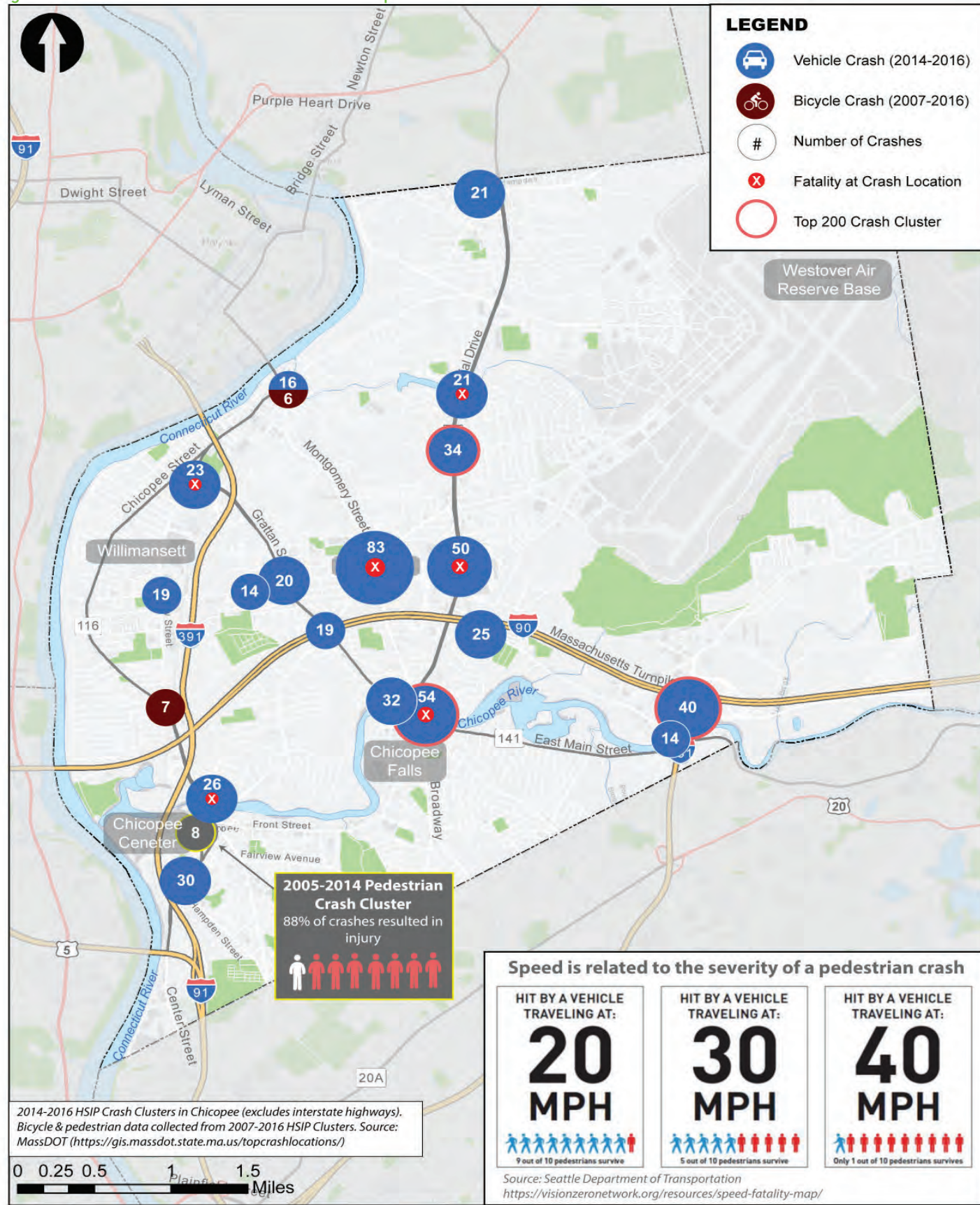


Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

Figure 8. Access Management on Main Street.

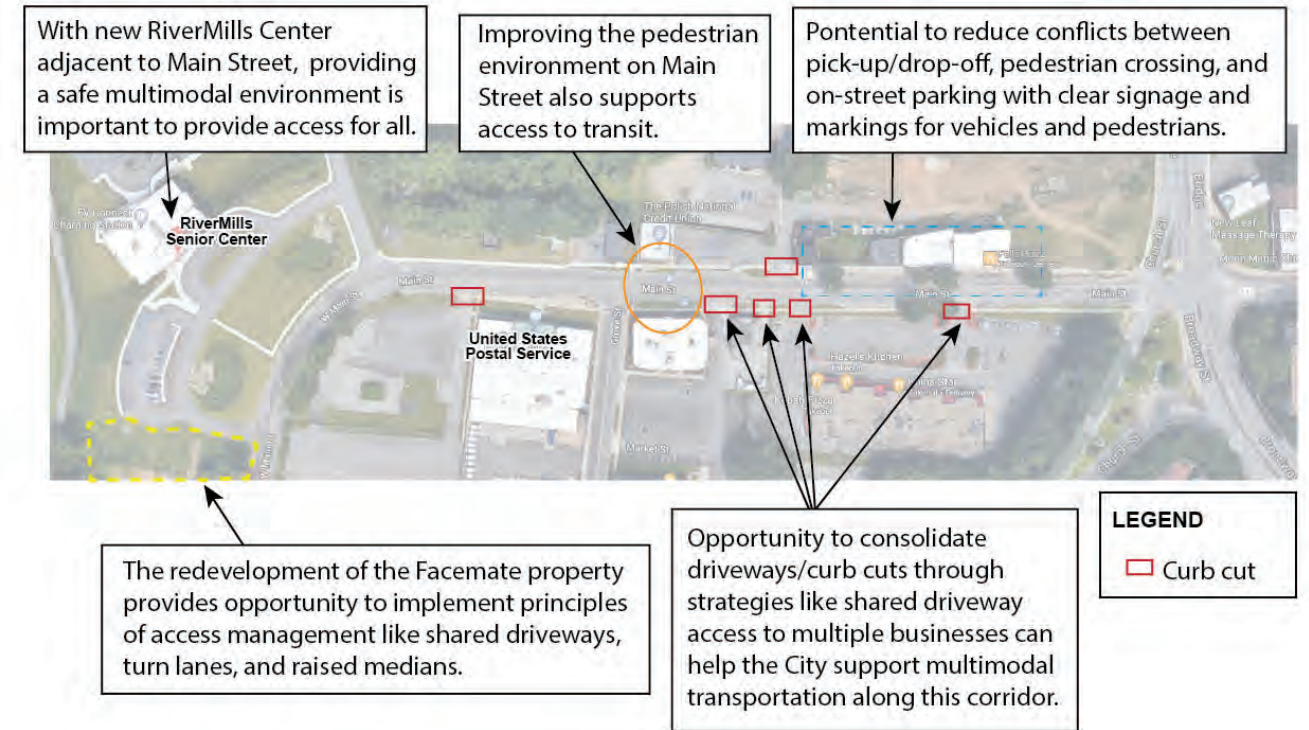


Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

Figure 9. Proposed roundabout design at the intersections of Montgomery Street, Granby Road, and McKinstry Avenue⁴.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

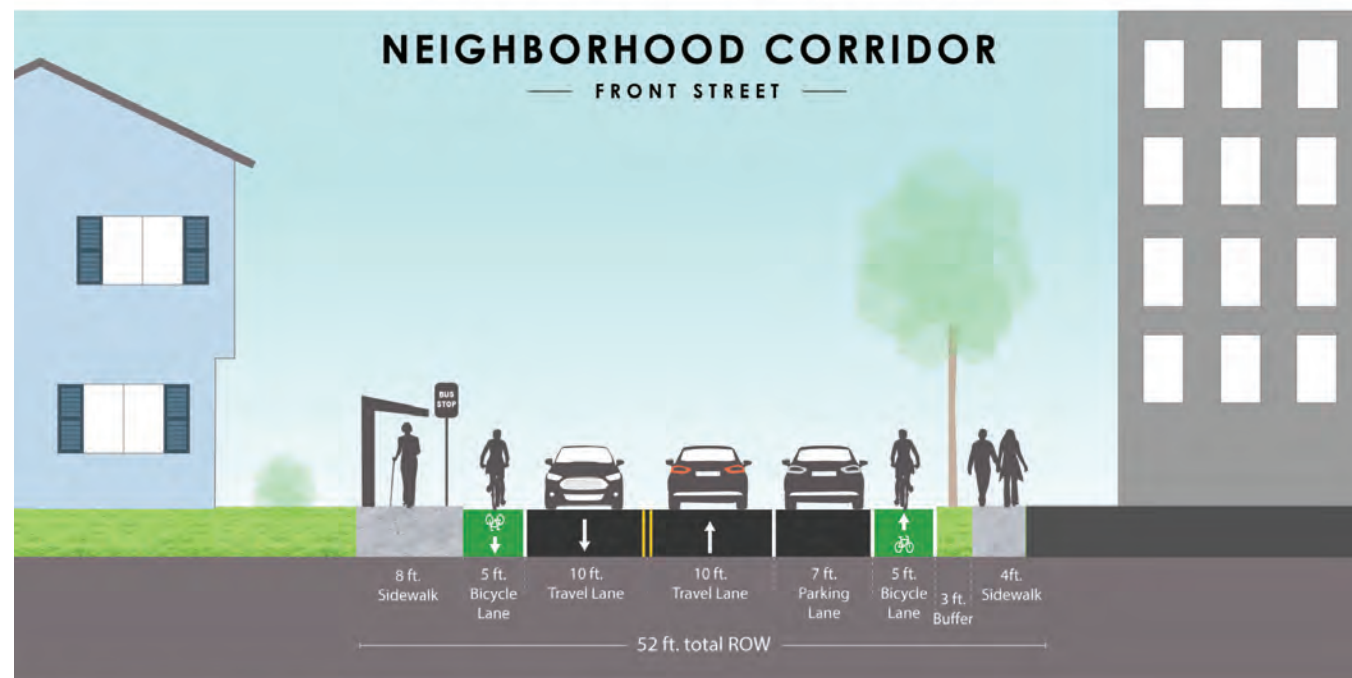
Getting it Done



- Develop and adopt a [Vision Zero](#) plan.
- Work with MassDOT or a consultant to complete Road Safety Audits (RSA) at the identified high crash locations.
- Support technological and sustainable solutions to anticipate impacts of autonomous

vehicles, both for private and shared use. This could include expanding electric vehicle charging stations at City facilities and private developments and supporting connected vehicle infrastructure, which would allow vehicles to communicate with signals to improve safety and circulation or enable dynamic curbside management.

Figure 10. Street Design Guidelines Example on Front Street.



Note: All measurements are approximate and require confirmation from a field review.

Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

PARKING

The parking supply in Chicopee’s neighborhoods does not optimally fit its demand. Chicopee Center and Chicopee Falls provide an oversupply of parking, while Aldenville and Willimansett have needs for general use public parking. Developing regulatory tools for the provision of parking, enforcement of management strategies, and planning for future technologies and curbside management will help to regulate the City’s parking supply and expand access to the curb for all users, including rising demand from technology based rideshare services and curb access needs for increasing e-commerce deliveries.



Getting it Done

- Identify a department responsible for parking enforcement and development enforcement guidelines, protocols, and a system to track enforcement.
- Complete a curbside inventory and parking utilization study in each neighborhood center to inform locations where paid public parking could be used to encourage turnover in downtown business areas to support

economic development.

- Review and revise the zoning code to ensure parking requirements help achieve goals for economic development and placemaking.
- Identify opportunities for shared parking between public and private owners.
- Improve wayfinding to/from parking lots in Chicopee Center to support a park and walk environment.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

With public transit service provided by PVRTA, Chicopee has a foundation upon which to build better connections for public transportation, including connections between buses and the ValleyBike Share and buses and rail service in neighboring communities. Existing barriers to public transit use in Chicopee are related to both service and infrastructure. Transit service barriers include infrequent headways (typically 20-30 minutes peak and 40-60 minutes off-peak) and that routes do not provide direct connections between where people are coming from and traveling to. Infrastructure barriers relate to the physical bus stop conditions,

Curb Space Productivity Index

A curb space productivity index is a metric that measures the number of people using the curb per hour. Calculating this metric in Chicopee based on curbside regulations can help guide policies to dynamically manage the curb to accommodate diverse users and technologies.

Figure 11. Curb space productivity index.

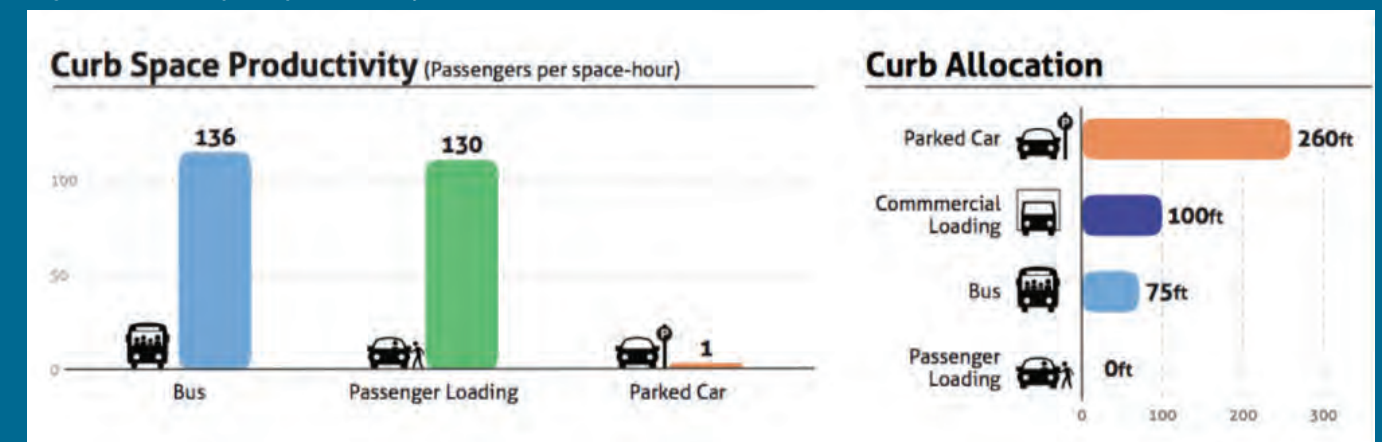


Photo Credit: Allison Wylie

which are typically only marked with a signpost, limiting visibility and pedestrian accessibility. These barriers not only limit the use of public transit on a local scale, but inhibit access to nearby regional rail service in Springfield and Holyoke. While the City must work with PVTA on improvements to transit service, and with PVPC on expanding access to and service of regional rail, the City does have an opportunity to improve bus stop accessibility and pedestrian connections between bus stops and destinations.

Getting it Done



- Advocate for regional bus stop design guidelines through PVTA.
- Study the potential for implementing a transit mobility hub in Chicopee Center or Chicopee Falls.
- Work with PVTA and PVPC to advocate for more frequent bus service to local destinations.
- Study the potential to implement on-demand microtransit.
- Work with PVTA to improve clarity of route

maps.

- Work with PVTA and major employers and schools to offer subsidized transit fare cards.
- Study the feasibility of implementing transit priority, such as exclusive bus lanes, queue jump lanes, and transit signal priority on transit corridors.

MULTIMODAL CITY-WIDE CONNECTIONS

Complete Streets is the notion that streets should be designed to prioritize safety, comfort, and access for all people who use them, including older adults, young children, people with disabilities, and people who cannot afford or do not have a car. Complete Streets provide opportunity for people to access activities that support daily life, recreation and entertainment, and other activities by ways other than driving. The more inviting an area can become, and generate more activity, the greater the investment. Complete Streets projects have demonstrated economic benefits through higher property values and increased business revenues.

What is a Mobility Hub?

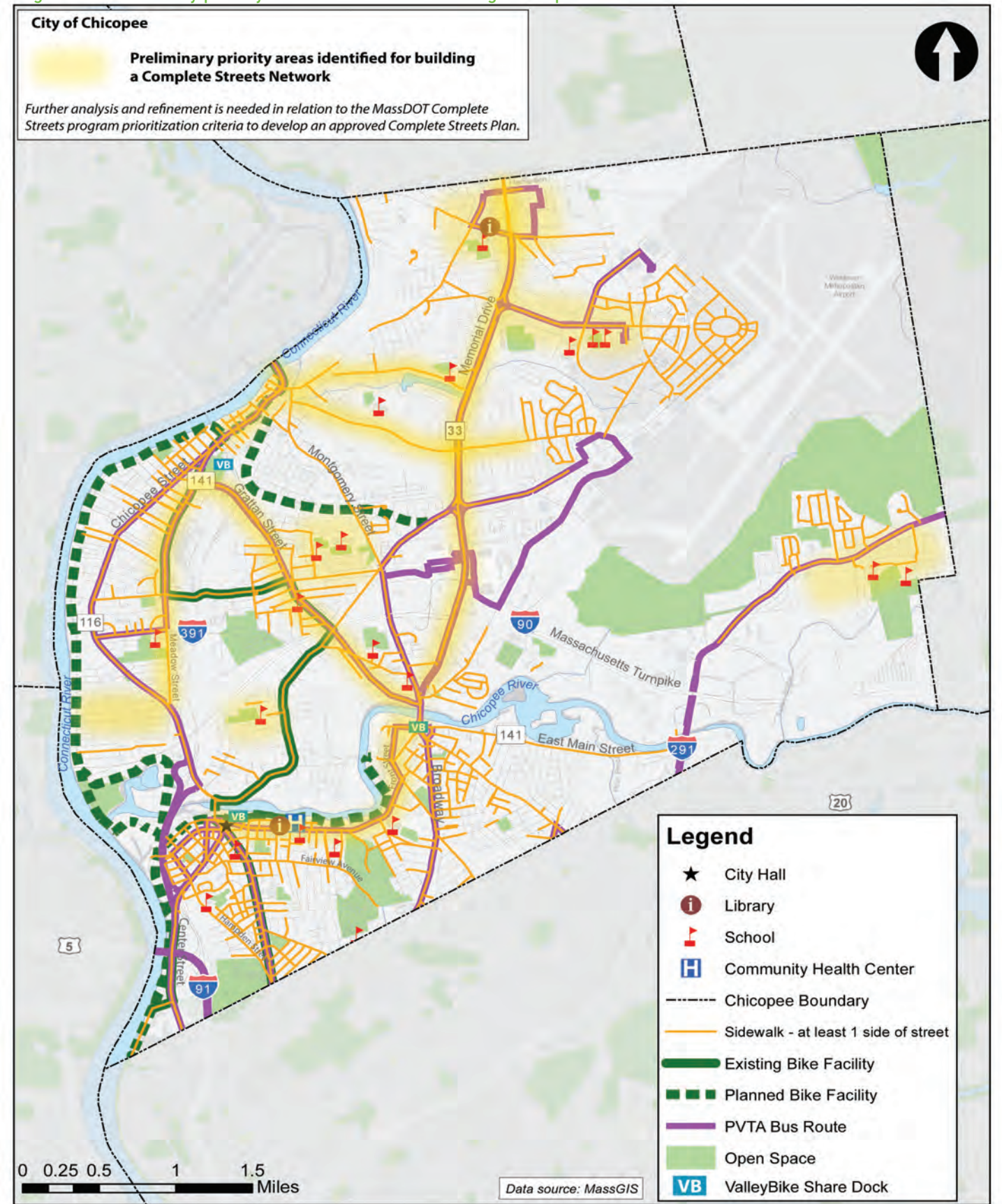
Mobility hubs are places where people can access services or amenities as they transfer between modes of transportation, such as transit, walking, bicycling, or driving. Mobility hubs are typically located where different bus routes converge, or a connection to another mode, offering a safe, secure waiting area, and serve areas with high average daily riders. The major features of a mobility hub are connectivity, safety and security, multimodal connections, and design and amenities. Likely locations for mobility hubs are downtowns or neighborhood centers, hospitals or medical buildings, shopping centers or malls, college campuses, and large business parks.

Figure 12. A Mobility Hub in South Portland, Maine provides a comfortable indoor waiting area and real time bus arrival information to make bus service more comfortable and easier to use.



Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

Figure 13. Preliminary priority areas identified for building a Complete Streets Network.



GATRA Microtransit Pilot Program

The Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) in Southeastern Massachusetts began operating a microtransit pilot program in 2019 to provide greater access and mobility options alongside their fixed route transit. GATRA partnered with TransLoc to offer a mobile app based system, also with a call in-number to a dispatcher, which can be used in a predetermined geo-fenced area. Operating a microtransit system in place of fixed route transit offers a cost-effective way to better meet rider demands by reducing vehicle size and trip time.

Figure 14. GATRA's On-demand Microtransit Vehicle.



Photo Credit: Wicked Local

Chicopee is currently registered with the [MassDOT Complete Streets Program](#), which provides funding to develop a prioritized list of projects that address traffic calming, walking, and biking improvements, as well as construction funding to implement projects. Projects are prioritized based on their ability to provide access to destinations such as schools, employment centers, and transit, improve safety and mobility for all populations, and create a connected network. Steps for participation in the program include:

1. Attending a free MassDOT Complete Streets training and developing and adopt

a Complete Streets policy consistent with MassDOT Complete Street requirements.

2. Developing and adopt a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. MassDOT provides up to \$38,000 in technical assistance funds to develop a plan. The plan will provide the City with a list of prioritized projects in order of need and community impact.
3. Applying for construction funding to implement prioritized projects. Municipalities may receive up to \$400,000 in funds from the program on a rolling four-fiscal-year basis (this means Chicopee could receive one full grant (\$400,000) or several smaller grants within any four-year-fiscal time-frame.)

Chicopee has many existing assets that set the foundation for a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, as seen in Figure 13. The City can build off resources including the existing sidewalk network, the Chicopee Canal & RiverWalk, Connecticut RiverWalk & Bikeway, existing and planned on-street bicycle lanes, transit routes, and ValleyBike stations, as well as local destinations such as schools, libraries, municipal buildings, community health centers, and open space to identify links that will create a connected network of multimodal facilities. These areas also serve as priorities for implementing rideshare infrastructure, such as consolidated and accessible drop-off pick up zones.

Getting it Done

- Develop and adopt a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and seek Massachusetts Complete Streets funding opportunities to implement the plan.
- Prioritize acceptance of additional roadways in Chicopee as part of the public right-of-way to increase available Chapter 90 funding through MassDOT.
- Pursue additional state and local funding sources to fund Complete Streets or other multimodal improvements.

REGIONAL ACCESS

Chicopee's proximity to regional highways is both an amenity and a challenge. Interstates 90, 291, and 391 provide quick and easy access to regional employment centers, retail, recreation, and entertainment, but also bisect the City both east-west and north-south, creating barriers in the local transportation network. Strengthening connections to Springfield and Holyoke provides opportunities for greater regional transit connections.

Getting it Done

- Develop a unique branding effort to promote Chicopee as both a local and regional destination.
- Work with PVRTA to evaluate bus service hours and schedules to improve services to regional rail.
- Work with PVPC and nearby communities to advocate for expanded access to passenger rail.

Repurposing the Depot Street and I-391 Overpass

The existing overpass at Depot Street and I-391 in Chicopee Center is underutilized space. Thinking creatively, the City can repurpose these spaces for public art and programming, as seen in the "Ink Block" area of Boston where the I-93 underpass houses murals and activities like yoga as part of an "urban playground."

Figure 15. Existing overpass at Depot Street and 1-391 in Chicopee (bottom) and public programming under the I-93 overpass in Boston (top right).



SPOTLIGHT ON: Memorial Drive

Memorial Drive houses many important retail destinations in Chicopee, but access is mainly provided for personal vehicles. The PVRTA service runs on Memorial Drive, but improvements are needed to make it a safe and comfortable destination for transit riders. Additionally, residential neighborhoods abut Memorial Drive, but connectivity between them and commercial areas is limited. There is a need to balance local and regional traffic on Memorial Drive. While it is an important destination for Chicopee residents, it is also home to businesses that attract traffic. Improving circulation and connectivity between properties can help improve traffic flow on Memorial Drive itself. Expanding connections to residential neighborhoods and multimodal options, such as bus transit, also provides the opportunity to reduce traffic.

GETTING IT DONE

- Work with PVRTA to develop bus stop design guidelines to improve stop level facilities and improve connectivity between bus stops and destinations on Memorial Drive (see **Public Transportation: Getting it Done**).
- Identify potential locations for informal paths between residential neighborhoods and Memorial Drive and conduct feasibility studies for designing or establishing off-road multiuse paths (consider land ownership, environmental conditions, etc.) (see **Biking: Getting it Done**).
- Review and revise the zoning code to require inter-site connectivity, reduced parking, drop-off/pick-up zones, connections to transit, and other multimodal infrastructure such as bike parking and sidewalks (see **Neighborhood Corridors: Getting it Done**).
- Pursue opportunities to improve rotaries on Memorial Drive and enhance the character of the area by requesting an RSA from MassDOT as rotaries are within State right-of-way. Coordinate with South Hadley as relevant (See **Safety: Getting it Done**).

Figure 16: Lack of vehicular access between properties necessitates indirect travel patterns on Memorial Drive, which can lead to increased congestion and delay.



Photo Credit: McMahon Associates, Inc.

Endnotes

1. City GIS data, as referenced in Baseline Report.
2. 2020 ADT of 7,528 ([https://mhd.public.ms2soft.com/tcds/tsearch.asp?loc=Mhd&mod=30 mph](https://mhd.public.ms2soft.com/tcds/tsearch.asp?loc=Mhd&mod=30%20mph)) and posted speed limit of 30 mph.
3. <http://chicopeema.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=446&ARC=703>
4. <https://perfectfitparking.mapc.org/>
5. <https://ridewithvia.com/>
6. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-90-apportionment>

Figure 1. Chicopee Mural.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee.

CHAPTER 4: THRIVING TOGETHER

Ensuring Chicopee's residents have equitable access to economic opportunity and Chicopee's businesses operate in a climate that allows them to thrive and support the community.

INTRODUCTION

Chicopee residents love that their tight-knit community offers great value as an affordable and family-friendly place to live with easy access to daily needs and job opportunities. The City itself is home to businesses across a variety of industry sectors, which not only provide job opportunities to residents, but also make up Chicopee's commercial tax base and support its fiscal health. Living up to the motto on its City Seal, *industriarum variae*, or "various industries," Chicopee's diverse and competitive local economy makes the city an attractive place for employers and residents alike.

Vision for Thriving Together

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will focus on sustaining a diverse local economy that offers meaningful employment opportunities and a path to prosperity for all.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the **Economic Development** section of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

In addition to this overall vision, Chicopee will aim to make all economic development decisions with the following values in mind:

- Make sure economic development decisions are focused on people first – use public funds for the public good.
- Build a transparent, consistent, and efficient business climate so that outcomes can be measurable and there can be accountability for outcomes.
- Create an environment where entrepreneurs of all backgrounds are supported and encouraged.
- Invest in our downtown and neighborhood centers to bring new jobs and a variety of housing, improve quality of life, and avoid displacement.
- Provide opportunities for a strong and diverse work force with a variety of career training for all ages that can help people adapt to changes in the job market.
- Ensure a vibrant economy supports public health and wellbeing, and that a healthy population enhances our economic competitiveness.
- Build a green, sustainable economy that preserves and restores our natural environment, improves the resiliency and carbon footprints of our buildings and infrastructure, and supports green businesses and jobs.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Attracting more “things to do,” including dining, shopping, recreation, arts, and entertainment.
- Refreshing or redeveloping distressed and blighted properties, including large mills.
- Filling vacant, neighborhood storefronts with businesses.
- Attracting grocery stores to and/or enhancing healthy food access in underserved neighborhoods.
- Offering dining and recreational opportunities along the riverfronts.
- Balancing new development in some parts of the city with conservation efforts in others.
- Ensuring that economic growth occurs in a way that supports the health of the economy, the environment, and the public.
- Expanding support and troubleshooting for entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- Providing job opportunities for people of all education and skill levels.
- Ensuring the workforce is prepared to meet the labor needs of businesses.
- Introducing new housing options, including market-rate and affordable units.
- Ensuring adequate transportation access between neighborhoods and job opportunities.
- Limiting future increases to property taxes.

THE FUTURE OF OUR ECONOMY

While many aspects of our lives could return to a feeling of normalcy in the years immediately following the pandemic, COVID-19 catalyzed and magnified emerging economic problems in a way that will have far-reaching effects. Chicopee can use these lessons to prepare for the future.

The pervasive impacts of COVID-19 have impacted Chicopee residents and businesses as they have communities around the world. Industries reliant on in-person contact have been especially hard hit, including entertainment, recreation, hotels, restaurants, and retail, which are now beginning to recover, a full year after social distancing protocols were first introduced. Meanwhile, other industries like e-commerce, warehousing and distribution, and building supplies have seen surges in demand. The economy is experiencing ongoing supply chain disruptions, demand spikes, and labor shortages, as we work our way toward the “new normal.” This will continue to have implications for Chicopee’s local economy and real estate market and require our community to adapt to the post-COVID reality.

Residential: The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated the challenge of affording a home. The crisis has caused many to miss rent and mortgage payments, prompted buyers and sellers to postpone their efforts, and has put a pause on new construction. At the same time, high housing demand driven by low mortgage rates, interest rates, and constrained supply have contributed to higher home prices in Chicopee’s neighborhoods.

While Chicopee remains relatively affordable compared to other locations, attainable housing for the City’s workforce and first-time homebuyers is an increasing concern.

Remember, there is a difference between subsidized affordable housing and housing that is generally affordable – both are important for

Chicopee’s economy! *For more on this topic and the relationship between housing and the economy, please see the **Making a Home** chapter.*

Commercial Office: With a shift to remote working in an already sluggish office market, commercial office space is one of the hardest hit markets of the pandemic. With many employers offering opportunities to continue working from home fully or partially, it is anticipated that overall office demand will not return to pre-pandemic levels. The most competitive office space will be high-quality space in amenity-rich locations that give workers a reason to go into the office. Coworking space and other spaces for short-term office use will also serve a growing need.

Enhancing the quality of place in Chicopee’s commercial centers will be instrumental in providing the type of environment that office users are seeking.

An example of a nearby community offering a competitive location for office tenants is downtown Northampton, with its multitude of food and recreational options that create a vibrant locale for office workers.

Industrial Space: Industrial space was a strong market going into the pandemic, and it remains so with the increased need for warehouse and distribution space due to the continued growth of e-commerce. Chicopee’s prime location in central New England, at the juncture of major highways (I-90, I-91, I-291, and I-391), and with access to air freight capacity at Westover Metropolitan Airport, means it is well situated to take advantage of this demand if sizable sites can be made available. As a largely built-out community, Chicopee’s inventory of undeveloped large, flat sites with nearby highway access is limited. Identifying vacant or underutilized 20+ acre sites that can be developed or redeveloped for industrial use will be critical. Once identified, such sites should be made “shovel-ready,” meaning that they are ready for immediate development in anticipation of interest by investors. This

Figure 2: Al's Diner is a historic restaurant in Chicopee that was added to the National Register of Historic Places.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

means that they are zoned appropriately, are served by roads and all utilities, have been environmentally remediated (if needed), and are being actively marketed.

Retail, Restaurants, Recreation, and Entertainment: With occupancy restrictions and prohibitions, the retail and restaurant real estate market has been particularly impacted during the pandemic. Some Chicopee-based restaurants and retailers have not survived the pandemic, resulting in increased vacancies of these types of spaces in the City. As consumer demand recovers and restrictions are relaxed, Chicopee residents will return to their favorite businesses. In particular, residents have expressed a desire for more recreational venues, full-service restaurants, specialty food stores, movie theaters, bookstores, clothing stores, and boutique retailers. A bright spot of the pandemic has been the expansion of outdoor dining options in the City and retaining and further expanding these offerings can help support efforts to increase vibrancy in key commercial areas.

Lodging: The COVID crisis dealt the lodging industry a crushing blow, with demand for ho-

tel rooms virtually disappearing and only now beginning to recover. Many businesses have realized that they can make do with fewer business trips, and as a result, demand for business travel is expected to remain below pre-pandemic levels for the foreseeable future. Hotels in Chicopee tend to rely on business travelers, including those associated with the military, more so than leisure visitors, and therefore will need to adapt to this changing market.

These shifting market trends present difficulties for types of spaces that were already experiencing challenges before the pandemic (particularly office and retail), while offering opportunities to repurpose vacant and underutilized spaces for uses that are in high demand, including affordable housing and industrial space.

Lessened demand for both office and retail space was a trend well underway in the decade leading up to COVID-19. In the case of office space, tenants were providing less square footage per employee in an effort to better optimize space usage, encourage employee collaboration, and save on leasing costs. Moreover, the availability of talent became increasingly

critical in office siting decisions, with locations offering access to highly skilled workers (whose own decisions on where to live were increasingly driven by access to cultural and recreational amenities) seeing higher office space demand and commanding premiums over other areas with a weaker talent pool.

Meanwhile, demand for retail space was experiencing a fundamental shift from goods to services, as ecommerce continued to gain market share. Consumers became increasingly interested in “experiential” retail, which was as much about the shopping experience as it was about the purchases themselves. Dining, entertainment, and recreational venues increasingly drove retail space demand, and customers wanted unique, high-quality places to frequent.

As a result of these trends, both the office and retail space markets exhibited a “flight to quality,” both at the building and district level. Lower-quality space and isolated, single-use districts saw heightened vacancy levels as tenants sought out modern and sustainably designed buildings in mixed-use, walkable areas with amenities like access to transit and green-space.

Flexibility in zoning will be key in ensuring Chicopee’s real estate can be reused efficiently and adapt to these trends that the pandemic has only further accelerated.

Investment in well-designed, easily accessible, mixed-use districts to create and nurture interesting destinations for workers, consumers, and residents alike will be instrumental in the long-term viability and competitiveness of commercial space in the City.

ENGINES OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Like a natural ecosystem, an economy requires a diverse set of activities to remain resilient and healthy. An important piece of support for this diversity is the ability to attract and retain

businesses in Chicopee’s key commercial areas and throughout the City. Input from business owners shows that Chicopee is well regarded as a business-friendly community, with leadership and residents generally supportive of development that positively contributes to the city’s economy and quality of life. Chicopee’s main engines of economic activity include Westover Air Reserve Base and the business parks that surround it, the Memorial Drive commercial corridor, Chicopee Center, Chicopee’s other neighborhoods, and the future economic prospects of Brownfields properties.

WESTOVER AIR RESOURCE BASE/ METROPOLITAN AIRPORT

Westover Air Reserve Base/Metropolitan Airport is a joint-use military-civilian facility. The military facility serves the United States Air Force Reserve Command’s 439th Airlift Wing, and the civilian facility serves the general aviation needs of Western Massachusetts. Its strategic location in close flying proximity to Boston, Albany, Hartford, and New York City makes it a favorable alternative to more congested airports. While the airport experiences a significant amount of recreational flying and military operations, a considerable portion of

Figure 3: Westover Air Reserve Base.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

the airport’s general aviation traffic is related to corporate business aircraft, sports teams and other charters, and the Massachusetts State Police Wing operations. Expanded commercial flights to and from Westover could further bolster local economic activity. A number of aviation service businesses exist in close proximity to the airport, supporting its operations. The airport was recently approved for 24-hour operations, expanding its ability to serve users. UMass-Amherst, in conjunction with an aviation industry partner, has established a new Aviation Research and Training Center at the airport where they will conduct advanced aeronautical research and provide training for air traffic controllers, pilots, and other aviation professionals. The City benefits from Westover through tax revenues, employment, Westover’s capital projects spending, airport operations, visitor spending, and more. An [economic impact summary](#) was released in 2015.

BUSINESS PARKS

Chicopee’s business parks are home to a large share of the city’s industrial and office space for

businesses across many industries. The Airpark business parks adjacent to Westover Airport as well as Chicopee River Business Park on East Main Street offer buildings and sites to companies interested in locating in Chicopee. They are a key driver of economic activity and are the home of many of the city’s manufacturing, logistics, and other industrial businesses. Most of the Airpark sites are fully developed, with relatively low vacancies. The availability of “shovel-ready” sites that business parks offer appeals to businesses that want to minimize the time spent between finding a site and being operational. However, the low availability of vacant, quality space in existing industrial buildings and the dwindling supply of sites in these business parks has presented challenges for attracting large space users to the city. Efforts are underway by business park operators, including Westover Metropolitan Development Corporation and Westmass Area Development Corporation, to expand offerings.

Westover Metropolitan Development Corporation is a quasi-public development corporation created in 1974 to convert former

military property at Westover Air Force Base to civilian use. The corporation has acquired over 1,300 acres and has developed them into 4 industrial parks in Chicopee and neighboring Ludlow, as well as the civilian airport. Today, the corporation manages day-to-day operations of the Westover Metropolitan Airport, the maintenance of 4 industrial parks, and the continuing development of commercial and industrial real estate at each of the parks.

The mission of Westmass Area Development Corporation (Westmass) is to promote, stimulate, develop, and advance the business prosperity and economic welfare of the western Massachusetts region. Created by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1960 as a not-for-profit economic and real estate development firm, Westmass shapes and manages large-scale development projects, prepares district development strategies, and develops financing and incentive packages. Chicopee River Business Park is part of its portfolio of development projects.

Chicopee’s three business parks—Airpark North, Airpark West, and Chicopee River Business Park—collectively are home to about 36 business tenants who employ an estimated 2,300 workers, representing 10% of all jobs in the city. The business parks generate about \$3.8 million in real and personal property taxes annually, about 4% of the city’s total levy. In total, industrial properties city-wide generate about 10% of the tax levy, compared to 17% for commercial property, 11% for personal property, and 62% for residential property. Supporting business expansion and attraction helps to further grow Chicopee’s industrial and commercial tax base and shifts the tax burden away from residents.

MEMORIAL DRIVE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

Memorial Drive, accessible directly off the Mass Turnpike, is Chicopee’s largest commercial corridor with an assortment of national retail, restaurant, and hotel chains. It is also home to most of the City’s full-scale grocery stores.

See more on grocery stores in the “Food Access” section at the end of this chapter and in the [Promoting Health & Wellness](#) chapter.

Memorial Drive is one of the largest employment centers in the city and serves the shopping and dining needs of residents from throughout Chicopee, as well as attracting customers from surrounding communities. The commercial businesses here perform well and there are few vacancies, and residents appreciate the ability to take care of almost all their daily needs locally, as long as they own a car. However, residents have expressed a desire for a more pedestrian-friendly environment as well as aesthetic and safety improvements that enhance the appearance of the corridor and make it more unique to Chicopee. *For more on this topic, see the [Getting Around](#) chapter.*

CHICOPEE CENTER

Downtown areas play a unique role in any local economy. In these areas, employment and property taxes generated “per acre” can be much higher than other commercial or industrial places because economic activity is so concentrated. When infused with arts and culture, a vibrant downtown can attract people from outside the area, generating new revenues and “word-of-mouth” marketing for the neighborhood. Many downtowns that have been hit with economic challenges start a renaissance with events linked to food such as a weekly farmers market, restaurant week, or a food festival. Events such as the Downtown GetDown and the Fest-Of-All have been a big part of Chicopee’s success in recent years, highlighting what makes Chicopee unique like its multigenerational roots. These sporadic events can often spin off into more regular events or even vendors moving into vacant storefronts. This increase in activity can spur additional reinvestment such as employers investing in redevelopment, creating a network of people to participate in the downtown economy. Chicopee’s residents have pointed towards a desire to increase this activity in Chicopee Center, making it a place where businesses want to locate, and residents want to spend time. Ensuring

Figure 4: Chicopee River Business Park.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

adequate parking and access through alternative transportation will help commerce in Chicopee Center to thrive. *For more on this topic, see the Coming Together and Getting Around chapters.*

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Safe and accessible neighborhood centers are critical to the quality of life for residents, important local economic development drivers, and a draw for new residents moving to the city. Access to a variety of transportation options, opportunities to meet basic, everyday needs through convenience and grocery stores and pharmacies, active opportunities to be involved in civic life, and opportunities for children to play and greenspace for relaxation and recreation is a critical component to economic vibrancy. Chicopee’s residents noted that neighborhood-specific identities are strong, and that people feel connected to the neighborhoods in which they live. Residents also pointed towards the fact that most neighborhoods lack walkable grocery, restaurant, and retail options that would improve the vibrancy of these communities. Neighborhood centers can help fill these economic needs. *For more on this topic, see the Coming Together chapter.*

MAINTAINING TODAY’S COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Chicopee’s commercial building stock (like its housing stock) is old – particularly within the traditional neighborhood centers, but even among the “newer” post-war commercial buildings along Memorial Drive and near the highway interchanges. While these older buildings add to the character and charm of Chicopee’s neighborhood centers, they can also be expensive to maintain and update for modern uses. These buildings must be in good condition and updated to be more energy efficient and meet contemporary needs if they are going to be attractive options for future businesses. Hundreds of buildings in Chicopee would benefit from full energy retrofits, including insulating the entire building, sealing off air

leaks, and installing more sophisticated HVAC systems — ideally powered by renewable energy sources. These needs are very similar to those discussed for housing in the “Making a Home” chapter, and the City needs similar tools to help commercial building owners reinvest in their properties, since this is very expensive. Repairs and upgrades may trigger additional code requirements, such as installing sprinkler systems, that are prohibitively expensive and simply do not make financial sense without additional assistance or incentives. Consequently, many commercial buildings are being neglected and falling into disrepair rather than being renovated or reused. Conversions of small to mid-sized commercial buildings to mixed-use with residential above commercial (a use the community wants to see more of) can be especially difficult to finance.

There are many existing programs at the local, state, and federal level to help homeowners maintain and improve their homes, but far fewer for owners of commercial buildings. MassDevelopment is an excellent resource and has several programs the City can promote to local property owners. It is also important to develop relationships with local banks who may be able to provide gap financing for such projects. Finally, because of the greater number of resources available for housing, there may be more success in commercial renovations when paired with residential mixed use.

BROWNFIELDS REDEVELOPMENT

Chicopee’s building stock reflects its rich industrial past, which means it has a large inventory of mill buildings, former factories, and other Brownfield sites that have fallen into disuse and disrepair over the decades. The large footprints of these buildings, potential environmental contamination, and lack of upkeep makes them challenging to rehabilitate or redevelop for modern uses. Chicopee has been successful in working toward repurposing these sites in recent years, by acquiring sites and receiving multiple grants for assessment and cleanup. The former Facemate property along Main Street in

Figure 5: Lyman Mills.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Chicopee Falls has been redeveloped into the RiverMills Senior Center and RiverMills Assisted Living facility. Other success stories include the WWLP Studios on Chicopee Street in Sandy Hill, the Ames Privilege apartments and commercial spaces in Chicopee Center, the Willimansett Registry of Motor Vehicles branch, and the new Center Place park in Chicopee Center. The city has also made great strides in cleaning up the former Uniroyal property in Chicopee Falls, readying it for redevelopment by the private sector. In addition, residential conversion projects are underway in Chicopee Center at the former Cabotville Mills and the Lyman Mills (Dwight Manufacturing). While these projects can be expensive, time consuming, and tedious, the ultimate value and return to the city is tremendous and well worth the effort.

GETTING IT DONE

Chicopee will advance the efforts of different real estate types to diversify the economy and drive desirable growth, while striking a balance with conservation of greenspace and preservation of community character

- Continue tax-abatement programs and other financial incentives for rehabilitating commercial and industrial properties, including Brownfield sites. Prioritize key geographic areas for these programs, including Chicopee Falls, Willimansett, and Chicopee Center. Hold developers accountable for following through on development agreements.
- Apply for redevelopment project funding for key properties through MassDevelopment programs, such as the Underutilized Properties Program.
- Identify specific sites for redevelopment and work to facilitate their redevelopment by partnering with property owners, real estate brokers, developers, economic development organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Promote development opportunities in Chicopee’s designated Federal Opportunity Zone located in Chicopee Falls.
- Actively solicit developers for specific projects that have been vetted with the public through proactive and transparent



Figure 6: Uniroyal Site.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

community engagement.

- Work with commercial property owners to modernize existing commercial spaces through façade programs, revolving loan funds, etc.
- List and keep up to date developable space and buildable sites on site selection websites, including [Western Mass EDC](#), [Mass Econ](#), [Westover Metropolitan Development Corporation \(WMDC\)](#), and [WestMass Area Development Corporation](#).
- Examine and modify zoning to promote flexible development in Chicopee Center, other neighborhood centers, along Memorial Drive, and in the Westover business Parks. Also, conduct overall zoning reform with an eye to making the zoning ordinances easier and more consistent to understand and enforce.
- Streamline the permitting and approvals process for development projects.
- Explore the benefits of passing the Community Preservation Act locally (or

seeking other options for raising funds, such as requesting permission from the Massachusetts Legislature to establish a real estate transfer fee), and the potential for using funds to start a grant or revolving loan program to help owners reinvest in their properties. *See similar recommendation under the [Coming Together and Making a Home](#) chapters.*

- Consolidate and regularly update a list of federal, state, and local services and resources as well as local bank services available to help Chicopee property owners maintain and improve their commercial properties or convert them to residential mixed-use, and actively promote these resources to property owners.
- Conduct a District Improvement Financing (DIF) feasibility study to project how much DIF revenue could potentially be raised in certain districts over a certain time horizon and how that compares to needed and planned public improvement.
- Prepare and implement Urban Renewal

Plans for blighted sites that are privately owned and would not otherwise be redeveloped without private involvement.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A thriving environment for entrepreneurship helps improve the standards of living and creates wealth within a community. Entrepreneurs develop innovative products and ways to deliver services based on the markets around them. They create new businesses that employ people and accelerate economic growth by creating new products and services. Entrepreneurs see a need where others do not, thus it drives social change and product and service innovations. Additionally, their impact is accelerated when their forces combine - motivating each other and creating networks for idea and inspiration exchange and partnerships.

What do entrepreneurs need to thrive in Chicopee? From the City, it is important for entrepreneurs to feel welcome and valued. One of the clearest ways to send this message is to make the process of opening a small business clear and easy to navigate. Support services and training to enable thoughtful and accurate business planning, marketing, website development, and online presence, etc. can help those with solid business ideas grow into successful enterprises. And ways to increase the enterprise skillset via effective communication, accessing capital, money management, leadership, etc. can further boost their effectiveness. These are things the City can invest in itself or partner and connect with other local providers on.

Chicopee's community of entrepreneurs is evident in successful small business startups taking place in Chicopee Center, including Goodworks Coffee House, Lids Live Well, Dâmes Beautique, and Yaad Food Bar & Grill, as well as the long-standing success of businesses such as Munich Haus, Collegian Court, Red Fez, and others. Other examples of entrepreneurial businesses throughout the City include Sabor Latino, Magri's, Millie's Pierogi, and Renee B's, to name

just a few. In public engagement sessions, citizens reflected on a need to encourage new business and specifically are interested in more restaurants, recreation opportunities, movie theatres, bookstores, clothing stores, coffee shops, and specialty food stores.

GETTING IT DONE



- Actively support entrepreneurs and their efforts to create meaningful employment opportunities in the city.
- Understand the services that currently exist for Chicopee's entrepreneurs, which services are used, and the effectiveness of said resources.
- Develop a list of entrepreneurial businesses as part of a broader Business Retention & Expansion program and routinely check in with business owners to understand and address their concerns about doing business in Chicopee.
- Create a landing page on the City's webpage that links entrepreneurs to resources, celebrates successful entrepreneurs in the community, and has contact information for pertinent City staff who can help answer questions about licensing & permitting, zoning, parking, event management, and the like.
- Ensure the availability of affordable commercial spaces, co-working spaces, and flex spaces for entrepreneurs to launch their businesses.
- Create or partner with an existing entrepreneurial mentorship program that connects successful business owners with new entrepreneurs, such as Valley Venture Mentors.
- Work to attract businesses that Chicopee residents currently leave the city to patronize and those that the economy has the potential to support.
- Designate an existing or hire a new City employee dedicated to serving as the main point of contact for existing and new

business owners, walking them through permitting processes and connecting them to local, regional, and national resources.

- Develop a streamlined city permitting process for events.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring that Chicopee’s residents have access to meaningful employment opportunities paves the way for professional growth and economic prosperity for everyone. At the same time, workforce availability is increasingly cited as the number one factor needed to support economic development within a community. The more skilled and trained a workforce is, the larger the number of job opportunities, the higher the wages, and the greater the ability to draw a variety of employers to the area. This “virtuous cycle” means residents have a wide array of jobs to choose from and can succeed in a career path that aligns with their skills and pays

a living wage. The composition of the current workforce is illustrated through the percentage of those who participate in the workforce, the types of jobs they have, their education level, and the types of jobs that remained unfilled in the community.

Chicopee’s current workforce is concentrated in the industries of manufacturing, health care, retail, and food services. Businesses have struggled with finding employees with the right skills for the jobs that exist. Chicopee’s manufacturers in particular feel burdened to train high school graduates that are entering the workforce without the reading and math skills needed to be successful at their work. With a relatively low percentage of adults participating in the labor force and a high commute rate there is an opportunity to increase Chicopee’s workforce in numbers and bring jobs to the city. This in turn will help to keep younger generations involved in the oldest businesses in Chicopee. Just under 19% of Chicopee’s residents possess a four-year college degree. A higher portion of residents are high school graduates (35.4%)

or have completed some college or obtained an Associate’s degree (31.9%). Therefore, strategies should focus on increasing the skillsets of those without a college degree.

Chicopee has a relatively high proportion of working age residents with disabilities, and they are statistically less likely to be in the workforce than their peers elsewhere in Massachusetts. Investments in workforce training for disabled adults will therefore likely have an especially positive impact in Chicopee.

The MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board continues to be an important partner in implementing initiatives to train and enhance the employability of the region’s workforce, particularly in nursing and advanced manufacturing. Elms College, Chicopee’s only higher education institution, plays an important role in producing graduates in a variety of fields that can go on to work at the businesses throughout the city. The Westover Job Corps Center offers education and training to young adults at no cost, preparing them for careers in fast-growing industries. Chicopee Comprehensive High School offers a broad array of vocational programs, such as Machine Tool Technology, Metal Fabrication, Automotive Technology, and Drafting.

evolving worker training needs and connect workers to employees.

- Identify partners to engage in this effort including trade schools, alternative learning institutions, major employers, the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce, and other service organizations.
- Facilitate a regular convening of those involved in workforce development to identify service gaps, celebrate successes, and create collaborative efforts.
- Work with government partners such as the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and nonprofit partners such as Work Without Limits to connect disabled youth and adults with career and job training opportunities.
- Review vocational programs offered at Chicopee Comprehensive High School and determine if any additional programs could be offered to meet regional job demands. In particular, analyze jobs within City government for which it has been difficult to recruit and retain younger employees.
- Develop stronger partnership with Elms College and other nearby educational institutions, such as American International College, Springfield College, Holyoke Community College, and Western New England University, to provide adult training for in-demand jobs.

Figure 7: Chicopee Labor Force.

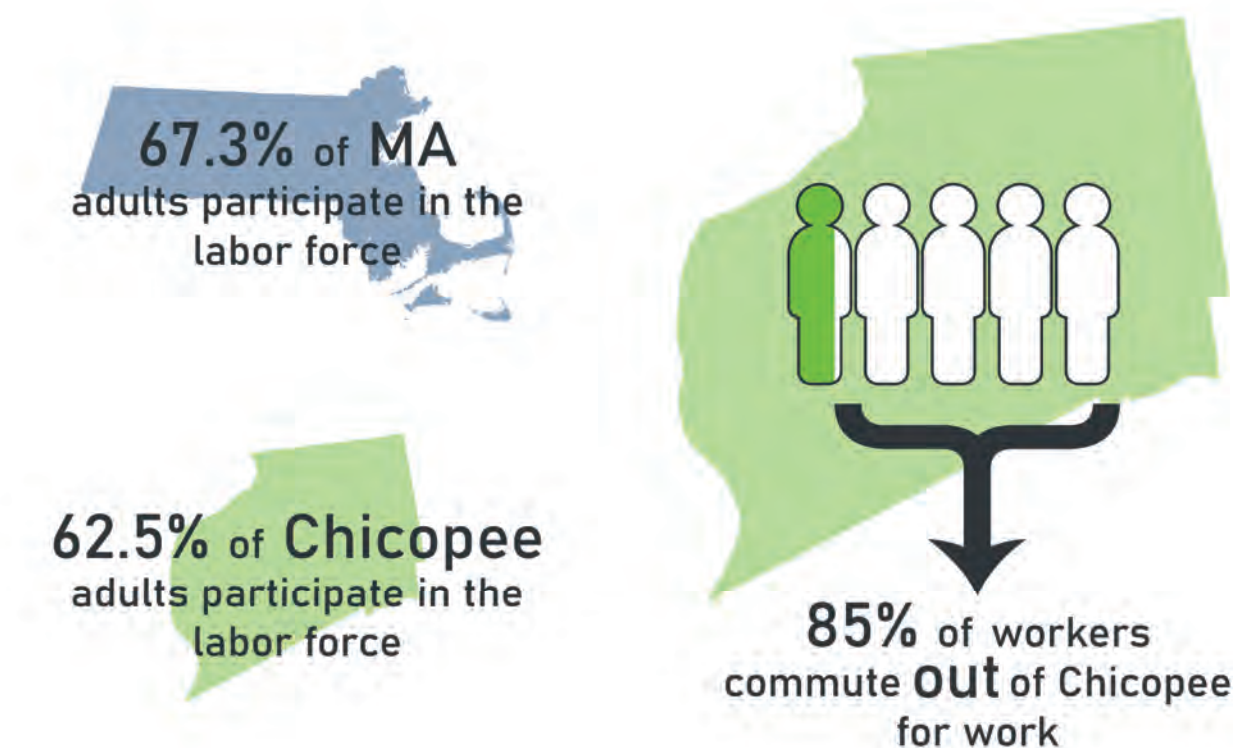


Photo Credit: Horsley Witten Group

GETTING IT DONE

Chicopee will facilitate the growth of its workforce to align employer needs with training opportunities.

- Partner with other communities in the Pioneer Valley to implement the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint, a regional planning initiative of the Massachusetts Workforce Skills Cabinet and align local workforce and economic development efforts with resources at the regional and state level.
- Act as a liaison and host forums between local employers, the Chicopee public school system, MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, trade schools, alternative learning institutions, and others to identify

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Economic development initiatives in Chicopee need to be coordinated by a full-time staff person and guided by an advisory organization. While complementary to community development and planning departments, by delegating economic development initiatives to staff

members that already have full-time positions, these efforts can often be put on the back burner. Delegating these initiatives to peripheral departments also demonstrates a lack of commitment to economic development to prospective businesses.

Critical to increasing economic activity in Chicopee is having City support. Who are the go-to people, what are the major programs and initiatives, and how are these programs being marketed throughout the area? What this requires is having a dedicated body or staff person who can maintain up-to-date information on programs while serving as the go-to lead on economic development initiatives.

A committee comprised of a diverse set of community members representing various interests helps understand the balance of impacts a particular project can have uplifting and magnifying positive impacts and mitigating potential negative impacts. In addition, strong City leadership will be important to prioritize and push initiatives forward. General education on how economic development can increase the prosperity in a community can go leaps and bounds when it comes to moving initiatives forward.

At present Chicopee does not have a committee or a staff person directly responsible for economic development. The City should identify the economic development tasks currently being completed or assigned to various departments, identify new tasks to be completed, and develop a plan for hiring an economic staff person and assembling an advisory body. Key action items to be carried out by economic development staff and advised upon by a citizens' committee include business retention and expansion efforts, industry attraction and site marketing, redevelopment of strategic districts and parcels, acting as a resource to the entrepreneurial community, and acting as a liaison for workforce development efforts.

CHICOPEE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

In Massachusetts, municipalities are able to

form Redevelopment Authorities, which are agencies authorized to undertake a range of public actions to revitalize disinvested neighborhoods and redevelop underutilized areas to encourage economic development, grow the local tax base, and create jobs. A Redevelopment Authority works to prepare and implement detailed Urban Renewal Plans that lay out a course of action for revitalizing districts. In addition to planning, it has the ability to acquire real estate through eminent domain, demolish and rehabilitate structures, undertake environmental remediation, issue bonds, and receive grants and loans, among other powers. Urban Renewal Plans can make it easier for a municipality to obtain state or federal funding and can be instrumental in signaling to the private sector the community's goals and desires for a given area. The authority is a separate entity from the City. The Chicopee Redevelopment Authority was dissolved in 2001 and could potentially be reestablished to offer a mechanism for implementing many economic development action items related to district revitalization. Staff leadership, likely in the form of an economic development director, would be needed to direct the initiatives of the authority.

GETTING IT DONE



- Hire an Economic Development Director.
- Form an economic development advisory committee comprised of local business leaders, real estate developers, entrepreneurs, workforce development partners, and other stakeholders.
- Engage in organizational management activities to identify mission, vision, and values and prioritize a workplan.
- Create a landing page for this new entity/department on the City's website to host relevant documents, events, resources, and contact information.
- Task this department with implementing the economic development strategies outlined in this plan, including those related to business retention and expansion, industry attraction,

site marketing, redevelopment of strategic districts, entrepreneurship, and workforce development

- Reestablish the Chicopee Redevelopment Authority, ensuring there is adequate technical and administrative support from existing or future City staff.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Affordable Housing

Safe and accessible housing is a critical human need and is also needed to support population growth and a thriving economy, including a range of employment opportunities. However, the availability of housing is driven by market forces and is subject to shifts in ways that do not align with what is needed. Therefore, it is necessary to create both policies and incentives to ensure that everyone has safe and secure housing so they can engage in the civic, social, and economic life of Chicopee.

*The current real estate market in Chicopee does not lend itself to large projects with an affordable component. While housing is more affordable in Chicopee than it is in other communities, it is still out of reach for many of the city's lower-income residents. At the same time, the market is not strong enough to support the high lease rates needed in order for market-rate units to effectively subsidize the cost of affordable units. In brief, it will be important for Chicopee to continue to invest in the Chicopee Housing Authority, strategically utilize state and federal funds, and partner with non-profit developers to meet the housing needs of the community. The market alone, for the foreseeable future, is unlikely to meet all these needs. The sooner such investments are made, the more successful and cost effective they will be, as opposed to starting investments in the middle of a hot market. For more on this topic, see the **Making a Home** chapter.*

SPOTLIGHT ON: *Food Access*

*Not having access to enough healthy food means a lack of or suboptimal participation in economic, social, and civic life, along with a decline in health and wellness. A workforce that is food insecure cannot make a positive contribution to the economy, nor participate in vital civic engagement. Chicopee's residents have commented on the lack of access to grocery stores within the local community. Residents noted that access to a car is necessary to get to a grocery store and that there are no walkable grocery options within Chicopee's neighborhoods. This is exacerbating equity issues for lower-income residents who find it a challenge to easily access groceries, services, transportation, and jobs. Identifying available buildings and properties will help in attracting grocery stores and other food-sellers like farmers markets and food delivery services to underserved areas. This will also help ensure residents have access to the nutrition they need, while at the same time providing direct employment opportunities for neighborhood residents. For more on this topic, see the Healthy Food Access section in the **Promoting Health & Wellness** chapter.*

Figure 8: Chicopee Farmers' Market.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

SPOTLIGHT ON: *Gentrification*

Gentrification occurs in communities when positive improvements (such as updated infrastructure like sidewalks and street trees, neighborhood amenities like parks and open space, new businesses, new construction, and renovation of existing buildings) lead to property values and rents rising faster than existing residents and businesses can manage. This can then lead to displacement. Chicopee is not unique in this – cities all over the world struggle with balancing the need to invest in things that improve neighborhoods with the ability of existing residents and businesses to stay and enjoy the benefits of these improvements. Through the public engagement process, it is clear that Chicopee residents want to see improvements made to Chicopee Center, other neighborhood centers, and public parks and facilities. However, many Chicopee residents have voiced a fear that as conditions in Chicopee improve, they or their friends, family or neighbors might be pushed out.

It is important for the City to acknowledge that improvements can have both positive and negative impacts. This should not keep Chicopee from making quality of life improvements, so long as the City prepares to help everyone stay and enjoy them. Negative impacts to current residents include rising housing costs and a shift in neighborhood culture. Positive impacts, when planned for, can include opportunities for better-paying jobs and the training to qualify for these jobs, as well as an increase in important basic goods and services in every neighborhood, such as access to a grocery store, drug store, better civic organizations, and health care. New investment in Chicopee can also mean higher property values and more tax revenue for the City, which can be used to create programs for further reinvestment.

But it is important for Chicopee to plan for gentrification in advance. The City is in a good position now to prepare, while housing costs and commercial rents remain lower than in Massachusetts overall. When economic development initiatives are successful, cost of living can increase quickly. The equity focus of this plan encourages the City to consistently ask, "Who will benefit from this decision? Who might be hurt?" All the actions in this plan should be viewed through how they are likely to impact the most vulnerable residents of Chicopee. In particular, avoiding gentrification involves 1) working to ensure that there is enough housing that people can afford without having to scrimp on other essentials such as food and health care, 2) investing in education and workforce training that helps more people expand their economic opportunity, and 3) investing in social services that can help fill the gaps that may keep people from reaching their full potential.

*All the actions in this plan should be working together to make sure everyone in Chicopee benefits as the City improves. In addition to the actions in this chapter, see the actions in the **Making a Home** and **Promoting Health & Wellness** chapters for the most direct ways to avoid gentrification.*

Figure 1. Ames Privilege Apartments.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

CHAPTER 5: MAKING A HOME

Making sure people have access to the homes they need at prices they can afford.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone needs a home. Providing residents with opportunities to have attractive, safe, affordable homes keeps our City strong, including our neighborhoods, schools, and businesses. Chicopee should be a place where people who are born here or who move here are able to find places to live throughout their lifetimes – an apartment after graduation, a family’s first home, or downsizing for empty-nesters or retirees. The type of housing available, how much it costs, how well it is kept up, and how accessible it is to the things we need each day (work, school, shops, services, etc.) are what make good homes.

Vision for Making a Home

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will work to make sure there is an attractive, safe, and affordable range of homes available for every stage of life.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the **Demographics and Housing** sections of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

What do we mean by Affordable?

Throughout this chapter, the term “**affordable housing**” will refer to any home that is generally affordable to the people who live there, whether market rate, subsidized, owner-occupied, or renter-occupied. Affordability is different for everyone, depending on your income, debt, etc.

“**Subsidized affordable housing**” will refer to any home that is made affordable through a subsidy and is deed-restricted to be affordable to households earning a particular income or lower. Subsidized affordable housing includes things like Chicopee Housing Authority homes, homes managed by non-profit groups like the Valley Opportunity Council, or individual homes that receive renovation assistance in exchange for a deed restriction.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Addressing the high cost of housing and the need for more housing throughout Chicopee that is affordable for residents.
- Specifically, providing more affordable senior housing.
- Evaluating property taxes and how they exacerbate housing unaffordability.
- Dealing with homes that are in poor condition or poorly maintained, including more resources and incentives for repairing houses and apartment buildings.
- Providing more resources and services for

those who are unhoused or at risk of homelessness.

- Avoiding too big of a focus on affordable housing and concern that there could be negative consequences for the community from having more of it.

MAKING A HOME FOR EVERYONE

Most homes in Chicopee are created in the private market, either by developers or by individual homeowners. However, there are many things the City can do to make sure that local housing is meeting the needs and preferences of residents.

HOUSING COST

While the cost of housing (for sale and for rent) is relatively affordable compared with the region and Massachusetts as a whole, it is still expensive compared to the incomes people make in Chicopee. As a rule of thumb, most federal agencies (such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development) suggest that no more than 30% of a household’s income should be spent on housing. This is a good target, because it means people have income available to address other basic needs like food, health care, and transportation as well as disposable income for fun things like eating out, going to the movies, and shopping. In short, it’s better for each household and for the City’s economy overall. However, in Chicopee today, over 1/3 of homeowners and nearly 1/2 of renters spend more than this on housing. Everyone benefits when housing prices and incomes match up.

That said, it is important to have homes at a wide range of price points to maintain a healthy community and economy. New, higher-end homes and apartments allow people and families to move up without leaving the City and allow higher-income residents to move in, both of which help support the tax base and economic

activity within the City’s neighborhoods.

HOUSING TYPE

How people live and who they live with is changing, and the type of housing available needs to change along with this. The average household size in Chicopee is getting smaller. More people are choosing to live alone or with a small group of friends or family. Fewer households consist of two adults and their children. Consequently, there is a stronger demand for alternatives to single-family homes. Young adults and seniors alike need smaller homes and apartments, ideally within walking distance of the shops and services in neighborhood centers. New larger-scale apartment buildings and conversion of mill buildings into housing can play a big role in meeting this need, but so can smaller scale two-, three-, and four-unit homes scattered among residential neighborhoods. Luckily, over half of the homes in Chicopee are something other than single-family homes, which should make it easier for Chicopee to meet these changing needs.

HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY

Chicopee has a large and growing part of its population that is elderly or disabled and needs “accessible housing” – which means housing designed to accommodate people in wheelchairs or with other physical disabilities, including

Figure 1. Aerial view of Chicopee Falls.



Photo Credit: US Army Corps of Engineers.

Zoning for Housing Diversity and Density

One of the greatest tools the City has to allow and encourage a range of housing types is its Zoning Ordinance. Changes in zoning can make it easier for developers or individual homeowners to build the types of housing Chicopee needs most, from an accessory apartment over someone’s garage, to a small apartment building, to the conversion of a mill building or other commercial or industrial space into housing. Flexible residential zoning allows housing to evolve over time and meet our changing needs.

One specific example of this is Chicopee’s Smart Growth Overlay District. Located in Chicopee Center, the purpose of the overlay is to “provide for a diversified housing stock at a variety of costs within walking distance of services and public transportation, including [subsidized] affordable housing, and in housing types that meet the needs of the City’s population.” The district is designed to meet the standards of Massachusetts’ Chapter 40R, a program that provides cities and towns with financial incentives if they zone for denser residential development. Chicopee’s Smart Growth Overlay District allows more homes to be built than would otherwise be allowed in exchange for at least 20-25% subsidized affordable housing and design standards to help make the area more livable and walkable. This district helps encourage development where the City wants it, taking advantage of the City’s many investments in and around Chicopee Center, including Brownfields cleanup and investments in infrastructure to support more growth. It also ensures that development is designed well to be an attractive, positive addition to Chicopee Center.

Figure 3. Leo P. Senecal Apartments.



Photo Credit: Housing Navigator Massachusetts

Figure 4. Birch Bark Place Apartments.

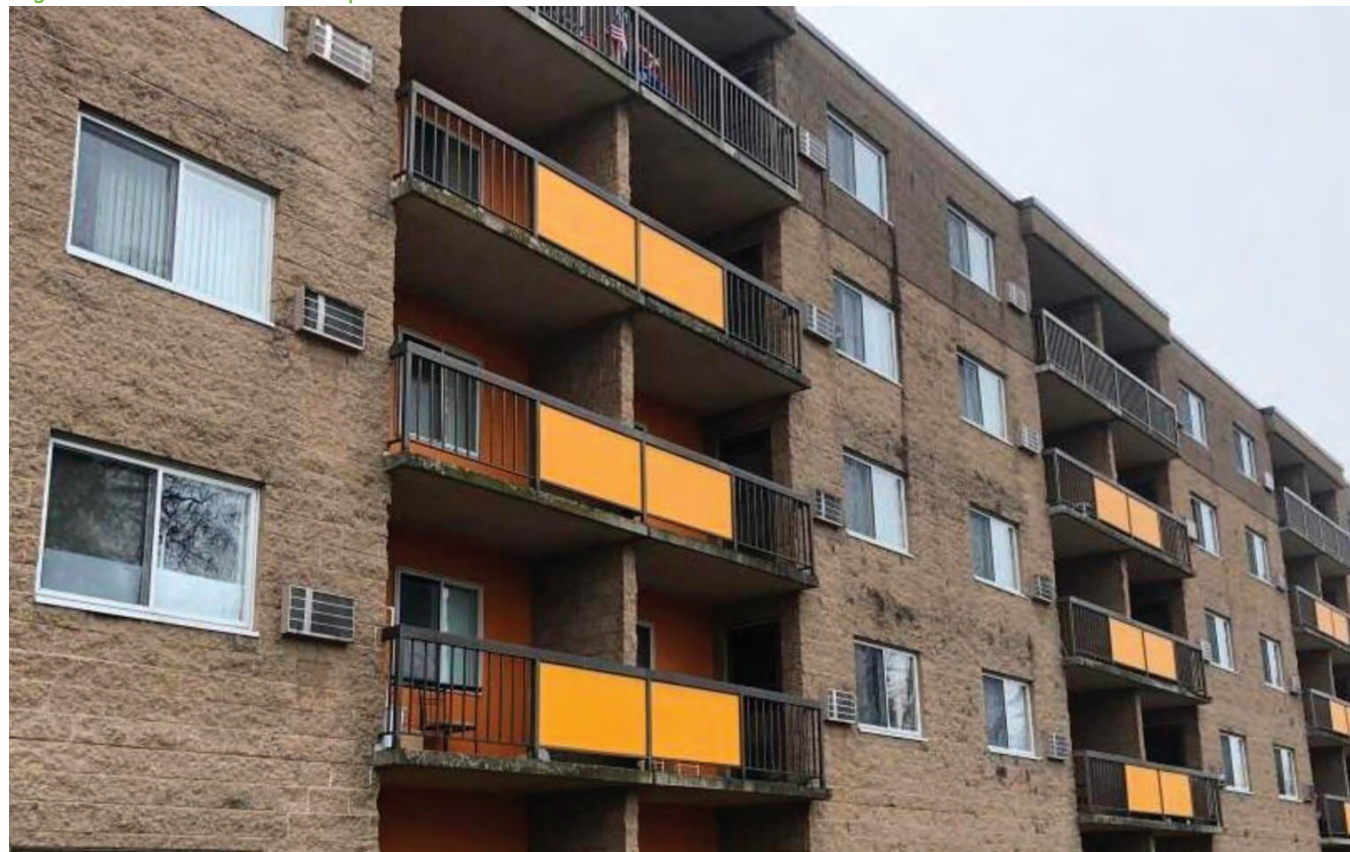


Photo Credit: Housing Navigator Massachusetts

wider doors and hallways, accessible appliances and bathrooms, elevators or other lifts in multi-story buildings, etc. Others may have friends or relatives who are elderly or disabled and need first floor spaces that are “visitable” – which means there is at least one wheelchair-accessible entrance and bathroom in the home, and wheelchair-accessible hallways.

GETTING IT DONE

- Promote the development of smaller homes and apartments that meet the needs of smaller households. In particular, maintain and attract younger adults by encouraging more studio and one-bedroom rental options at rates affordable for people making under \$50,000 a year.
- Continue to promote the reuse of mill buildings for residential and mixed-use development through the use of the Mill Conversion and Commercial Center Overlay District.
- Explore options for amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow detached or attached accessory dwelling units available for rent in some or all zoning districts, in order provide more naturally affordable housing and income for homeowners.
- Explore options for amending the Zoning Ordinance to more easily allow for the conversion of existing large single-family homes to multi-family residential uses with three or more dwelling units. At a minimum, consider allowing this in and around Chicopee Center and Chicopee Falls, and in combination with commercial mixed-use in zoning districts

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design means designing homes to be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. A home should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it.

What is Visitability?

Visitability means designing homes in such a way that they can be lived in or visited by people who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers.

Examples in Chicopee

- The new River Mills Assisted Living Facility in Chicopee Falls is an example of an accessible facility for seniors and other people with mobility or memory issues. Facilities like this ensure that Chicopee residents can stay in Chicopee when they can no longer be cared for at home.
- The Kendall Building in Chicopee Center was renovated in 2017 by the Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. into 41 studio apartments, including several that are handicap accessible.
- Many individual homes throughout the City have taken advantage of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission’s Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP) which provides no interest loans to modify homes of adults and children with disabilities.

Figure 5. River Mills Assisted Living.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Figure 6. Kendall Building.



Photo Credit: MBL Housing + Development

where commercial uses are allowed.

- Explore zoning options that allow detached or attached accessory dwelling units available for rent in some of all zoning districts, in order to provide more naturally affordable housing and income for homeowners.
- Explore zoning options that more easily allow for the conversion and adaptive reuse of existing commercial and institutional buildings for multi-family residential and/or mixed commercial/residential uses, in conjunction with performance standards for minimizing impacts on surrounding properties and maximizing the livability of the site. Consider separate standards for the conversion of individual buildings versus the conversion of a larger campus or office park.
- Explore a new zoning district that allows residential densities somewhere between what is allowed in Residential B and Residential C today (approximately 3-8 unit buildings), and consider placing the zone at the edges of neighborhood centers in order to provide smoother transitions from neighborhood centers to residential areas of predominantly single- and two-family homes while encouraging more housing diversity.
- Encourage housing above commercial uses in the Commercial A and A-1 districts by allowing it as of right rather than by special permit.
- Encourage common areas and outdoor amenities in all new multi-unit residential and mixed-use developments be designed to be accessible to the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Encourage “visitable” design in all new and renovated senior housing.
- Actively market the benefits of Chicopee’s Smart Growth Overlay District to developers and local property owners to encourage its use.

MAINTAINING TODAY'S HOMES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Chicopee’s homes are old – nearly 75% were built before 1970. While this historic housing stock adds to Chicopee’s character and charm, it can also lead to public health issues such as exposure to lead-based paint, asbestos, poor indoor air quality, and general disrepair. It is a great thing that Chicopee already has a diversity of housing types, but these homes must be in good condition and updated to be more energy efficient and meet contemporary needs if they are going to be attractive options for the next generation. Thousands of homes in Chicopee would benefit from full energy retrofits, including insulating the entire building, sealing off air leaks, and installing more sophisticated HVAC systems — ideally powered by renewable energy sources. The City needs as many tools as possible to help owners reinvest in their properties, since this is very expensive. Of particular concern are older, smaller multi-family buildings (approximately four to twelve units) that have stricter building codes than single-, two-, and three-family homes. Repairs and upgrades may trigger additional code requirements, such as installing sprinkler systems, that are prohibitively expensive. Without additional financial assistance or incentives, this can lead to continued disinvestment in these buildings.

There are many existing programs at the local, state, and federal level to help homeowners maintain and improve their homes, from the fuel assistance program run by the Valley Opportunity Council to energy efficiency upgrades from Chicopee Electric Light to Massachusetts programs to reduce lead paint and increase energy efficiency to City grants for reinvesting in three-family homes, to name just a few. However, many people don’t know about these programs or how to combine all the various sources. The City can serve as a compiler of this information and help residents and business owners navigate the details.

What is Chapter 40B?

Chapter 40B is a state statute which enables developers to bypass certain aspects of local zoning if they propose housing developments with at least 20-25% subsidized affordable housing. It is common to hear such developments called “Comprehensive Permits” or “40B Developments.” Because Chicopee has greater than 10% of its housing stock on the SHI, developers cannot bypass local zoning.



Even if all these existing resources are utilized, they are frankly a drop in the bucket compared to the needs for reinvesting in our aging housing stock. Fortunately, both the state and federal governments are seriously exploring options to dedicate funding that would help retrofit literally millions of homes. Also, Massachusetts is investing in design assistance to help property owners understand the most efficient ways to retrofit their buildings. For example, early in 2021, the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center announced the winners of a competition to design cost-effective, all-electric energy retrofit approaches to existing triple decker homes,

a housing style common to several Chicopee neighborhoods.

GETTING IT DONE



- Explore the benefits of passing the Community Preservation Act locally (or seeking other options for raising funds, such as requesting permission from the Massachusetts Legislature to establish a real estate transfer fee), and the potential for using funds to start a grant or revolving loan program to help owners reinvest in their properties. Consider targeting a portion of funds for specific needs like group residences for seniors and adults with disabilities. Seek other sources of grants and financing to couple with any local assistance. *See other ideas for using the Community Preservation Act in the **Coming Together and Thriving Together** chapters.*
- Continue to invest federal and state funds into rehabilitation grants or loans for rental properties and explore options for creating a program supported by local funds to augment this.
- Continue to invest federal, state, and local funds into grants or loans for energy efficiency improvements, and actively market these resources to private property owners.
- Consolidate and regularly update a list of federal, state, and local services and resources available to help Chicopee property owners maintain and improve their homes, and actively promote these resources to residents and business owners.
- Support state and national programs that would provide significantly more financing and design assistance for retrofitting existing homes, such as the Weatherization Assistance Program and Low Income Multifamily Energy Retrofit Program, and consider actively advocating for future state or federal legislation or programs that would increase such assistance.

Figure 7. George D. Robinson Apartments.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Housing Authority

MAINTAINING HIGH QUALITY SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE HOMES

Subsidized affordable housing is an issue on which people disagree in Chicopee. While most people we heard from see a strong need for more subsidized affordable housing as well as housing that is generally more affordable, there is still a significant portion of residents who are concerned that more subsidized affordable housing will be a drag on the local economy.

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY

Massachusetts law encourages municipalities to provide their “fair share” of subsidized affordable housing, or 10% of all local homes. To count toward the 10%, homes must be deed-restricted and subsidized, so that they are available at an affordable price for many years. Such homes are then placed on the Commonwealth’s [Subsidized Housing Inventory](#) (SHI). Chicopee is one of a few communities in Massachusetts that has reached and exceeded this 10% goal. This means Chicopee has more local control over proposed residential development under Massachusetts law, including [Chapter 40B](#). To

keep this local control, and to continue to meet the needs of lower-income residents, Chicopee will need to maintain its existing SHI homes and make sure that new SHI homes are a part of future development.

As of 2019, there are 2,626 units on the SHI in Chicopee, or 10.47% of the City’s 2010 housing stock. **The affordability of 819 (31.2%) of these units is set to expire by the end of 2030.** The City will almost certainly lose its 10% target after 2030 if it does not find ways to renew the affordability of most of these units. Further, even if all these homes are renewed, as new market rate homes are developed, Chicopee could still end up dipping below 10% if **new** SHI units are not developed concurrently.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND THE ECONOMY

Housing affordability is not an isolated issue to solve on its own. It is tied directly to economic development, transportation, and more. The more people’s incomes improve, the more they can afford to spend on housing. The more housing is located in walkable neighborhoods near jobs and shopping, the more people can save on transportation. And again, the less people spend on housing the more they can support the local

Figure 8. McArthur Terrace.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Housing Authority

economy with other purchases. At the same time, the more successful the City is at making Chicopee an attractive place to live, the more higher-income people may move to the City, which can put more pressure on housing costs to rise, making long-term subsidized affordable homes on the SHI all the more important.

In short, the whole economy benefits when housing is “affordable” – whether because it’s subsidized or just affordable to you based on your income. Maintaining 10% of the City’s housing stock on the SHI means that as the market rate prices for housing go up and down, Chicopee has a core of homes that will stay affordable for the long term.

CHICOPEE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Chicopee Housing Authority (CHA) homes are a major asset for the City that should be maintained for future generations. Founded in 1938, the CHA plays a very large role in providing long-term affordable housing in the City, managing 383 units of federal public housing, 816 units of state-aided public housing, and about 500 Housing Choice Vouchers. Together, this accounts for just under 7% of the City’s housing units and is a major reason why Chicopee has met its 10% SHI goal.

Because many of CHA’s buildings are over 50 years old, property maintenance and modernization are a large portion of CHA’s work. The older housing stock makes operations costly. CHA developments are maintained by an in-house maintenance department that includes a licensed plumber and a licensed electrician. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) funds specific improvements for state-aided public housing and CHA operates a federal Capital Fund Program for improvements to its federal public housing. While state funding is consistent and dependable, CHA is wary of diminishing assistance from the federal government and tries to use these funds as efficiently as possible, focusing on health and safety issues first.

Demand remains very high for CHA homes. According to staff interviews in 2021, the average waitlist is approximately two to three years depending on the number of bedrooms needed. There are 20,978 State applicants and 8,382 Federal applicants waiting for housing. Two-bedroom homes are in greatest demand followed by one-bedroom homes. The waitlist for family-size homes with four bedrooms is comparatively low, with only 177 applicants. This would seem to underscore the changing

Figure 9. Apartments at Carreau Block.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

demographics in Chicopee and the trend toward smaller households.

While many CHA units are dedicated to senior housing, only 15 are currently wheelchair accessible, with another unit in the works now. This represents just about 1.2% of all CHA units. In addition, there are several homes with temporary front door ramps for accessibility from the outside, but the interior doorways, kitchens, and bathrooms are not designed to be accessible. Given the greater than average disabled population in Chicopee (see the Promoting Health & Wellness Chapter), there is a need to increase the number of accessible units over time.

Having local control over CHA homes means Chicopee can more directly meet its housing needs and ensure that people who need it have a solid, stable, affordable place to live. CHA residents and the City's overall economy all benefit from this. When housing authority properties are lost, it can be very expensive to replace them. Further, while Housing Choice Vouchers are a positive tool, they are not as helpful in tight rental housing markets. Access to a voucher doesn't guarantee access to a safe and adequate home. It is in the City's best interest to maintain all its CHA homes and continue to reinvest in them so that they remain a resource

for generations to come.

VALLEY OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL (VOC)

VOC is a major partner with the City in providing a variety of much-needed housing throughout the City and around the region. VOC's programs for housing and homelessness have produced nearly 100 subsidized affordable homes in Chicopee and 35 rooms and apartments for homeless individuals and families. VOC also operates the Magruder Home for local Veterans as well permanent supportive housing for families moving out of homelessness.

GETTING IT DONE

- Maintain a fiscally healthy Chicopee Housing Authority (CHA) and local control over public housing management, ensuring that all CHA homes are retained and invested in to support future generations of Chicopee residents.
 - Prioritize funding for the renovation of existing CHA homes with universal design and visitability standards, to ensure accessibility for more people in wheelchairs or with other mobility disabilities.
- Continue to update the City's and the



Figure 10. The Valentine School.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Holyoke-Chicopee-Westfield HOME Consortium's Consolidated Plans for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and implement their affordable housing priorities, including homebuyer assistance.

- Conduct an annual inventory of Chicopee homes on the state's SHI database to ensure the City remains above the current or future 40B thresholds. At least five years prior to the expiration of any deed restriction, develop a plan for renewing the deed restriction.
- Continue to explore City-owned property appropriate for the development of subsidized affordable or mixed-income housing, such as the former Belcher School property.
- Explore establishing a [Community Land Trust](#), perhaps seeded with donations of City-owned property as an opportunity to expand subsidized affordable housing opportunities. Community Land Trusts build or renovate housing which is sold to homeowners, while the trust maintains ownership of the land. Because the cost of land is not included in the sale, the cost of the homes are more affordable. A resale formula is established to make sure homeowners can

build equity in their homes while keeping the cost affordable for the next owners.

- Explore areas of the City where it may be appropriate to require a certain percentage of new homes be subsidized affordable housing that qualify for the SHI and keep Chicopee above 10%. This is currently done in the Smart Growth Overlay District and could be explored for the Mill Conversion and Commercial Center Overlay Districts or other places where increased residential density could help make up for the costs of subsidized affordable housing.

MANAGING AND PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is not always the easiest social challenge to track. Families and individuals can live on the brink, falling in and out of homelessness over the course of a single year. Complicating things further, some individuals, for a variety of reasons, choose to be homeless and reject efforts to be housed. Statistically, homelessness is low in Chicopee. However,

based on demographic data, Chicopee has a significant population that tends to be at risk of homelessness, including those with very low incomes, those paying more than 50% of their incomes on housing, and those with certain disabilities, including mental illness and drug addiction. One thing the data does not provide is the last place of permanent residence for the homeless. Neighboring Springfield and Holyoke have a combined total of 1,825 shelter beds while Chicopee has zero. It is very possible that when residents of Chicopee have unstable housing situations and are forced into homelessness, their next step is to seek out a shelter in Springfield or Holyoke.

Further, while eviction moratoriums have kept many Chicopee residents in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City must be ready for the long-term impacts of the pandemic on housing security, especially as moratoriums end. The City's efforts around rental assistance and other social services for people at risk of homelessness will be more critical than ever as people recover economically from the pandemic.

GETTING IT DONE



- Keep track of the existing homeless population in Chicopee, and proactively connect them with services of the Springfield-Hampden County Continuum of Care and the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness.
- Build relationships between City departments, including the Police, and local homeless service providers. Develop protocol for connecting local homeless with services rather than asking the police simply to move them along.
- Monitor data on individuals and households most at risk of homelessness, including those with very low-incomes, mental illness, and drug addiction. Continue to invest in City services and connect to non-City services to help prevent these populations from slipping into homelessness, particularly rental and mortgage assistance, legal

assistance, counseling and advocacy, and anti-eviction programs and policies. *See the **Promoting Health & Wellness** chapter for discussion of other supportive services that can help prevent homelessness.*

- Seek funding, financing, and partners to expand the current stock of transitional and permanent supportive housing in Chicopee.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Mill Conversions

Chicopee is lucky to have many historic mill buildings. Mills were the engines that drove Chicopee's economy for over 100 years and shaped our neighborhoods. While their original uses are no more, they can now play an important second act as housing. This is a win for the City for many reasons:

- *Providing housing diversity – Mill conversions can provide the smaller rental or ownership homes needed by young adults, seniors, and others.*
- *Revitalizing our centers – Most mill buildings in Chicopee are in or within walking distance of our neighborhood centers. Mill conversions help physically revive our centers.*
- *Supporting nearby businesses - Mill conversions mean more people will be living in our neighborhood centers and shopping at local businesses.*
- *Promoting sustainability – Mill conversions are an efficient reuse of existing buildings and good for the environment by easing development pressure on Chicopee's remaining open space.*
- *Cleaning Brownfields - When mills sit for years vacant or underutilized, they can damage the health and safety of the community, polluting the soil and water. Mill conversions require sites to be cleaned up, making Chicopee's environment healthier.*

The City has invested in infrastructure improvements, brownfields remediation, and zoning to make it easier for private redevelopment to occur. However, financing for private development at this scale is complicated and progress can be slow, despite the City's best efforts. The City can seek assistance from MassDevelopment and may even consider purchasing important mill buildings to help ensure they are redeveloped appropriately.

Figure 11: The Lyman Mills building in Chicopee.



Photo Credit: MassLive

Figure 1. Chicopee Community Garden members.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Community Garden

CHAPTER 6: PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Making sure all of us are better connected to the network of health and social services they need to live healthy lives.

INTRODUCTION

Chicopee knows that to create a thriving community, access to healthy food, social services, and overall wellness is key. Much of this plan was developed and written during the COVID-19 pandemic which has shown us how interconnected our lives and health are with the way we travel, shop, socialize, work, and learn. To make sure that all residents in Chicopee are living their healthiest lives, the City needs a public health and social services network that is accessible, flexible, and far-reaching so it can equitably meet as many needs as possible. Convenient and healthy food that is easily accessible for Chicopee residents is a particularly critical, unmet need. It is important to make sure, no matter which neighborhood you live in, you have a grocery store with fresh and nutritious food nearby. It is also important to have greater access to farmers markets with local food and opportunities to grow your own food at home or in a community garden. Finally, it is important that people can access culturally relevant food options, including the produce needed to prepare dishes traditional to peoples' heritage and cultural backgrounds.

Vision for Promoting Health and Wellness

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will work to make sure everyone has the solid foundation of health and social services they need to live healthy, fulfilled lives and reach their individual potential.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the *Demographics, Transportation & Mobility, Planning for Food Access, and Public Health & Social Services* sections of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Chicopee knows that healthy communities lead to healthy people, improving our physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. To create a healthy community in Chicopee, it is important for the City to tackle public health and social services issues head-on and make sure those most at-risk are getting the services and care they need. It is also important to address public health as a whole, looking into how our incomes, education, community connections, social relationships, and the places we live impact our overall health. These factors are also known as the “[social determinates of health](#).” The Holyoke Medical Center conducts a [Community Health Needs Assessment](#) (CHNA) every three years in order to better understand the needs of the communities it serves, including Chicopee, Holyoke, South Hadley, and other areas throughout the Pioneer Valley. CHNA data for Chicopee shows specifically how these social factors impact local health.

The City cannot do this alone. While part of this work will come from City departments and programs, the rest will involve partnering with other service providers and resources and connecting them with residents in need.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:
- Continuing to invest in high quality and responsive emergency services, such as Fire and Police, with an emphasis on equitably serving everyone in the community.
- More services to residents with urgent needs, focusing on providing help to seniors, Veterans, and those with disabilities.
- Increasing public awareness for what public health and social services are available in Chicopee.
- Looking into how our City is built and spatially laid out impacts the physical health of the community (for example, making it easier to walk and bike).
- Supporting and expanding services and education to prevent substance abuse and treat those with substance abuse disorders. Many residents are particularly concerned about opioid abuse.
- More social services focusing on youth programming/activities, employment training, supportive housing, and shelters.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety services in Chicopee are handled primarily by the Police Department and the Fire Department, with contributions from the Emergency Management Department. In all these departments, significant changes in the types of challenges faced by the City have forced them to expand services or change the way in which they operate. Some important examples of issues affecting public safety operations in Chicopee include:

Community Policing: The police department has a long-time commitment to community policing and building relationships with local residents and businesses. They also run a Junior Police Academy with the Boys and Girls Club, and have an officer dedicated to many of



Figure 2. The Social Determinants of Health.

Photo Credit: U.S. Center for Disease Control

the local public schools to communicate with students on crime prevention and awareness. The City’s volunteer Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) has been reestablished and is a great help in responding to disasters.

Climate Change: Climate change has already shaped many new trends in public safety services across the country. In Chicopee, ice storms, heat waves, and intense storms will continue to increase in the coming years. These events will stress infrastructure, potentially causing intermittent flooding, power outages, and health emergencies.

Awareness of Racism: During the years in which this plan was developed, the U.S. as a country experienced an awakening to the reality of how systemic racism permeates every corner of our society. Chicopee’s commitment to community policing is a positive step toward the police force having an equitable and human relationship with all the people they serve.

Opioid Epidemic: Addiction to opioids in the U.S. has been a chronic problem in the 21st century and the takeoff of synthetic varieties in 2013 has been incredibly difficult to manage. All of Massachusetts’ small cities have been

hammered by this problem, and Chicopee is no exception. The Fire Department has noted this rise and considers it to be a drain on their resources. Chicopee will need to help prevent addiction and connect addicts with treatment, while also protecting the public from harmful actions of addicts.

Mental Health: Police and Fire Department staff are at the front lines of assisting people being challenged by mental health issues and should be regularly trained on how to identify, react to, and deliver appropriate care for individuals experiencing mental health crises, focusing on connecting them to the treatment services they need.

Traffic Control: Traffic is a significant concern for residents of Chicopee, and the Police Department is working to be more proactive on this issue. They are increasing enforcement through more citations and investing in equipment such as traffic and speed signs (including over 30 solar powered signs), two trailers with plate records, and devices that can track and record data on number of vehicles, direction, and speed.

Adequacy of Equipment, Facilities, and

Staffing: Technology has enhanced our ability to respond to public safety threats in many ways with improvements to vehicles, communication systems, and other emergency response equipment over the recent past. The Police and Fire Headquarters recently underwent a major renovation project. The three police substations and six fire stations are all generally adequate, though some repairs and expansion will be needed over time. The fire stations, in particular, are now sometimes too small or do not have high enough ceilings to fit modern equipment. Eventually, a central storage facility for emergency management vehicles and equipment will be beneficial and efficient. Another major challenge is recruiting and retaining staff and being more proactive about connecting staff with training opportunities.

ADDICTION TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

An increasingly pressing and difficult issue that Chicopee and many of its surrounding communities have had to reckon with over the past decade is high rates of substance abuse and opioid use/disorders. Tackling addiction cannot be done by one group in Chicopee. With meaningful collaboration from City departments, local nonprofits and organizations, neighboring cities and towns, and regional groups, there is hope for creating a better future for the Chicopee community that is struggling with or directly affected by addiction. This is a long-term problem, often tied to mental health issues, that can have reverberating impacts on addicts and their families, especially children.

[Chicopee's Health Department](#) has numerous programs aimed at tackling substance and opioid abuse like the Alcohol and Drug Awareness Prevention Team (ADAPT). ADAPT is a comprehensive program for drug abuse education and prevention, aimed at stemming problems with drugs and alcohol in the community before they start. The City's Health Department has also partnered with the neighboring cities of Springfield and Northampton to create strategies for combatting opioid abuse as well as with

Figure 3. Chicopee Boys & Girls Club.



Photo Credit: Western Massachusetts Boys & Girls Club

the [Chicopee Boys & Girls Club](#) and local schools on similar efforts. [River Valley Counseling Center](#), a multifaceted community-based mental health agency, also has some programs and services targeting teens and young adults battling substance abuse disorders. Regional efforts like the Springfield Coalition for Opioid Overdose Prevention (SCOOP), [Hampden County Addiction Task Force](#) (HCAT), and [Tapestry Health](#) also provide programs and services to Chicopee residents, including overdose prevention, clean syringe access and disposal, and community education and trainings. It will be important to proactively increase public awareness about these resources so that everyone in need knows how to access them.

It is very important for everyone in Chicopee to recognize that opioid abuse is an issue that spans class, race, and income. It is not a problem isolated among lower-income residents of Chicopee Center, Chicopee Falls, and Willimansett. Anecdotal evidence from local health care providers and Chicopee's emergency response calls suggest that opioid addiction is an issue throughout the city, even among

the middle classes of Chicopee's more suburban neighborhoods. It is important the City, local nonprofits, addiction service providers, and all residents of Chicopee continue to take substance abuse and opioid use seriously and seek approaches that are compassionate and understanding for all individuals and families involved.

Treatment

For individuals who currently live with substance abuse or opioid disorder, it is important to have multiple options available for treatment that are affordable and accessible, regardless of the type of health insurance someone has. To make treatment accessible, there needs to be increased collaboration among existing social services and programs in Chicopee that focus on substance abuse and opioid disorders. Increased communication and collaboration among these agencies and organizations can help increase efficiency and make sure individuals are receiving the best care for their needs.

Sometimes other underlying issues, like mental health, exist when treating substance abuse and opioid disorders. Integration of treatments can help individuals move closer to recovery and healthier lives. It is also important for the City and relevant organizations to continue to work on reducing the stigma surrounding substance abuse and opioid disorders, so individuals feel supported to get the help they need. When individuals feel stigmatized, reaching out for help and treatment is less likely. It is also vital for the City to make sure that overdose prevention kits and medications, like Narcan, continue to be accessible throughout Chicopee with access broadened – particularly, but not just, in social service or emergency response settings. Beyond emergency response providers, kits should be located at libraries, schools, and City Hall, and be placed in Department of Public Works vehicles. Staff in all these locations should be regularly trained to properly use the kits.

Prevention

A key to reducing the number of Chicopee families directly or indirectly affected by substance

abuse and opioid disorders is to make prevention a top priority. Starting in our public schools and youth/educational programs, increased education and awareness of substance abuse and opioid disorders is vital. Children who have been exposed to various kinds of trauma, including mental or physical abuse, and children growing up in households with family members suffering from substance abuse and opioid disorders are statistically more at risk and should be a particular target of outreach. Education and awareness should not stop with our youth but be available to the Chicopee community at large. Increased awareness and education will not only help to prevent addiction but to reduce the stigma around the issue and make it clearer that this is something that impacts families of all different incomes, neighborhoods, and backgrounds. ***Investing in prevention means more of our children and young adults will lead more productive lives, helping our whole community thrive.***

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Everyone who calls Chicopee home should feel welcome and supported. Chicopee has a relatively high proportion of residents who are disabled or live with a loved one who is disabled, and it is particularly important they have what they need to be fully engaged in the life of the community, including both supportive services and accessible public buildings, public spaces, homes. The City supports its residents with disabilities through the work of the [Commission on Disability](#), the Chicopee Council on Aging, the Chicopee Health Department, and the Chicopee Veterans Services Department. Local organizations and nonprofits are also important groups for disability support, services, and programs. For example, [Sunshine Village](#) provides life engagement services, employment services, and community-based services for individuals with disabilities in Chicopee and neighboring communities. Valley Opportunity Council, WestMass ElderCare, River Valley Counseling Center, and WomanShelter/Compañeras are other examples of the many non-profits that serve local people

Figure 4. RiverMills Health Fair, 2019.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Council on Aging

Figure 5. Vietnam Veterans' Day Remembrance Event, 2022.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Council on Aging

with disabilities, and the City uses a portion of its annual Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to help support their work. Continued collaboration between the City and local groups and organizations will help provide better services to residents with a disability.

Chicopee must continue to support and expand services to seniors living with a disability. However, Chicopee also has a relatively large population of youth and younger adults with disabilities who have different needs from seniors. For example, youth with disabilities may have needs related to educational access that can be partially addressed through the [Chicopee Public Schools](#), while young and middle-aged adults with disabilities need services and programs geared towards helping them enter or stay in the workforce and secure/maintain independent living.

Chicopee is committed to ensuring that all residents are able to access what the City has to offer, no matter their circumstance. This commitment means making sure that new developments subject to the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) meet the ADA/MAABs accessibility requirements and having a plan to make continual progress on bringing as many existing buildings into compliance as possible. Public buildings and outdoor spaces, as well as senior housing and apartment buildings, should all be encouraged to follow the principals of [universal design](#)—in brief, this means designing spaces to be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Beyond buildings, we can make our streets and sidewalks safer and more accessible by developing and adopting a Complete Streets policy. *For more information, see the [Getting Around chapter](#).*

ADA accessibility is not just about physical places and spaces but also how residents access City information. Making sure the City's virtual spaces, like its website, are regularly updated and designed for accessibility is important for those with visual, hearing or other

physical impairments. *For more on accessibility of City information, please see the [Governing Well chapter](#).*

VETERAN AND SENIOR SERVICES

Chicopee is lucky to have a large population of residents who are seniors, Veterans or both. It is important that the City continues and expands services to meet the needs of both populations.

Veteran Services

Chicopee is called home by many Veterans who bravely served their country, many at the Westover Air Reserve Base. The [Chicopee Veterans Services Office](#) currently has several different services to Veterans and their surviving family members. It is important to preserve and expand Veteran services to meet the evolving needs of Veterans and their families. Adding more staff at the Chicopee Veterans Services Office can help the Department focus on additional programs and services outside what is already being delivered and increase their outreach efforts so that all Veterans in Chicopee are aware of the services available to them. A high percentage of Chicopee Veterans report living with some sort of disability which could dictate different services needed.

Senior Services

Chicopee is lucky to have dedicated advocates, services, and programs for its senior residents with the [Council on Aging](#), the [RiverMills Senior Center](#), the [Valley Opportunity Council](#), and others. Many of these programs and services are currently at capacity and there are increased demands in transportation, food access, and mental health needs. For example, demand for “grab and go” lunch skyrocketed at the RiverMills Senior Center during the height of the pandemic, increasing by 150%. Since then, it has decreased by 50% but is still higher than normal. The Senior Center remains committed to providing as many lunches as are needed each day. Seniors have also been particularly isolated during the pandemic, and mental health counseling is greatly needed. Seeking additional grant funds, connecting to other

Figure 6. A Craft Time workshop at RiverMills Center.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Council on Aging

service providers, and increasing City investments can help meet some of the demand and alleviate pressure on current senior services and programs. It is important to keep up with both the current needs for seniors and anticipated future needs. One way to help meet these needs is through combining resources for youth and seniors and instituting more “intergenerational” opportunities. Incorporating day care and other resources for children at the senior center could be a good source of revenue, as well as an opportunity to encourage more positive interaction between children and seniors. Research shows that intergenerational shared sites [increase the health and well-being of both young and older participants](#), [reduce social isolation](#), and [create cost efficiencies](#).

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

The entire region around and including Chicopee suffers from inadequate access to primary medical and mental health care, particularly compared with other regions in Massachusetts. This is a structural, regional issue largely outside the direct control of the City. However, the City can explore ways to

attract and retain more primary care physicians locally and cooperate with regional partners including other municipalities, hospitals, and health care providers to make the region more attractive to medical professionals.

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This chapter would be remiss if it did not mention the pandemic and its long-term impacts on the City. During the worst of the pandemic, retailers, restaurants, and other businesses were forced to close for months and adapt to more outdoor and online sales; schools sent children

home and developed distance learning on the fly; churches and other civic groups turned to social media for worship and to stay connected; medical services turned to ‘tele-health’ for all but the very ill. In short, everyone’s lives were disrupted in one way or another, and while the worst is past, the impacts linger on. Long periods of isolation traumatized seniors and children especially and appear to have broken down many of the social norms that keep communities functioning civilly and effectively. We do not yet know what the long-term impacts of the pandemic will be on mental health and civic discourse, but it will be important for everyone in Chicopee to offer patience, grace, and understanding to their neighbors as we recover mentally and emotionally together.

GETTING IT DONE

- Expand efforts to educate the community on services that are available through City Departments and non-profit organizations.
- Continue investing in community policing efforts and building strong partnerships between law enforcement and social workers to make sure people who need it are connected to services and treatment.
- Ensure that Police and Fire both have adequate staff capacity, particularly as new developments, including apartments and senior housing/assisted living, bring in more residents likely to need services.
- Use a combination of modern call-routing technology and public education to make sure calls for emergency services are made appropriately and routed and prioritized accordingly.
- Develop a comprehensive Citywide approach to reducing and preventing opioid abuse.
- Assess the existing services available to those with disabilities at various stages in life—youth, young adult, middle-age, and seniors—and identify gaps in terms of the capacity of existing services and the need



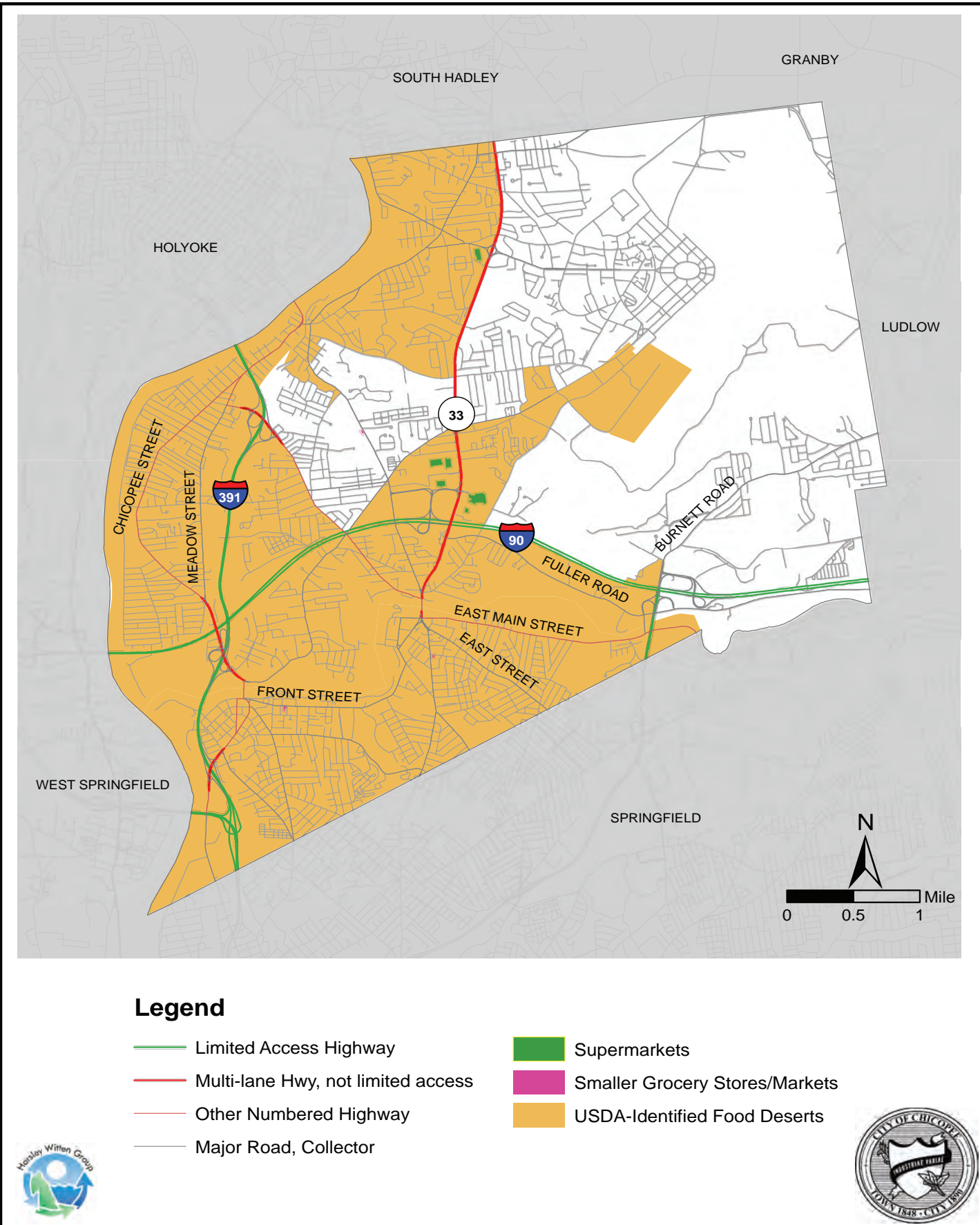
for additional services.

- Ensure ADA/MAAB accessibility for all City facilities and encourage universal design in the physical built environment and in virtual spaces to meet the needs of those with disabilities.
- Add additional staff support at the Chicopee Veterans Services Office to expand service and program offerings to Veterans and better connect with senior services in the City. Assess the existing services available to Veterans and identify gaps in terms of the capacity of existing services and the need for additional services. Take advantage of and collaborate with regional programs such as the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System.
- Assess the existing services available to seniors and identify gaps in terms of the capacity of existing services and the need for additional services. In particular, consider the diversity of Chicopee’s aging population and ensure that programs are culturally appropriate.
- Create opportunities for “intergenerational” collaboration between senior and youth services, both for cost savings and enriching the experiences of young and old alike.
- Explore ways to incentivize medical professional, such as residents and fellows, to locate and stay in Chicopee and the surrounding region. Consider home down-payment assistance, rental assistance, and other best practices from around the country.

Regional Efforts to Improve Health Care Access

Baystate Health welcomed its inaugural class of the Greenfield Family Medicine Residency Program in July 2022. The training program will establish a pipeline of primary care physicians in western Massachusetts that have been trained in the community. The program’s core focus is to train family physicians, who are critical providers of preventative and routine care for patients of all ages.

Figure 7. Chicopee Food Access



HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

To have a healthy and thriving community, everyone in Chicopee needs to have access to fresh, nutritious food. Appropriate access to healthy food can reduce the risk of chronic disease like heart diseases, stroke, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Barriers to food access are largely focused on availability, transportation options, price, income, and having the time, knowledge, and tools to prepare fresh and nutritious meals. Chicopee’s residents have commented on the lack of access to grocery stores within the local community and the abundance of fast food and other unhealthy options. Residents noted that access to a car is necessary to get to a grocery store and that there are not walkable grocery options within Chicopee’s neighborhoods. This is exacerbating equity issues for lower-income residents who find it a challenge to easily access groceries, services, transportation, and jobs.

Food insecurity and accessibility is a challenge in Chicopee; the City is ranked in the top 10 Massachusetts communities for having the least access to grocery stores.¹ There are several current projects and programs working to alleviate hunger and increase access to healthy food in the City, including ten food distribution sites managed by several local organizations and churches. For example, [Lorraine’s Soup Kitchen and Pantry](#) serves prepared meals Monday through Friday and has a pantry to provide groceries to families. According to Lorraine’s, approximately 13% of Chicopee residents have used their services, and that number has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as many lost their jobs or are underemployed.² The [United Way of Pioneer Valley](#) recently opened [Chicopee Cupboard](#), a food pantry to help people

in need with limited access to transportation. The Food Bank of Western MA has announced their intention to relocate their facilities from Hatfield to Chicopee in the next few years and has secured a site at the Chicopee River Business Park. According to the Food Bank of Western MA data, they served on average 3,347 people in Chicopee every month in fiscal year 2020 and saw a seven percent increase in food distribution over fiscal year 2019. During the same year, the organization enrolled 49 Chicopee households for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP) benefits.

Nonprofits and other community programs that offer food, food education, community gardens, etc. can play a role in alleviating the negative impacts of food access, but economic initiatives can also help. Farmer’s markets, food delivery services, and providing incentives for businesses that offer fresh and healthy foods (while limiting or taxing unhealthy foods) within [food deserts](#) are just a few ways to increase access. There are several initiatives that deal with providing meals to those in need. The [Massachusetts Food Trust Program](#) provides loans, grants, and business assistance to support new and expanding health food retailers and local food enterprises in low- and moderate-income communities, to increase access to healthy foods and spur economic development.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Increasing access to affordable, healthy, and fresh food in Chicopee.
- Adding more grocery stores to neighborhoods that currently do not have easy access; especially important for those with limited transportation options.
- Supporting existing food banks and pantries, like Lorraine’s Soup Kitchen.
- Continuing to support community food programs like Meals on Wheels, ChicopeeFRESH, and others.

What is a Food Desert?

In brief, any geographic area where residents’ access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is limited or not available at all due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance.

- Expanding the current farmers' market so it can be accessible to residents with different work or school schedules.
- Supporting the development of more community gardens or farms so Chicopee residents can grow their own food.
- Increasing public awareness about what resources and services are available for Chicopee residents in terms of healthy food and food access.

GROCERY STORES

Chicopee residents' proximity to food outlets like supermarkets, convenience stores, and cultural markets varies drastically based on the neighborhood you live in and your mode of transportation. Access to healthy and affordable food should not be a luxury but something everyone in Chicopee has. Increased equity in the location of grocery stores and supermarkets throughout Chicopee's neighborhoods is vital. Right now, most supermarkets and grocery stores in Chicopee are in and around the Memorial Drive commercial area. While technically accessible on public transportation, getting to these stores on the bus is generally not fast or easy. Creating incentives for food outlets to open stores in neighborhoods throughout Chicopee where access is limited today will help the City increase food security and boost economic activity. Access can also be improved by working with the [Pioneer Valley Transit Authority](#) (PVRTA) to alter bus routes to provide better and more frequent access between neighborhoods and existing grocery stores and supermarkets. Further, the City can work with local grocery stores to encourage more and more affordable direct food delivery to people's homes.

FARMERS' MARKETS

The [Chicopee Farmer's Market](#), run by the Valley Opportunity Council (VOC), gives local farmers and small vendors the opportunity to sell their fresh and locally grown products to Chicopee residents at accessible prices. This is a great opportunity for Chicopee residents to buy locally and have access to delicious, affordable,

Figure 8. Chicopee Center Farmers Market.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee.

Figure 9. A cleanup event at the Chicopee Community Garden.



Photo Credit: Chicopee Community Garden

and healthy food. Unfortunately, many Chicopee residents are not fully aware of what the market has to offer. Increasing awareness through promotion and advertising in spaces where the Chicopee community gathers can bring new shoppers to the market which helps the local vendors thrive. Currently, the market is open July – September from 10AM-2PM on Wednesdays, days and times that are not always easily accessible for working families. The City should continue to partner with VOC in finding ways to expand the days and hours of operation, and ideally find a new location or locations for year-round vending.

More recently, the Center Fresh Chicopee Farmer's Market, founded by the Chicopee

Food Force, was established to complement the Chicopee Farmer's Market and provide direct access to fresh foods in Chicopee Center, a neighborhood with otherwise limited access. The market runs each Thursday afternoon from 1-6PM on Springfield Street and has been a great success. Vendors include fruits and vegetables, honey, cheese, crafts, and food trucks. Expanded farmers' markets can play a bigger role in providing residents with access to affordable and healthy food options. While the City works to recruit grocery stores to more neighborhoods, multiple farmer's markets can help fill a gap as well as a long term need for fresh food access.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Chicopee's [Parks and Recreation Department](#) in partnership with a local non-profit organization manages 20 gardening plots at the Chicopee Community Garden at Lincoln Grove Park. Additional plots are being constructed at Rivers Park in Willimansett and will be available in Spring 2022. This is a great way for Chicopee residents of all ages to learn how to grow and care for their own garden and even grow their own food. Increasing promotion of the gardens can lead to more awareness among the community that this great asset is available. Based on resident demand, the City should look into additional parcels in other Chicopee neighborhoods that may accommodate community gardens, and can also connect residents with resources for growing fruits and vegetables in their own backyards or in planters (such as the University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment). These are all ways to increase food access and decrease food insecurity.

GETTING IT DONE

- Incentivize grocery retailers to locate in Chicopee neighborhoods currently experiencing food insecurity or in food deserts based on current food access data. Prepare a market analysis for grocery store sites to demonstrate demand to grocers. Provide incentives for larger scale mixed-use development to include grocery stores as part of their retail mix.

- Work with PVRTA to analyze existing bus routes to look for ways to improve connections and increase frequency between food insecure neighborhoods and existing grocery stores.
- Work with local grocery stores to encourage the expansion of home delivery of groceries. Consider offering incentives to provide free delivery in neighborhoods with limited fresh food access.
- Continue to support and expand existing food programs like ChicopeeFRESH, Chicopee Summer Lunch Program, Chicopee WIC, Meals on Wheels, local food pantries, and others. Serve as a connector between local grocery stores and these food programs, encouraging donations of food that can no longer be sold but is still safe and healthy for consumption.
- Expand the Chicopee Farmers Market and the downtown Farmer's Market to increase days and hours of operation to make it more accessible for working families; work with the VOC to find a location or locations for year-round vending, and encourage more Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) "farm share" pick up locations at these markets and other accessible spots.
- Increase public awareness of the local farmers markets through local community groups and leaders. Emphasize the multiple benefits that SNAP participants can redeem at local markets (as well as additional benefits such as access to free bike share use).
- Work with Lorraine's Kitchen to coordinate locations and a schedule for their new "mobile market" that can best serve underserved neighborhoods and communities.
- Look into parcels in other underserved neighborhoods that could accommodate small grocers (10,000 SF+/-) and community gardens so that residents have access to fresh foods.
- Prepare online and hard copy resource

documents showing where in the City fresh food and produce can be purchased and where EBT cards are accepted – work with other City departments and local social service providers to distribute this information.

- Work with existing organizations and programs to provide education to local residents on gardening, food storage, meal preparation, etc.

SPOTLIGHT ON: *Health and the Physical Environment*

Designing the physical environment to support safe and accessible walking and biking facilities is an important element of promoting health and wellness. Providing options for people to engage in active transportation, such as walking and biking, has been linked to reducing rates of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and asthma. Promoting active transportation also has shown to help alleviate mental health issues like depression and anxiety. Proactively planning and designing for streets that support active transportation connections to reduce even one vehicle trip per day or per week will result in cumulative benefits for individuals as well as the community.

For more information see: <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/active-transportation>

Figure 10: Chicopee River Canal Trail

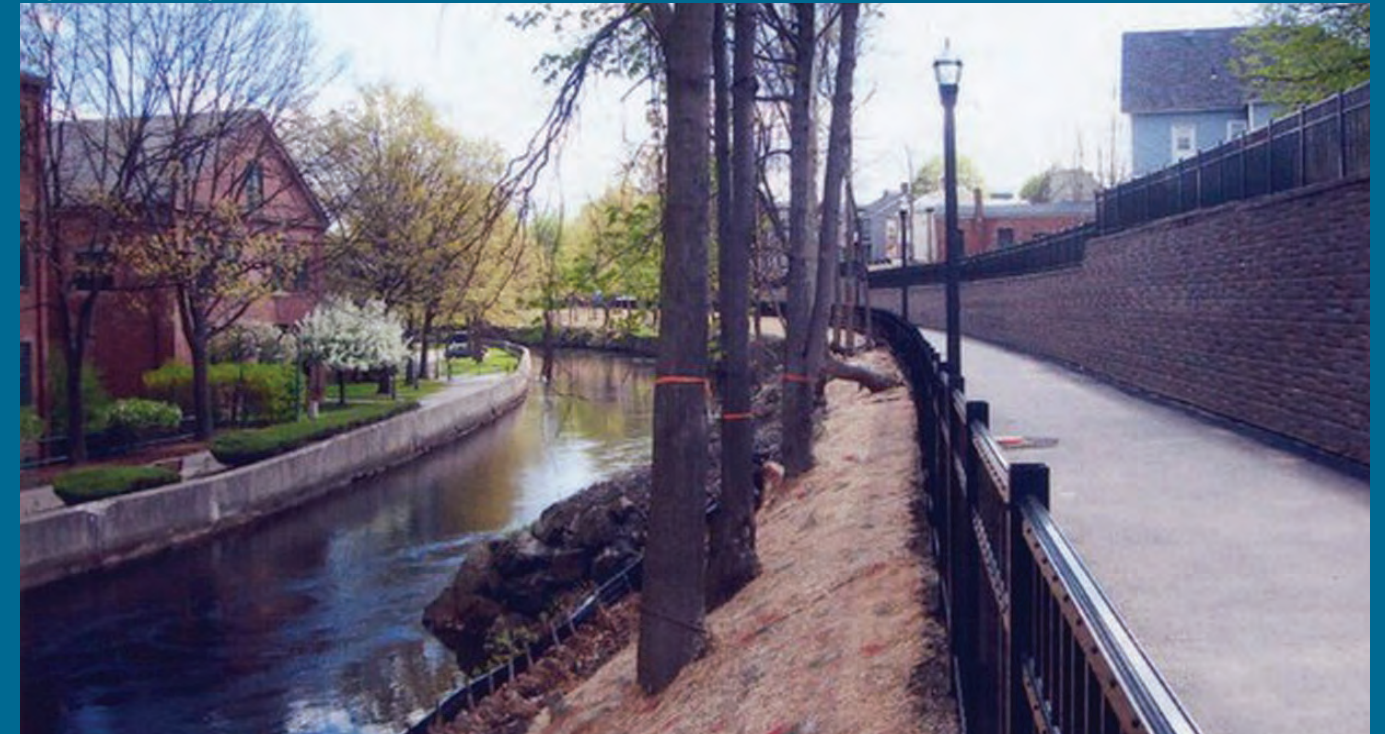


Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

Endnotes

1. <https://mapublichealth.org/priorities/access-to-healthy-affordable-food/ma-food-trust-program/>
2. <https://www.masslive.com/news/2021/04/chicopee-welcomes-2nd-food-pantry-to-serve-downtown-residents.html>



Figure 1. Black Eyed Susans.

Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

CHAPTER 7: PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Preparing for long-term resiliency.

INTRODUCTION

A sustainable community is adaptable and able to bounce back from events that challenge or threaten its environmental, economic, and social well-being. A resilient community plans for these anticipated challenges, investing in the tools it needs to ensure that it is prepared today and for what may come tomorrow. A sustainable and resilient Chicopee will not only plan for residents today, but also for future generations to come.

Vision for Planning for a Sustainable Future

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will build its capacity to withstand forces and events, both internal and external, that threaten our quality of life.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the *Natural Resources, Climate Change & Sustainability, and Energy* sections of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY INTO OUR ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Being sustainable and resilient means our natural environment and built infrastructure can withstand unexpected challenges. More and more, such challenges are coming from changes in the climate. Average temperatures are getting warmer which can be dangerous for people without air conditioning in the summer. Snowy winters are giving way to rainy seasons and drought is becoming more common in the summer, making it more difficult to manage drinking water supplies. Individual storms are becoming more frequent with more intense winds and rain, which leads to increased flooding and subsequent property damage as well as strains on the City's stormwater management system. Beyond climate change, the City has an obligation to make sure we pass down well-functioning systems and a healthy environment to the next generation.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Flooding concerns, specifically around the Connecticut River.
- Maintaining clean air and water quality in the City.
- Greening the City by planting more trees, creating and protecting green spaces/parks.
- Increasing emergency preparedness plans

for severe/extreme weather, particularly flooding and heat waves.

- Being a leader in addressing climate change.

PROTECTING AND ENHANCING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

To meet the challenges of climate change, we, as a community, need to understand the importance of our natural environment: the water, air, soil, and plants. We often refer to these resources as “green and blue infrastructure.” Green infrastructure includes our parks, open areas, wetlands, and forests. Blue infrastructure includes our major waterways (the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers), our ponds, floodplains, streams, and brooks. Together these resources create a system throughout our City that can help us be resilient to the effects of climate change and other environmental challenges. They contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents, cleaning our air and providing spaces to be active and gather as a community. Finally, they provide important habitat areas for plants and animals that connect Chicopee to the greater environment in the region surrounding the City.

Cleaning Our Brownfields

As the City and surrounding communities developed over the centuries, we lost many important natural resources or caused so much harm to the environment that what was left could no longer provide us with the same ecosystem benefits. We see these impacts when significant storms produce more rain than the ground can absorb and cause flooding, and at our old industrial buildings that have become polluted “Brownfields.” The City and its neighbors have put tremendous effort into protecting and restoring natural areas through cleanup and redevelopment of Brownfield sites, acquiring land for conservation, restoring wetlands and wild spaces, and adopting protective regulations and policies. Regional efforts within the Connecticut River Watershed, including efforts of the [Connecticut River Conservancy](#), have transformed what was once a chronically polluted

What are Brownfields?

Brownfields are former industrial or commercial sites where future use is affected by real or perceived environmental contamination. Chicopee, like other cities, has several of these sites (see the Thriving Together chapter under “Brownfields Redevelopment”) and has been working steadily over the years to clean them and put them back to use. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts maintains a [website to track known Brownfields](#).

waterway into one with many areas now safe for swimming, boating, and fishing. Similar efforts in the Chicopee River Watershed, including those of the [Chicopee 4 Rivers Watershed](#) group, have produced cleaner, healthier waters and increased awareness and responsible use of the river. Building on these accomplishments can continue to improve our natural areas and make life in Chicopee better for everyone.

Expanding the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network

It will be important for the City and neighboring communities to continue to build a network of parks and natural areas, including along the Connecticut and Chicopee Rivers. This network creates incredibly important travel routes and nesting areas for local wildlife, while improving the health of the watershed across the region.

The bikeway system along the Connecticut and Chicopee Rivers connects neighborhoods and Chicopee as a whole to surrounding communities. It also provides great opportunities for green infrastructure development, by incorporating elements that enhance the natural environment, such as areas designed to absorb water and treat runoff from the trailways before it flows into the rivers.

The documented increase of precipitation by climate change may more frequently overburden the City's existing system of catch basins, underground pipes, and outfalls (a.k.a. “gray

infrastructure”). However, the use of “green infrastructure” can help to reduce this burden by using landscaping to hold and treat stormwater runoff before it gets to the storm drain. Encouraging the use of these “nature-based solutions” in new and redevelopment projects, including Brownfields, is one way to dramatically improve stormwater management while cooling the air and providing attractive landscapes with pockets of habitat featuring native vegetation.

Nature-based solutions can also be used to manage rain runoff and flooding in our streets by creating Green Streets. Rain gardens, trees, and other plantings support the existing gray infrastructure by absorbing rainwater and reducing the burden on the system. They also make our

SPOTLIGHT ON: The Connecticut and Chicopee Rivers

Existing and future multiuse paths along the Connecticut and Chicopee Rivers provide sustainable transportation and recreational opportunities in Chicopee. The Chicopee Canal and Riverwalk, once completed, will connect Chicopee Center, Chicopee Falls, and eventually Willimansett. The Riverwalk will provide an off-road connection for residents and visitors of these areas, expanding mobility for those who cannot or choose not to drive for these local trips. The Chicopee Riverwalk will eventually connect to the planned Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway, which will run for 7-miles through the western edge of Chicopee, connecting from Springfield through Chicopee Center and Willimansett to Holyoke. This will expand sustainable mobility options for both local and regional connectivity.

For more information see: <https://chicopeema.gov/198/RiverWalk-Phase-II>

streets more beautiful, reduce pavement, and cool the air. Green infrastructure can be more elaborate, like the bioswales and rain gardens in the photos below, or as simple as planting trees. The City is currently working to plant new

Figure 2. Green infrastructure installations, sometimes called “nature-based solutions,” come in all shapes and sizes. Some are installed in old parking areas (top), along streets (middle), and within natural landscapes (bottom).



Photo Credit: Horsley Witten Group, Inc.

street trees throughout Chicopee. This is a simple but very effective (and inexpensive) way to absorb more rainfall and keep it from entering our stormwater system.

In addition to creating new green infrastructure projects that mimic nature, the City should also protect and enhance its remaining natural and undeveloped areas. Riverbank and wetlands restoration projects are examples of special projects performed by the City. The City’s stormwater regulations are the primary tool for capturing opportunities for green infrastructure improvements. As with many municipalities,

Some Benefits of Green and Blue Infrastructure¹

Environmental Benefits

- Decreases impervious surfaces
- Creates wildlife habitat
- Increases infiltration of runoff into the soil
- Adds storage capacity to reduce runoff and discharges with pollutants
- Increases trees, bushes, and greenery that absorb air pollution and reduce air temperatures

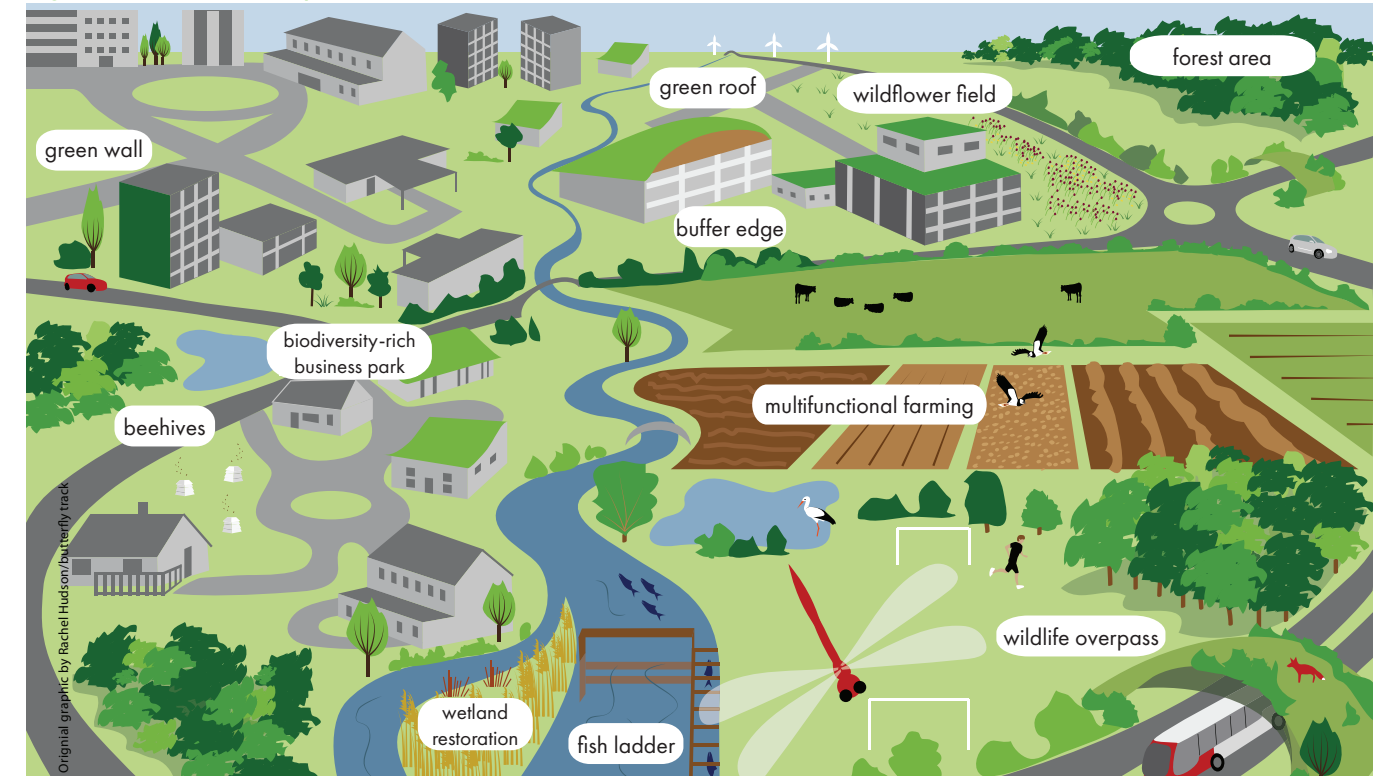
Economic Benefits

- Reduces heating and cooling costs
- Reduces municipal water usage
- Increases property values
- Reduces costs associated with flooding

Social & Public Health Benefits

- Reduces exposure to water pollution and flood-related hazards
- Creates links between existing open spaces as pathways for increased opportunities for physical activity
- Makes our city more beautiful

Figure 3. Potential Components of Green and Blue Infrastructure in Urban Areas.



Intact natural features, like a forest, provide high biodiversity value, capture rain, and cool air temperatures.



Built features that enhance the ecosystem, like a fish ladder, green roof, or eco-bridge, serve and assist wildlife movement.



Improving the water quality of rivers and streams reestablishes healthy habitat and places to enjoy.



Natural buffers that are managed sustainably help improve the ecological quality of the landscape.



Restored habitats help reconnect and enhance existing natural areas, like a restored wetland or wildflower meadow.



Multi-use areas provide opportunities for people to interact with nature, be active, and sustainably use the land. Examples include urban farming and recreational fields.



Connected features like a river, stream, or natural buffer along a roadway or property create wildlife corridors.

Photo Credit: European Commission

Chicopee relies heavily on the Conservation Commission to ensure that new development or redevelopment that may impact wetlands or surface waters is designed to minimize impacts to these resources. The City also uses a more comprehensive Stormwater Management Ordinance to regulate a larger number of development activities over a larger geographic area.

New tools the City may consider adopting include requiring [Low-Impact Development](#) (including nature-based solutions) in new

development and redevelopment projects. Further, the City may consider developing a “cluster development” ordinance, which would allow a subdivision to “cluster” homes closer together on smaller lots in order to protect natural resources on the property. However, with few parcels of land remaining for subdivision, this will have a limited impact. Chicopee’s best course of action is to conserve as much of our remaining open space as possible, and to encourage new development and redevelopment

in already built up areas (see the *Making a Home and Coming Together* chapters for more on this topic).

BUILDING MORE RESILIENT WATER-RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE

During the 20th Century, municipalities got into the habit of managing different issues related to water with different departments. Today we still see this in most cities, with separate departments for wastewater (sewer), drinking water, stormwater, and flood control. Each of these water-related issues brings distinct challenges to the City, so it does make sense to have staff and resources dedicated to them individually. However, over the past couple of decades, municipalities have started to take a more integrated approach to these issues, recognizing that the way water moves through a community affects more than one department. For example, the water we use to fill the bathtub comes through our drinking water system, but then leaves the house as wastewater. Water that runs down the street in a rainstorm can be piped to the sewer treatment plant or cause localized flooding in rivers and streams. Furthermore, cities that coordinate the repairs of different utilities can save considerable amounts of money by consolidating activities like digging up roadways, etc.

Integrated Water Resources Management

Chicopee recognized the interconnections between its different water services long ago and has since been working to better manage these utilities as a system. Most notably, the City developed an Integrated Water Resources Management Plan (IWRMP) for its water systems, including: sewer, water supply, stormwater, and flood control related infrastructure. The goals of the plan are to measure the success of completed Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) reduction projects, consider several means of reducing project costs, and prioritize projects the City needs to complete to address government requirements or to replace aging facilities. The objective of the IWRMP is to develop a plan to complete projects that have the greatest social, economic, and environmental benefit, on a

Figure 4. Water Main Repair.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

schedule that is affordable for the City.

The City has been taking decisive action to reduce and eliminate its CSOs for the past twenty years, as well as eliminating sewer backups into homes. During the construction of the new separated sanitary sewer system, the City discovered that its existing drinking water, sewer, and drain systems are in need of more extensive repair and replacement than originally anticipated. The pipe replacement needs, coupled with rising construction costs, have resulted in steadily rising sewer rates in the City.

In addition to rising costs associated with stormwater and CSOs, the City is faced with the new cost of improvements to the Drinking Water Treatment Facility and distribution system, as well as to the Water Pollution Control Facility, which are anticipated in coming years to address aging equipment and stricter requirements posed by the state and federal governments.

The Integrated Management planning process includes the following steps:

- **Examine the City's obligations as a whole:** This includes evaluating all of the City's wastewater, stormwater, and water system needs for the next 20 years.
- **Prioritize projects:** The process allows for prioritizing all wastewater, stormwater, and water system projects based on public health benefits, environmental impact, and other critical parameters.
- **Analyze the City's financial capability:** A

What is Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO)?

What is Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO)? A traditional sewer system collects all rainwater, sewage, and wastewater into one place and sends it to a treatment plant. However, if the amount of wastewater exceeds the capacity of the collection system or the treatment plant, the excess gets dumped into nearby rivers and streams – this is a combined sewer overflow. CSOs can contain untreated human and industrial waste, toxic materials, and debris. Chicopee has been slowly and steadily reducing CSOs, which helps keep our rivers clean and healthy.

detailed financial capability analysis is underway to evaluate current and predicted future sewer, stormwater, and water rates.

- **Develop an implementation plan:** The final implementation plan will establish an affordable schedule for carrying out projects according to their assigned priority.

The City has massive responsibilities related to water infrastructure and flood control. Between investments and repairs needed to meet federal requirements and providing affordable, consistent services to residents, Chicopee needs the planning, funding, and patience to tackle these issues bit by bit, year after year. Frankly, it is an overwhelming task for a small city like Chicopee. Fortunately, the IWRMP will be a very helpful roadmap, allowing the City to do the best it can with the resources it has to stay on top of this work.

Focus on Stormwater and Flooding

Of all the issues addressed in the IWRMP, managing stormwater and flooding present some of the greatest environmental challenges, many of which are exacerbated by increasingly severe storms and other impacts of climate change. When rain falls on our City's streets or when large piles of snow melt in driveways and

Figure 5. Sewer Separation Project on East Street.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

parking lots, the water that runs off into the storm drain carries a surprising amount of pollution. These storm drains, often built decades ago, carry the polluted runoff directly to rivers and streams and, even in small storms, the results can be unhealthy for wildlife and people. Over time, these repeated doses of pollution can do long-term damage to the ecosystem and even cause closures of swimming and boating areas. The objective of stormwater management, including the reduction of CSOs described above, is to reduce the amount of pollution in the runoff and the amount of runoff that reaches our rivers and streams.

Stormwater management is complex, and the best programs coordinate permitting at the federal and state level, local regulations and policies, and initiatives led by municipalities, watershed associations, and other community organizations, ideally working collaboratively. Work includes public education, local and regional infrastructure projects, and state and municipal regulations that limit or manage pollutants entering a waterbody. In Chicopee, the City's Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) helps to identify local priorities for these efforts.

CONTINUED RESILIENCY PLANNING

Chicopee continues to plan for resiliency and the anticipated impacts of climate change. In 2017, the City, along with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, undertook the process of pre-disaster planning and mitigation in accordance with requirements for FEMA funding.

Figure 6. Stormwater Runoff.

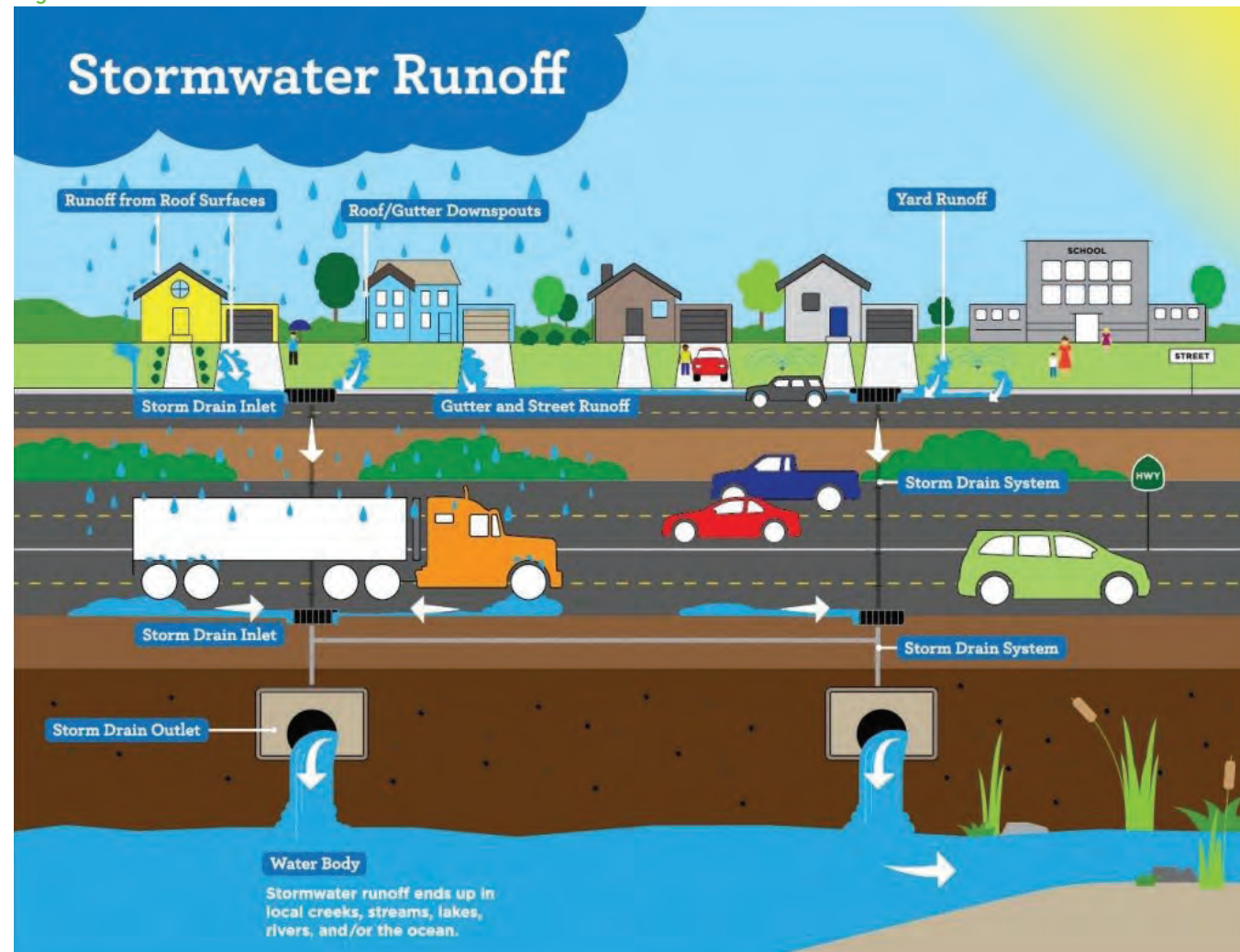


Photo Credit: City of Bainbridge Island, WA

The result was an updated [Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) for the city. In June 2019, the City participated in the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness \(MVP\) Program](#) in order to expand its resiliency planning efforts, with a Community Resilience Building Workshops Summary of Findings prepared by Milone & MacBroom in June 2019. The MVP program provides support for cities and towns in Massachusetts to plan for climate change resiliency and implement priority projects. This process, driven by local residents and grounded in community knowledge and experience, resulted in recommendations that build on Chicopee’s strengths and address its vulnerabilities in responding to the challenges of climate change. These recommendations specifically targeted

environmental features, social networks and resources, and public infrastructures like roads, bridges, and municipal facilities. With this list of vulnerabilities, Chicopee can prioritize what needs to be done to withstand and recover more quickly from these events in the near and long-term. Completing the MVP Program process also makes the City eligible for state implementation grant funds.

The City will continue to build on these planning efforts, monitoring climate data as it becomes available and understanding how it will impact the City’s infrastructure and operations to deliver services to residents. It will also amend local land development policies and regulations to ensure designs considers a changing environment and result in more sustainable public and private investments.



Figure 6. Chicopee Falls Dam.

Photo Credit: Richard B. Johnson, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

GETTING IT DONE

- Require the incorporation of green infrastructure on City properties and streets and in existing or planned infrastructure, as well as for new private development via site plan regulations. Find opportunities to incentivize such infrastructure on existing private properties.
- Create new and needed jobs within the City’s workforce to maintain and manage the City’s growing green infrastructure network.
- Prioritize acquisition and preservation of properties of high conservation value that abut existing open space and recreational properties.
- Continue to protect and enhance the City’s tree canopy through the City’s Urban Forestry Program and continued implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan. Establish a system for residents to request the planting of trees on public properties.
- Provide standards and guidelines in site plan regulations, the wetland protection ordinance, and other relevant policy documents for the installation of landscaping that is beneficial to the natural environment and promotes the use of native and drought-tolerant plants.
- Continue to update and implement the Integrated Water Resources Management Plan (IWRMP).
- Require nature-based solutions wherever practicable to manage stormwater as part of public projects and investments.
- Require the use of nature-based solutions in private development and redevelopment projects in areas near significant natural resources and encourage them citywide wherever possible.
- Explore ways to financially support the City’s efforts to meet the requirements of its federal NPDES permit and implement citywide

What is Resilient Design?

Resilient design is the intentional design of buildings, landscapes, communities, and regions in order to respond to natural and manmade disasters and disturbances—as well as long-term changes resulting from climate change—including sea level rise, increased frequency of heat waves, and regional drought.

- [Resilient Design Institute](#)

stormwater best management practices.

- Continue involvement in regional and watershed-based collaborations to help meet common stormwater management and water quality goals and objectives.
- Continue to evaluate standards for stormwater management in local regulations to ensure that best practices are required in proposed development and redevelopment projects.
- Review and update parking lot development regulations to shift away from parking minimums to parking maximums to reduce the size of new and redeveloped parking lots. Revise regulations to ensure all parking lot reconstruction projects meet stormwater and green infrastructure requirements.
- Continue to maintain the City’s flood control infrastructure to ensure these systems receive certification from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and are capable of managing future storm events.
- Develop an Emergency Action Plan specific to flood events, including a clear chain of command with neighboring cities and towns for evacuation, sandbagging, etc.
- Partner with the City of Springfield to ensure that any vulnerabilities in their flood control system are not putting Chicopee at risk.
- Continue to implement the actions of the 2017 City of Chicopee Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) and update the HMP every five years.
- Maintain and expand the network of stakeholders that participated in the MVP process. Consider periodic update meetings to evaluate progress and revisit priorities as needed.
- Continue to monitor climate data and use this data in land development policy decisions as appropriate.
- Update local ordinances, subdivision regulations, and other land development standards

and policies to include performance standards related to climate data.

- Evaluate the implementation of resilience design standards² (required or voluntary) for new non-residential and multi-family buildings. Resilience design standards can include a variety of tools that help projects meet the challenges of climate change.
- Develop a program for public education to increase awareness of natural hazards and climate change impacts and identify measures individuals can take to prepare for and lessen climate change (*See also the City’s Hazard Mitigation Plan*).

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

When it comes to planning for a sustainable future and being a more resilient city, we all need to do our part. As the City implements policies that prepare it to be resilient to the impacts of climate change while also protecting our natural environment, it also needs to encourage residents to do the same, because our collective actions and contributions have an impact.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Addressing overall cleanliness and trash management city-wide.
- Encouraging residents to be more environmentally conscious in their daily activities.
- Providing more education about climate change and sustainability in the community and within schools.
- Providing more education on what can and cannot be recycled.
- Providing opportunities for composting of food waste.



Table 1. Public Education and Outreach Opportunities

TARGET AUDIENCE	ACTIVITY
All city residents	Create a pamphlet about the City’s recycling programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can be recycled and how/where • What cannot be recycled and what to do with it • What to do with household hazardous materials
All ages	Hold educational events at parks and recreation areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant identification and their importance—the difference between invasive and native plants, the value of pollinator plants • Walking tours of habitat restoration projects
All ages	Install information kiosks at city green infrastructure projects explaining their development and purpose
All ages	Prepare informational flyers on the environmental harm of single-use plastic and Styrofoam containers to encourage reduction of use
Ages 16+	Not all trips require your car—encourage people to think before they drive: “Can I walk or bike there?”
Community garden users, homeowners, renters	Create a pamphlet that explains the harms of pesticides and herbicides and more environmentally-friendly alternatives
Homeowners, renters	Hold demonstration seminars showing how to install a rain garden in your backyard
Neighborhood residents	Establish “Friends of” groups to help with cleanup and maintenance of a local park, playground, or other green space
Private property owners, developers, contractors	Create a pamphlet and a City webpage to educate the public on existing conservation and planning regulations for property development.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Residents should be educated regarding the impact of their actions on the environment and the opportunities in Chicopee to increase their contribution to our long-term resilience. Several initiatives already exist, including the Community Garden Program and the Urban Forestry Program; and there are many other opportunities such as those described in Table 1.

These programs and activities can be led by the Parks & Recreation Department, Conservation Commission, Planning Department, and the Department of Public Works, and incorporated into public school curriculum. The City can lead by example and highlight public projects that showcase best practices in resiliency.

TRASH COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

Trash collection was one of the most commonly mentioned issues by the public related to City services. Many residents would like the City to provide larger or more trash and recycling bins per household, as well as composting services to reduce landfill waste and resident trash. The City should work aggressively to increase residential and commercial recycling rates, expand access to composting services and tools, and provide opportunities and incentives for the reuse of items that might otherwise be thrown away. The City worked with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in 2016 to develop Report: Landfill Closure Alternatives, a waste reduction and resource management analysis for the City of Chicopee looking ahead to the closure of the Chicopee Sanitary Landfill. The City will continue to explore ways to implement these alternatives, including moving toward a goal of zero waste. The City Council passed a Resolution Adopting the Zero Waste Guiding Principle and Supporting the Creation of a City-wide Plan for Zero Waste by June 7, 2016. This Resolution noted the City's commitment to reducing solid waste by 30% by 2030 and 80% by 2050 consistent with the Commonwealth's Goals established through the Massachusetts Pathway to Zero Waste Plan.

GETTING IT DONE



- Use the installation of nature-based solutions for stormwater management and other green infrastructure elements to educate the community about the benefits of these resources, particularly along bike paths and in public spaces. This might include informational kiosks at rain gardens and wetland mitigation projects along the rivers.
- Create pollinator gardens and bee houses with informational boards along bike paths, walkways, and public spaces to educate about the importance of pollinators to our food system and overall biodiversity in the region.
- Develop a public outreach program that

educates the public on what sustainability/resiliency means to a community and its residents. Topics might include water conservation, recycling, composting, walking and biking instead of driving, and using reusable bags, cups, and utensils.

- Increase the availability of community gardens for City residents.
- Educate residents about the impacts of fertilizers, lawn chemicals, pesticides, and herbicides on local waterways and promote and encourage the use of alternative environment-friendly options. Lead by example and establish a policy to minimize the use of such materials on public lands.
- Educate residents, property owners, and businesses about benefits and different ways of managing stormwater on their properties. Promote the use of rain barrels, rain gardens, and permeable pavers for driveways and walkways, as well as the importance of cleaning up pet waste, among other approaches. Consider options for bulk purchase of rain barrels, permeable pavers, and other such items to sell at a reduced rate or provide free of charge to residents.
- Support residents and businesses who want to organize their own projects that have environmental and community benefits. The City can provide a platform either online or at City Hall (something as simple as a bulletin board) to connect residents with similar interests and ideas.
- Use events at parks and conservation areas to promote the important functions the City's natural resources play in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change, increasing our health and social wellbeing, and other benefits. Partner with regional organizations that can provide resources and support for these types of community events (e.g. Hitchcock Center for the Environment).
- Commit to working regionally and at the

state level to advocate for bigger picture environmental stewardship efforts, such as working with businesses to use and sell more environmentally friendly products, cut down on wasteful packaging and the use of plastics, promote the use of refillable containers, and establish or expand "cradle to grave" recycling and reuse standards for items such as solar panels, mattresses, batteries, etc.

- Explore new services or expand existing services and programs that improve recycling rates and reduce the costs of waste being landfilled.
- Study all options for removing food waste from the local waste stream.

ENERGY REDUCTION AND CONSERVATION

Conserving energy and being more efficient in its usage can help Chicopee reduce its carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality and helping the City achieve its resiliency objectives.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Increasing the use of renewable energy sources for public buildings, residential homes, commercial business, and industries, and finding ways to make this more accessible and affordable.
- In particular, expanding the use of solar energy.
- Finding ways to reduce the costs of energy.
- Adding more electric vehicle charging stations throughout Chicopee.
- Providing more information to the public on energy saving resources and incentives for residents and businesses to be more energy efficient.

Examples of Chicopee's Green Community Progress

Siting and Use of Renewable Energy

- CEL purchases clean energy from facilities generating power through solar, hydro, wind, and methane and owns the hydro facility in Chicopee Falls
- At least three solar fields have been approved and built

Energy Use Reduction

- All street and traffic lights use LED units
- Upgrades to heating and cooling systems, windows, and lighting at City Hall and the City Hall Annex will be more efficient and reduce energy consumption
- Overall annual municipal energy use has dropped 20% since 2015

Fuel Efficient Vehicle Policies

- Four city vehicles and three street sweepers have idle-reduction technology or mechanisms
- Two dual electric vehicle charging stations with a four-car capacity were installed at RiverMills Senior Center

CITY FACILITIES, BUILDINGS, AND OPERATIONS

The City has made a commitment to lowering the energy usage of municipal operations and promoting clean energy to residents and local businesses. Further, City efforts to decrease dependence on automobiles and expand opportunities for walking and biking all help reduce emissions and clean the air (see the Getting Around chapter). The Chicopee Energy Conservation Commission leads energy savings policies for the City, making recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

In February 2017, Chicopee was designated a

Green Community by the Green Communities Division of the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER). Once a community has been designated as a Green Community, the Division provides technical assistance and financial support to improve energy efficiency and increase the use of renewable energy in public buildings, vehicles, facilities, and schools.

The City is fortunate to have the Chicopee Electric Light Department (CEL) as its municipal electricity provider, allowing Chicopee to take a more direct and proactive role in its energy future. It offers incentives to customers looking to make their homes or buildings more energy efficient. CEL's Home Energy Loss Prevention Services (HELPS) program offers customers energy education, home energy audits, assistance with home energy improvements, and ENERGY STAR appliance rebates. CEL also participates in the Massachusetts Municipal Light Plant Solar Program. Through this program, CEL and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) offer rebates to support the installation of residential solar generation.

Attendees participating in the MVP process noted that having a local utility like CEL is a strength because the company is highly responsive to local needs and is a reliable power source for the community. While it is a strength, the electricity grid is vulnerable to hazards like extreme wind and heat. Both underground conduits and above-ground wires (electricity and telecommunications) were considered vulnerable, and the City will work to strengthen these assets. CEL will need to continue to explore energy resiliency initiatives, including more robust battery storage systems for energy backup, neighborhood microgrids, ground source heat pumps, etc. It will also be important to collaborate with other cities and towns to advocate at the state and federal level for more renewable energy infrastructure and other grid resiliency issues that are beyond the control of any one municipality.

RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES

As the City continues to improve the efficiency of municipal facilities, vehicles, and operations, it must also find opportunities to encourage local businesses and residents to be more energy-efficient and reduce dependency on fossil fuels. Challenges include:

- There is a limited supply of large blocks of open space that could be used for renewable energy projects.
- Most homes in the City are old and were not built to today's standards of efficiency.
- Many residential buildings are renter-occupied, and it can be difficult to convince building owners to do upgrades such as installing solar panels or retrofitting buildings for increased efficiency.
- Currently, CEL does not have the infrastructure to allow it to buy back solar generated electricity.

GETTING IT DONE



- Continue making energy efficiency upgrades and improvements to City buildings and facilities.
- Identify larger municipal parking lots for the installation of solar canopies.
- Expand vehicle charging stations at City properties, including schools, parks, and recreational facilities that see a lot of car traffic.
- Install bike racks at public buildings and in neighborhood centers.
- Budget for the replacement of City fleet vehicles with more fuel efficient models, such as electric or hybrid, as vehicles age out of service.
- Continue to promote CEL's Go Solar Program to Chicopee residents.
- Develop materials, including online resources, that guide businesses and residents to energy efficiency and renewable energy financial incentive programs (rebates, loans,

and other savings) available through the Commonwealth.

- Develop an outreach program for homeowners, particularly those with rental properties in the City, to educate them on simple affordable ways to make their properties more energy-efficient. Consider demonstration projects and giveaways of programmable thermostats or other incentives to encourage participation.
- Develop programs to incentivize private property owners (residential, commercial, mixed-use, etc.) to advance building energy efficiency upgrades for older buildings and infrastructure.
- Consider Energy Fairs or other community events as part of a larger community education program on energy efficiency and reduction.
- Review Zoning ordinance and identify new language that would require or encourage commercial electric charging stations.
- Incentivize public electric vehicle charging stations (Level 3) and individual charging stations (Level 2) as part of commercial development and redevelopment projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Becoming a resilient City requires preparation from individuals, businesses, and the community as a whole. The City must be able to adapt to, respond to, and recover from the impacts associated with climate change and other environmental challenges. While climate change touches everyone, some portions of our community are more vulnerable to these challenges. Factors that contribute to these vulnerabilities include poor living conditions, lack of access to services (including health care, transportation, education, job opportunities), existing chronic health conditions or mental illness, reduced

mobility, and lack of neighborhood investment.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Making sure the most vulnerable people in Chicopee (those who are homebound, elderly, low income, homeless, etc.) have support to during emergency weather events.
- In particular, making sure there are plans to protect the local homeless population during emergency weather events.
- Increase shelters and warming and cooling centers for people who need them.
- Planting more trees and add open space to older, denser parts of the City (helping clean the air/improve conditions for people with asthma).

Environmental justice (EJ), as a concept, asserts that everyone in Chicopee should enjoy the benefits of a healthy environment, and no neighborhoods should be overburdened with the majority of environmental problems. Historically, policy decisions around the country have not always operated this way. Vulnerable populations, like lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color, were typically left out of the decision-making process, and the location of "environmental bad actors," such as polluting industries, highways, and landfills, were built in and around these neighborhoods.

But there are new policies that are working to correct these conditions at the state and local level. According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs:

"Environmental justice is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental hazards and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment regardless of race, color, national origin,

income, or English language proficiency. Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people and communities with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of energy, climate change, and environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens.”

They are defined as neighborhoods (U.S. Census Bureau census block groups) that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The annual median household income is not more than 65 per cent of the statewide annual median household income;
- Minorities comprise 40 per cent or more of the population;
- 25 per cent or more of households lack English language proficiency; or
- Minorities comprise 25 per cent or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 per cent of the statewide annual median household income.

In Chicopee, EJ communities are located throughout the City but tend to be clustered to the west. Areas that meet the criteria for income and minorities are clustered in the former Industrial Villages (Willimansett, Chicopee Center, and Chicopee Falls), but also now spread into parts of Aldenville, Fairview, and Westover. There are no areas in Chicopee where 25% or more of the population lacks English language proficiency.

Additional vulnerable populations include the City’s significant homeless population, individuals who are homebound or those with mobility limitations, and individuals with mental-health issues or intellectual disabilities. Members of

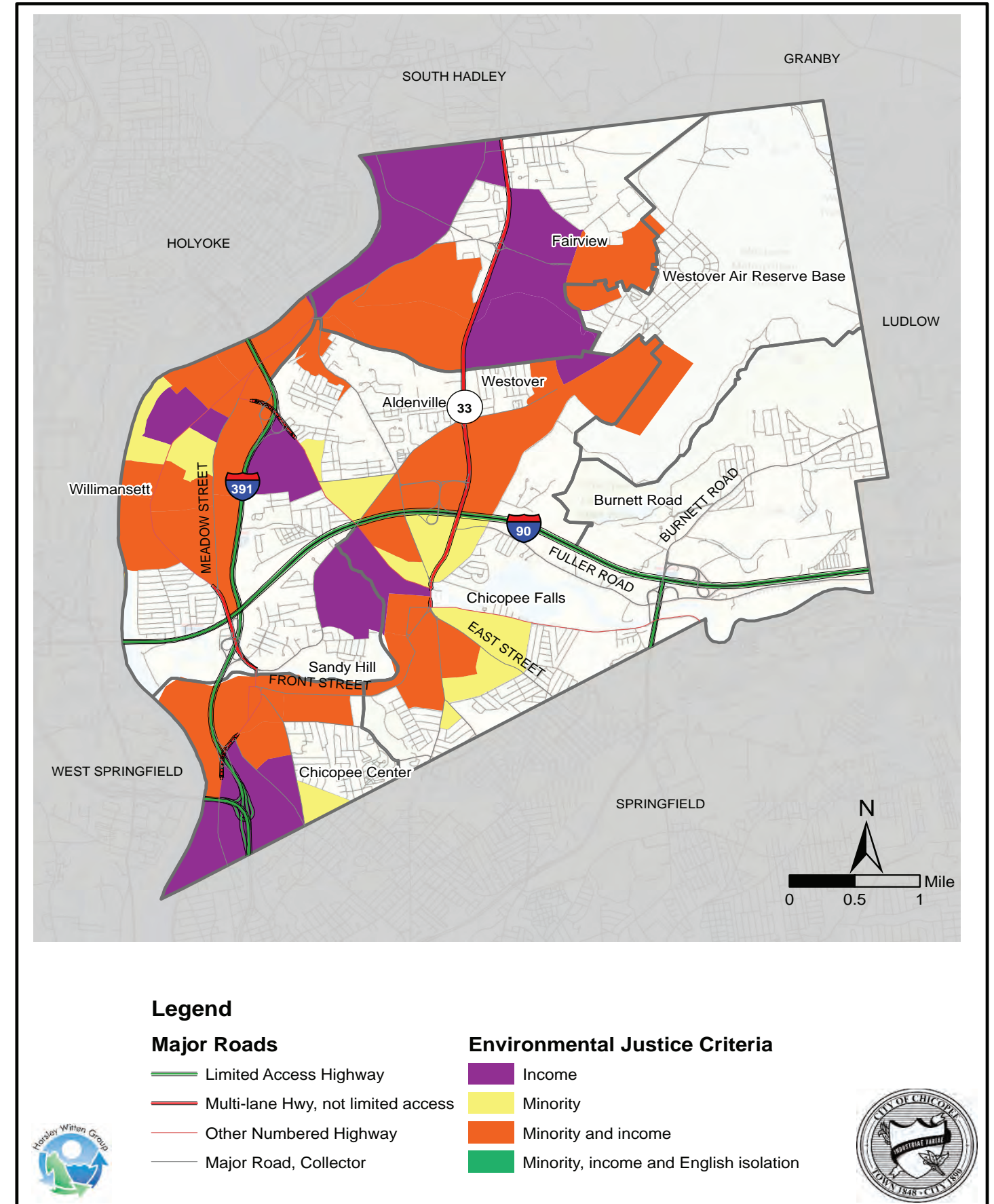
these populations are less likely to be aware of and prepared for, more likely to be impacted by, and less capable of recovering from climate change and natural hazards. Because they are less able to access public assistance during disaster recovery, targeted efforts need to be made to ensure they are aware of available resources, and first responders are able to mobilize and meet needs as they arise during emergency events.

GETTING IT DONE



- Develop relationships with key stakeholders and organizations within EJ communities to create a network of support and communication.
- Develop a process to collaborate with EJ communities in decisions around resiliency and preparing for the impacts of climate change and natural hazards. Determine best practices for meaningful engagement and ways to encourage participation.
- Develop a “checklist” that can be used by decision-makers to improve equitable outcomes of resiliency projects, programs, and other initiatives.
- Prioritize EJ communities for installations of green infrastructure and other strategies that reduce and minimize the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.
- Perform outreach and raise awareness within vulnerable populations to assist and prepare them for natural hazards. This includes working with local community organizations and nonprofits to develop and perform public outreach. Erect signs in locations where homeless and vulnerable populations are known to frequent to provide information and resources about where to go and who to call during an event.
- Ensure that heating and cooling centers, and other community facilities and staff are equipped to help homeless and vulnerable populations.
- Develop a resource center where these

Figure 7. Chicopee Environmental Justice Communities.



populations can access certain amenities, such as showers or kitchens. This resource can also act as a shelter during weather events.

- Formalize a procedure for alerting, evacuating, and relocating homeless and other vulnerable populations prior to a severe event.
- Add an annex or addendum to the City's Emergency Response Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan detailing procedures for all the actions noted above.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-11/documents/greeninfrastructure_healthy_communities_factsheet.pdf
2. https://www.abettercity.org/assets/images/Voluntary_Resilience_Standards.pdf

Figure 1. The K-2 Art Club at P.E. Bowe School.



Photo Credit: P.E. Bowe School

CHAPTER 8: **LEARNING TOGETHER**

Preparing our children for productive and well-rounded lives and promoting life-long learning and skill-building opportunities for all residents.

INTRODUCTION

Chicopee residents take great pride in their public schools and want to make sure that students are receiving the opportunities they need to have productive and well-rounded lives. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clearer than ever how important our schools are for youth and families within Chicopee. With all the challenges that have come from virtual and hybrid learning, school administrators and staff, teachers, and students have pushed through and persevered. The City commits to making sure that all of Chicopee's schools have the resources, facilities, and staff needed to give students a first-class education. Chicopee is also a city that promotes life-long learning for all residents and the opportunity to build on skills and learn new ones. Making sure that Chicopee residents who have aged out of the public school system still have opportunities to learn and grow is important for the success of Chicopee as a whole. New skills build the local workforce. Having new skills give residents the opportunity for high paying jobs and advancement, which can increase household incomes and improve quality of life.

Vision for Learning Together

Over the next 20 years, Chicopee will work to make sure that our educational institutions are providing opportunities for all youth and adults to have thriving and productive lives.

For more on the data and statistics that informed this chapter, please see the **Demographics, Economic Development, Transportation & Mobility, Planning for Food Access, Public Health & Social Services, and Public Services & Facilities** sections of the *Envision Our Chicopee: 2040 Baseline Report*.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, Chicopee residents want the City to focus on:

- Repairing and upgrading all Chicopee school buildings and grounds and better supporting Chicopee Public Schools financially.
- Making sure programs at Chicopee Public Schools are preparing students for a successful future.
- Capitalizing on the resources of Chicopee's many private schools and colleges.
- Expanding resources for adult education and training with the Valley Opportunity Council, Chicopee Comprehensive High School, Westover Job Corps, and others.
- Improving access to and the affordability of daycare and pre-schools and setting up children for success in grade school.

ENHANCING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Chicopee Public Schools are a huge part of the local culture in Chicopee. Many residents

attended school in Chicopee and now are sending their children to those same schools. It is important that our public schools are meeting the needs of all students and setting them up for a successful future in whatever career they decide to pursue. To be set up for success, Chicopee students need updated school facilities, the best teachers and school staff, solid curriculums, and social, emotional, and mental health support.

Students need resources both academic and non-academic to succeed, and Chicopee Public Schools are working continually to provide the resources needed to meet identified local needs.

Identified needed academic resources include:

- Decreasing classroom sizes
- Increasing tutoring or individualized learning
- Adding more advanced level classes at the high school level
- Increasing options for vocational and career training and education that directly link to jobs with local businesses—and making sure students have support with transportation to jobs/internships
- Increasing pre-school options
- Maintaining English Language Learner (ELL) programs, particularly in Spanish, Arabic, Polish, and Russian
- Ensuring all students have access to a computer, tablet, or other electronic devices
- Increasing funding for special education programs that help meet the needs of our students with disabilities

School teachers and administrators see the impacts of poverty and community health up close every day and recognize a need for all sorts of social services and stable housing for their students. Young people are under increasing stress and anxiety, which can be a huge barrier to succeeding in school. While schools can't provide for all these needs directly, they play a large role in helping all students succeed despite their

socio-economic and mental/emotional health situations. Identified needed non-academic resources include:

- Increasing mental and emotional health counseling from an early age
- Increasing counseling and services for drug addiction and other substance abuse
- Making sure all students are well fed (breakfast and lunch is free for everyone, and there are also dinner offerings at the middle and high schools)
- Providing after-school programs and activities to keep kids engaged even after the school day has ended
- Better transportation options to school and for after-school activities
- Providing training for parents on how they can best support the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of their children

In addition, many school facilities are old and too small to provide the desired classroom sizes, and the school administration building

is too small to fit all staff and is not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) accessible. Also, it can be difficult to recruit and maintain teachers and staff, particularly people who reflect the diversity and cultures of the student body.

This is a lot of responsibility for our school administrators and teachers, who deserve all the support we can give them. These are important investments not only in our children and their futures, but also in making sure Chicopee is an attractive place for new families to come and live.

Investment and funding for Chicopee Public Schools needs to be a top priority and focus going forward. More specifically, increased investment and funding need to be focused on resources for teachers, classrooms, school libraries, after-school activities, emotional and mental health counseling, career training and counseling, and updating facilities. Creating an educational environment where all students thrive, no matter who they are or what their background, can help unlock everyone's potential to contribute to the future of the community.

Figure 2. Graduates from the Chicopee High School Class of 2021.



Photo Credit: Chicopee High School

Figure 3. Chicopee High School.



Photo Credit: John Phelan, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Investing in the City’s school facilities can also support larger community initiatives, such as adult learning classes, workforce training, and space for community center programming. Chicopee, unlike many other school systems, generally has minimal activities in all school buildings after school hours and during the summer months.

GETTING IT DONE



- Prioritize grants, technical assistance, and other outside sources for Chicopee Public School expenses that are otherwise difficult to fund, such as resources for arts and music, after-school activities, emotional and mental health counseling, career training and counseling, etc.
- Expand high school vocational and career training programs into sectors with high job demand in the region and connect students with local employers and apprenticeship opportunities. Partner with businesses in these sectors to help fund and/or run these programs. Find ways to integrate career training into other curriculum and ensure students have access to transportation to training, jobs, and internships.
- Develop a comprehensive School District-wide approach to maintaining the social, emotional, and mental health of students.

Support and expand existing counseling for students and incorporate mental wellness into the day to day curriculum. Build relationships and partner with local service providers to connect with students who have particularly acute needs.

- Continue to develop outreach materials and programs for parents of students, to help parents better support their children with academic, social, emotional, and mental health issues, as well as substance abuse issues. Create an online clearinghouse of resources and organize both in-person and virtual trainings.
- Look for opportunities to offer before and after-school programming in the City’s schools for students and adult learners.
- Develop a 10-year Facilities Maintenance Plan for all public school operations, including but not limited to exploring options for renovating school buildings and facilities to provide an environment that helps set up students for success.

Figure 4. Elms College.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

CAPITALIZING ON OUR PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Chicopee is home to many successful private schools, charter schools, and colleges, and can capitalize on these institutions to increase learning and educational opportunities throughout the City.

Charter Schools

- Hampden Charter School of Science East
- Hampden Charter School of Science West
- The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School

Private Schools

- St. Joan of Arc
- Valley West School
- St. Stanislaus School
- St. George’s School
- Stefanik School

Colleges

- Elm College (Chicopee)
- Western New England University (Springfield)

- Holyoke Community College (Holyoke)
- American International College (Springfield)
- Springfield College (Springfield)
- Bay Path University (Longmeadow)
- Westfield State University (Westfield)

Chicopee’s private schools and educational programs provide benefits and opportunities to Chicopee families, and are very important community and cultural institutions. Many local private schools, like St. Stanislaus, have deep roots in the City, with families having attended them for generations. Chicopee should make sure it continues to support the City’s private schools and educational programs while providing

Figure 5. Chicopee residents celebrate earning their General Educational Development (GED).



Photo Credit: Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.

opportunities for public and private institutions to come together for after-school clubs and activities or other educational experiences.

Chicopee and its surrounding communities are home to numerous private colleges and universities, most notably Elms College located in Chicopee Center. Having these institutions in Chicopee’s backyard can provide a significant opportunity for collaboration with Chicopee Public Schools and other City agencies and organizations. Possible collaboration could entail: scholarship and financial aid opportunities for Chicopee students who attend a local higher education institution; college and university fairs at Chicopee’s schools; and college-level classes that high school students can attend for future college credit. Partnering with local community colleges can help high school students transition into a four-year institution. Elms College and other local institutions can also help create a pipeline of new, young teachers for local schools. These opportunities do not have to be exclusive to those in the school system but should be accessible by all Chicopee residents at large.

GETTING IT DONE



- Advocate for increased collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions of higher learning, including encouraging programs that allow easier transfers from one to another.
- Look into working with local colleges to create scholarships or financial aid packages for Chicopee students who attend an institution of higher learning locally.
- Build a foundational relationship with Elms College, local community colleges, and other public and private colleges and universities to provide significant links to higher education while ensuring the colleges can train students for jobs available within the City and the Public School system.

Figure 6. A food and nutrition class with the Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.



Photo Credit: Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.

Figure 7. An ice cream party at the Chicopee Public Library.



Photo Credit: City of Chicopee

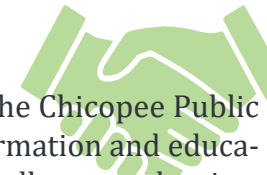
CHICOPEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Chicopee Public Library has been serving the City since 1853. Since that time, the role of libraries has evolved significantly. Libraries are no longer simply a place for borrowing books, newspapers, and magazines. They are centers for lifelong learning and important places where everyone is welcome to expand their horizons. Library staff are trained to connect people with the things they need and to serve as a hub of local and regional information, both in person and online.

The Library is a fantastic source of educational programs and services for children and adults alike. Children and teenagers can take advantage of homework help, book clubs, summer reading programs, and more. Adults also have access to

book clubs, language learning, test preparation, and special programming. Everyone has access to computers, printers, WiFi hotspots for personal use, and other equipment that may not be available at home, as well as books, music, DVDs, and digital/streaming services. The Library also runs a Bookmobile with scheduled stops at the Senior Center and Farmers Market as well as Doverbrook, Cabot Manor, Birch Bark Place, and McKinley House. The Chicopee Public Library will continue to evolve to educate, entertain, and support everyone in Chicopee.

GETTING IT DONE



- Take full advantage of the Chicopee Public Library as a hub of information and education for City residents of all ages, and actively promote their programs and services to the public.
- Explore ways to expand the Library’s mobile services, both in terms of frequency and locations.

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Chicopee is a city that celebrates life-long learning opportunities. No matter what your age, you should have the resources and facilities available to build on the skills you already have and learn new skills to help you thrive in your field or start a new career. Increasing access to adult education and training resources can help Chicopee residents achieve a higher quality of life, finish or receive their General Educational Development (GED) and create local economic and job opportunities.

Throughout Chicopee, there are many places and organizations for residents to continue their adult education and learn new skills such as the [Valley Opportunity Council \(VOC\)](#), [Chicopee Comprehensive High School](#), the [Westover Jobs Corps Center](#), and others. All these programs and organizations provide comprehensive resources, classes, and opportunities for continuing adult

education including adult basic education courses, citizenship courses, employment skill classes, new skill classes, English as a Second Language courses, and more. These opportunities are essential in helping many Chicopee residents create new opportunities for themselves and their families.

These organizations and programs need ample funding to continue to provide high-quality education and skills training, and to expand the courses available as new needs emerge in the community. It is also important to realize that some adults who would like to pursue these educational and training opportunities may have circumstances that prevent them from doing so, including lack of childcare, costs of classes or training, or conflicts with work hours. The City can help coordinate and make connections between its residents and these services, and work with service providers to make these programs accessible to as many people as possible.

GETTING IT DONE



- Continue to grow adult education programs and organizations in Chicopee, including distance education from local colleges and universities, and make sure they are meeting the needs of adult learners. Ensure that these programs are well advertised and easily linked to from City and School Department websites.
- Create opportunities for cross-collaboration between adult education programs, Chicopee Public Schools, and the Chicopee Public Library and regional educational programs and institutions.
- Better link adult training programs to economic sectors and employers in the region with job demand.

DAYCARE/EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Chicopee is a city that builds for success, and success in school starts early. Early education, including pre-school or even simply regularly reading to a child, is critical for laying the groundwork for future learning. Unfortunately, for many families, access to affordable, convenient, and well-resourced pre-schools is not always attainable. Chicopee wants to make sure that all families have the opportunity to send their children to a pre-school that sets their children up for success in grade school and beyond.

Chicopee families can enroll their children at [Szetela Early Childhood School](#), which is run by Chicopee Public Schools. The school has a capacity of approximately 300 students. Enrollment is below capacity and has been trending downward. School staff suggest that there are several barriers to increasing enrollment. First, this is not a free service – parents must pay a fee to send their children to the program. While this is less expensive than private daycare, it can still be out of reach for many families. Second, school hours do not align with the hours that many parents work. Children with parents who work full time often need before school and after school care or activities. Third, this is exacerbated by a lack of transportation for pre-school students. With the exception of special education students, most other students are dropped off and picked up from school by parents. This limits the number of families who can take advantage of this program. If these barriers are lifted, the school will likely need to increase its physical capacity and hire more teachers and staff.

There are also a number of private, non-profit, and church-run pre-schools in Chicopee for families to choose from. The Valley Opportunity Council offers a number of different [early childhood education options](#), especially focusing on families with a service need or who are income-eligible. Some of the options include the Center-Based Child Care program,

the Family-Based Child Care program, and Pre-K classrooms at three of Holyoke's Public Schools through the [Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative](#) (CPPI). [Holyoke Chicopee Springfield](#) (HCS) Head Start also provides early childhood education services, along with parent and family programs, for lower income households in Western Massachusetts communities.

Chicopee should make it a priority to help families by investing more into local public pre-schools, like Szetela Early Childhood School and the two pre-schools provided at Chicopee High School and Chicopee Comprehensive High for children of public school and City staff. Investing more into these public pre-schools helps ensure that more young students have the resources and facilities they need to succeed. Not only will this help Chicopee families looking for pre-school opportunities, it will also attract younger families to Chicopee. The City and local nonprofits can assist with the affordability of pre-schools by connecting Chicopee families to vouchers and scholarships that can be used at local private pre-schools. Szetela Early Childhood School does not accept vouchers, and would benefit from reduced or free tuition, perhaps on a sliding scale based on household income. Early childhood education is vital in laying a foundation for children to thrive as they move to grade school, middle school, high school, and beyond.

Figure 8. Students building parachutes during a science class at Fairview Elementary School.



Photo Credit: Fairview Elementary School

Chicopee is a diverse community, and it is important to meet the early childhood education, daycare, and pre-school needs for families in different situations. For working parents and families, the stress of having access to affordable and convenient daycare for their children can be almost too much to handle. Some families have grandparents or other family members who can take care of their young children during the day, but for many that is not an option. For some families, a family member might have to stay home with their young children if the daycare programs available do not meet their needs, which decreases employment opportunities. The Valley Opportunity Council currently provides some flexible daycare services for families in a center-based setting or a home-based setting. By providing diverse and flexible daycare options, Chicopee can help expand employment opportunities for working parents.

GETTING IT DONE

- Develop or connect existing monetary assistance programs with lower-income Chicopee families that can be used to reduce the cost of pre-school, day-care, or other early education programs.
- Support local organizations and programs in Chicopee that provide low-cost or free



early childhood education opportunities for Chicopee families, and continue to invest in early childhood programming at the Chicopee Public Library.

- Expand flexible daycare and childcare for families to ensure they can work and/or train for new jobs, etc.
- Expand access to early childhood education by reducing or eliminating fees for Szetela Early Childhood School on a sliding scale based on household income and providing bus transportation for students. Make sure investments in facility and staff capacity keep up with student enrollment.

Figure 9. The Career & Technical Department's Machine Shop at Chicopee High School.



Photo Credit: Don Treeger via The Republican

