



## OUR VISION FOR A CREATIVE SPRINGFIELD

SUBMITTED FOR THE "REBUILD SPRINGFIELD" MASTER PLAN

BY MEMBERS OF THE TEATRO V!DA YOUTH ENSEMBLE

CREATED IN COLLABORATION WITH MAGDALENA GÓMEZ



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*“Springfield has all the right ideas, but the approach doesn’t work.” “We put pigs in the pool and fish in the mud.” “That’s what happens when people don’t communicate.” “All these great ideas without any sense of flow or connectedness.” “If people aren’t united, how will the design of the city be united?”*

*-Ensemble group quotes*

This youth generated project was inspired by dialogues and higher order thinking prompts about our Experiences, Observations, Intuitions and Visions for the future of Springfield. The youth immediately embraced the idea of sharing their ideas for inclusion in the process of rebuilding Springfield. We believe in the importance and necessity of including youth voices across all sectors of decision making that have an impact on their community and their lives. Our circles of conversation were intensive, passionate, imaginative, innovative and heartfelt. The youth ensemble members of Teatro V!da are committed to making Springfield a more imaginative, creative and welcoming place. They gave up rehearsal time to work diligently on this project, and all of our other work was put on hold. They had to stay up extra late after our long meetings to finish homework and papers for school. I have gathered their ideas and organized them, adding ways to connect the dots to the bigger picture of community health, arts, education and economic development. The voice of the writing flows from the youth to mine, back to youth and to Haydee Lamberty-Rodriguez, reflecting the organic flow of our dialogues. Their ideas and direct quotes are included throughout this document. We present this in the unity of one, collective, intergenerational voice. Because we are an ENSEMBLE in the truest sense of the word, working together for the good of all.

We don’t want to just REBUILD, we want to

## *RE*-IMAGINE A Creative Springfield

We have worked to keep our ideas simple, win-win, direct and cost effective.

*Not all of our members were able to participate; some are still waiting for a bus after the second job that’s paying for their textbooks. They are with us in spirit.*

Teatro V!da

Our Vision for a Creative Springfield

-Magdalena Gómez, Co-founder and Artistic Director, Teatro V!da

## Color. Light. Vibrancy.

### CREATING WELCOME AND SAFETY.

#### LET'S START WITH:

#### -TRANSPORTATION AND TOURISM-

**CHALLENGES: BUS STATION: DINGY, DIRTY, DANGEROUS.**

**TRAIN STATION: LIFELESS, DESOLATE, DREARY.**

***Would you want to visit Springfield again if you arrived at one of our terminals?***

*“Those places feel scary, depressing, dirty and unwelcoming and they give a bad message about our city. I would never get on a PVTA bus alone. Many of us are afraid to use the bus station, but those without other transportation have no choice.”*

*-Delmarina López, ensemble member, columnist, Governor Patrick's Western, MA office intern, high school student.*

#### Now, Imagine This:

- 1. Feeling relaxed in a bus station. Invest in the power of colors and light:** i.e., lavender creates a sense of well-being. De-institutionalize and revolutionize. Bus and train terminals in most urban centers have become synonymous with grunge, stress and danger. Soothing colors make people less likely to feel angry or afraid. Daylight is healthier than florescent lights-put in large, clean windows. Use softer, “green” lighting for the evening. Consider the addition of plants. Create a few jobs and hire people to do upkeep. Involve youth in some element of the design; perhaps a school (or different school every year) can “adopt” the bus station and become responsible for keeping it green with plants they grow themselves as part of a school science curriculum. In return, Peter Pan offers paid summer internships to youth as \*greeters (see #4) for those visiting Springfield. Win-win: A welcoming station inspires return tourism and an internship program nurtures a new generation of riders and/or loyal employees for the Peter Pan Corporation and its affiliates.
- 2. Create murals or other public art created by local artists and students** that welcome with diverse images & send a message of what to expect in Springfield. Art content should reflect the people who live here or highlights of the city. Use the walls of the waiting area as an art gallery for local artists to display their work. Partner with existing art galleries and local curators. Make it a desirable and safe place for artists to want to feature their work-panel clips would be an easy and inexpensive way to go if there are ledges. ***What do we want people to expect and experience when they get off a bus or train in Springfield?***



*“When my friends come into Springfield, I honestly can’t think of anyplace to take them that feels good. The Basketball Hall of Fame, maybe, and Forest Park. That’s about it. Well, I know the Museums are nice, but the only building that appeals to me is the one where they have Asian art and a room for children that is so beautiful with bright colors and images. I love that room. And the building itself has more character than the others.*”

***-Jasmine Noemí Jiménez, founding ensemble member, college student, worker, & the youngest artist in the Springfield Art & Soles Sneaker Project. Her sneaker was displayed outside of the Basketball Hall of Fame.***

3. **Media Hospitality:** Have a large flat screen with a video running in a loop where people are welcomed to the city by actual residents, not only politicians and the privileged, but by neighborhood residents, across class and ethnicity, age and generations. Welcome the LGBTQ community with intention. Consider making a few different videos so that regular visitors experience variety. The Chambers of Commerce could host video competitions regionally through the high schools and universities media, communications and film programs.
4. **Welcome Kiosk at each terminal:** Provide materials in more than one language. No \$ to hire personnel? Partner with colleges that have hospitality programs and get interns as concierges. Or offer bus tickets for travel to nearby areas. As an incentive, the more hours they put in, the more miles they can accrue, offering them travel opportunities to other cities.
- a) Make **headsets** available for rental that take visitors on guided tour of the city in their chosen language. Have promotional materials, maps, restaurant menus and discount coupons available in attractive display mounts. Have easy access to PVPA schedules and taxi service numbers. An other idea is to have a **multi-language touch screen menu** of events happening throughout the city and how to get there on foot or by public transportation.
5. **Maps:** Create color coded maps with a different color and symbol that represents each neighborhood. To create a sense of ownership, have each neighborhood participate in what their color and symbol will be. Put up banners in each neighborhood that correspond to the map color and symbol. Every banner can have one unifying design element for the whole city. **Make color coded arrows on the streets that make it easy for walkers and drivers to get around and identify neighborhoods.**
6. **PVTA Buses:** Create removable signage or even flags for buses that correspond to the route color of its destination neighborhood.
7. **Bus Schedules:** More frequent service is needed; especially during night and evening hours for a 2nd and 3rd shift work force. Better connections. **(Please see Transportation and Health)**

8. **Increased Security:** As students without cars who must take public transportation to school and work, we do not feel safe at the Peter Pan Bus Station. We live here and don't like being there, so how would a tourist feel? The more joyful the environment, the less security will be needed. PVRTA stops in isolated areas, should have emergency call boxes that are easily accessible.

## Connecting the Dots: Transportation and Health

*"I get sick when I'm waiting outside for the bus at the Peter Pan terminal; the cigarette smoke is everywhere. There should be an outdoor designated smoking area that is far from the bus waiting area. Even the inside smells like cigarettes. Why should I get sick because somebody else wants to smoke?"*

*-Keila Matos, ensemble member, college student, worker with two jobs*

*"Sometimes I have to wait so long for the PVRTA bus! If it is raining I get home all wet. People can get sick because there is no shelter."*

*-Carlos David Palacio, ensemble member, high school student*

Many people in Springfield must work late at night and have to wait for buses in poorly lit areas without shelters or benches, for extended periods of time. Waiting for buses without shelter or seating in all kinds of weather is a health hazard that affects people of all ages. It is especially brutal on the elderly, disabled and mothers with young children. It is also a safety issue, as sometimes people will make the choice to walk instead in places that are dark, desolate and don't have sidewalks. Connecting bus schedules need to improve, since many destinations require passengers to make connections, sometimes more than one. The amount of time it can take to travel can also lead to increased stress, fatigue, anger and poor health. **If it takes someone ninety minutes to two hours each way to get to work, on public transit where they have no control over the experience, how productive will they be? What will be their disposition when they arrive at work or home? How will this have an impact on those around them? This can have a negative affect on the productivity and efficiency of the workplace, which also results in harm to the economy over time.** This also impacts the individual, their families, and potentially child welfare: what if a parent can't get home on time and the child is left alone due to circumstances, not neglect? It can cause a vicious cycle that could potentially destroy a family:

**Scenario-Imagine This:** A parent misses the bus connection. The child is locked out of the home. Someone calls child services and the parent is charged with neglect, or worse. The child is taken from his/her loving home, where the family is simply struggling to make ends meet. The child ends up in the system and gets shuttled from place to place. Child drops out of school. Joins a gang to regain a sense of control over his/her life. Everybody loses, including schools, businesses and the economy. **Yes, one missed bus connection in a poor community where many must juggle multiple jobs to survive, can spiral into a crisis that touches the entire city.** In 2009, \*27.1% of the population lived below the poverty level, and 8.9% of the residents had income at 50% below the poverty level that same year. So imagine the odds of transportation related crises throughout the city on any given day. This hurts everyone and diminishes opportunities to build a creative and vital workforce. (\*citydata.com)

1. College students who also have jobs and/or live on their own need more support in being able to access easy transportation to and from school. They should have the opportunity to take advantage of what all of our campuses have to offer. **Getting through college is a very stressful time and a tough schedule adds to already prevailing poor eating habits and obesity which are creating an escalation in youth diabetes.**

*“Because I have to take buses, sometimes I don’t have time to eat. I like to eat healthy food, but sometimes I have to pick up something quick to get the bus. It’s hard to find something healthy to eat when you’re running to get to work after school. Now I have to make time to bring my own food wherever I go.”*

*-Eiliane Alvelo, ensemble member, Springfield college student, athlete, worker*

2. **Now that STCC and HCC have a partnership**, we need frequent bus service that travels between the two. Also, all of the colleges have events that are open to the community, but the information about these events is difficult to access and not centralized. It would be good to have something like the Five-College calendar of events. Going to college is especially challenging for youth in poor communities, those who are the first in their families to attend, and those who have to juggle jobs and school. Having access to what the many colleges have to offer, gives students a chance to engage with new people and explore ideas from other perspectives besides the small world that an overwhelming schedule creates. Use buses themselves as educational places with posters and brochures on how to stay healthy while getting through school, and the importance of rest, exercise and checkups. De-stigmatize the need for mental health services, by making the information readily accessible and out in the open-use the buses to spread the word! We want more collaborations and connections among all the colleges and increased access to attend and/or visit them.

### 3. **Bicycles Everywhere, Please!**

We would like to see bicycle paths and lanes throughout the city, with bicycle rental places in every neighborhood, like the rental stands in Boston, for example. Every rental place could offer a city map guiding people to all of our beautiful parks and to the bike path along the riverfront. We would like to be able to get around the city safely on bicycles.

*“When I went to Spain you could rent bicycles real easy [sic]. I loved it! You can get around and it’s not so expensive and it’s healthy. I want to be able to rent a bicycle in Liberty Heights and return it downtown. It should not be too expensive so that more people will use them.”*

*-Carlos David Palacio*

*~Speaking of Bicycles~*

## How About that Riverfront?

**CHALLENGE:** The River Front is underdeveloped and underutilized. The entry way is dirty and not very inviting. We know the tornado took out countless trees, but it wasn’t too well cared for to begin with. Many people are afraid to use it. The fewer people use it, the scarier it seems.



Self-service bicycle rental spot near South Station in Boston, MA.

Photo: James Lescault

**Now, Imagine This:** Every weekend in the warm weather, (or at least monthly) have tents, kiosks and carts with vendors selling international items, food, books, vintage items, clothing, jewelry, etc. Have vendor tables for local businesses and services. Live music, children's programs, events for families, elders. Have days that celebrate a particular culture's art forms, like dance styles of Vietnam, for example. We believe progress is stunted in Springfield, in part, because communities are isolated from each other instead of working together. The arts are an effective way to bring people from all backgrounds into the same space. Plant more trees, flowers and shrubbery-partner with a horticultural school to help with this. Make the riverfront picnic friendly with attractive recycling and trash receptacles. Or like some parks, post signs for people to leave nothing behind but their footprints. Have trash bags available for people to take their trash with them. **Create a culture throughout the entire city where littering becomes unacceptable to a vocal public. Have signs that post fines for littering, or not picking up after your dog and impose them. Have fines to a few people and the word will get around quickly.** Have bicycle rentals for the bike path that goes along the river from Chicopee to downtown. Bring colors to the area - like the benches at the Quadrangle. Have vendors selling healthy snacks for those using the path. Connect the path to a Baystate Health program. Sponsor health related events through Baystate and/or Mercy Hospital. The path used for biking, walking, skating. Revive the ticket station and turn it into a welcome area. Make it vibrant with color-have attendants to welcome people, give out maps, etc.

In the winter have **Hot Chocolate Sundays** with a volunteer station that serves free hot chocolate to anyone who uses the bike path. Normalize the area as a gathering place for families and friends by making it safe and culturally relevant. If we can't afford security, start a citizen patrol group-give them nice jackets to wear-make it a fun club to belong to. Add night lighting and connect it to Bright Nights to encourage people to take night strolls along the river in large groups, until it starts to feel safer just because more and more people are going. Bring businesses to the riverfront that relate to health-services like a community acupuncture clinic (more affordable, as sessions happen in groups); dance and theater classes; art-therapies; a health food store; a center for leadership and cultural competency training in a global economy and other services that do not compete with L.A. Fitness. Make getting fit desirable and fun-make it about communities coming together. Have outdoor exercise events for people of all ages that L.A. Fitness can help sponsor.

We know lots of people assume that Latinos or people of color aren't vegans, vegetarians or practice yoga. Stereotypes can destroy a vision with assumptions. Yes, we do eat more than rice and beans and pork ribs and we invest in a community that will invest in us.



**Note from MG: There was a very successful national anti-littering campaign connected to the first Earth Day in 1970: GIVE A HOOT-DONT POLLUTE. It had an owl as a mascot. Let's start our own anti-littering campaign, and make it go viral!**



**Yo Soy Fina-the rules don't apply to me.**



## Okay, Let's Talk About Main Street & Beyond

“Too many liquor stores! It brings our neighborhoods down and makes us feel unsafe. Too much concrete not enough color. Drab. Boring. The walk down Main Street to the North End or South End has some streets where we just can't breathe. The South End doesn't even feel like it begins until you get to La Fiorentina. I feel scared walking home at night. It's so dark and the dreary; the dead colors make it feel worse and scarier. Too many ugly buildings. We need more trees. We need more lights. We need more color. Bright colors make a place feel less dangerous. The fear of color (in every sense) is what keeps us from moving forward.” -An ensemble cacophony

**Challenge: Disconnect among neighborhoods.** North End, South End, Mason Square, Downtown, etc.; each in their own bubble of fear and mutual suspicion.

*“We need more public gathering places where people can come together and also have more recreational activities. We need places where we can get information like the kind we get in Teatro V!da. We have Teatro V!da, but what does everybody else have?”*

*-Dana H. Murray, ensemble member, college student, worker.*

### Imagine This:

A colorful Main Street - a downtown that extends the full length of Main Street, dissolving invisible borders. Small businesses. Storefronts turned into art galleries, performance venues, cafes. More sitting areas like the one at 1350 Main Street/One Financial Plaza and outside Palazzo's Cafe.

People flock to the Caribbean Islands to vacation-it isn't just for the beaches and the climate, but for the relaxed and festive atmosphere. Public gathering places are a significant part of everyday life in the world's top vacation spots and some of the best places to live. In Puerto Rico, every town has a small plaza with trees and flowers and sitting areas-these are intentional gathering places for the community.

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Fence in Mission Hill District of San Francisco. Colorful, vibrant murals by local artists throughout the Mission have tourists and young professionals flocking there. Photo: Magdalena Gómez.

We need places where we can talk, see and create events together, with **more public art by the artists who live here**. Even NYC has created islands of sitting areas throughout the city, in addition to their beautiful parks. In Europe, the plazas are part of every day life. These gathering places help communities to feel united. Imagine colorful cement benches (so they can last and don't have to be locked up or chained), a beautiful mural or other piece of public art and a simple stage where the community and different communities can share their talents with each other in the warmer weather.

How about concrete tables with checkers and chess boards built-in, like in Washington Square Park in NYC? On any given day you can see people of all ages playing together. Have some for dominos too. Each plaza could have it's own personality to reflect the neighborhood it's in. A grassy area, a fountain.

**Most important: Gathering areas that are colorful, welcoming, well lit and emotionally warm.**

These plazas can also come alive at night, with *faroles* (street lamps, like the old time gas lights). Provide businesses with incentives to stay open at night. More dialogue between events venues and businesses downtown so that businesses can plan when to stay open on events nights. Have coupons to give out when people purchase their tickets to local events.

### Imagine This:

- Entire neighborhoods coming together to work on projects, like fixing up abandoned buildings or creating more community gardens and murals.
- A central location in each neighborhood where big equipment is kept for sharing or rental: snow blowers, lawn mowers, ladders; gardening tools, etc.
- More recreational places, like a place to roller skate park that's easy to get to;
- A safe skateboarding park;
- Housing and professional buildings that also have recreational opportunities and performance spaces. Samuel D. Plotkin Associates, for example, use the lobby at One Financial Plaza for performance events, arts receptions, and it also functions as an art gallery.
- Rooftop gardens! Yes! Raised bed gardens! Yes!
- Educate people on how to make better use of church buildings and free corporate community rooms;

*"We need more fountains throughout the city.  
The sound of water changes things."*

*-Delmarina López*

- More programs that teach people how to grow gardens.
- Vendors of healthy food all around Court Square; partner with existing cafes, so they are not in competition, but complementary to each other. Farmers bring greens, cafe buys them for salads, for example.

**A city that says  
WELCOME  
everywhere you go.**



## Bring Back the Trolley!

### Have you seen the endless lines for the Powell Street Trolley in San Francisco?

Imagine an electric trolley that is free at certain hours of the day, but has a fee at other times. It travels the full length of Main Street with on and off privileges. The driver announces what is available to do and see, with the humorous spirit of the successful Southwest Airlines Model. "Today there's a sale on plantains at Medina's Market, 12 for a \$1." "The Rainbow Bookstore is having a poetry reading at 2:00 p.m". Do you know that Frederick Douglass used to live in Springfield? Tell me where and I'll give you a coupon for a free ride, any day, any time, of the week." Fledgling actors would love to drive that trolley and practice their improvisational and comedic skills. Get acting students to do it! When people look out of the trolley, imagine them seeing colorful, lively neighborhoods with plazas, raised bed gardens, bike rental racks, and fruit and vegetable vending carts like every other street corner in NYC. It would encourage people to grab a healthy snack instead of junk food and create a business for the vendors. Make the vendor's license affordable and put the money towards the trolley. Have flags from all around the world that run the length of all Main Street. Expand the definition of Downtown and create artful spaces everywhere, but start with the heart of the city: Main Street. With Main Street as an anchor, then you can follow suit up the State Street Corridor and into other neighborhoods.

The Hostos Community College area in the Bronx, anchored by the college and Pregones Theater (the first stand-alone theater in the Bronx) now has a Culture Trolley, that travels to all the local arts venues. Artists are flocking to the area, now being considered a desirable place to live.

### What Museums? Quadrangle? Too Much Beige.

*"I love going to museums and I never knew their were museums in Springfield. I didn't know it was free for Springfield residents. When I found out about it from Teatro V!da I went and I really liked it. But there's nothing colorful to let you know what to expect when you go inside. We need a hint on the outside that lets us know this is a place of education and exploration."*

-Gabriel Cifuentes, ensemble member, award winning videographer (national) and scientist (statewide); high school student

**Challenge:** The Museums are invisible to a majority of Springfield residents. It feels inaccessible from the outside. It's a great place and once people get there, they love it. The issue is getting people there.

**Imagine This:** More diverse advertising and outreach materials. Radio ads in Spanish that inform the public that the Museums are free for Springfield residents. Signs or banners that direct people to the Museums from Main Street. More shows that highlight the work of Latino artists. More additions to permanent collect that include diverse artists reflecting the people who live here. Asking the greater community what kinds of activities and classes they would like to see at the Museums. Film nights in the Davis auditorium that feature films in languages other than English. If getting films is too costly, ask film schools if students would like to present their films there.

Teatro V!da has performed several times at the Museums, and Kay Simpson and Sara Orr let us know that after our events the numbers of Latino families who attend the Museums increased significantly. We have always felt loved, respected and welcomed there-so it's all a matter of changing public perception.



School should be as much fun as learning civic journalism at Amherst Media! We take charge of our learning and don't ask for permission to do it. What the schools won't teach us, we can learn on our own.

## EDUCATION

*“If a school looks and feels like a prison, has inadequate ventilation and light, has a culture of violence, and the clocks are worn from being watched, what kind of future is it pointing to?”*

*-Any sane, thinking person*

**Challenge:** Outdated school buildings that pose health risks, create a feeling of morbidity, claustrophobia and general malaise. School meals that are unhealthy, mostly refined and processed foods. These, along with a myriad of other factors contribute to escalating drop-out rates, especially among Latin@ and African American youth, as well as violence, bullying and poor physical and mental health.

**When asked how we could turn school buildings into community anchors and regular after-school gathering places for the community, our response was unanimous-we're paraphrasing here:**

*We don't want to be there during the day, what would make us want to be there at night? Parents don't want to go there, because they don't feel welcomed. The buildings are ugly and depressing. They feel like jail. We don't think people would go for it. They might go for their kids' events, but would they go there all the time? Probably not.*

### Imagine This:

Schools gardens created by the students: use outdoor spaces, roof tops. Mentor, Haydee Lamberty-Rodriguez and I then spoke with them about raised bed gardens; urban gardens of our youth where elders, often grandmothers, planted herbs and vegetable in the smallest plot of earth, in bins, boxes, tin cans. We talked about how some created beautiful gardens in coffee cans on the landings of urban fire escapes-they even grew tomatoes. One of our members told us that their uncle is able to grow papaya in Massachusetts! The gardening conversation brought more ideas:

- We can grow veggies and fruit in school gardens that we can eat and sell; it will help us to choose healthier snacks;
- We can create outdoor pavilions and eating areas, where we can also plant gardens and hold art classes;

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- We can build enclosed glass pavilions that can be used year round and turn them into green spaces where classes can be held;
- Brightly painted, colorful walls; murals by students
- We need more oxygen; more cleanliness
- We need clean water, not water that tastes like rusty pipes;
- Better, healthier lighting;
- Booths in the cafeteria *“It’s very successful at Chicopee High School, students monitor themselves with the booths. They have their own code of ‘first come, first served’. Students know how to develop their own culture of behavior. We don’t need adults to monitor us.” -Delmarina López*

**We can change school culture. Start with the environment.**



Start small: allow students to paint one wall in the classroom. No time? Volunteer a couple of hours after-school, and invite your students to paint with you. They will take better care of a school in which they have an investment. The experience is bonding and builds trust.



**Give us VOICE:  
It’s Our City Too.**

**Direct Action.  
Honest Dialogue.  
Unity.  
Then, anything is possible.**





Springfield families do care, and they do show up.  
You just have to know HOW to ask.

## RE-IMAGINE & Let's Talk About It:

### Media Access is Our Right

Why is our access television station so inaccessible and of such poor quality in programming and technology? Why is there so much air-time wasted? We want to know who runs it and how it works. We have learned that access stations belong to the community, so why isn't more of the community engaged in programming?

★★★

### Healthy Food for Everyone

How do we change food disparities and inequalities in our neighborhoods? Farmers markets and community gardens are a good place to start. Higher income neighborhoods have better quality, fresh produce in the markets and access to healthier choices of foods. How can we improve quality and access to the foods of diverse cultures? Why do we continue to allow substandard, unhealthy and processed foods to prevail in poor communities, when we know it causes disease and obesity? What WILL we do about it? Can we partner with our local hospitals and health centers to activate change in the politics of food?

★★★

### Environmental Racism

The foul stink that comes into some of our neighborhoods from places like Bondi's Island; the dumping of waste into the river-just to name some basics. We want to see action taken against environmental racism. It is a health and economic issue. Who wants to buy a house where they can smell sewage? Asthma is one of the biggest health issues in Springfield. Sick people can't work or attend school. How can a business survive over time in a place that stinks?

★★★

Want to discuss our ideas for a better Springfield?

[www.teatrovida.com](http://www.teatrovida.com) or call: 413.330.8210

or e-mail: [TeatroVida08@gmail.com](mailto:TeatroVida08@gmail.com) (RE-IMAGINE in the subject line)

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