

Envision Our Chicopee Steering Committee
Meeting: July 22, 2021
Discussion Notes

Getting Around

- Activating areas under overpasses
 - Make sure any improvements can be maintained, and are well-lit, clean, and safe.
 - If activities are scheduled in these spaces, they should be well-programmed. How will people get there? By bike or by foot? By car? Will there be parking?
 - Maybe some overpass spaces would be better utilized for parking, depending on the area.
- Accessibility
 - All streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure should use universal design to be as accessible as possible to people of different abilities.
- Pedestrian Bridges
 - Can we plan for pedestrian and bicycle overpasses or bridges over particularly busy streets or highways?
 - Memorial Drive would be a particularly useful location.
 - These can serve as linear parks, or even space to advertise/promote City events.
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Network
 - Develop and map a clear network of bicycle and pedestrian paths
 - Consider brochures or signage that show the time it will take to walk or bike between certain locations. In some cases, this may be faster than driving and looking for parking.
 - Some of this network can be accommodated with off-street paths, but a lot can be improved with “complete streets” that accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians equal to motor vehicles.
 - A cultural change is needed around bicycles – many drivers don’t understand when bicyclists have the right of way. This can lead to conflict and anger, which is dangerous for everyone. Need signage and a marketing campaign to educate the public and make biking and walking more socially acceptable.
- East-West Rail
 - Need more consistent bus or tram service from Chicopee to Springfield Station in order to make access to East-West commuter rail more attractive.
- Transit
 - Can the City partner with PVRTA to offer subsidized fare cards through employers, schools, etc.?
 - Can the City work on dedicated transit lanes so that buses aren’t sitting in the same traffic as everyone else?
- Road diets traffic calming measures are needed to reduce speeds at dangerous intersections.
- E-bikes – are there things the City can or should be doing to prepare for or encourage the use of e-bikes?

Making a Home

- Converting Single-Family Homes to Small Multi-Family Homes
 - Will there be an impact on schools or other City infrastructure?
 - Consider doing a cost-benefit analysis for all new development in the City (note: if this is done, the City should have very clear standards). Sometimes schools have plenty of capacity and the added tax dollars are a net positive.
 - Should applicants have to show demand for the type of housing they're proposing?
 - If this action is kept, it should be changed from "Amend" to "Explore."
- Converting Commercial/Institutional Buildings to Small Multi-Family Homes
 - If this is done, will there be enough open space on site to support residential use? Roof gardens and balconies, or even "indoor green space" can help meet open space requirements.
 - There's a difference between a large-scale conversion of, say, an office park vs. the conversion of a single office building in a "downtown" setting.
 - There can often be building code hurdles of making these conversions, particularly once there are four or more residential units. Things like installation of sprinklers become an issue.
 - City can consider closing streets to traffic and converting them to shared outdoor space for conversion projects otherwise lacking in open space opportunities.
- Inclusionary Zoning
 - Is Inclusionary Zoning viable for a City like Chicopee that doesn't have a "hot" residential real estate market? Will this discourage development? Or keep the numbers from working at all? – This is certainly a possibility, and the City would need to talk with local developers before making a decision about inclusionary zoning.
 - Is rent control a better solution? – It often leads to disinvestment in rental properties. Some communities put an annual cap on how much rent can be raised, but this can lead to disinvestment as well.
 - Maybe rent subsidies are a better solution for Chicopee?
 - Everyone wants to work with dependable, responsible developers and not those that want to build things cheaply and quickly and then leave. The better reputation the City has as a place to do business, the more attractive it will be for responsible developers.
 - Sometimes, affordable housing financing is attractive to good developers, because it adds a layer of support they wouldn't otherwise have. The City can encourage developers to make use of these financing tools, which make development projects more viable while also providing affordable housing.
- Question: Could zoning be passed that automatically got "denser" every 5-10 years? Answer: Not per state law. This would violate the process for making zoning changes. Each change requires notification and a hearing, etc. The City needs to completely overhaul its zoning, and then check in regularly to consider amendments.

Sidebar on Energy/Electric Vehicles/Micro-grids

- Electric vehicles can be used as battery storage/micro-grids when they are not in use. Are there ways to invest in electric vehicle fleets that can put electricity into the grid when not in use, and "fill up" with electricity prior to use?
- CEL is doing a battery storage facility at one of the City's large solar farms. What else is CEL doing to develop microgrids and ensure resiliency?
- The City should build and promote more solar canopies in parking lots.

- Does Chicopee's solar ordinance require an escrow or other funds to help decommission solar farms?
- Where can individual homeowners get financial assistance when their old solar systems need to be upgraded or replaced?