

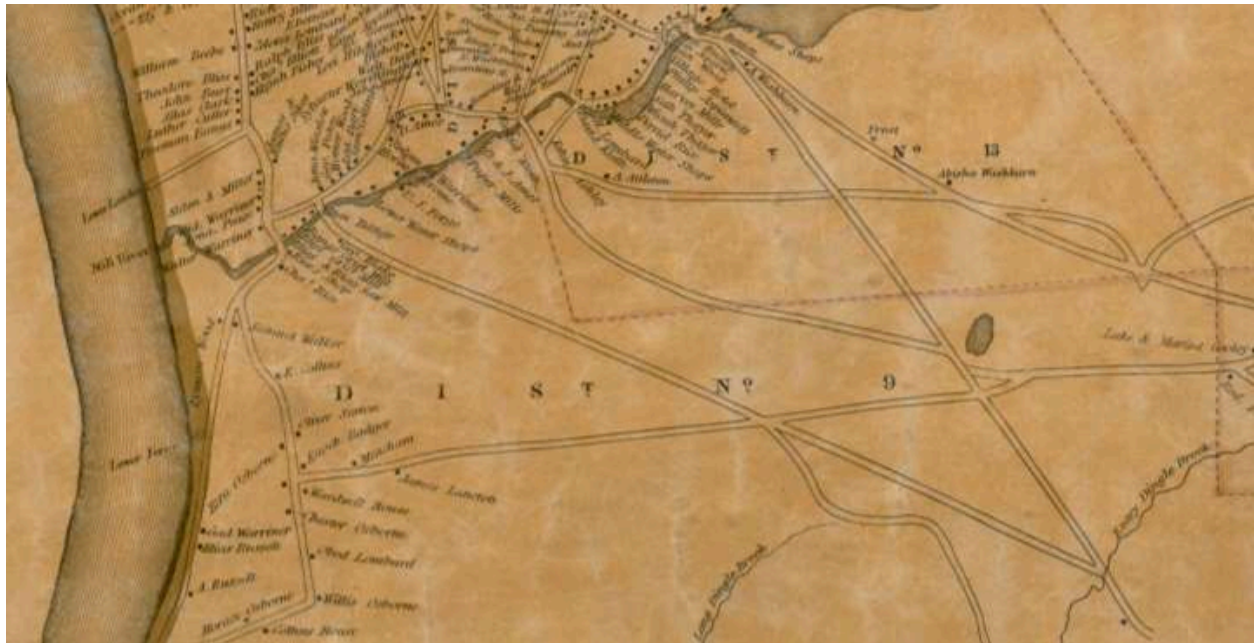
FOREST PARK
Uplifting Communities Through Connection, Greenspace, and Revitalization
LA 607/608
Graduate Urban Design Studio
Lia Potter and Michael Nevins
Spring 2025

History

The land that we now know as the Forest Park neighborhood was part of the ancestral homelands of the Agawam people, an Algonquian speaking tribe who lived in the area around modern-day Springfield.

During King Philip's War in 1675, land around Forest Park and Springfield was raided and burned. Post war, this now vacated land was claimed by the local governments. By the early 18th century, homes and roads began to appear in and around the area now known as Forest Park.

However, in comparison to the other neighborhoods in Springfield, Forest Park's development was rather slow, with just 30 homes found in the neighborhood by 1835.



Detail from Plan of Springfield (1835) by George Colton, showing the area that would later become the Forest Park neighborhood. Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

During the late 19th century, the city of Springfield experienced a rapid growth in the downtown neighborhoods after the Civil War. Around this time, city leaders began expressing a need for a large public park. Several potential locations around the city were identified, including the banks of the Connecticut River and Watershop Ponds. Ultimately, 65 acres of land in the Forest Park neighborhood was donated to the city in 1884, transitioning the land to parkland, and aptly naming the land- 'Forest Park.'

In 1890, hundreds of acres of land was donated to the city by Everret Barney, a local ice-skate manufacturer, completing the southern portion of the park. With the establishment of the park, the neighborhood went through a rapid development that lasted through the 20th century. Trolley lines began operating along Sumner, Fort Pleasant, and Belmont Avenues, further stimulating growth.

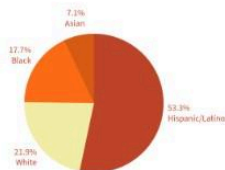
The neighborhood's population experienced growth as well over this time. The 1920 census put Forest Park's population at 14,714. By 1950, the population had doubled, growing to 28,027 residents. By the mid 20th century, most of the developable land in Forest Park had been built out, and the neighborhood has not experienced major population changes since then. The neighborhood has consistently comprised about 17% percent of the overall population of Springfield.

Forest Park proper has become one of the largest urban parks in the United States, at 750+ acres overlooking the Connecticut River. It is now home to a zoo, ice-skating rink, ball-playing fields, rose gardens, an amphitheater, and aquatic gardens.

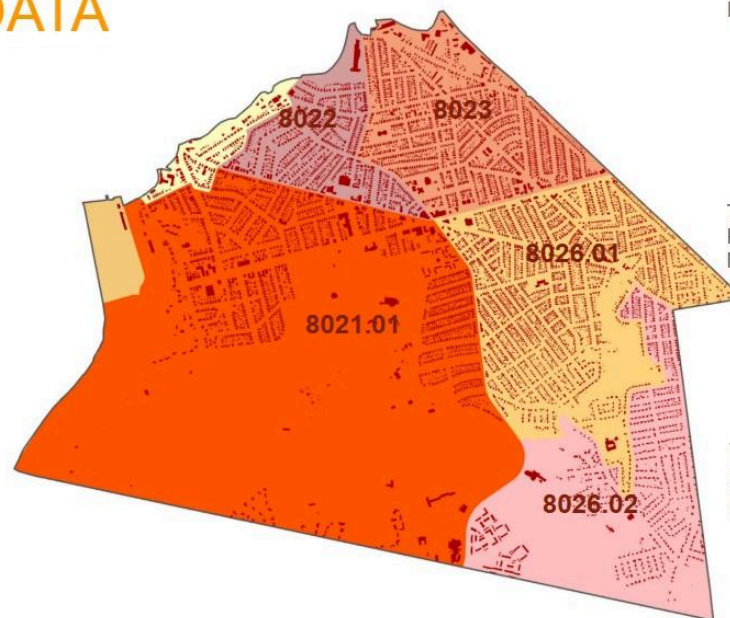
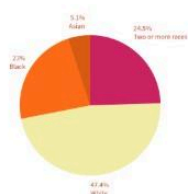
Located in the Southwest Corner of Springfield, Forest Park is the second largest neighborhood in size at 2500 Acres, and the largest in terms of population, at around 26 thousand people. The boundaries are defined by the Connecticut River to the west, the Watershops ponds and Mill River to the North, a Former railroad right-of-way to the northeast, the town of Longmeadow to the south, and the town of East Longmeadow to the southeast.

CENSUS DATA

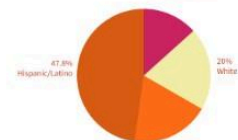
TRACT 8022
POPULATION: 3,594
MEDIAN INCOME: \$33,934



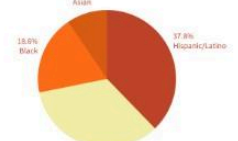
TRACT 8021.01
POPULATION: 6,176
MEDIAN INCOME: \$51,900



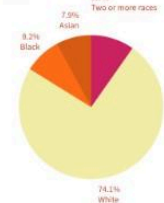
TRACT 8023
POPULATION: 7,033
MEDIAN INCOME: \$32,844



TRACT 8026.01
POPULATION: 7,351
MEDIAN INCOME: \$53,058



TRACT 8026.02
POPULATION: 2,022
MEDIAN INCOME: \$58,947

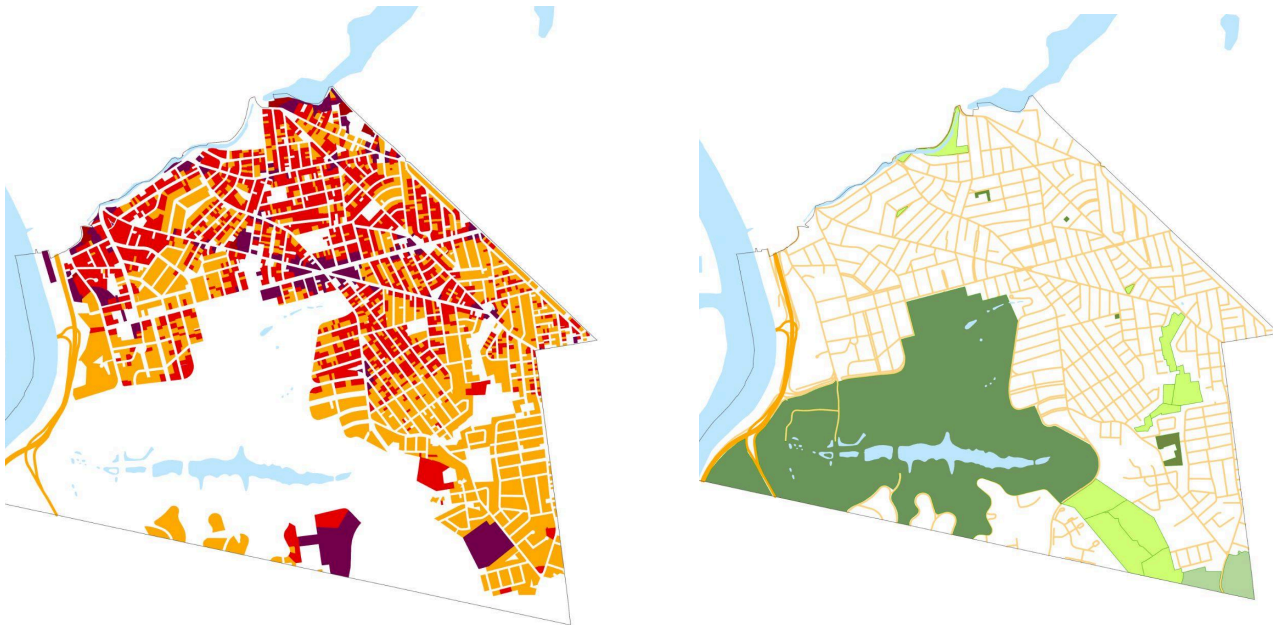


Census Data

The 2020 Census reports a population of 26,176 residents in the Forest Park neighborhood. The neighborhood is broken down into five Census tracts. Tract 8021.01 consists of the park itself and the

historical district neighborhood, located to the west of the park. It also contains portions of the 'X' intersection and Belmont Avenue. This tract has one of the highest median incomes of the neighborhood. Tract 8026.01, 8026.02, found to the east of the park are predominantly single family homes. These two tracts have the highest median incomes of the neighborhood, and are the most financially stable. To the north of the neighborhood, tract 8022 and 8023 have some of the weakest median income levels in the city as a whole.

Zoning and Land Use



The zoning in Forest Park is primarily residential. Approximately 91% of zoned land is classified as residential, with a range of densities from single-family homes to large apartment complexes. 46% of residential housing is single family housing, seen above in orange. Density of housing increases around the 'X' intersection and to the north of the neighborhood, with multi-family housing seen above in red.

7% of land in the neighborhood is designated for commercial use. Seen above, in purple. Commercial uses are primarily found at and around the 'X' intersection and in other neighborhood nodes, like the corners of Oakland Street and Orange Street. The remaining 2% of land is designated for industrial use. This is strictly found in the northernmost portion of the neighborhood, near Watershops Ponds, where industry of the 19th and 20th century formerly existed. It is now multiple vehicle auto-body shops. Forest Park contains 806 acres of parkland, which comprises 32% of the total land area in the neighborhood. The Forest Park neighborhood has the highest percentage of land designated parkland in the whole city of Springfield. However, this parkland is not evenly distributed between the 5 Census tracts in the neighborhood.

95% of all Parkland in the neighborhood is located in tract 8021.01. On the other hand, tract 8022 and 8023 have by far the lowest amount of recreational land in the city, at under two acres between the two tracts. As mentioned, these two census tracts have the lowest median income of the neighborhood, as well as the highest poverty rates of the neighborhood, and lowest homeownership rates of the neighborhood. This indicates that the poorest parts of the neighborhood are also the ones that have the least access to recreational greenspace in the entire neighborhood.

Community Workshops



The project team has had the opportunity to collaborate with community members multiple times throughout the semester, to provide feedback on our work and insights into the community at large. Our First Meeting, on a cold day at the end of January was attended by just two people, and not many discoveries were made. Our second meeting, in March, was attended this time by five members of the community. In this meeting, we identified and discussed some key issues facing the neighborhood, with reports of excess litter and trash found everywhere in the neighborhood, and a clear lack of community and gathering spaces in the neighborhood, besides Forest Park itself. The community desired incorporating new local businesses, green pocket parks, and a new community center into their neighborhood.

Our third community engagement meeting took place in mid-April, this time with 15 residents. We engaged with the community in the form of two activities- One activity worked with residents by looking at the intersection of White Street and Sumner Avenue, and talked with the community about the placement of streetside parking, locations of potential bus stops, and the placement of other street amenities, like benches, trash barrels, street lights, and street greening and plantings. Our second activity turned our residents into landscape designers- for a short while- We engaged with the residents by printing out a plant view of a vacant parcel of land along Dorset Street, and working together, we conversed and designed a pocket park together.

The park designs, seen below, provided the team great insight into what the community is actually looking for in these potential spaces- amenities for children of all sizes, community garden plots, charcoal grilling stations, pavilions, ample seating, formal walking gardens, parking for ADA access, and of course, room to run and play were all elements the community wants to see implemented.

We also had the opportunity to connect with Forest Park resident Shelia McElwaine, and explored the 8026.01 neighborhood and the Entry Dingle Brook Parcel that abuts her neighborhood. Sheila is a longtime resident of Forest Park and is passionate about the success of the neighborhood. The team would like to thank Sheila again for her guidance and insight.





Second Community Meeting-Pocket Park Designs

Greenways

A Quote from professor emeritus Jack Ahern helped guide our project;

“ Greenways are networks of land containing linear elements that are planned, designed and managed for ecological, recreational, cultural, aesthetic, or other purposes compatible with the concept of sustainable land use.” J.Ahern, 1995

This concept started as a way to further connect the surrounding, marginalized census tracts to greenspace and to Forest Park itself, the goal being to create a green network of pedestrian friendly and inviting greenspaces.

The overall goal of greenways is to increase the connectivity of the neighborhood, decrease the amount of impervious surfaces throughout the neighborhood, and increase the urban tree canopy wherever possible. The team’s overall greenway plan, seen below, proposes connecting Forest Park, Entry Dingle Brook, Shamrock Park, The Mill River, King Philip's Stockade, and the Connecticut River Trail into one cohesive network of greenways, connecting and enhancing the neighborhood.



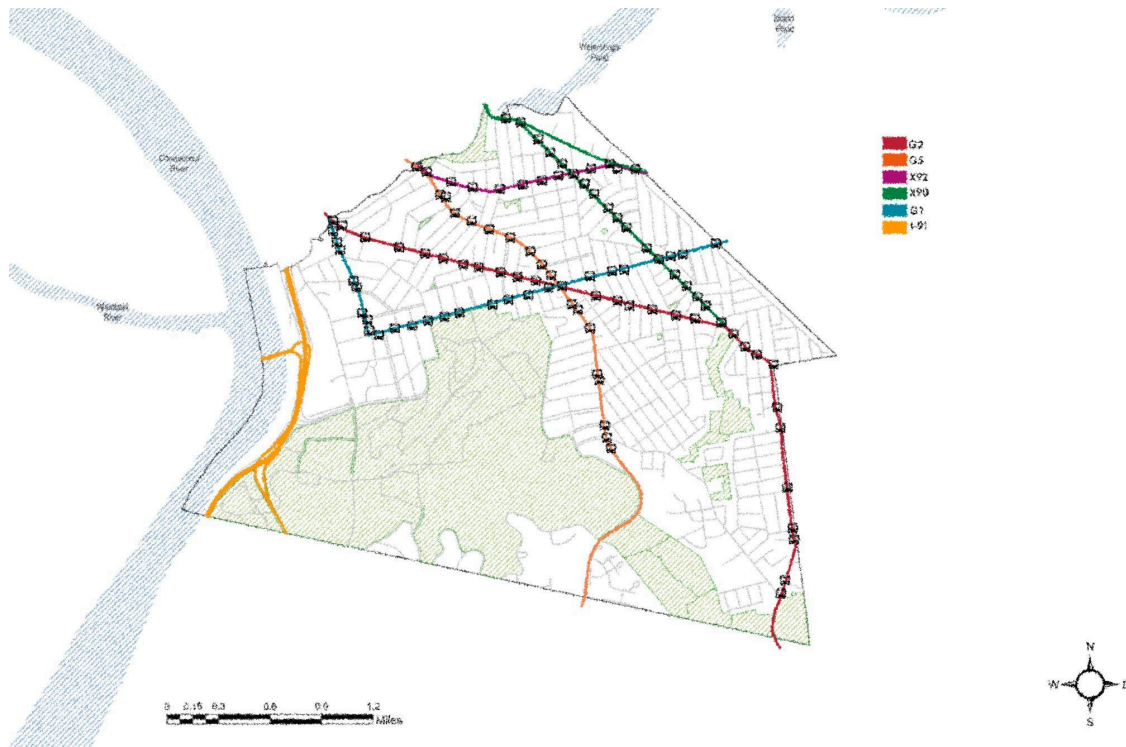
Current Perspective View of Oakland Street.



Perspective View of Oakland Street- Street Greening and Traffic Calming Proposal.



Greenways Plan View



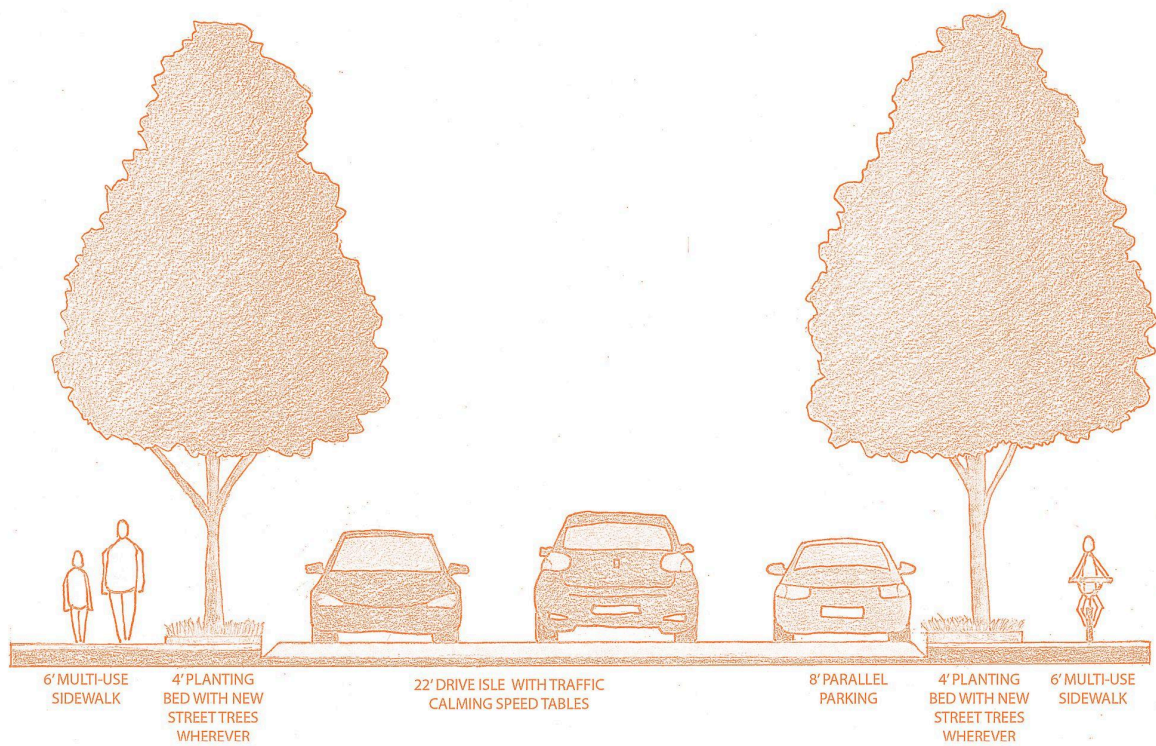
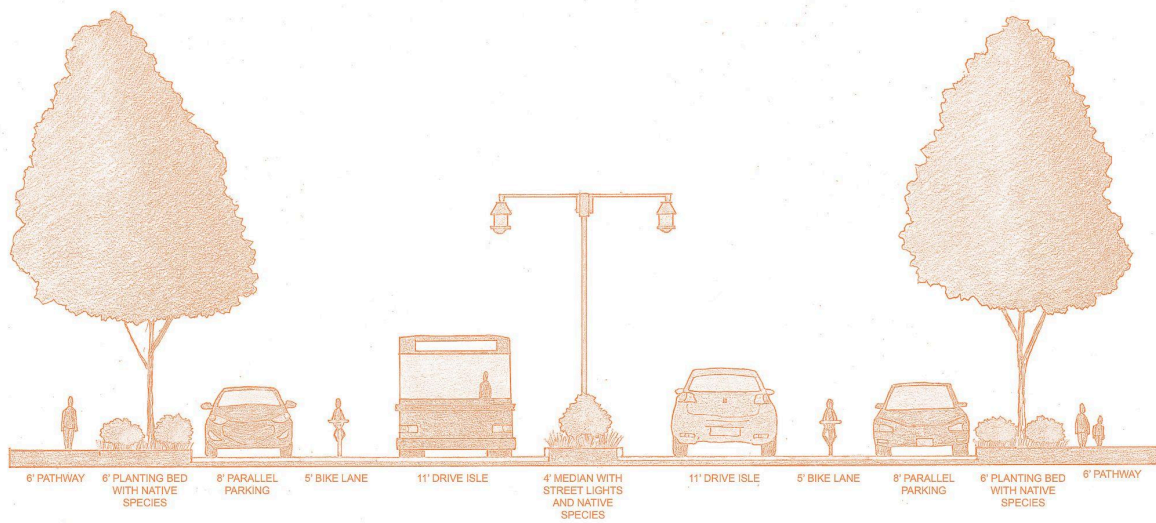
Forest Park- Bus Routes Map

Safe Streets

Forest Park is in the midst of a multi-million dollar infrastructure project to address the traffic situation at the 'X' intersection. It includes the implementation of new traffic signals and intersections, safer pedestrian crossings and walkways, median islands with plantings, pedestrian plazas, and street greening, adding 57 new trees to the project area. As a result of this project, the team made the decision to steer clear of any interventions at the 'X' intersection, deciding to focus on other needs and issues in the neighborhood.

Additional roadways were identified by PVPC and the community, including rear portions of Sumner Avenue, White Street, Dickinson Street, Longhill Street, and Locust Street were all identified as streets in need of improvement. These primary corridors have the potential to accommodate sidewalk improvements and repairs, parallel parking, bike lanes, medians with native plantings, increased street lighting and increased tree canopy wherever possible.

Heavily used secondary roadways throughout the neighborhood provide further connectivity, but more could be done to improve the streetscape. A number of streets were identified, including Forest Park Ave, Bloomfield Street, Alderman Street, Ranney Street, Olmstead Drive, Fountain Street, and Trafton Road. These roads have a lot less right-of-way than their primary counterparts. Interventions on secondary streets include raised, speed table crossings at intersections and near schools, formalized parallel parking, and increasing the urban tree canopy wherever possible.



Section Views of Primary and Secondary Streets

The Forest Park neighborhood has very little vacant land. Most of the neighborhood is either developed or is protected as open space. According to the city assessor's data, there are 70 residential parcels in Forest Park that are classified as vacant and developable, totaling 14.1 acres. Due to the lack of remaining vacant land within Forest Park, careful future planning is imperative to ensure optimal use of existing land to create sustainable sites that reflect residents' desire for arts and culture, economic development, parks and open spaces, and housing opportunities within the Forest Park neighborhood.

| Sector | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------|
| Economic Development | 54% |
| Arts and Culture | 50% |
| Transportation | 47% |
| Housing | 41% |
| Parks and Open Space | 34% |
| Access to Food | 34% |
| Energy | 26% |



Arts & Culture



Current Conditions 501 Belmont Ave Next to Better Care LLC.



Proposed Community Center along Belmont Ave.



Current Conditions 298 Oakland St..



298 Oakland St. Park Proposal.

Spaces that foster opportunities for community gathering and play act as central hubs for economic and social growth. The creation of community centers and small public greens can draw people to an area and allow for shopping opportunities and tourism. Space for arts and culture in a neighborhood brings a number of benefits to the community, including opportunities for neighbors to interact and engage with each other and the surrounding residents. Access to the arts enhances the overall quality of life for residents, offering opportunities for leisure, learning, and activity through programs such as those provided by community centers and planned events. Arts enhance creativity, critical thinking, and

problem-solving skills, and offer learning opportunities for all ages. Hosting local art festivals, offering walking tours of the neighborhood, and establishing book and movie clubs are additional opportunities for the Forest Park neighborhood. Art and culture embrace business opportunities drawing curious visitors and tourists to the neighborhood, stimulating local businesses and fostering tangible economic growth.

Economic Development



Current Condition 733 Sumner Ave, Intersection of Sumner and White.



Proposed Street Greening and Economic Development, Intersection of Sumner and White.

Developing the economic environment in Forest Park has multiple benefits; new employment opportunities, increased local spending between businesses, and generating new tax revenue. Local economic development creates unique destinations within the community as well as attractions for visitors. When communities support local business, it creates a sense of place and local identity, which enhance the communities character and vibrance. Offering short-term business leases for pop-up shops and attracting businesses that target underserved needs, like a grocery store, can really enhance the Forest Park neighborhood. Cleaning up existing store fronts and increasing pedestrian access and walkability increases a businesses existing potential and street trees offer shade and reduce temperatures for passing residents. Additional ways to increase economic prosperity in local businesses and incentivize growth include advertisement through large scale events and festivals as well as the implementation of zoning that “supports multi-story, pedestrian-oriented districts that include a mix of small and large commercial spaces, and that preserve historic buildings”. (Mitchell)

Parks & Open Space



Aerial perspective of proposed pocket park on Dorset Street.



Perspective of Dorset St.



Perspective of proposed pocket park on Dorset Street abutting The Highland Rail Trail

The Forest Park Neighborhood is home to over 800 acres of parkland and open space, with a vast majority of it located in the Southwest side of the neighborhood. The northern census tracts of the Forest Park neighborhood are vastly underserved by parkland, and are disconnected from the existing parkland in the neighborhood. Environmentally, parks improve air quality, provide a habitat for wildlife, and mitigate the urban heat island effect found in cities. Providing more parkland to the Forest Park community encourages physical activity and improves community health. Communities that have access to open space such as parks, community gardens, and trails are more likely to have better sleep, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of chronic disease (Writer, ByStaff, et al.)

Housing Opportunities



229 Orange St.



Proposed single family housing on Orange St.

Developing vacant land into affordable housing options offers a multitude of benefits that strengthen the entire community. By providing stable and accessible housing options, it fosters economic diversity, allowing essential workers and lower-income families to reside within the neighborhood, contributing to the economy and enriching the social fabric of the neighborhood. The strategic use of underutilized land can revitalize areas, improve neighborhood aesthetics, and enhance safety. Vacant Land

can be an underutilized resource to a neighborhood, leading to property value declines and an overall sense of disrepair. Opportunities for affordable housing on vacant parcels can bring new resolve to an area, and improve the overall quality of life.

| Action | Lead Implementer | Collaborators | Timeline |
|--|---|---|------------------|
| Safe and Complete Streets- Traffic Calming on Primary and Secondary Roadways throughout Forest Park | Complete Streets Funding Program | Springfield DPW MASSDOT | 1-3 Years |
| Entry Dingle Brook- Cleanup of Site and implementation of Trail System | Community Preservation Act | MassTrails Grants | 3-5 Years |
| Highland Division Rail Trail | Gateway City Parks Program | MassTrails Grants | 3-5 Years |
| Dorset Street Pocket Park | Community Development Block Grants | MassTrails Grants | 1-2 Years |
| Oakland Street Dog Park and Playground | Community Preservation Funds | Community Development Block Grants | 1-2 Years |
| Highland Rail Trail-Summer Avenue Trailhead | MassTrails Grants | Safe Routes To School Program | 3-5 Years |

SAFE AND COMPLETE STREETS 1-3 YEARS TO COMPLETE

- implementing raised crosswalks on key streets identified by the community
- installing curb bump outs where possible to reduce traffic speeds
- introducing medians where possible
- Adding street trees and native species, increasing the urban tree canopy
- Enhance bus stops with new shelters, seating and trash bins.
- installing speed tables on secondary roads, reducing speeds.
- formalize street parking with new lane markings, and eliminating parking where not needed.

VACANT LAND RE-USE 1-3 YEARS TO COMPLETE

- Utilize vacant parcels on Oakland Street, turning the space into basketball courts, community garden plots, and a dog park.
- Use existing structure on Oakland St lot as an activities shed and pavillion.
- use identified land for housing infill when possible.
- Clear litter and invasives from vacant parcel along Dorset Street, transforming the land into community gardens and playspace for children.

REVIVE EXISTING ASSETS 5+ YEARS TO COMPLETE

- Major remediation and removal of invasive species and down trees in Entry Dingle Brook
- Cleanup paths and neighborhood connections into Entry Dingle Brook
- Implement the creation of the Highland Division Rail Trail- create a Multi-use path for the Forest Park community to enjoy
- Utilize vacant land on Sumner Ave alongside rail trail, transforming the space into a trail head with formalized parking for the trail and surrounding buisnesses.

Work Cited

-Mitchell, Stacy. "8 Policy Strategies Cities Can Use to Support Local Businesses." Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 1 May 2024, ilsr.org/articles/8-policy-strategies-cities-can-use-to-support-local-businesses

-Writer, ByStaff, et al. "Time Spent in Nature Can Boost Physical and Mental Well-Being." Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 22 Nov. 2024, hsph.harvard.edu/news/time-spent-in-nature-can-boost-physical-and-mental-well-being/

-Forest Park Neighborhood Investment Plan 2025-2035- [Forest Park neighborhood investment plan DRAFT 2025-01-13.pdf](#)

-Highland Division Rail Trail Report 2021- [2021-09-09HighlandTrailReport.pdf](#)