

# Appleton-High Street Area Opportunities Assessment



Prepared for Wayfinders, Inc

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## Section 1: Introduction

### Purpose

Wayfinders is a nonprofit housing/community development organization with over 40 years of successful work at improving communities in Western Massachusetts with several successful developments in Holyoke. Most recently, they developed the Library Commons housing community along Chestnut and Elm Streets. As an extension of its mission, Wayfinders expressed a desire to be a catalyst in revitalization of the High Street-Appleton Street area.

The City of Holyoke was receptive to the energy that Wayfinders brings to transformative projects and how that transformation could generate additional revitalization in contiguous areas of the Downtown and Churchill neighborhoods. However, there was expressed a need for an assessment of the area to determine opportunities and needs for the area.

Based on the interests expressed by Wayfinders and the City, the objective of this study is to provide a concentrated action-focused planning analysis of the 5-block area of Holyoke bounded by Appleton Street, Nick Cosmos Way, Worcester Place, and High Street (see Map1).

High-Appleton Study - Map 1:  
Study Area Boundary



## **Process**

The scope of the assessment involved an examination of the area's population characteristics, housing supply, environmental conditions, infrastructure conditions, and barriers and opportunities for development through an examination of relevant past planning reports, available data bases, and interviews with various stakeholders including representatives of city departments. As such, the assessment involved the following interrelated steps:

1. Review of Relevant Prior Plans, Studies, and Regulations
2. Collection and analysis of demographic and housing data
3. Review and analysis of selected available on-line environmental databases
4. Review and analysis of data provided by the City regarding tax and inspections
5. Visual assessment of the study area buildings and properties
6. Interviews with Identified community stakeholders
7. Review of Infrastructure through visual assessment and interviews with city officials
8. Integrated analysis and mapping of data and inputs from the first seven steps
9. Identification of development opportunities
10. Development of recommendations relevant to the development opportunities

## **Outline of Report**

The assessment is provided in the following seven sections:

- Prior Planning Review
- Study Area Residents and their Housing
- Land Use and Environmental Conditions
- Infrastructure Conditions, Plans, and Needs
- Regulatory Review
- SWOC Process and Analysis
- Concept Plan and Recommendations

A full-sized copy of each map is provided in the Appendix.



## Section 2: *Prior Planning Review*

The City of Holyoke has a rich and long history of planning citywide as well as for various neighborhoods. Based on a discussion with Aaron Vega, the City’s Director of Planning and Economic Development, Diane Smith, Wayfinders Chief of Real Estate, and a review of the City’s website, the assessment focused on the following documents as baseline:

### *Urban Renewal Plan (2012 and 2021 Amendment)*

An Urban Renewal Plan was adopted/approved in 2012 and then amended the plan in 2021. Goals and objective of this plan did not change with the amendment. The overall goal is

*“To promote economic development and growth in Holyoke by capitalizing on the City’s unique characteristics, connecting people and places, constructing infrastructure and creating a more vibrant and prosperous Center City.”*

To achieve the overall goal of this URP, the plan also established “subgoals” or objectives:

- *Promote private investment and create new jobs*
  - *Retain critical business – such as retail, manufacturing, commercial*
  - *Attract new business –fill vacant buildings and parcels with new jobs*
  - *Support existing and key planned development projects – such as the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center*
- *Improve housing options*
  - *Provide more housing choices – market rate and affordable housing, rental and ownership*
  - *Improve housing stock – better quality, more choices, rehabilitate existing*
  - *Increase home ownership opportunities –a policy statement for Holyoke Redevelopment Authority supported actions*
- *Rehabilitate or remove blighted properties*
  - *Address public safety concerns – such as deteriorating structures*
  - *Preserve valuable resources – rehabilitate/restore historic resources*
  - *Improve image – by addressing the most distressed property*
- *Upgrade public infrastructure*
  - *Streetscape improvements and street paving*
  - *Subsurface power, water and sewer improvements*
  - *Bridge replacements*

- *Create a sustainable community*
  - *Promote and enhance green energy – HG&E low-cost renewable power*
  - *Promote transportation options – bicycle, pedestrian, rail, mass transit*
  - *Promote a mix of housing (rental through home ownership) and businesses (retail, manufacturing, office, health care, etc.)*
  
- *Improve quality of life*
  - *Enhance open space network – rehabilitate parks, expand Canal Walk, and promote open spaces*
  - *Enhance cultural offerings – Victory Theater, art events and promoting the City as a destination for creative economy industries*
  
- *Increase the tax base in the Center City area*
  - *Redevelop underutilized and vacant property – increases property values*
  - *Add more density – residential and commercial*
  
- *Modify Regulations and Develop Programs to Support URP Actions*
  - *Modify Zoning Bylaw where needed to support URP program*
  - *Develop Design Guidelines for the Center City Area*
  - *Create incentive programs to assist private development, property owners and businesses who are proposing actions that support URP goals – such as programs that address hazardous materials and building improvements, amongst others.*
  - *Promote energy efficiency in building*

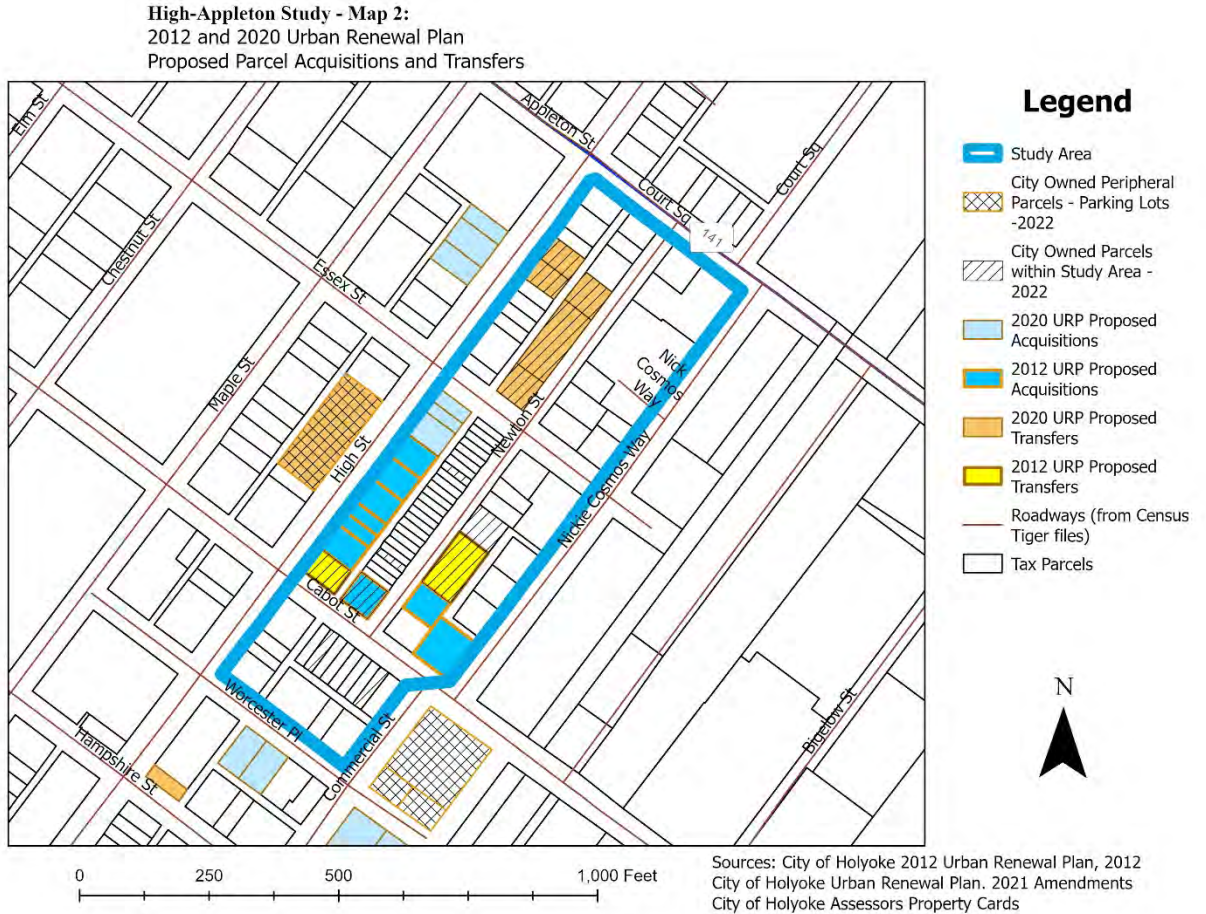
The 2012 plan established ten subareas for acquisition and clearance. These areas were not significantly changed by the 2021 amendments. Most of the Study Area lies within the Urban Renewal Plan Area 4 – the area between Cabot Street and Worcester Place is not within any Urban Renewal Plan Area. The URP describes Area 4 and the proposed action for the area as follows:

This area includes the area between High Street and Nick Cosmos Way/Heritage Street, and the Lyman Terrace complex. Recommendations include:

- Working with the Holyoke Housing Authority as a partnership for the rehabilitation or Redevelopment of the Lyman Terrace buildings.
- Public infrastructure actions include rehabilitation of the existing Dwight Street parking garage, reconstruction of the Suffolk Street parking deck, demolition of the old Police Station/parking deck and construction of a small parking lot with green space in its place, streetscape improvements, and the acquisition of vacant buildings in the area for rehabilitation and reuse.
- The HRA also will take actions to support the revitalization of the Victory Theater, the Holyoke House and Hadley Falls Trust building, which should be

done in a manner which ensures the preservation of the building’s historic character and attributes and is complementary to adjacent properties.

A number of properties were proposed for acquisition in the 2012 plan with some additional properties added in the 2021 amendment (see Map 2). Some properties proposed in 2012 for acquisition/disposition have been acquired but not all. None of these parcels appear to have been disposed of yet.



In reviewing the actions recommended for Area 4, it appears that the recommended actions which might involve the study area are “*streetscape improvements, and the acquisition of vacant buildings in the area for rehabilitation and reuse*”. While the URP Goals have a close relationship to the study area needs and conditions, the focus of the URP recommendations appear to be for areas outside of the study area.

### 1999 Master Plan

The Master Plan serves as a guide for future development, provides insight into issues identified as significant by the city in 1999; but is over 20 years old. Due to its age, the Director of Planning and Economic Development indicated that the Master Plan needs to be updated. This is a valid point as a Master Plan should be updated every 10-20 years.

However, at least seven of the “Priorities” from the 1999 Master Plan appear to be relevant to this assessment and the study area.

- Celebration of Holyoke’s assets
- Gateway improvement
- Sites for business growth
- Workforce development
- Opportunities presented by Ingleside area growth
- Neighborhood action
- Neighborhood cleanliness & appearance
- Building code enforcement
- Capitalizing on downtown’s waterfront and attractions
- Harnessing municipal powers to redevelop downtown
- Capital planning
- Capitalizing on Holyoke’s fiber optic’s infrastructure
- Community responsibility & involvement
- Community sense of safety
- Student achievements
- Increased educational opportunities
- Historic building protection
- Appreciation of Holyoke history and historic sites
- Natural resource protection along Mount Tom and East Mountain ranges
- Condition of Holyoke’s park system

### City of Holyoke Community Preservation Plan (2018)

This document was developed for and with the City’s Community Preservation Committee. The Plan presents:

- A description of the process for administering the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in the City of Holyoke.
- A description of the CPA as it applies to the City
- An analysis of local needs and goals for CPA program areas, and priorities and potential projects to utilize CPA funding over the coming years.
- A guideline for applicants seeking project funding through the CPA, and
- A blueprint for this and future CPA Committees in making recommendations to the City Council for project funding.

Of particular relevance to this assessment's objectives are some of the data and priorities:

- The Plan projects a total of \$2,575,601 in funding to be generated over a 5-year period. At least 10% or \$257,560 must be used for affordable housing
- Close to 5,800 households are cost-burdened (i.e., spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing), including one quarter of the city's homeowners and half of all renter households.
- Investment in affordable housing can help to support efforts for downtown revitalization, supporting a vision for increased economic diversity.
- The Plan's overall goals for CPA funding:
  1. Projects should be highly visible and accessible, generating broad benefits to the community.
  2. Projects should be consistent with other City and regional plans, with priority given to those that are part of a coordinated, connecting vision for area improvements.
  3. Projects should not replace funding from the City budget or other sources.
  4. Priority is given to projects that leverage funding from other sources and/or fill a gap where other sources are not available.
  5. Projects should demonstrate cost-sensitivity both in the short-term use of CPA funds, and the long-term maintenance or lifespan of the resource for which the funds are used.
  6. Priority is given to projects which facilitate growth in Holyoke's tax base, either directly (through investment in taxable property) or indirectly (through improvements that enhance a neighborhood or encourage private investment.)
  7. Priority is given to projects with a public sector or non-profit applicant or co-applicant above private individuals or for-profit applicants
- The Plan's Affordable Housing Goals:
  - a) Improve social and economic integration through creating opportunities for homeownership, mixed income communities, and reducing blight in residential neighborhoods.
  - b) Sustain the supply of affordable housing, in particular to accommodate seniors and people with disabilities, as well as families, individuals, and first-time homebuyers.
  - c) Support low- and moderate-income households in accessing housing that they can afford.

### Property Preservation Report

The City wrestled with the complex problems that some properties posed for over 30 years. It became evident that blighted properties needed a focused and organized effort.

Therefore, In December 2015, the City created the property preservation group “led “by the City Building Commissioner. The mission of the group is to:

*Coordinate interdepartmental efforts to improve blighted properties in the City of Holyoke*

The following departments participate in the property preservation group:

- Board of Health
- Building Department
- Department of Public Works
- Fire Department
- Law Department
- Office of Planning and Economic Development
- Mayor’s Office
- Office of Community Development

At the time the group was organized, the City established a problem property list by combining the individual lists from the fire, building, health, and community development departments. At that time there were over one hundred properties.

This approach has been effective as evidenced by the reduction in the number of known significantly unsafe, vacant, and blighted properties. In 2010 there were seventy-four such properties but as of 2021, this number had been reduced to fourteen properties.

Properties on the list were rated as to their public safety concerns and their economic impact. The Building Commissioner provided a copy of the current list with the priority and safety rating. Six of the properties were on the list:

- 011-05- 022 115 NEWTON ST
- 011-03- 011 84 NEWTON ST
- 011-05- 031 480 HIGH ST
- 011-03- 006 115 CABOT ST
- 011-05- 032 468 HIGH ST
- 011-05- 031A 490 HIGH ST

The first two properties scored “12” regarding public safety compared to “6” or “7” for the other four properties. A score of “12” is near the top of the ratings indicating a high public safety concern. In terms of economic impact, the first two properties scored a “4” compared to “5” or “6”.

The cost to address the issues with 115 Newton Street was estimated at over \$125,000 (purchase, etc., would increase the costs). No cost estimate was available for the other five properties.

## City of Holyoke Rapid Recovery Plan

Rapid Recovery Plans were funded by Massachusetts DHCD in response to the impact which the COVID-19 pandemic had on business districts. The goals of such planning are to get people back to work, support small businesses, foster innovation, revitalize downtowns, and keep people in stable housing. The plans are not to be “sit on the shelf” documents but “actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to the unique economic challenges and COVID-19 related impacts to downtowns, town centers, and commercial areas “. The City of Holyoke received funding to undertake such planning and completed their plan with the assistance of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Third Eye Network, LLC in 2021.

The plan recommended many implementation actions within eight implementation strategies some of which could be helpful towards achieving the objectives of this assessment. As provided in the plan, the cost to implement the recommendations is estimated to range between \$1,850,000 to \$4,580,000. Costs could exceed this amount and some actions are intended to be on-going; thus, there would be an annual cost.

- *Implement Streetscape and Walkability Improvement Plans for the District*
- *Improve Downtown Wayfinding for Automobiles and Pedestrians*
- *Adopt a Community-driven Civic Engagement and Development Strategy*
- *Develop Creative Capital Solutions to Increase Access to Capital for Small Businesses*
- *Adopt Location-based Marketing Platforms for Local Retail Activation*
- *Advance Equitable, Inclusive Recovery with Undoing Racism® Workshops*
- *Refresh Passport Holyoke to Centralize the Arts, Culture, and Tourism Online*
- *Establish a City Center Cultural District in Downtown Holyoke*

The location for the implementation actions varies with some actions intended to be undertaken City-wide. But all actions would have a focus on Census Tract No. 8114, 8115, 8116 and 8117. The assessment’s study area is within Census Tract 8116. Of potential benefit to the study area are the recommendations regarding streetscape, walkability, and wayfinding improvements. Improvement in civic engagement could be of significant benefit to the area’s residents while creative capital solutions could benefit the area’s small businesses.

### Housing Development Incentive Plan

In 2012, the City developed and submitted an application for a Housing Development Incentive Zone. The zone encompasses the Center City area inclusive of the study area. The application documents the economic and social distress of the area including census tract 8116 which encompasses the study area.

Under the program, the City would provide tax incentives for housing development (focused on vacant buildings). The tax incentives could be up to 100% for the first ten years of the program. However, since the program has a life of 20 years, and is effectively in its second half, it would appear the incentives may be less at this time.

### MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Holyoke (1982)

This report documents the transportation routes, population, settlement patterns, economic base, and architecture for different time periods in Holyoke's history. Rather brief, but the report provides a glimpse into the development of the city including the High Street area and the canals.

### Holyoke Tourism Strategic Plan

This 2020 plan was prepared by Crane Associates, Inc from Burlington, Vermont. It documents role of tourism in the city and opportunities for enhancement of the tourism activity. Some recommendations may be equally applicable to study area assessment. Recommendations include:

- Recommendation 1: Create and Market a New Brand for Holyoke
- Recommendation 2: Permit Reform
- Recommendation 3: Monitor and Report Progress
- Recommendation 4: Improved Infrastructure Maintenance Program
- Recommendation 5: Coordinate business communications and Holyoke tourism opportunities into one marketing effort
- Recommendation 6: Create Holyoke's Signature Destination
- Recommendation 7: Establish a Puerto Rican Cultural District on Main Street
- Recommendation 8: Promoting Natural Areas
- Recommendation 9: Develop Opportunities with MGM Springfield
- Recommendation 10: Complete a financial and human resources plan to implement these recommendations

While Recommendation #2 applied to tourism related permits, it may be equally applicable to permits for housing and business development. Similarly, Recommendation #4 could help beyond tourism. Perhaps Recommendation #7 could be shifted to High

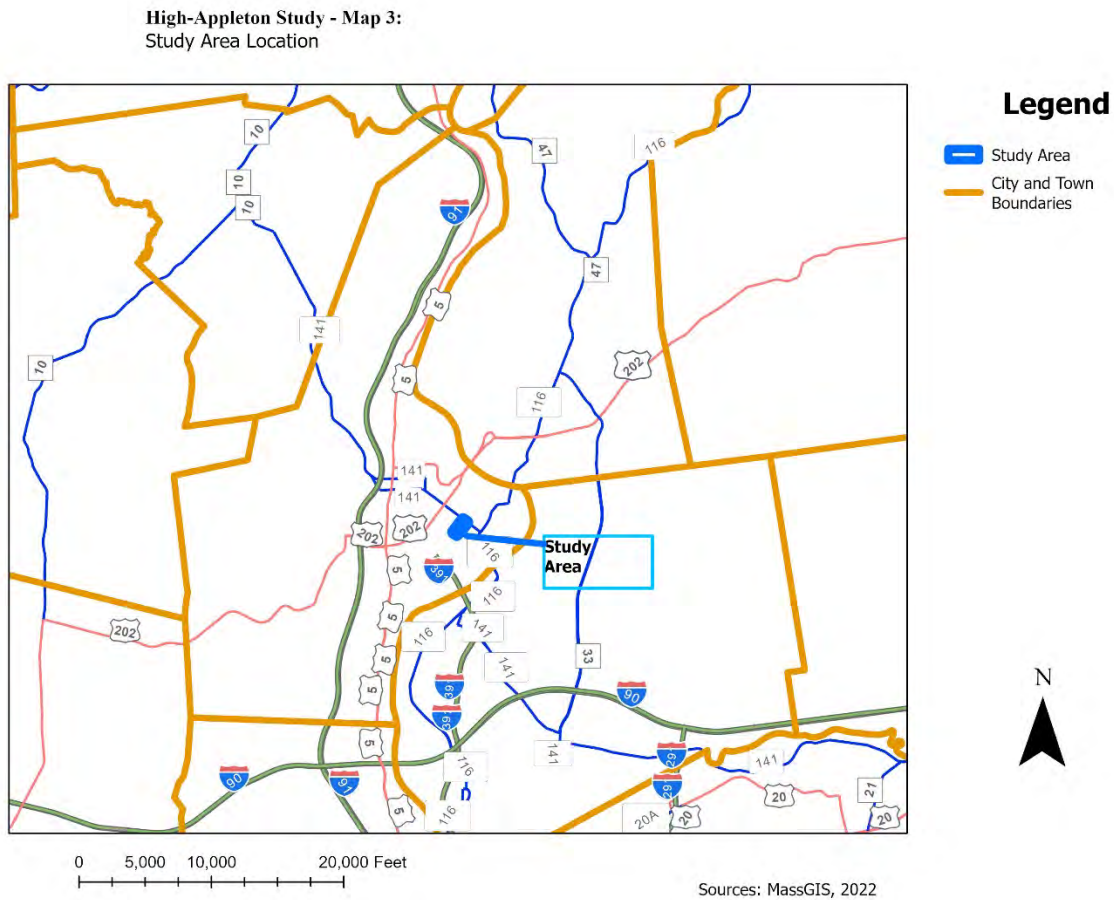


Street as its focus given the access to I-391 and the heart of downtown and the large concentration of the Puerto Rican community in the area surrounding the study area.

### Section 3: Study Area Residents and Their Housing

#### Location

The study area is in the easterly portion of the City of Holyoke (see Map 3) along the edge of the downtown neighborhood. While most of the study area lies within the Downtown neighborhood,



one block lies within the Churchill neighborhood. The dividing line between the two areas is along Cabot; thus, most of the area is in the Downtown Area.

State Highway 141 runs along the northern edge of the study area. Interstate 391 lies within ½ mile of the Study Area at the end of High Street

#### Size

The study area consists of approximately eleven acres inclusive of segments of roadway right of ways. Non-roadway area consists of ninety tax parcels which constitute approximately 7.1 acres or approximately two-thirds of the area. Parcels range from The parcels range in size from 958

square feet to over 21,000 square feet with an average parcel size of approximately 3,400 square feet.

### People and Housing – An Overview

Data at the block level is limited. While it could be obtained by a 100% survey, such an effort is beyond the scope of this study and would be exceedingly difficult to achieve and subject to significant potential error. Thus, this study relied on available relevant data – primarily at the State, City, and Census Tract levels with some data at the Block Group level.

The Study Area lies within Census Tract 8116. Portions of Tract 8116’s Block Groups 2 and 3 lie within the Study area (see Map 4).



Data from the 2000, 2010, and 2020 censuses provide some description of the Census Tract’s population, households, economic status, and mobility.

## Population

### Summary of findings:

- The census tract, block groups, and study area have lost residents during the past 20-years
- Over the past 10 years, the study area lost two out of 5 of its 2010 residents
- Residents in the census tract are significantly younger than the City and State populations
- Nearly 9 in 10 residents of the census tract are of Hispanic/Latino heritage
- 90% of the census tract's Hispanic/Latino residents originate from Puerto Rico
- 1 in 2 families in the census tract have incomes below the poverty level despite experiencing a high percentage growth in income over the past 20 years
- Area residents are heavily dependent on public transit and other forms of non-automobile transportation as nearly half of the households in the census tract lack an automobile
- All of the area falls within the designation of an Environmental Justice community

*Overall Population Changes.* While the State grew by approximately 681,000 persons (10.7%) from 2000 to 2020, the city and census tract 8116 experienced slight declines (4% and 1.6%, respectively) during this two-decade period. Reflecting the local declining trends and significant building demolitions, Block Groups 2 and 3 experienced declines during the last 10 years. In 2020, Census Tract 8116 accounted for 9% of the City's population slightly down from its 2000 level of approximately 11%. The two Block Groups accounted for 1.6% to 2.4% in 2020.

The population of the State, City, and Census Tract are aging. However, Statewide, the population is aging more rapidly as the Median Age increased from 36.5 years to 39.6 years over the last twenty years. The City and Census Tract 8116 have a younger population with the City having a Median Age in 2020 of 35.8 years (an increase of 1.8 years over the two-decades). Census Tract 8116 has a much younger population – 26.6 years in 2020 (up from 20.7 in 2000).

*Race and Ethnicity.* Most residents of the State identify themselves as “White”. Approximately half of the City's residents identify themselves as “White”. However, in Census Tract 8116 and Block Groups 2 and 3, the most often identified racial group is “Some Other Race”.

Hispanic or Latino residents comprise a more sizable portion of the population of the City and Census Tract 8116. While the Hispanic/Latino population of the State grew by 93% from 2000 to 2020, this group grew by one-third in the City. However, the share of the population accounted for by this group in the City and Census Tract is significantly different from that of the State as a whole. Statewide, Hispanic/Latino population as a share of the total population grew from 6.75% in 2000 to 12% in 2020. However, within the City, the change was from 41% to 55% during the same time span. Within Census Tract 8116, the Hispanic/Latino population has maintained a steady dominant share of approximately 86% of the population.

Within the Hispanic/Latino population, residents with a Puerto Rican heritage are more dominant in Holyoke and Census Tract 8116 than the State. From 2000 to 2020, Statewide, persons with

Puerto Rican heritage declined as a percent of the Hispanic/Latino population from 47% to 39% over the past 20 years while residents with a Dominican Republic heritage increased as a percent of the Hispanic/Latino population from 12% to 19%. This is not reflective of the City and Census Tract 8116 as persons of Puerto Rican heritage have maintained a dominant share of the Hispanic/Latino population – generally in the 88% to 92% range with persons of Dominican Republic Heritage growing from 1% to 3% of the Hispanic/Latino population.

*Residents Income.* Massachusetts has experienced a steady increase in income since 2000 as measured in Median Household Income, Media Family Income, and Per Capita Income – 67%, 73%, and 75%, respectively. This reflects a steady low percent of families in poverty (approximately 6.6% in 2020 compared to 6.7% in 2000 and 7.5% in 2010). Holyoke residents have also experienced increases in income as measured by Median Household Income, Media Family Income, and Per Capita Income – 40%, 43%, and 55%, respectively – albeit less significant than the State as a whole. Slightly over one-fifth of Holyoke families have incomes below the poverty level (22.6% in 2020, the same as 2000 but less than the 28.4% of 2010).

Residents in Census 8116 experienced greater income increases as measured in percent of 2000 levels, but this reflects the much lower income of households and families in the area.

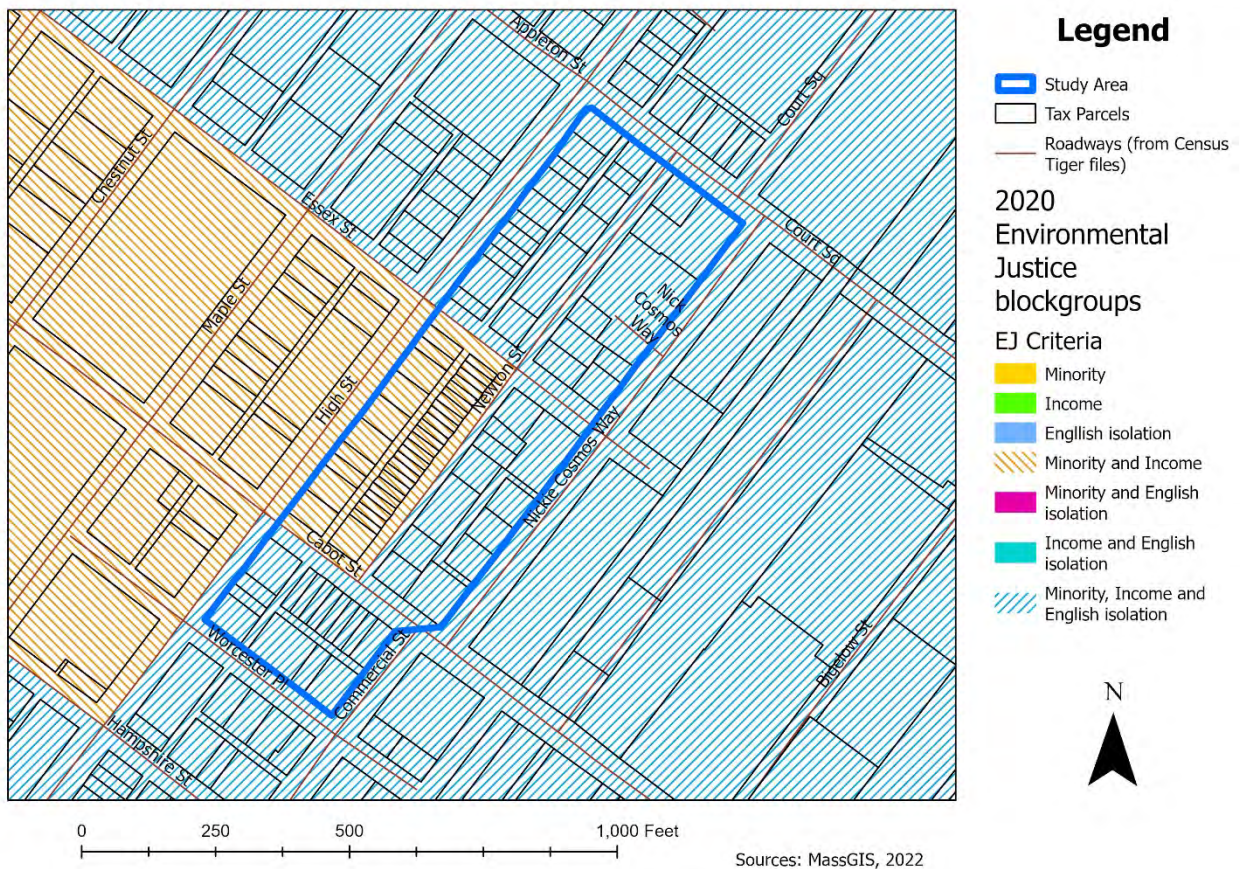
- Median Household Income grew by 71% from 2000 to 2020. The 2020 Median Household Income was \$24,138 – approximately 56% of the City’s 2020 level and slightly over one-quarter of the Statewide level.
- Median Family Income grew by 798% from 2000 to 2020. The 2020 Median Family Income was \$29,712 – approximately 57% of the City’s 2020 level and slightly over one-quarter of the Statewide level.
- Per Capita Income grew by 92% from 2000 to 2020. The 2020 Per Capita Income was \$13,317 – approximately 54% of the City’s 2020 level and 29% of the Statewide level.

Reflecting the much lower income levels of residents in Census Tract 8116, despite experiencing a 3% decline in the percent of families with incomes below the poverty level from 2000 to 2020, the percent of families below the poverty level was double that of the City in 2020 – 45.4%. This level was nearly 7 times the rate of poverty experienced Statewide.

*Mobility.* Massachusetts is an auto dependent state. This is reflective of the fact that only approximately 12% of households lack an automobile – this level has remained fairly steady from 2000 to 2020. Residents of Holyoke are also auto dependent as reflected by only 22% of the households lacking an automobile – down from 27% in 2000. Access to public transportation is essential for residents of Census Tract 8116 as 44% of households in 2020 lacked an automobile (in 2000, this figure was 50.4%).

*Environmental Justice.* Environmental Justice communities are identified on a block group level based on three criteria: concentration of low-income residents, concentration of racial minority populations, and/or concentration of “English Isolated” populations. Areas may be designated based one, two, or all of these criteria. All of the study area population falls within the Environmental Justice community designation. While the block encompassing the Newton Street Row Houses is within the EJ community due to concentration of low income and racial minority populations, the rest of the study area fall within the EJ community based on ALL three criteria being met for Block Group 2 of Census Tract 8116 (see Map 5).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 5:**  
Environmental Justice Community By Criterion



*Study Area Population.* Extremely limited census data is available at the block level. However, the data that is available shows that the population has declined by 39% in the past 10 years - from 314 persons down to 191 persons. Half of the population decrease was in the block bounded by High Street, Newton Street, Cabot Street, and Essex Street. There were a number of buildings demolished during this time in this block. One-quarter of the population loss was

accounted for in the block bounded by Nick Cosmos Way, Newton Street, Cabot Street, and Essex Street with a similar portion of the decline being accounted for by the block between Cabot Street and Worcester Place.

### Households

#### Summary of findings:

- Households grew regardless of whether population increased
- Average household size tended to decrease
- Households in the census tract tend to be larger than those in the State and City
- 1 in 5 households in the census tract have a single adult head of household with women heading over half the households – this greater than found at either the State or City levels

*Trend in Households.* Reflecting declines in the average household size, the growth in households have outpaced population growth at the City and Census Tract levels but lagged at the State level. From 2000 to 2020, households grew by 8.4% statewide compared to the 10.7% growth in the population. Conversely, in Holyoke, the number of households grew by 3.3% despite the City’s decline in residents. Similarly, Census Tract 8116 experienced an 11% growth in households compared to its 1.7% decline in total residents.

*Average Household Size.* The State experienced a slight increase in the average household size from 2.6 to 2.66 persons per household. Locally, the trend has been in the opposite direction as the City experienced a decline from 2.66 to 2.47 persons per household and Census Tract 8116 declined from 3.14 to 2.77 persons per household (still exceeding the State average).

*Single Head of Households.* Most households in Massachusetts have two adults as indicated by the 2010 and 2020 census. But the incidence of households with a single adult has increased over the past 10 years at the State, City, and Census Tract levels.

Data show that in 2010, 16% of Massachusetts households were “single head of household”; but this increased to 46% by 2020. Similar, but more dramatic changes have occurred locally with the City rates increasing from 28% to 61% from 2010 to 2020 and within Census Tract 8116, the rate increased from 49% to 78%.

Significantly, households with a single female head of household accounted for 12% of all households compared to 4% for males in 2010. This changed somewhat as the female headed households grew to 29% while male headed households grew to 17%. Within the City, female headed households grew from 23% to 41% and male headed households grew from 5% to 21%. Reflecting the economic challenge in Census Tract 8116, female headed households accounted for 59% (up from 35% in 2010) of all households in 2020 while male headed households accounted for 19% of all households (up from 14% in 2010).

## Housing Units

### Summary of findings:

- The housing supply grew faster than either population or household growth would suggest
- Unlike the State and City, the census tract's housing is dominated by non-single-family dwellings
- Single-family dwellings constitute only 26% of the study area's housing supply
- Reflecting the two-family, three-family, and multifamily nature of the census tract's housing supply and its income limited households, 9 out of 10 households in the census tract rent their residence
- Over half of the census tract's dwellings were constructed prior to 1940
- The study area's housing units are in building over 100 years old

*Growing the Supply.* With a 14% increase from 2000 to 2020, housing unit growth in Massachusetts outpaced population and household growth with the number of dwelling units reaching 3 million in 2020. A similar but less dramatic trend was evident in Holyoke as housing stock grew by 4.1% compared to a 4% population decline and a 3.3% household growth. Within Census Tract 8116, the supply of housing grew by 11% compared to a 1.7% population decline; however, unlike the State and City, the growth in the housing stock was slightly less than the growth in households – 11.5%. This difference in housing supply growth in Census Tract 8116 is likely a result of the considerable number of demolitions which the City undertook during this time period.

*Housing Type.* Massachusetts is a predominantly single-family housing market as demonstrated by the 2000, 2010, and 2020 census data. Over this 20-year period, the portion of housing accounted for by single-family homes varied only slightly – 56%, 58%, and 57% as reported for 2000, 2010, and 2020, respectively. Within the City, single-family homes as a percentage of the housing supply ranged changed from 39% in 2000 to a high of 41% in 2010, down to 36% in 2020. Residents of Census Tract 8116 are unlikely to reside in single-family homes as they only accounted for 12% in 2000 and this declined to 8% in 2020.

*Housing Tenure.* It is understood that persons are more likely to own a single-family house than an apartment. Thus, reflecting the fact that over 56% of the supply consists of single-family homes, it is not surprising that over 60% of dwelling units are owner-occupied Statewide. This number has varied little over the past 20 years (62%, 64%, and 63%). Similarly, approximately 40% of the housing units in Holyoke are owner-occupied – only slightly higher than the percent of the supply in the form of single-family homes. Continuing this pattern of reflecting the housing type, residents of Census Tract 8116, which has less than 10% of its housing in single-family homes, are highly likely to be renting their residence – approximately 89% to 90% of the dwellings are renter occupied.



*Age of Housing.* Massachusetts has a relatively modern housing supply with slightly less than one-third of the units being constructed prior to 1940. Approximately 42% of the City’s housing supply was constructed prior to 1940. By contrast, residents in Census Tract 8116 are most likely to reside in a dwelling constructed prior to 1940 as 56% of the housing is pre-1940 – this percentage would be higher but for the significant amount of demolition activity which the City has undertaken in the area.

*Study Area Housing Supply.* The Tax Assessor’s data base was reviewed to determine the area’s quantity and age of housing the area. Based on this review, it was determined that there are 109 dwelling units in thirty-nine buildings within the area. Seven multi-family buildings ranging from 6 to 19 units account for 71 (or 65%) of these units. Twenty-eight (28) dwelling units are in single-family housing. – generally, row houses along Newton or Cabot Streets. The balance is in two-family, and three-family buildings – along Newton and Cabot Streets. Two of the multifamily buildings are mixed use buildings – one on High Street and one on Newton Street.

Reviewing the Tax Assessor’s on-line Property Cards provides an insight into the age of the study area housing. While buildings and dwelling units have been rehabbed or renovated over the past decades, the Property Cards show that the mixed-use building at 21 Essex Street is the most recently constructed building used for residential purposes – it was built in 1915 (see Map 6). Over four out of 10 dwelling units are in buildings constructed prior to 1900 while 3 in 10 of the

**High-Appleton Study - Map 6:**  
Year of Residential Building Construction



units are in buildings constructed in 1900. Cabot Street row houses are dated 1880 while the Newton Street row houses are dated 1890. Only two buildings containing housing units were constructed after 1900.

**Section 4: Land Use and Environmental Conditions**

***Land Use - Current***

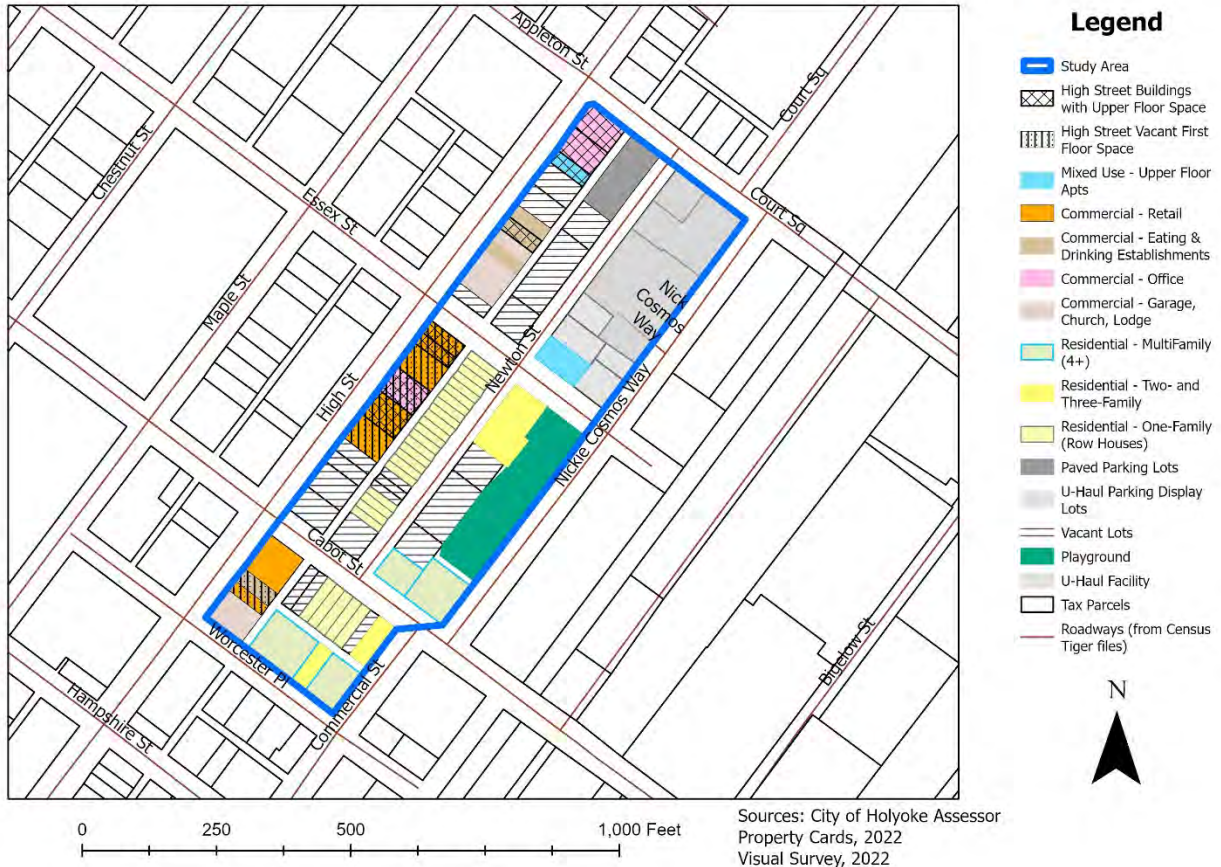
Current land uses are measured as the use of the ground and the first floor of multi-floor buildings. Occupying nearly 40% of the study area see Table 1 commercial uses are the dominant land use – largely attributable to the U-Haul facility on Nick Cosmos, Appleton, and Newton. This facility accounts for 1.2 acres of the commercial land use (including the parking associated with the facility). This category includes an automobile servicing garage.

Residential land uses are comprised of three sub-categories: Single-family (row houses), two- and three-family, and multifamily/apartments. As a group, these residential land uses account for 26.6% of the area. The residential land uses are on lots ranging from less than 1,000 square feet to slightly over 9,000 square feet. The single-family lots range from 958 square feet to just over 1,800 square feet.

As one would expect, the commercial uses are almost exclusively located along High Street (see Map 7). Similarly, the limited mixed-use buildings are also predominantly along High Street. Single-family uses and the limited two- and three-family uses are along Newton, Cabot, and Worcester Streets.

<b>Table <u>1</u></b>		
<b>General Land Use</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Residential Single-Family (Row Houses)	0.732	10.3%
Residential 2 & 3 Family	0.274	3.9%
Residential Multifamily/Apartments	0.880	12.4%
Commercial	2.818	39.7%
Parking Lots	0.224	3.1%
Vacant Lots (includes used for parking)	1.606	22.6%
Playground	0.571	8.0%
	7.105	100%
Sources: City of Holyoke Assessor’s Office database. Richard Harris, Planning Consultant Visual Assessment, 2022		

**High-Appleton Study - Map 7:  
Existing Land and Building Uses**



Vacant land in this area are parcels on which buildings once stood but have been demolished. This category totals nearly a quarter of the study area. Parcels range from 958 square feet to 9,800 square feet – larger than most of the residential parcels. At least four of these parcels along Newton Street totaling approximately 21,000 square feet are used for “informal parking” (see Map 8). At slightly over ½ acre, the largest open space area is the playground along Nick Cosmos Way. This use is made distinct from the vacant lots in that it is developed open space which is used for programmed activities by the Boys & Girls Club.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 8:**  
 Vacant Lots, Parking Lots, Informal Parking Lots,  
 Playground, and U-Haul Display/Parking Lots



***Land Use - Historical***

Land Use maps from MassGIS as well as aerial photos from the City of Holyoke online property viewer were reviewed to determine what land use changes have occurred over the past 50 years. This review concluded that the land use had not changed except for demolishing of buildings which largely resulted in vacant lots, playground, or parking areas. Review of the Assessor’s data base and Inspection records supplied by the Building Commissioner and the Director of Public Health supported this conclusion. No records were provided which suggested any industrial use or automobile servicing use had previously operated in the area and been removed during this time.

**Building Upper Floor Use and Vacant Building Space**

While land use is an important consideration, in an urban environment such as Holyoke, upper floor use is also, perhaps more, important to examine. There are approximately 78,925 square feet of upper floor space in the commercial buildings within the study area (see Table 2). This translates into approximately 1.8 acres of floor area – much of which is currently vacant. Slightly over 22,000 square feet is used as part of the U-Haul storage facility. All but approximately 23,000 square feet of the upper floor commercial space is in buildings along High Street and it is largely vacant (see Map 9).

<b>Table 2</b>	
<b>Floor</b>	<b>Square Feet</b>
Upper Floors	78,925
First/Ground Floor	72,747
Basement	53,991
<b>TOTAL SF</b>	<b>205,663</b>
Sources: City of Holyoke Assessor’s Office database. Richard Harris, Planning Consultant field survey	

**High-Appleton Study - Map 9:**  
High Street Buildings with Upper Floor Space



In addition to the vacant upper floor space along High Street, it is important to note that there is significant ground floor space which is vacant as well. This totals approximately 18,000 square feet. Thus, while the land use inventory depicts this as “commercial use” because it is developed; it is, in fact, vacant building space available for use. This space is predominately comprised of the HAPCO and Haberman properties – which also account for a portion of the vacant upper floor space (see Map 10).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 10:**  
High Street Vacant Land, Vacant Building Space,  
and Building Uses



### ***Building Construction Ages***

When buildings were constructed is another indicator of land use changes – or lack of change. While buildings have been renovated/converted in recent years – the U-Haul facility is a notable example, only two buildings have been constructed in the area in the past 62 years – the garage at 532 High Street (1940) and a small office building at 468 High Street (1987). As noted in

“Study Area Residents and Their Housing”, building containing dwelling units are dated between 1880 and 1915. The area’s row houses (Cabot and Newton Streets) date to 1880 and 1890, respectively (see Map 11). This history of older development suggests that the demolition of buildings over the past 60 years has resulted in change to vacant lots, parking lots, or playground use.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 11:**  
Year of Building Construction



**Topography**

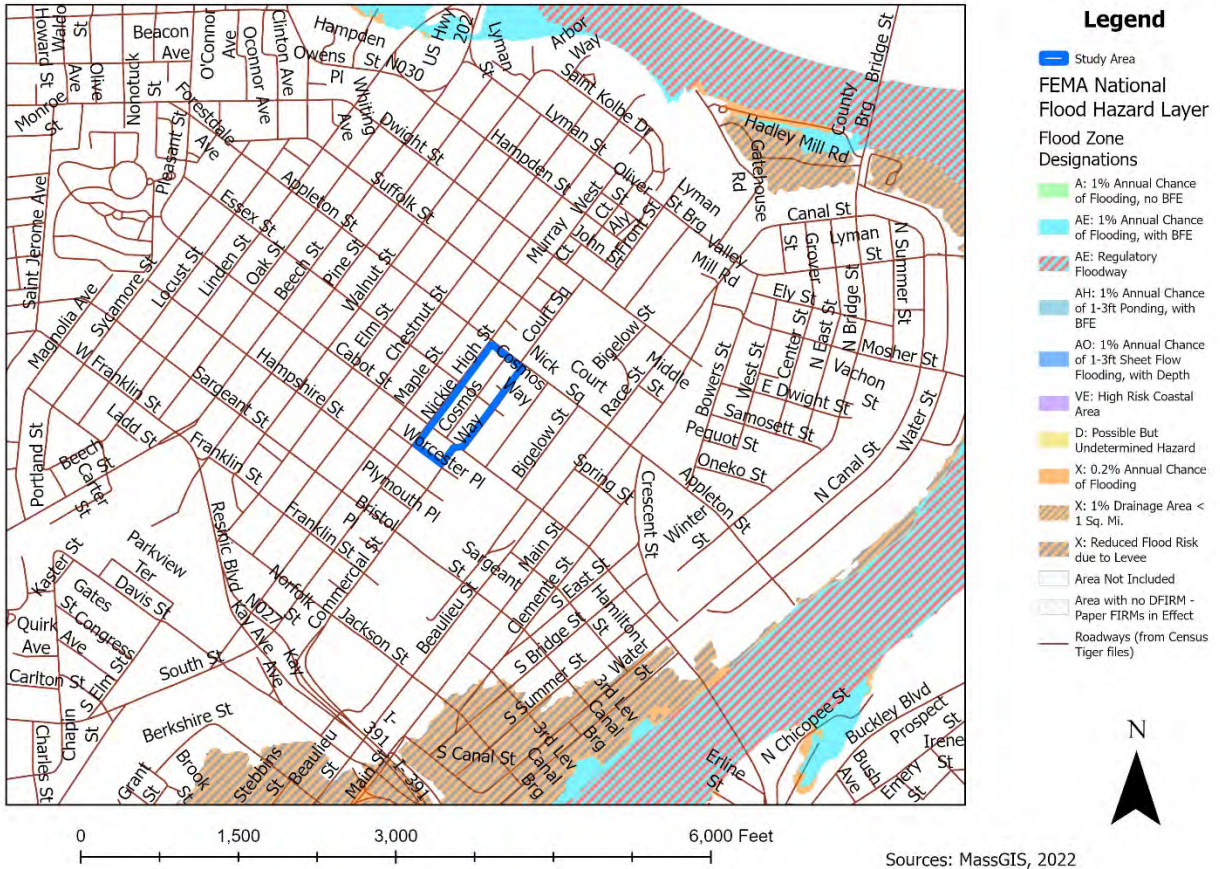
The study area has a flat terrain. A review of the USGS Topographic Quadrangle Map depicts only a few contours suggesting that the site drops perhaps five (5) feet from High Street towards Nick Cosmos Way.



## Floodplain

While the study area lies less than 100 yards from the canal, the flood plain does not impact any portion of the study area (see Map 12).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 12:**  
Flood Hazard Areas

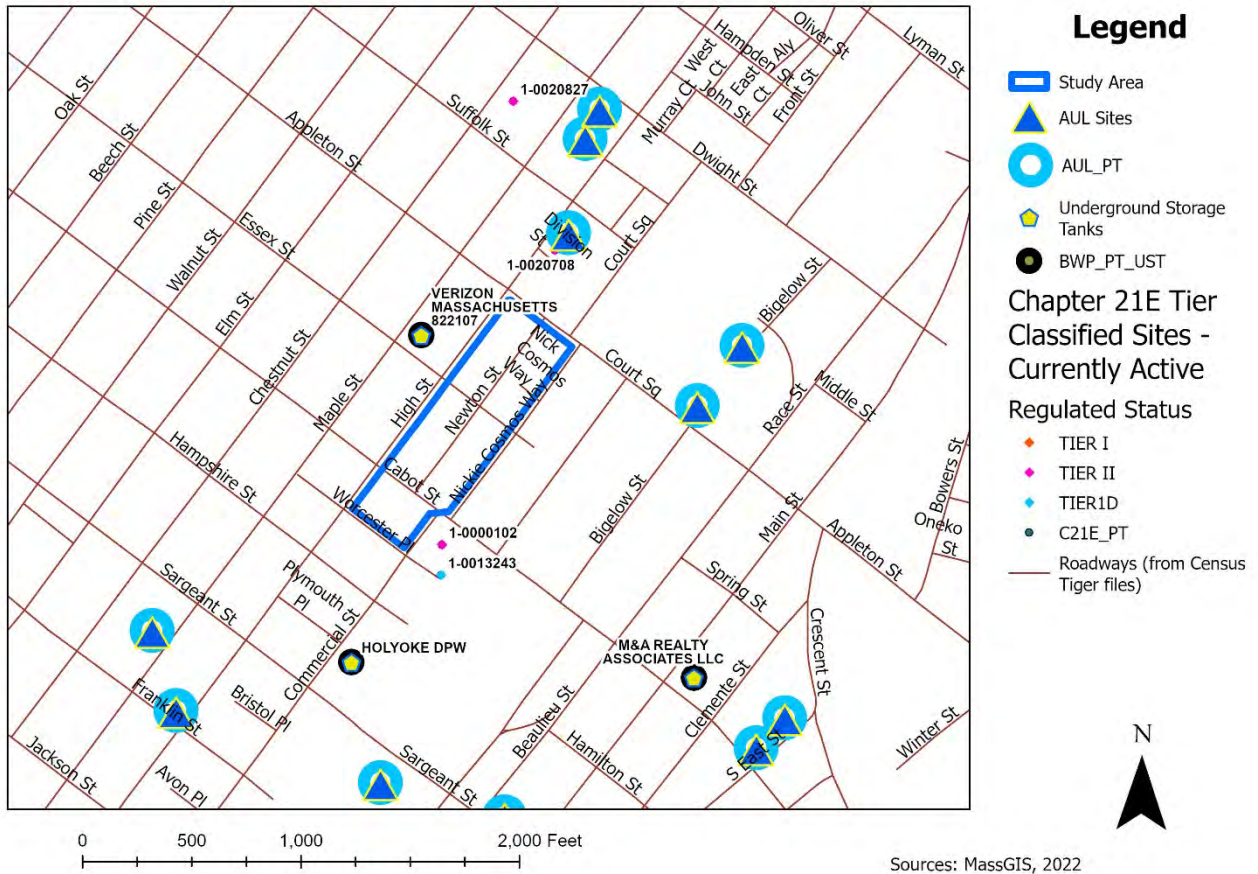


## Review of MassDEP Database

The MassDEP online data base and MassGIS data were reviewed to determine if there were any properties of concern within the study area. Only one parcel, 532 High Street, appears to have a MassDEP record of complaints or inspections. This parcel is developed with a garage; thus, some MassDEP issues related to the operation is not surprising.

A site contamination cleanup may sometimes result in an Activity Use Limitation established by an agreement between MassDEP and the property owner. Thus, knowing whether such an AUL existing is vital information. MassGIS has data layers which detail locations of AULs, Underground tanks, and 21E sites, While there are sites with such limitations near the study area, no such restriction is within the study area (see Map 13).

High-Appleton Study - Map 13:  
MassDEP AUL, Underground Tanks, and 21E Sites



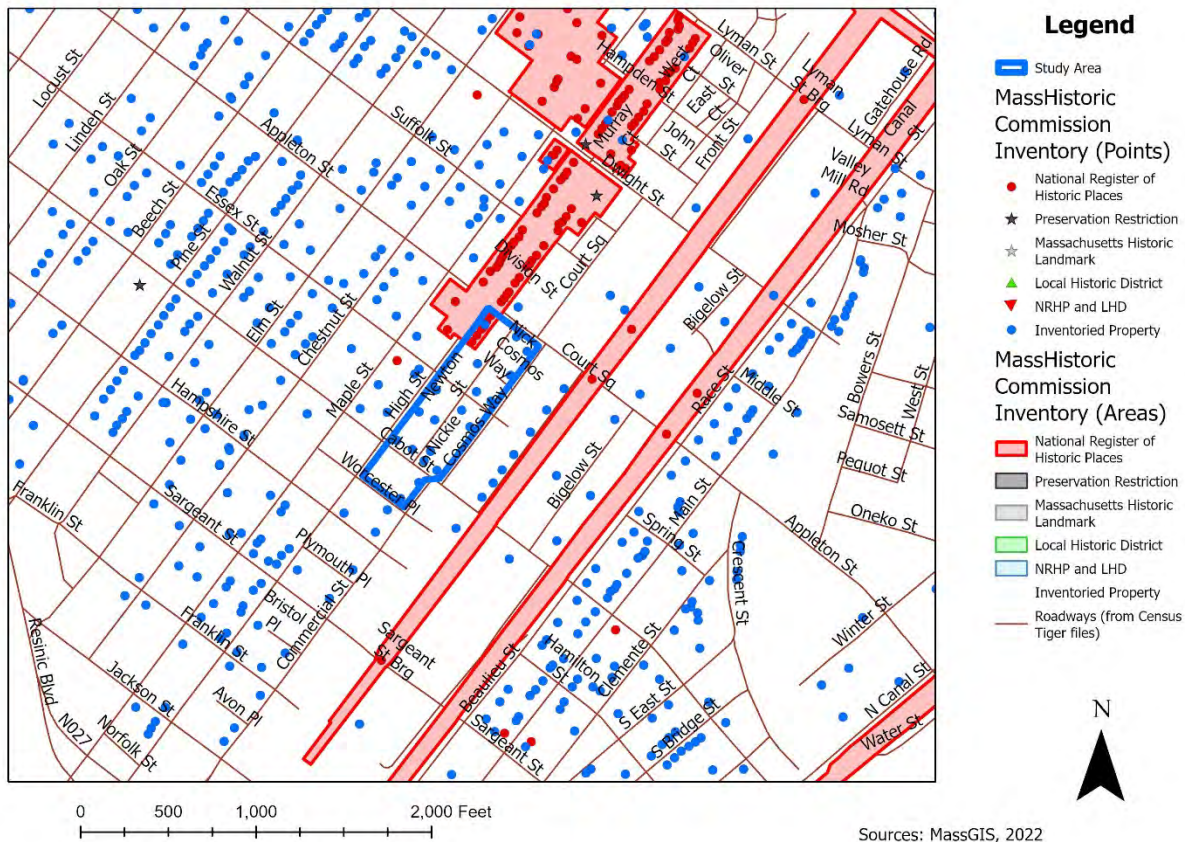
## Natural Heritage & Endangered Species

None of the study area is impacted by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program’s Priority Habitats of Rare Species or the Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife. The nearest such Habitat exists is along the canal approximately 100 yards away from the study area.

## Historic Register

Holyoke has an extensive record of supporting historic preservation. The 1982 MHC Reconnaissance Survey Report is just one example. More significantly, the City has four historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places – all of them are at least partly within the Downtown neighborhood (see Map 14). One of these districts extends into the study area

**High-Appleton Study - Map 14:**  
Mass Historical Inventories and National Historic Districts -  
Study Area and Surrounding Areas



including several buildings along High Street. Additionally, there have been many buildings which have been included in a Massachusetts Historic Commission survey within the study area (see Map 15).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 15:**  
 Mass Historical Inventories and National Historic Districts -  
 Study Area Focus



### ***Building & Health Department Records Review***

The Building Commissioner and Public Health Director provided voluminous amounts of inspections and permitting records for each of the parcels and buildings within the study area covering the past 20+ years. These records were reviewed and evaluated as to how they impacted the quality of life and quality of buildings in the area. The following were used as a guide in grading the reports and properties:

- Properties with extensive or persistent violations were considered severely impacted
- Properties with intermittent violation records were considered moderately impacted
- Properties with only an older violation or recently resolved violations were considered to be mildly impacted

- Violations which related to trash, debris, etc. were considered to be quality of life impacting
- Violations which related to building elements were considered to be impacting building quality

This review was supplemented by the results of a Visual Assessment survey conducted during March-April 2022. During this survey, each building façade was reviewed in regard to the following items:

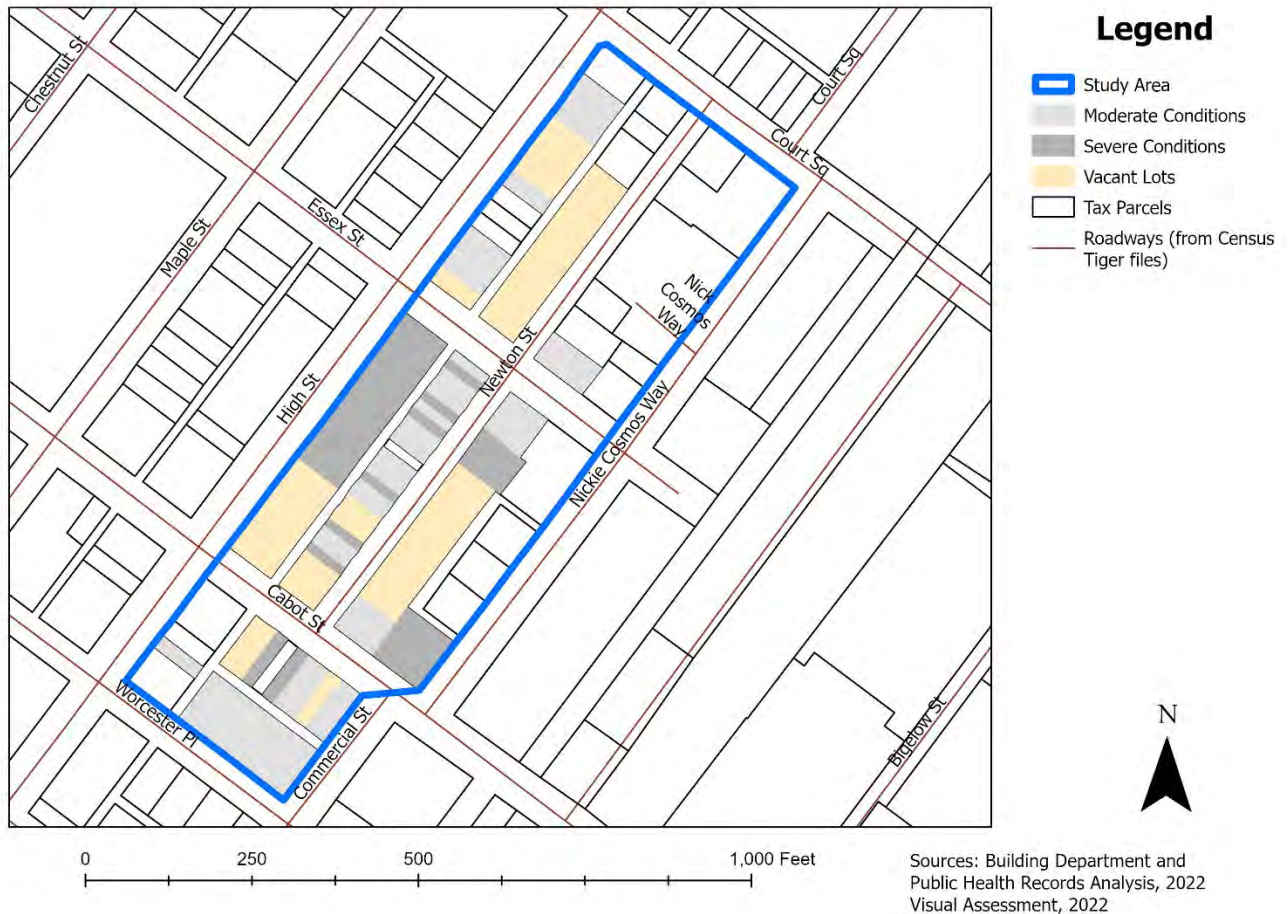
- Alignment Issues with emphasis on windows, rooflines, etc.
- Façade Issues with emphasis on windows, siding, brick work, graffiti, etc.
- Weather Tightness Issues with emphasis on roofs, siding, windows, etc.
- General Appearance Issues with emphasis on yards, autos, vegetation, etc.

A composite score based on the records review and visual assessment tasks was assigned for each building and parcel. Not surprisingly, vacant buildings scored highest (the worse score). Nearly all residential buildings showed at least a moderate degree of impact. Buildings with a moderate degree could be considered for rehabilitation. However, since an inspection was not conducted, caution should be used in reviewing this data analysis – an interior inspection is likely to identify more issues.

What does this analysis show? Approximately 1/3 of the properties would be in “moderately” negative condition. Another quarter would be in “severely” negative condition. Almost all of the residentially developed properties would be in one of these two categories – not surprising since these properties are all over 100 years old and given the changes in ownership, tenancy, and management structure over the past 10+ decades. Commercial buildings – if occupied – tended to fair better – a function of the role that property maintenance plays in the ability of the business to succeed. However, vacant commercial buildings did not fare well as these create the largest concentration of “severely conditioned” properties (see Map 16).

While this analysis suggests that properties on Newton Street are not as “severely conditioned”, it should be noted that all the vacant land are sites formerly dilapidated buildings – mostly residential – that have been demolished. When this fact is taken into consideration, the vacant land reflects that Newton Street has been a long-term issue for the City.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 16:**  
Moderate and Severe Building and Property Conditions



### ***Transformation of the Landscape***

The data on demolitions and the review of records provides a statistical and “plan view” of the transformation and conditions. A review of Google Streetview images provides a more graphic depiction of the dramatic transformation which has occurred in this area over the past 15 years.

These images show that portions of Newton Street were previously developed with 3-4 story residential blocks – likely dating back to the 1880’s. Similarly, development on High Street included several buildings with 4+ stories of residential use (see images on the following page). The historical development pattern involved no front setback – buildings were just behind the sidewalk. So, suburban development standards with wide lots and “deep” setbacks were not needed nor appropriate.

*High Street @ Cabot Street (2007)*



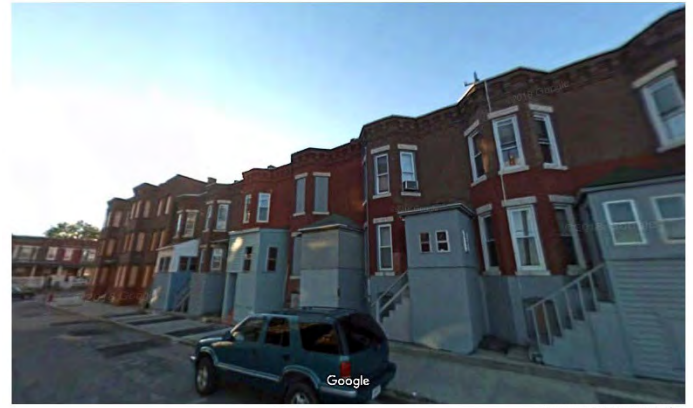
*400 High Street (2007)*



*31-61 Newton Street (2007)*



*Newton Street Row Houses (2007)*



Appendix B provides the following 8 pairs of images showing a location in 2007 in the top image and a more recent Google Streetview Image (2018, 2019, or 2020) in the bottom image.

1. High Street at Cabot Street – 2007 and 2018
2. High Street (400) – 2007 and 2020
3. Newton Street (31-61) – 2007 and 2020
4. Newton Street at Essex Street – 2007 and 2020
5. Newton Street (73-79) – 2007 and 2019
6. Newton Street (89-95) – 2007 and 2019
7. Newton Street (111-123) – 2007 and 2019
8. Cabot at Newton Street: 2007 and 2020

## Section 5: Infrastructure

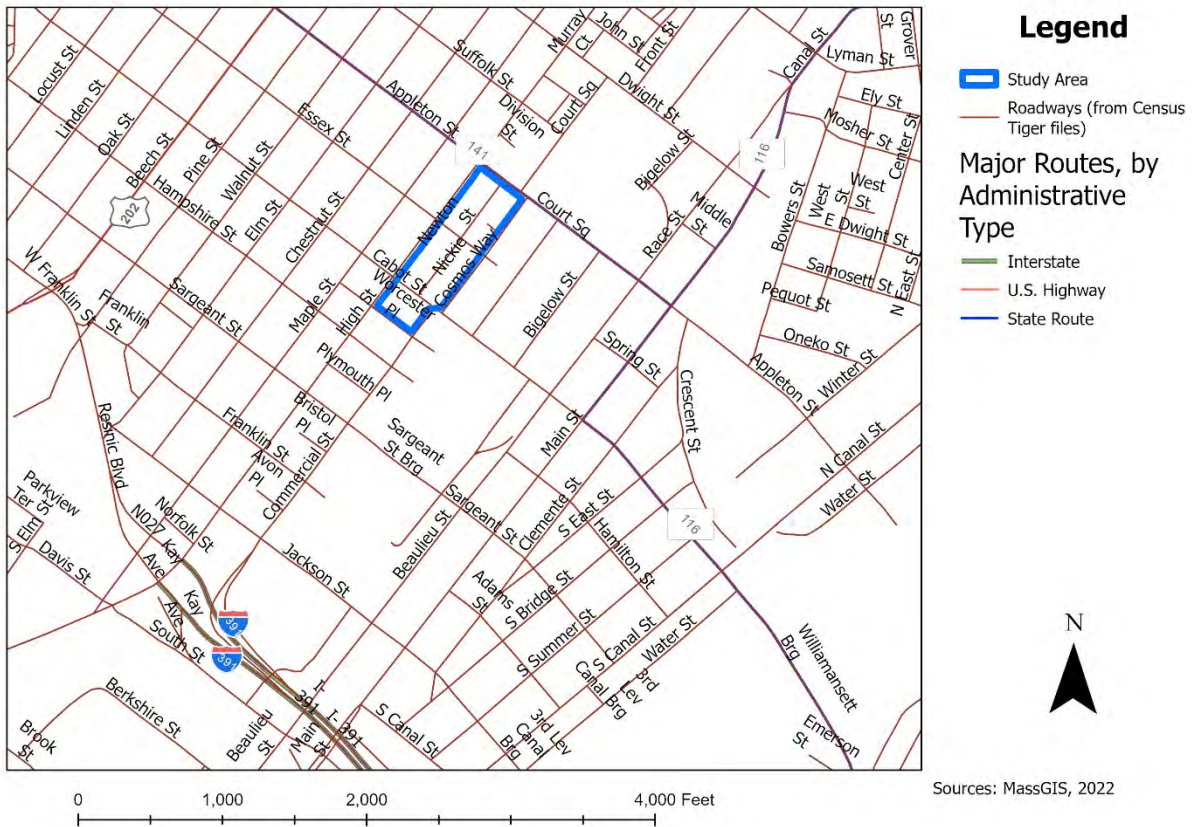
Infrastructure is the essential foundation for development. Without sufficient and sound infrastructure appropriate for a community’s environment, development cannot be effectively undertaken. Through discussions with representatives of various municipal departments and visual assessments, a picture of the status of the area’s infrastructure and its needs has been developed.

### Roadways

Holyoke’s downtown roadway system is built on a “grid”. Roadways traversing the study area are a mix of one-way and two-way roads which connect to major points of access directly or indirectly. Their current condition is fair to good.

I-391 is within ½ mile of the study area via High Street (see Map 17). Bordering the study area, Appleton Street is designated as State Highway 141 and is a major arterial link to downtown.

High-Appleton Study - Map 17:  
Roadway Network





Similarly, High Street borders the study area and is a major arterial linking I-391 to downtown. Within proximity to the study area are State Highways 116 and 202.

Plans have been developed to upgrade High and Maple Streets (one block away from the study area). However, the High and Maple Street project is being rescoped by MassDOT and their consultant GPI. There is no timetable for implementation and no plan yet for what is going to be implemented. It appears that the project engineer (GPI) is just starting work on a pre-25% design effort. Optimistically, the City Engineer indicated that “reconstruction of High Street is 3-5 years away” but could be longer. He added that he expects “the city will be moving ahead with a short-term resurfacing project on High Street sometime this fall. It will be a thin mill and overlay project that is intended to buy some time before reconstruction.”

No other roadway improvement plans have been developed which would impact the study area and its development. A total of one miles of roadway provides abutting access to the study area properties.

An alleyway provides rear access to parcels in the block bounded by Newton, Cabot, High, and Essex Streets. A few other properties have rear access via an alleyway as well. The alleyways, especially the one serving the Newton Street row houses, have been the focus of issues regarding maintenance and allegedly the site of “unacceptable activity” (trash and debris dumping, illegal activity in some instances, etc.). In a few instances, utilities also run down the alleyways.

*Traffic Volumes.* As part of design process associated with the proposed improvements to High Street, SLR International Corporation (the project engineer) undertook a traffic study including traffic volume counts (seasonally adjusted). The data is available for a few locations within the study area but mostly near the study area (see Table 3). Not surprisingly, the highest volume was on the I-391 ramp. Some of the higher volumes were on High Street.

<b>Table 3</b>	
Count Location	Average Daily Traffic (ADT)
I-391 off ramp	7,584
I-391 on ramp	12,068
Appleton Street (west of Maple Street)	7,569
Appleton Street (east of High Street)	4,721
Cabot Street (west of Maple Street)	4,955
Cabot Street (east of High Street)	7,720
High Street (north of Dwight Street)	4,310
High Street (south of Resnic Boulevard)	8,192
High Street (south of Worcester Place)	8,404
Source: CITY OF HOLYOKE, HIGH AND MAPLE STREET, Functional Design Report by SLR International Corporation (SLR), October 2021	

*Accident History.* As part of its October 2021 traffic study, SLR International Corporation (the project engineer) also reviewed the accident history of intersections within their study area. A

few points are particularly relevant to the current study area which suggests that there has been a history of accidents in and near the current study area:

- The intersection of Cabot Street and High Street ranks 8th on MassDOT's statewide Top 2015-2017 Crash Locations Report.
- The following intersections are listed on the 2015-2017 Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Cluster:
  - Hampshire Street at Maple Street
  - Cabot Street at High Street
- The following intersections are listed on the 2008-2017 Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Pedestrian Cluster:
  - Hampshire Street at High Street
  - Worcester Place at High Street
  - Cabot Street at High Street
  - Appleton Street at High Street
  - Suffolk Street at High Street
  - Dwight Street at High Street
- Appleton Street at High Street is among the intersections are listed on the 2008 to 2017 Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Bicycle Cluster.

*Assessment of the Pedestrian Environment.* In its October 2021 traffic study, SLR International Corporation (the project engineer) noted that the area's pedestrian signal equipment is deficient and there are ADA compliance issues:

*“The pedestrian signal equipment is out of date and not ADA compliant at the signalized intersections within the project limits. Indications for the existing pedestrian signal heads were not in working order, and some are missing. There are no push buttons for the concurrent pedestrian movements. Pedestrian ramps are provided at all corners but do not include tactile warning strips. Most of the ramps are apex ramps, and some have obstacles in which pedestrians would have to navigate around to get to the ramps. The crosswalks were in good condition at many of the intersections.”* (Source: CITY OF HOLYOKE, HIGH AND MAPLE STREET, Functional Design Report, page 19 by SLR International Corporation (SLR), October 2021

### ***Sidewalks***

This study area is part of an urban neighborhood; thus, sidewalks are provided along both sides of nearly every street. The notable exception to this expectation is along Newton Street between Appleton and Essex where the sidewalks are noticeably missing on one side of the street.

Approximately 5,400 linear feet of sidewalk are within or abut the study area. Most sidewalks are constructed of concrete; however, some segments – perhaps 25% - are constructed of asphalt.

A visual assessment of the sidewalks in April 2022 concluded that nearly half of the sidewalks are in “Good” condition. Another ¼ are in “Fair” condition leaving approximately 30% considered to be in “Poor” condition. Common issues with the sidewalk system are:

- Interruption of sidewalks by driveway curb cuts
- Intrusion by utility poles and signage, fire hydrants
- Parked cars

These issues arise even in some segments considered “Fair” or “Good,” Notably, a portion of Newton Street does not have any sidewalks. Portions of Cabot, Essex, and Newton Streets were noted for particularly significant amount of “poor” sidewalk conditions (see Map 18).



### ***Electricity***

Holyoke Gas & Electric Department (HG&E) provides electricity, gas, and fiber optic services throughout the city. However, due to the gas moratorium, all new development will need to be all electric. Much of the infrastructure is old, for example,

- High Street system is 100 years old

- Nick Cosmos system dates back to 1913

According to HG&E representatives, they need to rebuild the system. While the system functions well, but any infrastructure which dates to the early 1900’s needs to be upgraded/modernized. The cost of such rebuilding will be substantial. A proposed reconstruction of High Street is to include rebuilding the High Street infrastructure. The cost of the electric system upgrade of High Street to Lyman Street is estimated to cost \$35 million.

The system is well managed and largely underground. Within the study area, all of the primary conduit service lines are underground except for approximately 300 feet along Newton Street between Essex and Cabot Streets (see Map 19). HG&E would like to see all of it underground. It

High-Appleton Study - Map 19:  
Study Area Major Electric Lines



would likely cost \$200,000 to place the electric underground. If possible, HG&E would like to relocate the conduit into the alleyways – however, they would need at least a 15-foot-wide corridor.

As noted, due to the gas moratorium, all new development would need to be “all electric”. The supply of electricity is not an issue; however, depending on the number of units to be built or

developed, there could be a need for 1 or 2 new circuits. To run a new circuit could range from \$500,000 to \$5 Million. Redevelopment of the Newton Street area would likely involve providing service of the Nick Cosmos system.

**Sewer and Stormwater**

Sanitary sewer in this area is part of a combined sewer system the sanitary sewer system - in general everything connects back into the city's "Front Street Interceptor Sewer". All flows are transported to the satellite CSO treatment facility adjacent to the wastewater treatment facility on Berkshire Street. The map of the systems for the study area (see Map 20) depicts the combined nature of the collection system. Sewer lines vary from 8" in diameter to 36" (see Table 4). Newton Street does not have a sewer line within the roadway, properties are served by a 15" sewer line within the alley. High Street between Essex and Appleton is similarly served by the alleyway sewer line, From a review of the maps provided by the City Engineer, sewer line in the study area appear to be constructed with varying materials: Brick, Vitrified Clay, Cement/Concrete, and. Reinforced Concrete.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 20:**  
Study Area Sanitary Sewer and Stormwater Lines



<b>Table 4</b>		
<b>Roadway Segment</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Material</b>
High: Worcester to Cabot	30"	VC
High: Cabot to Essex	24"	RCP
High: Essex to Appleton	N/A	No sewer
Newton: Appleton to Essex	N/A	No sewer
Newton Alley: Appleton to Essex	15"	VC
Newton: Essex to Cabot	N/A	No sewer
Newton Alley: Essex to Cabot	15"	VC
Nick Cosmos: Appleton to Essex – extends 300' from Essex	12"	VC
Nick Cosmos Alley: Appleton to Essex	18"	VC
Nick Cosmos: Essex to Cabot – Only 100 ft +/-	15"	C
Nick Cosmos: Cabot to Worcester Pl – only to the alley way	8"	VC
Worcester Place: Nick Cosmos to High	N/A	No sewer
Worcester Place Alley: Nick Cosmos to end	8"	VC
Essex: High to Newton	18"	C
Essex: Newton to Nick Cosmos	18"	C
Cabot: High to Nick Cosmos*	30"	VC
Cabot: High to Nick Cosmos*	36"	BR
Appleton: High to Nick Cosmos*	24"	VC
Appleton: High to Newton*	18"	VC
<b><i>*Two sewer lines are depicted in these two roadways</i></b>		
Source: Sewer Maps provided by the City of Holyoke City Engineer. Please note the City Engineer cautioned that the maps he provided with the dimensions, locations, and materials of the sewer have not been field verified.		

While the City engineer indicated that the sewer system is in good condition; it is about the same age as the electric system – 100 years old. At present there are no plans to undertake any replacement or improvements to the sewer system. There have not been any reported issues with the sanitary sewer in this area. However, based on the system's age, the City is planning to do an assessment study of the system. This assessment may lead to new improvement plans. If a line needed to be upgraded, the City Engineer indicated it would likely be addressed through “slip

lining” if that is a feasible approach. “Slip lining” is a cost-effective means to address some sewer line issues.

While there are no known system limitations in the area, there could be sewer service issues regarding specific properties. Any plan for development needs to include a site-specific sewer service review. The City Engineer noted that the system on Essex Street uphill of the study area has been problematic. Accordingly, the City recently lined a portion above Pine Street after several collapses. However, at present there is no evidence of a similar condition of the sewers in the study area.

**Water**

Holyoke Water Works operates the municipal water system. As with much of the other infrastructure in the area, some water lines are quite old dating back to the 1880’s. Some lines have been replaced within the past 30 years (see Table 5). While some water lines may be over 100 years old, the system is considered to be upgraded as the valves, gate, etc. have been replaced throughout the study area. Pipe sizes appear to range from 8” to 16”.

All water lines are located within the roadways – not within the alleys (see Map 21).

<b>Table 5</b>		
<b>Street</b>	<b>Date of Water Line</b>	<b>Size</b>
High Street	1885	8”/10”
Newton Street	2002	8”
Nick Cosmos Way	1996	8”
Commercial Street*	1882	8”
Appleton Street	Not Available	16”
Essex Street	2002	8”
Cabot Street	1880	8”
Worcester Place	Not Available	8”
*Commercial Street is the extension of Nick Cosmos Way		
Source: Interview with David Conti, Holyoke Water Works Manager and review of map provided by Holyoke Water Works		

High-Appleton Study - Map 21:  
Study Area Water Lines



### *Parking Facilities*

The City of Holyoke currently has two municipal parking facilities – both of which are within close proximity to the study area:

- Suffolk Street Municipal Parking – Located on Suffolk Street
- Ernest Proulx Municipal Parking Facility – Located on Dwight directly across Heritage State Park & City Hall

The City maintains a public parking lot on High Street opposite the study area (see Map 22). On-street parking is generally also permitted. Generally, it is not metered within the study area but is metered elsewhere in downtown.





## Section 6: Regulatory Review

Development within the study area is primarily regulated by two ordinances: Zoning Ordinance and the Stormwater Management Ordinance (Article IV of the City Ordinances). While other regulations (Building Code, Wetlands, Floodplain Management, etc.) regulate development, those requirements are more specific to the project. It should be noted that there do not appear to be any wetlands or floodplain within the study area; thus, those regulations have not been reviewed.

### Zoning Ordinance

Parcels within the study area fall within one of three zoning districts: Downtown Business, Downtown Residential, and General Industry. Nearly half of the area is within the Downtown business district (see Table 6). Another 32% is within the General Industry district.

<b>Table 6</b>	
<b>Zoning District</b>	<b>Acres</b>
BC - Downtown business	3.163
DR - Downtown residential	1.668
IG - General industry	2.271
Sources: City of Holyoke Zoning Ordinance. City of Holyoke Assessor's database	

Parcels abutting High Street lie in the Downtown Business district as do most of the parcels in the block bounded by Newtown, Essex, Cabot, and Nick Cosmos Way (see Map 23). General

Industrial zoning covers the block anchored by the U-Haul facility and most of the block between Cabot Street and Worcester Place.



*Dimensional Requirements.* Zoning does not just regulate the use of land but also how land is developed through dimensional regulations. Of particular relevance are minimum lot area and lot frontage requirements. While other dimensional requirements may also apply (such as, setback, density, height, etc.), lot size and area determine whether a lot is “buildable” under zoning.

*Downtown Residential:*

Minimum lot size: 6,000 square feet

Minimum frontage: 60 feet

*Downtown Business:*

Minimum lot size: N/A

Minimum frontage: N/A

*General Industrial:*

Minimum lot size: 10,000 square feet

Minimum frontage: 100 feet

*Implications.* Since the Downtown Business district does not impose a minimum lot area or lot frontage requirement, parcels in this district may be sufficient for building purposes. However, nearly all of the study area parcels within the Downtown Residential and General Industry districts are nonconforming due to lot area (and possibly other dimensional requirements). This would preclude rebuilding the structures without a Special Permit granted by the City Council. Many developers will be deterred from pursuing a Special Permit due to the unpredictability of the outcome.

Newton Street row houses are in the Downtown Residential district and may be the area’s land use most impacted by today’s zoning. All of the row houses along Newton Street are on lots which are less than 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the required area and perhaps ¼ of the frontage requirements. Though single-family housing is permitted by right in the Downtown Residential district, development of the row houses on individual lots as they are presently laid out would require some form of special relief. Without special relief, the 25 row house lots on Newton Street could not be developed today. Rather,

- Based on the current minimum lot area requirement of 6,000 square feet, no more than 4 single-family homes could be developed in this section of Newton Street.
- Based on the current minimum lot frontage requirement of 60 feet, the number of homes allowed would be no more than 6 units.

It would be easier to develop an apartment building to replace the single-family row houses than redevelop the row houses consistent with their current character. Given the conditions of the buildings – as described previously – the revitalization options for these lots are limited and the Zoning Ordinance makes it more challenging.

In terms of the use regulations, a portion of the residentially developed properties lie within the General Industry district. This district prohibits one- and two-family dwellings and requires a Special Permit for multifamily buildings. Such uses are allowed by right in the Downtown Residential and Downtown Business districts.

Parking requirements for multifamily dwellings are 2 spaces per dwelling for developments of 50 or fewer units; it decreases to 1.5 spaces per unit over 50 units. This is a suburban community level of parking not typically followed in a dense or downtown urban setting. It essentially results in approximately 500+ square feet of paved parking area per dwelling for most multifamily developments. Most parking areas would be surface parking which would mean there would be significantly more land area devoted to parking than to housing.

### ***Stormwater***

Holyoke's Stormwater Management Bylaw is set forth in Article IV of the City's code of ordinances. Under Sec. 38-79, we can assume that any development within the study area is likely to require compliance with the Stormwater Management Ordinance:

- (1) Large developments.
  - a. Multifamily residential developments involving four or more units.
  - b. Any new land development which results in the creation of at least 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface on a site.
  - c. Any redevelopment or additions to existing uses which will result in the addition, reuse, reconstruction, refurbishing or repaving of at least 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface area on a site.
  - d. Any land disturbance or construction activities disturbing greater than or equal to one acre.
  - e. Land development or redevelopment involving multiple separate activities in discontinuous locations or on different schedules if the activities are part of a larger common plan of development that together disturbs one or more acres or adds 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface.
- (2) Small developments.
  - a. Any new land development which results in the creation of at least 2,000 but less than 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface on site.
  - b. Any redevelopment or additions to existing uses which will result in the addition, reuse, reconstruction, refurbishing or repaving of at least 2,000 but less than 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface area on site.
  - c. Any land disturbance or construction activities disturbing greater than one-half acre but less than one acre or adds at 2,000 but less than 5,000 total square feet of impervious surface.

Due to concerns regarding the combined stormwater/sewer system, the City Engineer advised that the City requires redevelopment projects to reduce the post-development runoff by 25% of the pre-development runoff. This standard is established in Section 5.01a(vii) of the City's Stormwater Authority's Regulations adopted in 2010:

*A redevelopment project is required to meet the following stormwater management standards only to the maximum extent practicable: A 25% reduction in peak rate of discharge for the 2, 10 year, 24-hour storms, from the Massachusetts Stormwater Handbook: Standard iii, and the pretreatment and structural best management practice requirements of Standards iv, v, and vi. Existing stormwater discharges shall comply with Standard I only to the maximum extent practicable. A redevelopment project shall also comply with all other requirements of the Stormwater Management Standards and improve existing conditions.*

## Section 7: SWOC Process and Analysis

### Overview

Collection and analysis of facts is helpful in undertaking an assessment, but that analysis is enhanced when coupled with input from community stakeholders. A key step in this assessment was the consultation with 13 persons representing a variety of interests during April-June 2022. Persons consulted during this process included:

- Eileen Cavanaugh, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club
- Marcos Marrero, MassDevelopment and former Director of Planning & Economic Development
- Anabelle Rondon, MassDevelopment
- Jordan Hart, Executive Director, Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
- Andrew Melendez, Latino Chamber of Commerce
- Mayor Joshua Garcia
- Mike Curtin, Holyoke Gas & Electric
- Jeff Brouillard, Holyoke Gas & Electric
- Alicia Zoeller, Holyoke Director of Community Development
- Damian Cote, Holyoke Building Commissioner
- Sean Gonsalves, Holyoke Director of Public Health
- Aaron Vega, Director of Planning and Economic Development
- Angel and his spouse, owners of Lechonera El Paseo

Efforts were taken to interview several more persons, but their schedules did not accommodate participation.

Some of the discussions took place in person while others were conducted virtually. Selection of the prospective participants was undertaken in consultation with Diane Smith, Wayfinders Chief of Real Estate, and Aaron Vega, Director of Planning and Economic Development.

This analysis is presented in the following manner:

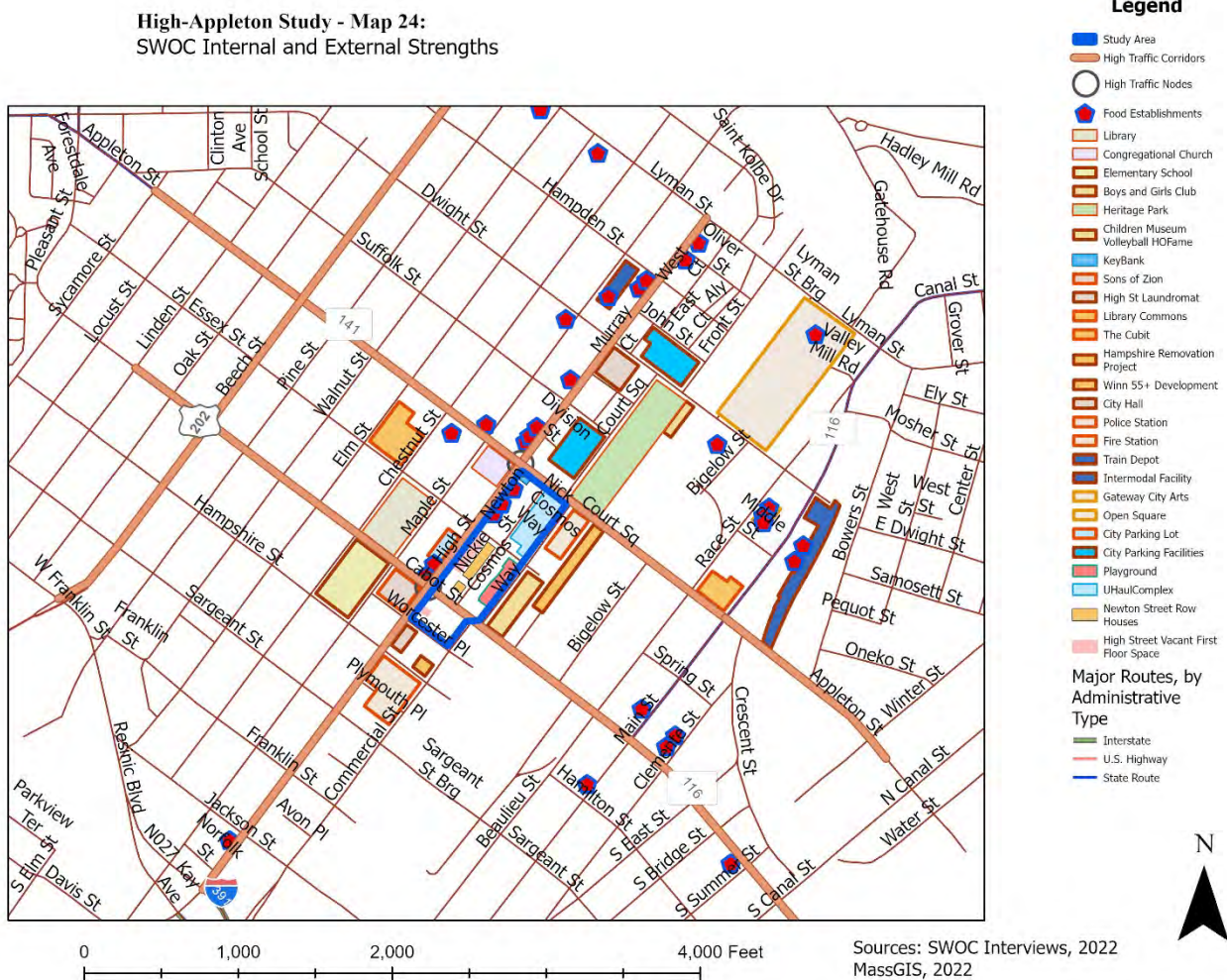
- Summary of the participants discussions - SWOC
  - Strengths
  - Weaknesses
  - Opportunities
  - Challenges
- Summary of participants' comments regarding:
  - Issues encountered delivering services in the area
  - Key properties impacting the area or affording opportunities for the area

- Particular parcels/locations offering unique opportunities, etc.
- Other comments that should be considered

**Summary of the participants comments - SWOC**

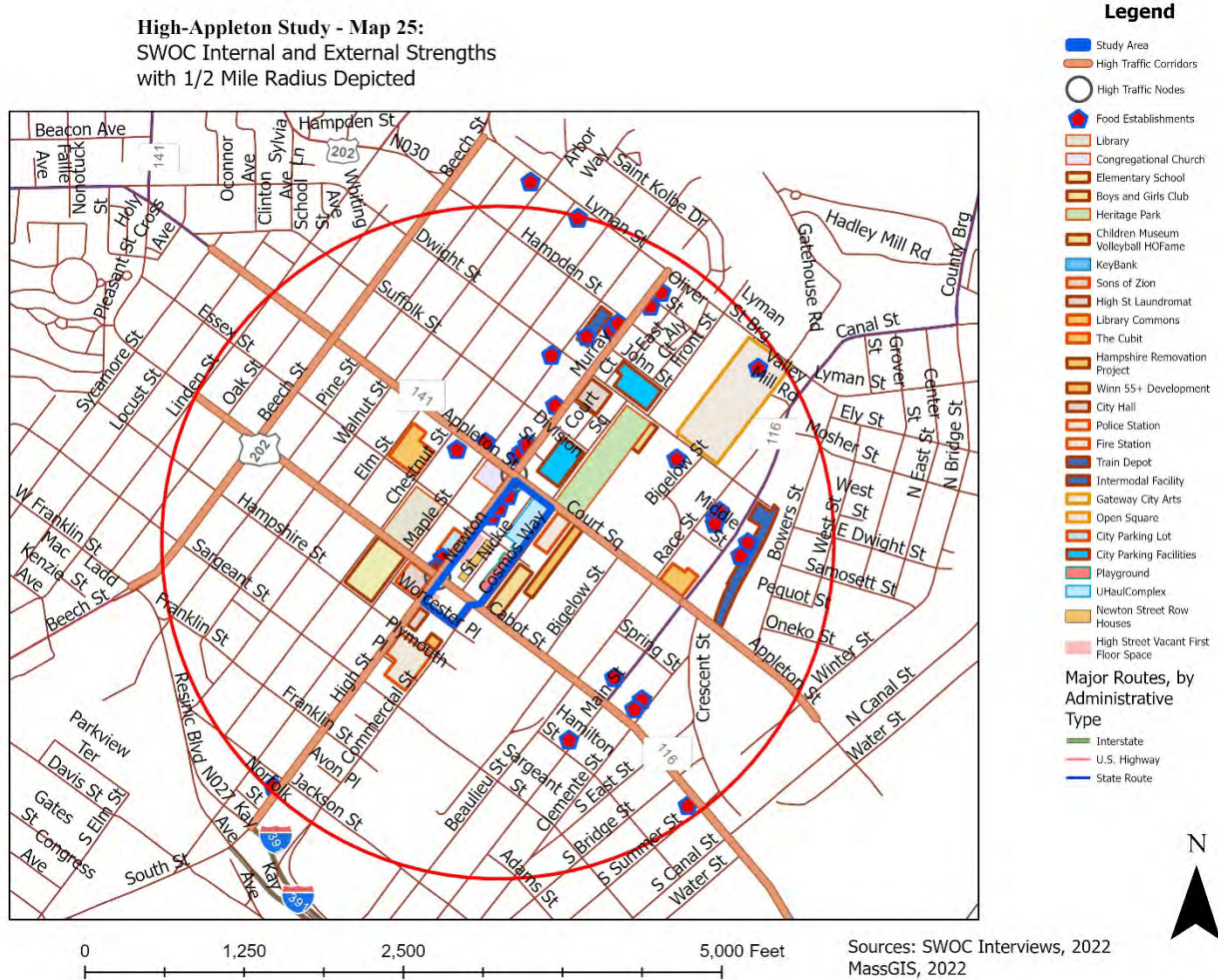
Presented in this section are the participants’ assessments as to the study area’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges.

*Strengths.* Participants identified many strengths - in excess of 20 distinct aspects of the study area or the surrounding area (see Map 24). Not surprisingly, the participants’ perspectives varied



widely. Some focused on the area’s access while others focused on cultural and recreation or housing. It was illuminating to hear some identify as strengths what others observed as weaknesses. A central overriding strength was the one word that is often mentioned in real estate – Location, Location, Location. This is reflected in the fact that nearly all the strengths identified

by participants are within ½ mile of the study area (see Map 25). Persons residing or visiting the study area could reasonably walk to the places mentioned by the participants as “strengths.” The top 10 strengths identified in this process Involved the following:



- Newton Street – vacant parcels and Row Houses
- Library facilities
- Heritage Park & Nick Cosmos park
- Access to 391 and downtown
- High traffic volumes on Cabot and High Streets
- Police Station & Fire Station
- Boys & Girls Club
- Cultural identity and diversity
- Food Establishments
- Housing developments



Newton Street has eight (8) parcels owned by the City. While two of these parcels are developed with row houses, the other parcels are sites of demolished buildings. Those between Appleton & Essex were viewed as strengths in that they provide areas for parking and/or housing in support of development along High Street. Row houses between Essex and Cabot Streets were viewed as a resource to meet the need for owner-occupied single-family housing.

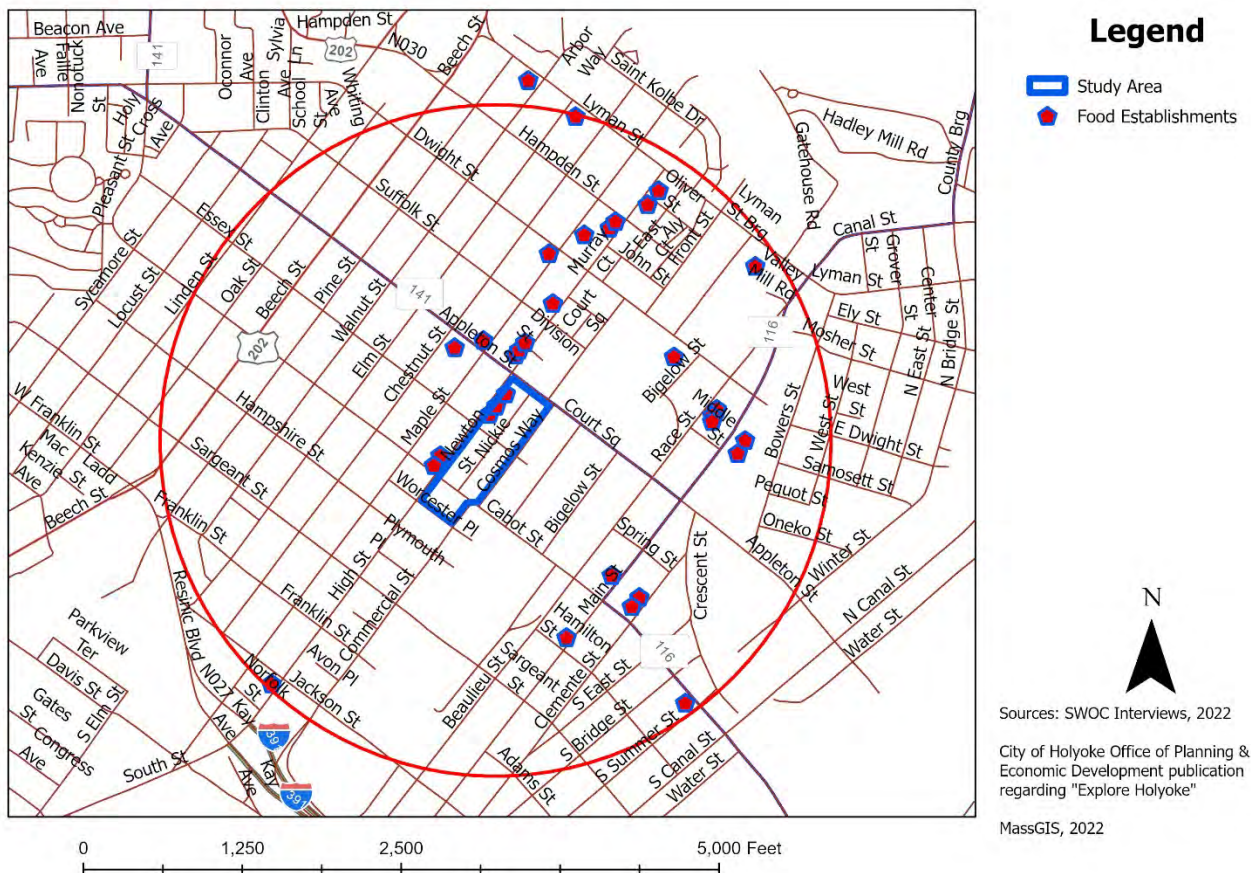
Cultural and recreational areas are usually considered a strength to support residential development. As residential development occurs – “add more rooftops” – local businesses benefit from an available customer base and workforce. The Boys & Girls Club is an institution which provides a wide array of services and programs for the community. They can be a resource for supportive services for housing developments as well as a source of support for the community.

Location! The location of this area as the gateway to downtown via I-391 is a clear strength for consumer-based businesses. But also, a draw for residents looking for easy access to I-391 and the region’s workplaces. However, the one-way pattern could be a negative in that it captures traffic in only one direction and poses navigation delays for travelers needing to reach I-391. Related to this access, it was noted that the intersection of High @ Cabot was a strength for business development opportunities due to its traffic volume.

As described in “*Study Area Residents and Their Housing*,” Holyoke is a rapidly transforming minority/majority community with persons of Latino heritage accounting for most of the population. The neighborhoods surrounding this study area are even more predominately of Latino heritage. And persons of Puerto Rican heritage are even more dominant as they comprise 90% of the surrounding neighborhoods’ Latino population. The restaurant businesses reflect the diversity of the larger population while also reflecting the dominance of the Latino population and the Puerto Rican population even more so.

Restaurants were noted with particular reference to the diversity of the menu offerings – “international” flavors. Within a ½ mile radius of the study area there are approximately 30 food establishments (see Map 26). These range from limited hour restaurants to restaurant/bars to grocery stores with deli service. The food offerings are international in flavor – diverse island and central/south American cuisine to standard American and Irish offerings. Sit down restaurants as well as fast-food with drive through services are available. Yet, the need for a “real” grocery store was also noted – there does not appear to be such a store within ½ mile radius.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 26:**  
SWOC Strengths - Area Food Establishments



While individually not in the top 10 identified strengths, housing developments underway or recently completed were identified as strengths by half of the participants. This identification was suggested to be a sign that investors are not discouraged to invest in the surrounding area.

*Weaknesses.* As with the strengths, participants identified many weaknesses as well - more than 20 distinct aspects of the study area (see Map 27). Some of the aspects of the area identified as strengths by some participants were identified as weaknesses by others – for instance, the Newton Street Row Houses.

High-Appleton Study - Map 27:  
SWOC - Weaknesses

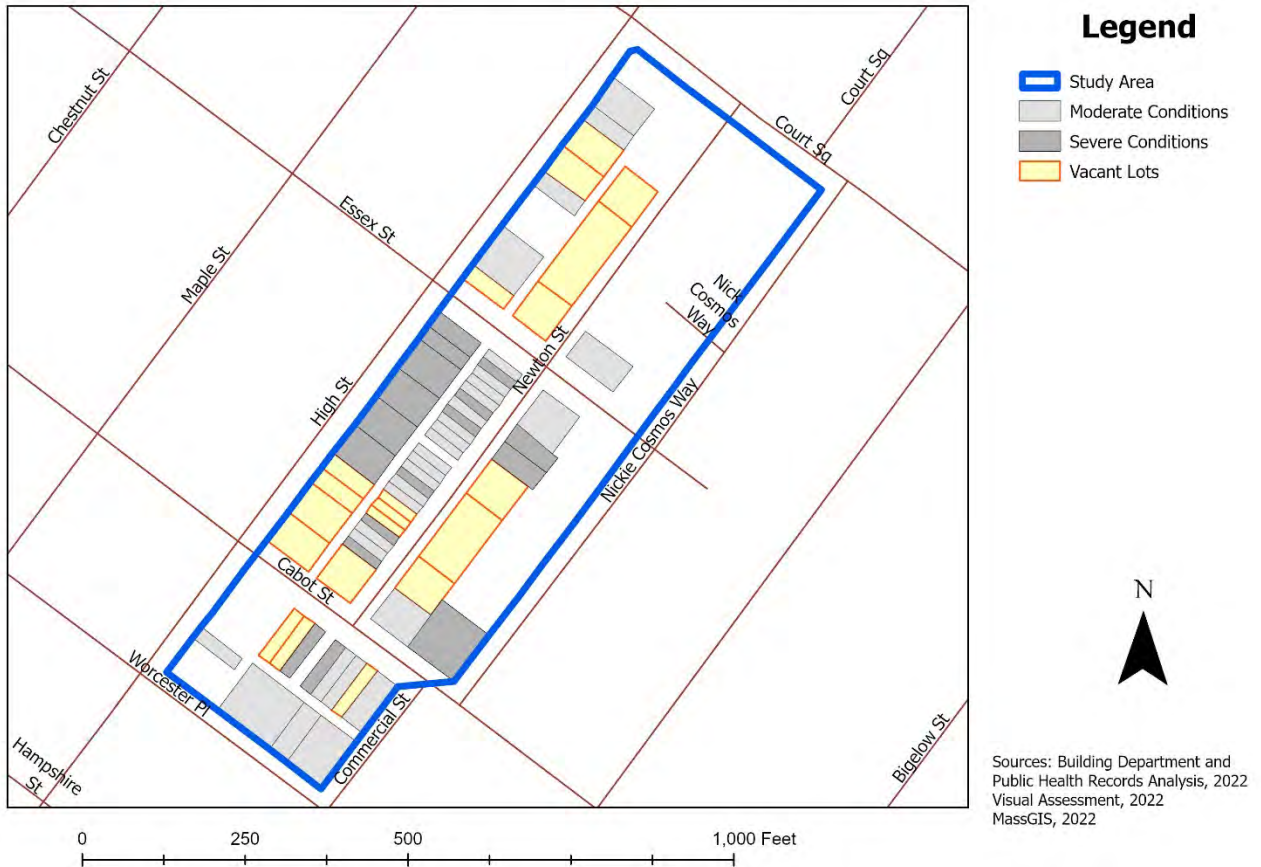


The top 10 weaknesses identified in this process Involved the following:

- Building deterioration/neglect
- Delinquent tax properties
- Absentee ownership
- Crime/Safety – real and perceived
- Newton Street Row Houses
- Quality of housing
- Parking
- Unmanaged sites of demolished buildings
- Lack of resident/business ownership
- Lack of development activity

As described in “Land Use and Environmental Conditions,” subsection “*Building & Health Department Records Review*,” Most of the buildings and housing is in a moderate to severe negative condition. This intersects with other negative factors – such as, ownership issues and tax delinquencies. Newton Street and High Street (both between Essex and Cabot Streets) had the largest concentration of buildings in negative conditions (see Map 28).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 28:**  
 SWOC - Moderate and Severe Building and Property Conditions and Sites of Previously Demolished Buildings Which Have Not Been Redeveloped



There is an apparent correlation between property conditions, ownership/management issues, and Tax Delinquencies. Nonpayment of taxes and other assessments is a significant factor impacting the local neighborhood and the broader community. Revenues generated from property taxes are the core funding source for local government. High delinquencies cuts into annual operating funds as well as bonding capacity for long-term capital investments.

Data from the City Tax Collector reflected a total of \$777,950 in overdue taxes from properties within the study area (as of April 11, 2022). Another \$4,131 in delinquent sewer assessments were due to the City for a total delinquency of \$782,081.

Delinquent assessments are a deterrent to prospective developers/purchasers since they would need to pay such delinquent amounts – unless they have been cleared. This data was analyzed by comparing the delinquent amounts to the assessed values (see Table 7) – this is based in the perspective that the higher the ratio of delinquent amount to assessed value, the less likely the property will be sold, or the delinquent amounts paid off.

Three properties account for 48% of the delinquent amounts - \$372,600 Delinquent amounts on these properties ranged from 101% to 929% of their assessed values.

<b>Table 7</b>			
<b>ID</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Delinquency Totals</b>	<b>Delinquency as a % of Assessed Value</b>
011-03-008	118 NEWTON ST	\$318,767	929.350%
011-05-020	111 NEWTON ST	\$10,968	120.525%
011-05-004	79 NEWTON ST	\$42,866	101.337%
<b>Total Delinquencies: \$372,600</b>			
011-05-027	510 HIGH ST	\$36,449	92.746%
011-03-011	84 NEWTON ST	\$38,260	83.720%
011-05-005	81 NEWTON ST	\$35,958	82.285%
011-05-025	121 NEWTON ST	\$29,429	69.737%
010-01-023.1	528 HIGH ST	\$32,179	53.101%
011-05-021	113 NEWTON ST	\$4,655	50.054%
<b>Total Delinquencies: \$176,931</b>			
011-04-011	412 HIGH ST	\$56,737	43.745%
011-04-012	408 HIGH ST	\$38,914	32.811%
011-05-029	HIGH ST	\$3,562	24.234%
011-05-030	HIGH ST	\$3,585	24.225%
011-05-028	HIGH ST	\$5,343	23.539%
010-01-008	136 CABOT ST	\$14,048	19.430%
011-05-035	446 HIGH ST	\$9,171	14.792%
011-05-034	450 HIGH ST	\$6,894	13.984%
011-05-022	115 NEWTON ST	\$5,248	13.422%
011-05-033	460 HIGH ST	\$15,963	12.791%
010-01-022	532 HIGH ST	\$12,493	10.988%
<b>Total Delinquencies: \$171,959</b>			
<i>Sources: Delinquency information from Tax Collector Laura E. Wilson, 4-11-2022</i>			
<i>Assessment information taken from the City of Holyoke online mapping program, April 2022</i>			

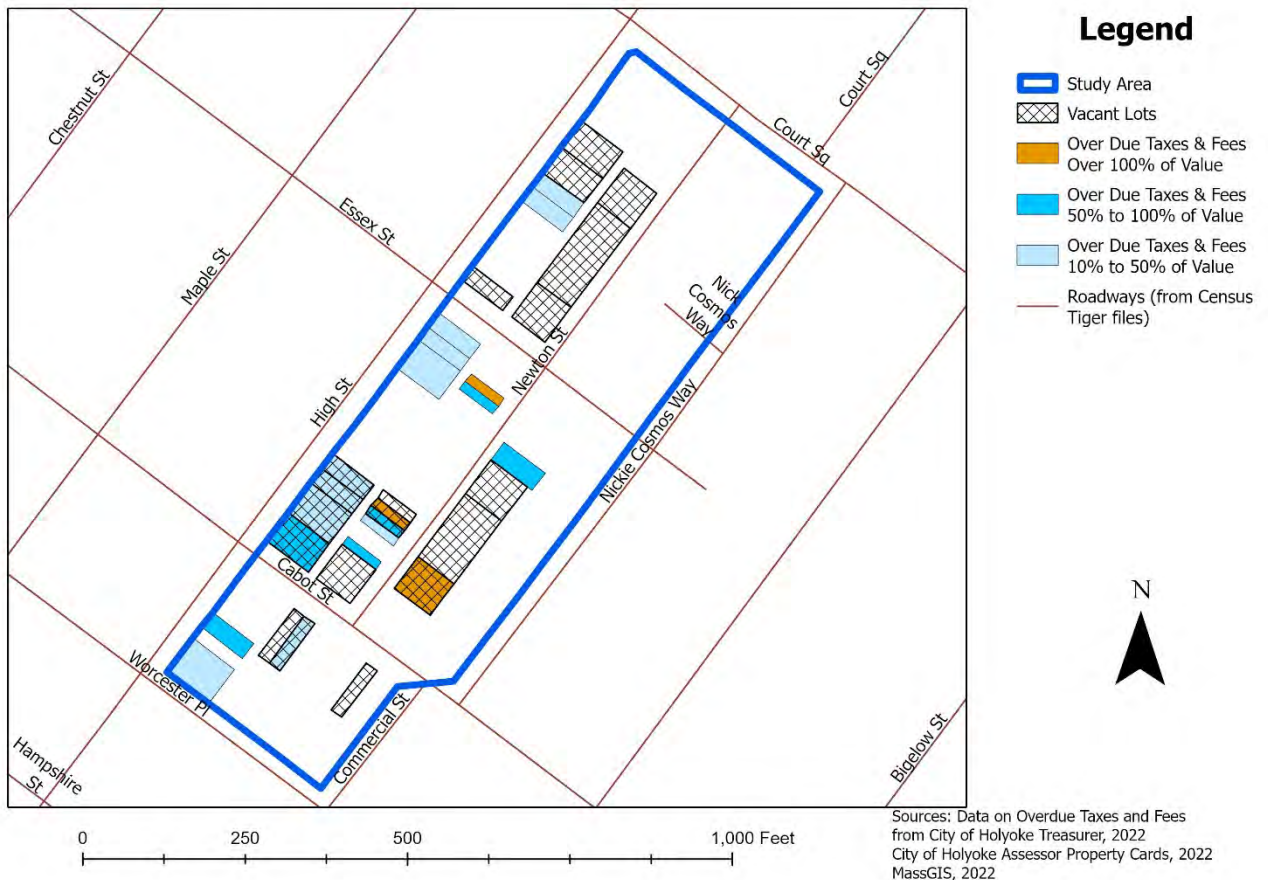
Another six properties account for 23% of the delinquent amounts - \$176,931. Delinquent amounts on these properties ranged from 50% to 93% of their assessed values.

Another eleven properties account for 23% of the delinquent amounts - \$171,959. Delinquent amounts on these properties ranged from 11% to 93% of their assessed values.

The remaining 70 properties, 48 had no delinquent amounts (some are owned by the City), leaving 22 parcels accounting for a collective delinquent amount of \$60,591. Delinquent amounts on these properties were 9% or less of their assessed values.

Properties with the highest ratio of delinquent amounts to assessed value were along Newton Street between Essex and Cabot (see Map 29). High Street between Essex and Cabot is another area of concentration of such properties. These areas also were locations of the buildings with the most severe negative property conditions.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 29:**  
SWOC - Properties with Significant Over Due Taxes and Fees and Vacant Lots



Absentee ownership also tends to relate to delinquencies and negative property conditions. Without undertaken significant title research or significant research of other records, it is difficult to determine the scope of absentee ownership since many buyers will list the property location as

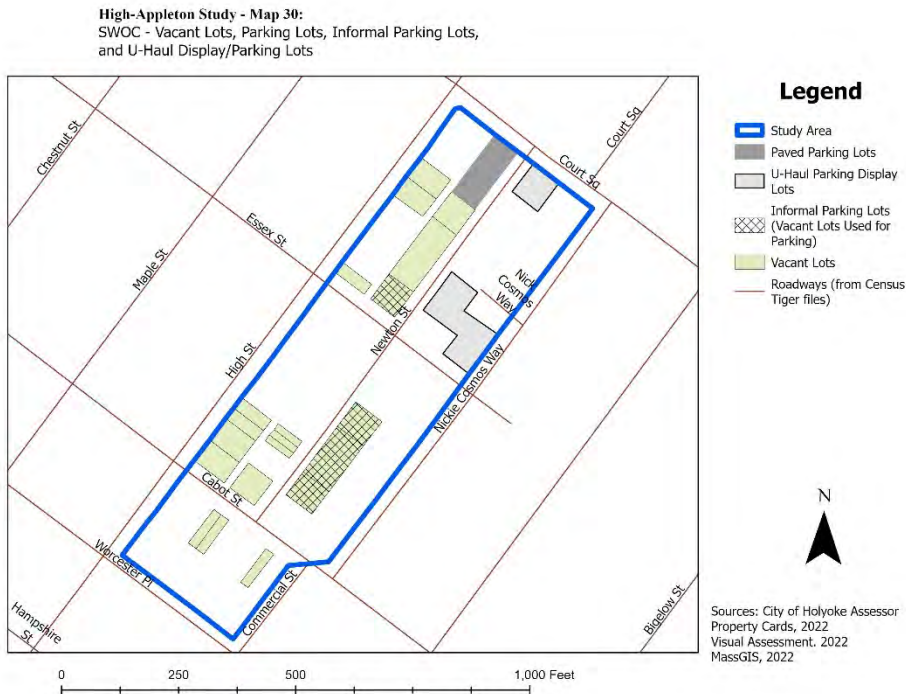
their address even if it is a rental property. However, a review of the Assessor's data base suggests that at least half of the properties not owned by the City are owned by persons who do not reside in the property (in case of residential properties) or operate a business on site (in the case of nonresidential property). At least 20 of the 70 properties used for residential purposes are not owner occupied based on this review.

Crime and safety (real and perceived) were mentioned more than any other concern as a weakness. Several participants noted that the crime issue is more limited to drugs activity in the alleyways – behind Newton Street and off Cabot Street. However, the area around Sam's Food Store was noted as well.

Newton Street row houses are mentioned as positives, negatives, opportunities, and challenges. They date back to 1890/ Ownership of the row houses vary from owner-occupancy to absentee ownership. At least 7 of the row houses are not owner-occupied based on a review of the Assessor's database. This area is a concentration of the properties considered in poor condition as well as a concentration of properties with a high ratio of delinquent assessments to assessed values.

Housing conditions are not particularly good as noted previously. While some properties have been rehabbed in recent years, the residentially used buildings are over 100 years old. The quality of the buildings and the long term issues the City has had with a number of rental properties over the years has resulted in an accepting of "good enough" work being considered a "win".

There are not any municipal parking lots within the study area (see Map 30). There is a



perception that there is a lack of parking due to the desire to have parking spaces in front of one's building. However, there seems to be a real issue of resident parking spaces given the age of the housing. Most of the housing was constructed prior to the automobile becoming the dominant form of travel. As such, the buildings were constructed without on-site parking and

the on-street parking is not enough. From a business perspective, the limited parking spaces available to them need to be reserved for customers, but residents of nearby properties will park on the street on weekends. Additionally, several properties which were subject of building demolitions have become "informal" parking lots – corner of Essex and Newton as well as along Newton between Essex and Cabot Streets.

Demolition of buildings often leaves vacant lots. Those parcels will usually be used "informally" if not managed. Sometimes the use becomes a "hangout" area with undesirable activities occurring. The demolition sites on Newton Street between Essex and Cabot Streets were particularly mentioned as becoming problematic. Development of an "interim" use plan and a cooperative approach to management would be highly desirable to prevent the "informal" uses resulting in adverse impacts on adjoining properties.

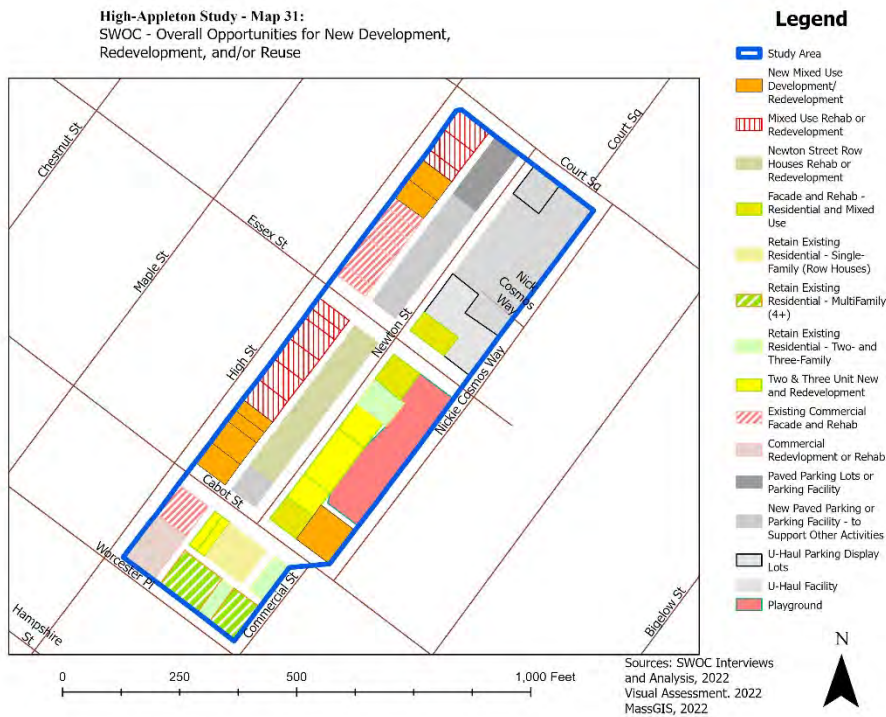
Resident ownership of properties can add to neighborhood stability and growth of wealth. This applies to residential units as well as business properties. As areas revitalize, the previous residents and businesses – when renting – often find themselves priced out.

Lack of development activity is evident. The most recent new construction was in 1987 as noted in the section "Land Use and Environmental Conditions". Some renovations have been undertaken. With the vacant lots on High Street, there are significant gaps in the historic street front.



*Opportunities.* Participants saw this area as ripe with opportunities – this topic generated a lengthy list of possibilities and recommendations for capitalizing on the opportunities. They

tended to reflect the strengths previously noted but expanded beyond those items (see Map 31).



On a generalized basis the primary opportunities were identified in five “general areas” or groupings of parcels (see Map 32).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 32:**  
 SWOC - Specific Areas with Special Opportunities  
 for Development and Redevelopment and/or Reuse



The top 10 opportunities identified in this process Involved the following:

- High Street
- Food Establishments
- Cultural identity
- Newton Street – vacant parcels
- Newton Street Row Houses
- Vacant upper story space for housing and/or offices
- Vacant store front space
- Cabot Street buildings for rehab or redevelopment
- Parking areas
- Food truck plazas

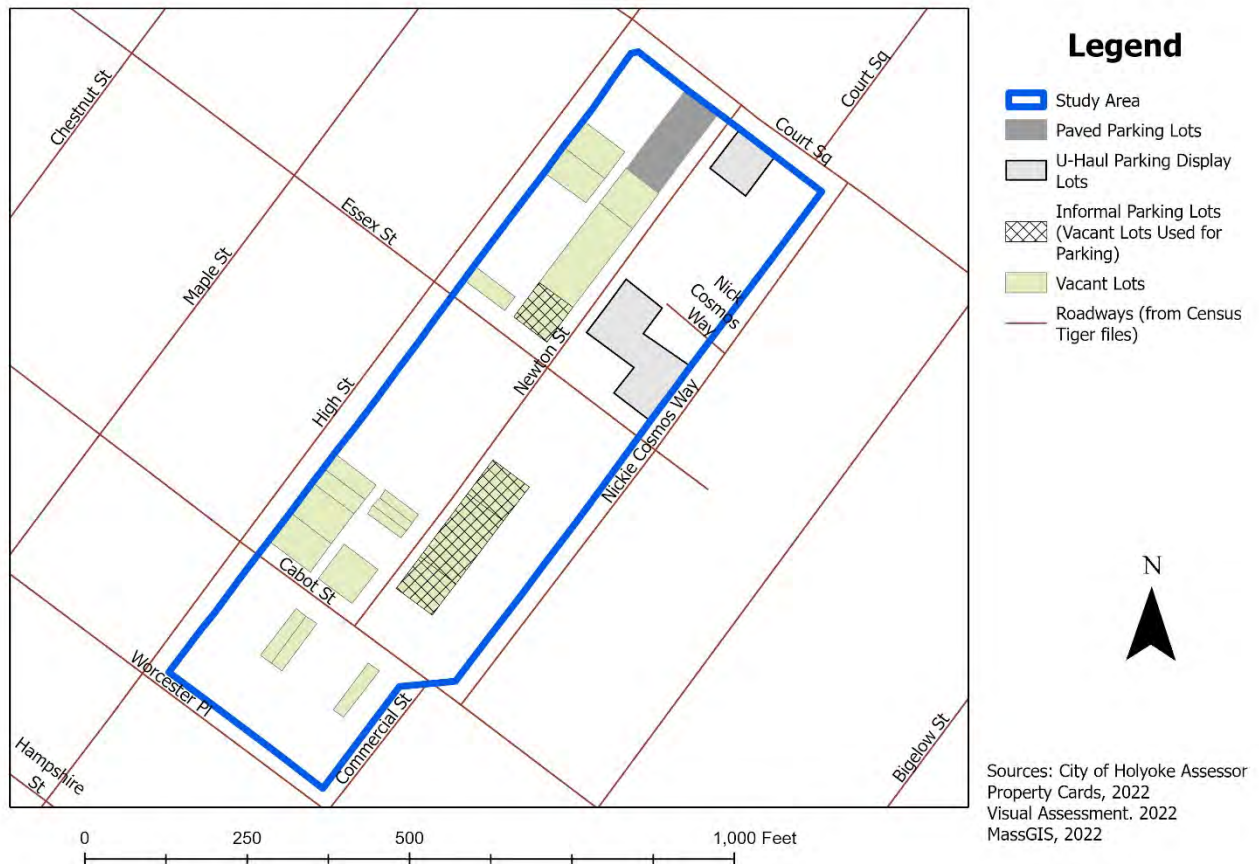
High Street was touted as an opportunity for a variety of reasons. The access it provides directly from I-391 to downtown is viewed as major benefit for business development. The City’s plans



Given the access which High Street affords traffic from I-391, there is an opportunity to create this area as a “International Food and Culture Corridor”. Such an approach would integrate the diversity of the community’s population, housing, and restaurants capitalizing on the area’s strengths. Traffic on High Street, the area’s proximity/relative ease of access to everything, and the vacant building spaces and lots create an integrated opportunity to meet housing, jobs, and business needs within this corridor.

Vacant parcels on Newton Street offer several opportunities (see Map 34). The parcels between Appleton and Essex Streets could be used as sites for new housing and/or parking to support “in-

**High-Appleton Study - Map 34:**  
SWOC Opportunities - Vacant Lots, Parking Lots, Informal Parking Lots, and U-Haul Display/Parking Lots



fill” development on High Street. The parcels between Essex and Cabot Streets offer an opportunity to provide off-street parking for the row houses along Newton Street. Or they could be used to develop some one- or two-family residential structures – preferably owner-occupied. There is a desire to also incorporate some open space into any new development – this would also aid in meeting the City’s Stormwater Authority’s 25% reduction policy (see the section “Regulatory Review”, subsection “Stormwater”).

Newton Street row houses were viewed as an opportunity to be redeveloped or, potentially rehabilitated, to meet the need for affordable owner-occupied housing. Most of the dwellings appear to be in significant need of rehabilitation – at a minimum. They date back to 1890; thus, they have been through many ownership transfers, changes in approach to management, and an untold number of alterations. They appear to have firewalls every third or fourth dwelling. Whether the firewalls meet current codes or have been comprised would need to be evaluated. Any rehabilitation or redevelopment needs to maintain the cultural identity of the area.

In addition to the High Street vacant upper floor space between Appleton and Essex Streets mentioned above, there is approximately 18,000 square feet of vacant store front space along High Street between Essex and Cabot Streets. (see Map 35). This space could be an opportunity for multiple businesses. This same area has approximately 18,000 square feet of vacant upper

**High-Appleton Study - Map 35:**  
SWOC Opportunities - High Street Vacant Land,  
Vacant Building Space, and Building Uses

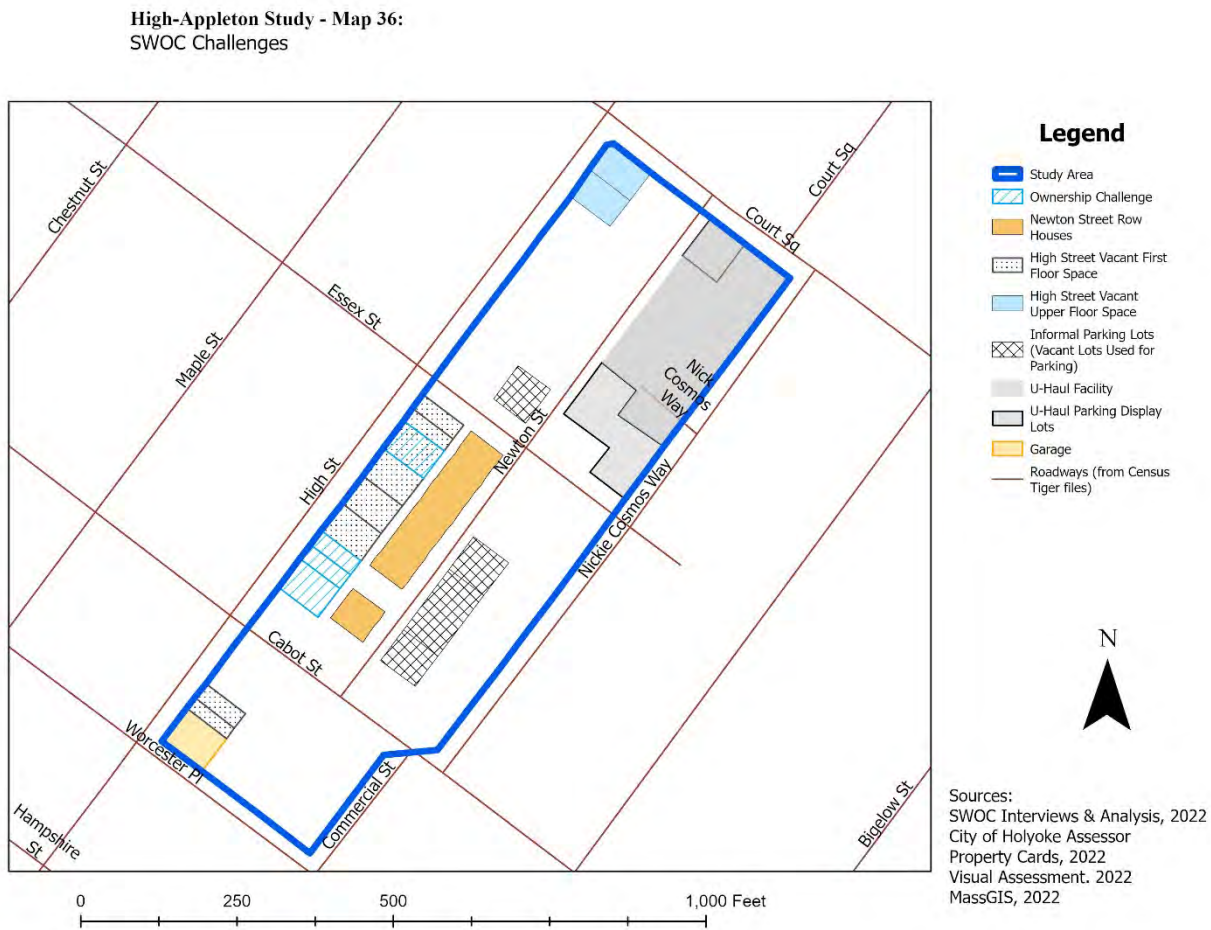


floor space which could converted/renovated for housing or other uses to support ground floor businesses.

Several buildings on Cabot Street between Newton Street and Nick Cosmos Way were mentioned as possible opportunities for renovation or redevelopment. It is likely that the building at 115 Cabot Street would need to be demolished and the site could then be redeveloped

Food trucks are a method that offers opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop a business without the high cost and restrictions of a fixed site restaurant. However, there is concerns about where they locate. It was suggested that the municipal parking lot on High Street across from the study area could be good site for a “food truck plaza.” This could be an effective way to support businesses and capture the cultural character of the area.

*Challenges.* With strengths and weaknesses, to capitalize on opportunities, there are going to be challenges. This was evident in discussions with the participants who identified diverse challenges (see Map 36).



The top 10 challenges identified in this process Involved the following:

- Vacant buildings and vacant land

- Crime locations
- Engagement/partnerships
- Ownership
- Absent ownership & overdue taxes
- Funding
- U-Haul facility
- Alleys
- Residential/Commercial
- Restaurants/Food Trucks

Many of the identified challenges are integrated. The vacant buildings and land challenges relate to the absentee ownership and ownership issues. Ownership issues such as these create barriers to successfully assembling properties for redevelopment. Difficult ownership issues apparently have impeded prospective sales of some of the vacant commercial buildings along High Street between Essex and Cabot Streets. Common ownerships (see Map 37) are evident in the

**High-Appleton Study - Map 37:**  
SWOC Challenges - Ownership Blocks



commercial areas and can be a strong asset towards simplifying redevelopment unless the ownership entities pose obstacles.

Need for funding interrelates to the issue of overdue taxes. Property taxes is the primary source of general-purpose governmental functions – if taxes are not paid, government is limited in its abilities to deliver services and undertake improvements. Additionally, overdue taxes (as well as overdue sewer assessments) create a lien on property which discourage prospective purchasers. As described previously, analysis of overdue municipal liens within the study area identified a total of \$ 777,950 in overdue taxes and \$4,131 in overdue sewer assessments. Generally, properties with a high ratio of overdue taxes to assessed value can be assumed to also have an absent owner and be in a deteriorated condition.

Funding for capital facilities will be crucial. HG&E has noted that one or new circuits could be required for 100-150 new housing units. The cost of such circuits is estimated widely between \$500,000 and \$5 Million. Additionally, the remaining overhead primary service line would cost \$200,000 to place underground. Undertaking a Complete Streets project for Newton Street – without utility work could easily be in the range of \$500,000. Fortunately, the water and sewer systems, though characterized by predominately old lines (100 years old), are apparently functioning well.

The U-Haul facility has been noted as a “successful” conversion project while other participants have expressed that it will be a challenge to design redevelopment in the study area – it is not of the same character as the rest of the area. Additionally, the site has extensive asphalt areas associated with the display and parking of rental trucks. This appearance or concern about the appearance “forces” developments to “turn their backs” on the section of Newton Street between Appleton and Essex Streets.

The alleyways pose multiple challenges. They tend to be used as places for illegal activities – drugs as well debris and trash dumping. Ownership of the alleyways is apparently an issue – they may not be owned by the City, but they need to be kept open for public access. Additionally, it appears that city sewer lines are located in these narrow ways.

Residential and commercial uses (such as restaurants) can have a symbiotic relationship. However, they can also pose challenges if they are not effectively planned. The two mixed-use buildings in the study area are over 100 years old. As such, they were not planned and built with modern life in mind. In particular, parking can be a point of conflict as the residents want the same access to their abode as the business wants for their customers – the on-street parking space right in front of the building. It is essential to balance the equally compelling interests.

Restaurants are a draw for visitors and residents to an area. Food trucks can similarly generate a sense of celebration and draw visitors into an area. But it can be a challenge when both are located within the same market area. One owner of a local restaurant said food trucks are okay as long as they pay their fees. But another owner expressed concern that they will take business away from their operation. Several participants suggested that the creation of a food truck plaza would add to the customers being drawn into the area. There is also challenge of ensuring that



the food truck places are planned and designed such that they do not diminish customer access and parking utilized for the “brick and mortar” restaurants.

**Summary of participants’ responses or comments to supplemental questions**

During the SWOC discussions, participants made additional comments regarding:

- Issues encountered delivering services in the area
- Key properties impacting the area or affording opportunities for the area
- Particular parcels/locations offering unique opportunities, etc.
- Other comments they offered that should be considered

Without duplicating the materials provided above, provided below are a summary of those comments.

***Issues encountered delivering services in the area***

Participants offered a variety of issues, but the following appeared to be the most significant without repeating the above discussions:

- Lack of engagement with property owners
- City has not been supportive
- Language/ethnicity conflicts

*Lack of engagement.* There is a belief, at least among some, property owners have not been engaged in the process of planning for this area. To some extent this comment was expressed as a belief that it is essential that the property owners be engaged if the City is to be successful – particularly with the new TDI Initiative. There are a variety of types of property owners in this area, as there are in any urban neighborhood, including:

- Resident
- Business
- Absentee
- Investor

Some are easier to engage than others. Unfortunately, engagement is a long and time-consuming process.

*City has not been supportive.* The nature of this comment varied from – the City has not done enough to address the issues of property neglect to the City needs to do more to help small business. One specific suggestion was that the City needs to establish time limits for on-street parking to maintain those limited spaces for businesses during the hours of operation so that

residents of the area do not monopolize them. Another aspect of this comment relates to pursuing overdue taxes.

*Language/ethnicity conflicts.* Holyoke has been a city in transition for several decades. It is most evident now with the “minority” populations now being the “majority.” This area is one of the areas where there is a high level of “English isolation” as noted earlier. The need to be able to communicate in two languages can result in not being able to obtain the services needed – or not even knowing what services are available. The isolation, compounded by the usual not understanding how city government works, can feed the “helplessness” that individuals (residents and businesses) feel. It also results in a lack of engagement by the residents and the businesses.

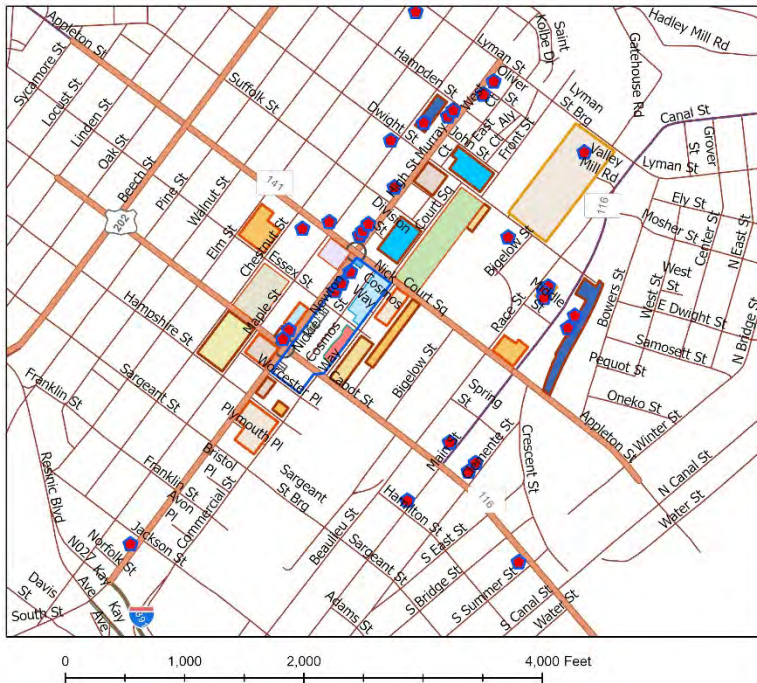
All three of these issue conflicts are very pronounced in communities which are undergoing the socio-economic transformation which Holyoke is undergoing. The workshops proposed in the Rapid Recovery Plan – “*Advance Equitable, Inclusive Recovery with Undoing Racism® Workshops*” could be an effective means by which the community can lay a foundation to address these interrelated issues.

***Key properties impacting the area or affording opportunities for the area***

While response earlier addressed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, the responses here are broader and inclusive of those which are negative and positive. On a broad scale, respondents identified a voluminous number of properties which they felt are impacting this area (see Map 38). These properties can be broken into several categories:

- Cultural, Educational, & Recreational
- Food Establishments
- Commercial & Residential Developments/Investments
- Public Safety & Public Facilities
- Major Roadways

**High-Appleton Study - Map 38:**  
 SWOC - Area Properties/Developments/Assets  
 Impacting the Study Area



**Legend**

- Study Area
- Food Establishments
- Library
- Congregational Church
- Elementary School
- Boys and Girls Club
- Playground
- Heritage Park
- Children Museum
- Volleyball HoopGame
- KeyBank
- Somo of Zion
- Somo Food Store
- High St Landmark
- Library Commons
- The Cubit
- Hampshire Renovation Project
- Wing SS+ Development
- City Hall
- Police Station
- Fire Station
- Gateway City Arts
- Open Square
- Intermodal Facility
- Train Depot
- City Parking Lot
- City Parking Facilities
- U-haul Complex
- High Street Vacant First Floor Space
- High Traffic Nodes
- High Traffic Corridors
- Roadways (from Census Tiger files)

**Major Routes**

- Interstate
- U.S. Highway
- State Route

Sources:  
 City of Holyoke Office of Planning & Economic Development publication regarding "Explore Holyoke", 2022  
 SWOC Interviews & Analysis, 2022  
 Visual Assessment, 2022  
 MassGIS, 2022

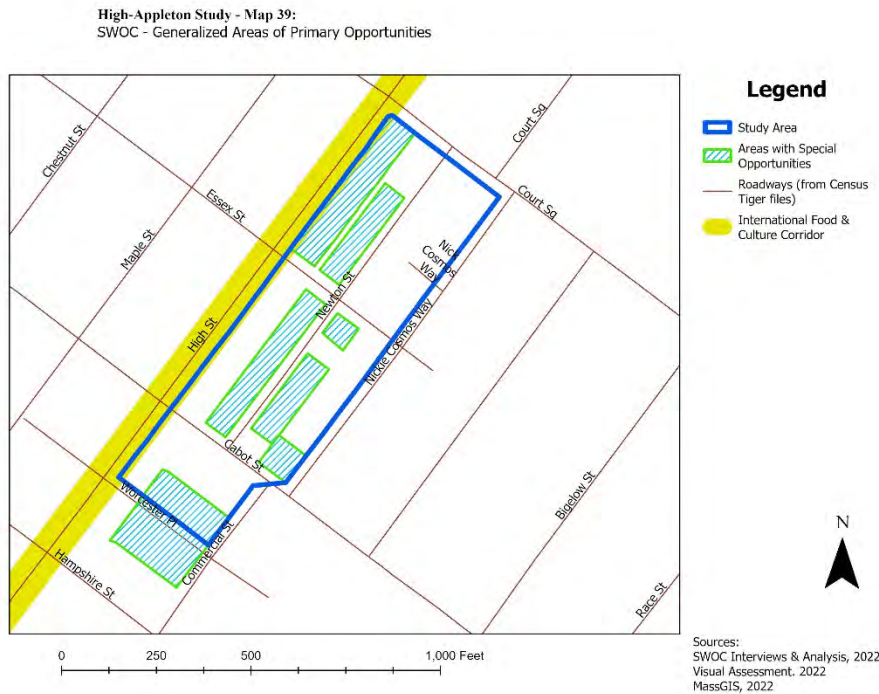
Some properties are clearly negative in their impact – for instance, deteriorated properties, absentee ownership properties, etc., Others, are generally considered to be positive in their impact – for instance, the Police and Fire Stations, playgrounds and parks, schools, library, etc. There was a suggestion that how open space is used for business opportunities – or not so used – would be a determinant whether they are positive impacts.

***Parcels/locations offering unique opportunities, etc.***

Participants identified five “areas” or groupings of parcels which they felt offer unique development opportunities – housing and commercial development:

- High from Key bank to Essex
- Newton Street– redevelopment
- Vacant parcels adjoining playground
- Worcester Place
- Essex at Newton corner

Additionally, there was a suggestion that, given the diversity of restaurants along and near High Street, the area's role as an access route to downtown, and the cultural/ethnic character of the area, this area could be an "International Food and Cultural Corridor" (see Map 39).



*High from Key bank to Essex.* This area has several key vacant city-owned parcels, several multi-story buildings with approximately 36,000 square feet of vacant upper story space which could be redeveloped into housing and/or office space.

*Newton Street.* There are two segments to this corridor.

- The first segment between Appleton and Essex has vacant parcels on one side of the road – three of which currently serve as private parking lots and three parcels owned by the City which could be combined with the two lots on High Street for redevelopment.
- The other segment is between Esse and Cabot Streets. The row houses offer an opportunity for redevelopment into new or rehabbed, owner-occupied homes on one side and three vacant lots on the other side of the street which could be used as parking for the new row houses or sites for new 2-family housing development.

*Vacant parcels adjoining playground.* Demolished building sites become reuse sites – whether planned or not. Sometimes, unless effectively managed, the sites become reused in a manner that adversely effects the adjoining property. This is the case of the property on Newton Street adjacent to the playground. It is causing issues for the programming of the playground by the Boys and Girls Club. The property also offers an opportunity for redevelopment – possibly as 2-family housing. It has also been suggested that it could be a good side for a “teen center” for the Boys & Girls Club.

The building at the corner of Cabot and Nick Cosmos Way is in need of demolition. Once demolished this site would offer a good redevelopment opportunity – either as new housing or a mix of housing and a “teen center.”

*Worcester Place.* Comments were offered that Worcester Place “could be a beautiful area.” The work undertaken on housing on Hampshire Street has been offered as a suggestion of what could be done to revitalize the housing on Worcester Place.

*Essex at Newton corner.* Across from the row houses, the multifamily building at this corner is in need of rehabilitation. It was suggested that to complete the rehab which the current owner started but may not be able to finish, would not be a significant amount. Additionally, the adjoining properties may need substantial rehab or total replacement – but combined with the corner property, would offer an opportunity for a significant redevelopment project that would keep the neighborhood in its historical character.

### ***Other comments that should be considered***

Participants were given an opportunity to offer other comments which they felt should be considered in conducting this assessment and when the area is being considered for development. The comments offered were:

- High Street is the gateway to Holyoke not Race Street (Open Square and the other facilities there do not do anything for this corridor or the city)
- Boys and Girls Club could be a partner in providing residence support in housing
- Boys and Girls Club could possibly help maintain adjoining sites following building demolition
- The following should be housing priorities: 1) Rent to own model; 2) sustainable housing opportunities; and 3) fix up the Newton Row House block
- Newton Street should be redeveloped as a complete streets project
- The “strange colors” of the row houses is an attempt to recreate the feeling of old San Juan, Puerto Rico
- There may be an opportunity to partner with Revitalize CDC
- Newton row houses and the commercial space on High Street behind them are the most challenging areas
- Row Houses are “too far gone” in most cases
- Rebuilding the Newton Street row houses would require special Zoning Ordinance relief – at a minimum, a City Council Special Permit
- Rehabilitation of the Newton Street row houses would be difficult, technically, due to interconnection of structural elements
- Maple Street Condos is an example of what can be done – subsidized with CDBG funding and sold out at \$80,000

- Matune Street, Long Hill Gardens Condos in Springfield are examples of the type of development that could be undertaken in this area
- Special Permit process in the city is challenging – particularly in regard to nonconforming uses
- 532 High garage licenses expired therefore they lost their nonconforming status
- Utility nonpayment has been a widespread issue during pandemic
- HG&E has some incentives for new businesses but no particular incentive for major overhaul/rehab
- There is a circuitous cycle of management neglect and disinvestment (lack of maintenance)
- Need to retain the area’s cultural identification with redevelopment.
- From 1989-2017 there was no new housing in South Holyoke other than an occasional 1-2 family dwelling
- Lack of engagement with property owners
- Cubit has a high demand which speaks of the potential for new market-rate housing in the area
- Food trucks – “the more the better;” the food trucks will bring more people into the area which will help all businesses including fixed restaurants
- Food Trucks are fine as long as they pay their fees and licenses, etc.
- Food trucks will be more competition for existing restaurants for the same market – and will be on weekends which is the busiest days.
- The library, parks, schools, etc. are not strengths in that they do not provide business development opportunities
- End of COVID conditions means people are back to work with less leisure time and the “extra” income which has hurt businesses
- Local businesses routinely draw from Chicopee, Holyoke, Springfield; but also draw customers who are visiting the region from out of state
- There is a homelessness issue which can impact businesses if there is not an effective approach to meeting the needs
- Residents parking on High Street during business hours take away parking spaces for customer
- A limit of on-street parking to one-hour between 11:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. would be helpful
- Restaurants need outdoor patios post pandemic
- A café in the Children’s Museum would afford a business development opportunity and expand the experience for visitors – without a café, the Museum is not successful.
- Housing which is not income restricted or has higher restrictions than 80% of AMI is needed – perhaps 120% or 150% of AMI
- If a housing program is successful and a tenant is able to improve their income, they often have to move out and leave the neighborhood which contributes to neighborhood instability

## **Section 8: Concept Plan and Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing research, analyses, and assessments, a concept plan was prepared for this area. Described in this section are:

- Opportunities
  - New Development,
  - Conversion,
  - Rehabilitation
  - Redevelopment
  
- Proposed Conceptual Plan which identifies:
  - Buildings most appropriate for rehabilitation
  - Areas most appropriate for new Multifamily housing
  - Areas most appropriate for other uses
  
- Infrastructure Needs
  
- Recommendations

### **Opportunities for New Development, Conversion, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment**

This 11-acre area has short and long-term opportunities for development (see Map 40). It can and should be part of the entry way to downtown.

As presented in the “*Land Use and Environmental Conditions*” section, the environmental and infrastructure conditions do not appear to present constraints on development. This area does not appear to be adversely impacted by prior toxic land uses, wetlands, or floodplains which often impact redevelopment plans. Similarly, none of the utilities indicated a major issue in terms of water, sewer, or electric capacity. Roadways appear to have sufficient capacity and the city is undertaking projects to improve High Street.

Opportunities appear available for a variety of uses:

- Housing:
  - Mixed Use along High Street anchored at High @ Appleton
  - Row House redevelopment
  - New 2- and 3- family
  - Multifamily redevelopment
  
- Commercial:
  - Part of Mixed Use along High Street

- Rehabbed commercial space along High Street
  - New commercial space along High Street – through redevelopment
- Other Uses
- Teen Center
  - Food Truck Nodes

**High-Appleton Study - Map 40:**  
 Concept Plan Elements - Capturing Opportunities



Source:  
 Appleton-High Street Area  
 Opportunities Assessment, 2022

***Housing***

Housing opportunities appear to be in several forms. Different parcels appear most appropriate for new multifamily development, new housing development, rehabilitation, and housing redevelopment. While it is envisioned that most of the housing would remain in rental occupancy, some of the housing would seem to be viable for resident ownership.



*Mixed Use along High Street anchored at High @ Appleton.* Five parcels in this area could be transformed into a mixed-use development through new multifamily development, rehabilitation of existing residential and commercial space, and conversion of vacant upper floor space into residential use. Several properties (378 and 384 High Street) have approximately 36,000 square feet in upper floor space which offer potential to be converted into housing. Additionally, an existing mixed-use building at 390 High Street should be rehabbed while maintaining the mixed-use character. Two parcels at 394 and 400 High Street offer potential to be developed into mixed use buildings with the first floor used as commercial (office/retail/restaurants) and possibly 4 floors of apartments.

The three existing buildings included in this area are within a designated National Historic District; thus, historic tax credits could be explored as a source of financial support. Parking for the development would need to be on the properties along Newton Street.

*Row House development/redevelopment.* There are 22 single-family row houses along Newton Street which offer opportunity to be renovated or redeveloped. Another couple of single-family row houses are along Cabot Street which similarly appear to offer opportunities for rehabilitation. The condition of the interior and structural elements of the buildings is unknown. But, if the detailed assessment of the buildings deems the buildings unsuitable for rehabilitation, the area could potentially be redeveloped in a manner which maintains their character. Additionally, 26 parcels along Newton Street and two parcels along Cabot Street could be considered for new sing-family row house development – in the same design, scale, and overall character as the adjoining housing.

*New 2- and 3- family Housing.* Three parcels along Newton Street situated opposite the row houses offer opportunity to provide new housing in the form of 2- and 3-family housing structures. Two existing adjacent buildings may be suitable for rehab, but if that is not feasible due to their deteriorated state, the sites offer potential for redevelopment in conjunction with the adjoining the parcels. The building at the corner of Essex and Newton and a building on Worcester Place appear to offer an opportunity for rehabilitation into 2- and 3- family housing.

*Multifamily redevelopment.* A deteriorated multifamily building at 115 Cabot Street appears too deteriorated to be suitable for rehabilitation based on information from several city officials, records of inspections, and an external visual assessment. Demolition of this building would offer an opportunity for construction of a new multifamily building.

*Alternative Concept – To Capture More Housing Opportunities.* The concept plan depicted in Map 40 relies upon use of city-owned parcels along Newton Street between Appleton and Essex Streets for surface parking to serve the residents of the proposed High Street mixed-use development. Such an approach sets aside the opportunity to redevelop the 3se properties with multifamily housing – which is the historical character of these properties.

An alternative concept plan to capture this housing opportunity was also developed (see Map 41). Under this concept, it would seem viable to have 2 floors of housing developed. This could add approximately 30,000 square feet of additional housing to this area which would strengthen the commercial market. However, this concept will require some significant investment in parking facilities or a creative approach to meeting the parking demands. A review of the 2007 Google Streetview images also suggests such developments need to be sensitive to the potential for making this corridor appear “dark” due to the potential for the structures to impede natural sunlight.

### ***Commercial***

*Part of Mixed Use along High Street.* Any development along High Street should, at a minimum provide first floor space for commercial use – retail, office, and/or restaurant. The potential mixed-use development would appear to offer the opportunity to retain the existing 10,000 square feet of first floor commercial space and adding another 8,000 square feet.

*Rehabbed commercial space along High Street.* There are multiple buildings along High Street that need to be renovated. Some of the buildings may only need façade or similar “cosmetic” rehab. Some of the buildings clearly need more extensive rehabilitation work. Where rehabilitation is deemed infeasible, the buildings would need to be demolished as part of a redevelopment project.

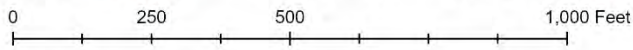
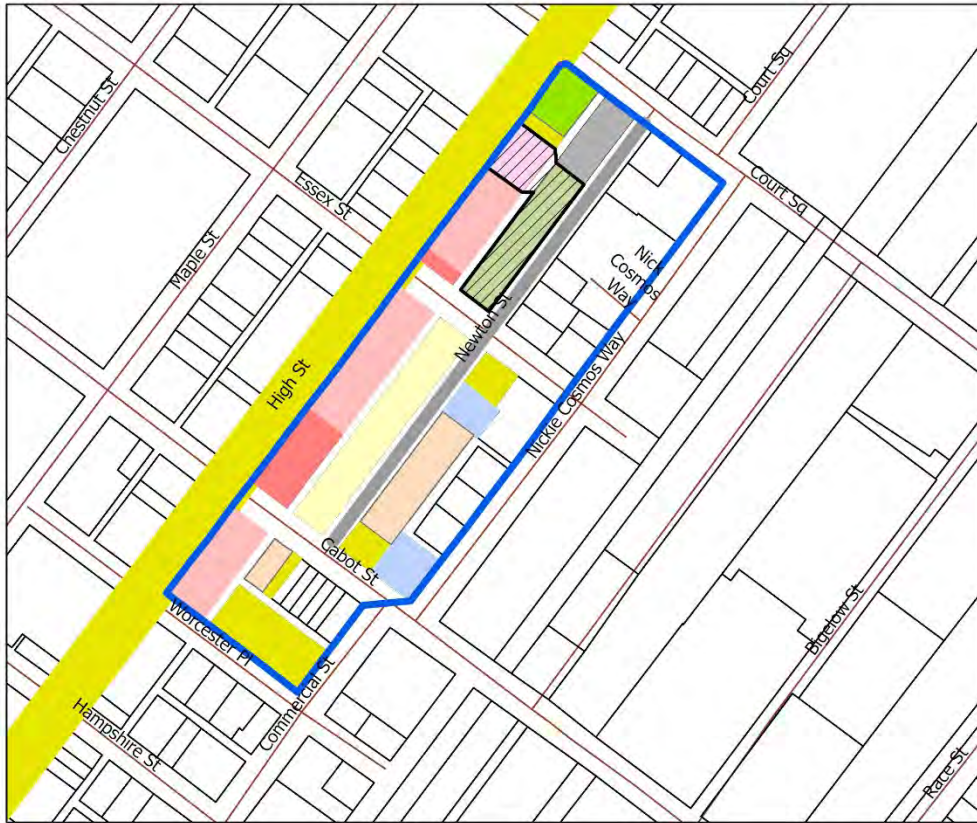
*New commercial space along High Street – through redevelopment.* Five vacant parcels along High Street offer opportunities for new commercial development. Due to the lack of options for parking on adjacent properties and the undesirability of having large areas of asphalt along High Street, these properties would not seem to be viable as mixed-use development sites.

### ***Other Uses***

*Teen Center.* A need for a teen center has been expressed by the Boys & Girls Club, The most viable location for such a facility would seem to be at 115 Cabot Street. While this site offers potential for a multifamily development, it may be possible to incorporate a teen center into a mixed-use building. It would also be reasonable to redevelop the site as a teen center incorporated into the adjoining playground/park.

*Food Truck Nodes.* Significant interest was expressed in providing “parking areas” for food trucks to support other uses and provide support for the entrepreneurs themselves. There are several potential approaches to providing such space. Within the study area, the vacant commercial land at the corner of Essex and High Street as well the four parcels along High Street at Cabot Street would appear to offer potential places for such uses – at least on an interim basis. These spots would seem to offer minimum conflicts with existing restaurants.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 41:**  
 Concept Plan Alternative Elements -  
 Capturing More Housing Opportunities



**Legend**

- Study Area
- Redevelopment Block
- Upper Story Conversion - Housing
- High Street Mixed Use Infill
- New Residential Multifamily
- Commercial Rehab & Redevelopment
- New Commercial Development
- Row House Redevelopment - Owner
- New Housing
- Redevelopment - Housing
- Housing Rehab
- International Food & Culture Corridor
- Complete Streetscape Redevelopment
- Paved Parking Lots



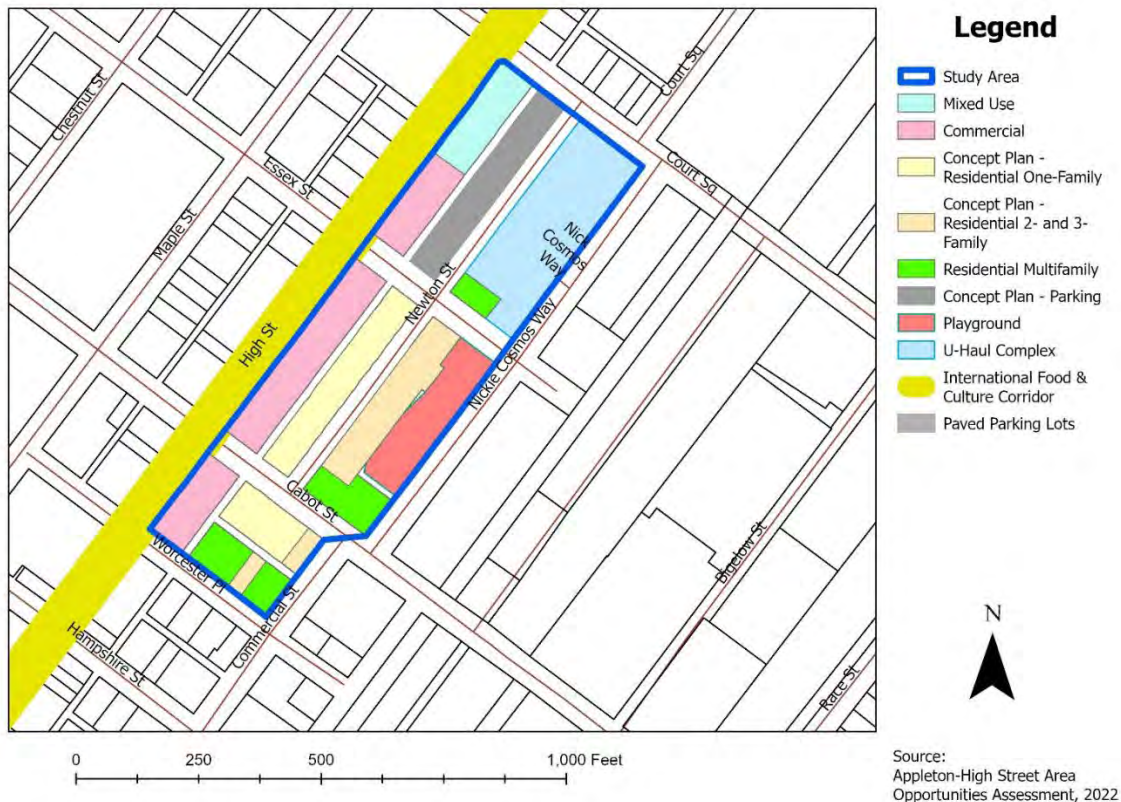
Source:  
 Appleton-High Street Area  
 Opportunities Assessment, 2022

**Conceptual Land and Building Use Plans: “International Culture and Food Corridor”**

What would the area look like if the identified development and redevelopment opportunities reflected in Map 40 or Map 41 were realized? Land and Building Use plans were drafted (see Map 42 and Map 43) reflecting the Concept plans. Under both scenarios, the land use pattern and the character of the area would reflect the area’s “historical land use character” while providing for 21<sup>st</sup> century modes of travel and today’s multi-cultural, ethnically diverse community:

- High Street would be a vibrant commercial corridor – an “International Food & Culture Corridor” gateway to downtown.
- Multi-story buildings along High Street would provide housing in the upper stories
- Small business owners would own their store front
- On-street parking would be supplemented by ample, landscaped parking areas along a portion of Newton Street.
- Redevelopment of some areas along Newton Street could provide opportunities for single-family home ownership
- A range of rental housing from 2-family buildings to apartment blocks would provide safe and reasonably priced housing

**High-Appleton Study - Map 42:**  
Land and Building Use Plan



Capitalizing on the traffic from I-391 into Downtown, the international mix of the area’s population, and the diversity and quality of the food offerings, this corridor could be a foundation for the area’s housing and economic revitalization.

The first Land and Building Use Plan (see Map 42) reflects the initial Concept Plan (see Map 40) while the second Land and Building Use Plan (see Map 43) reflects the “alternative concept plan” (see Map 41). As such, the alternative Land and Building Use Plan would be more reflective of the area’s historical land and building use character.

**High-Appleton Study - Map 43:**  
 Land and Building Use Plan Alternative -  
 Capturing More Housing Opportunities



## Infrastructure Needs

An assessment of the infrastructure needs associated with implementation of the concept plan and recommendations was developed based on discussions/communications with the City Engineer, HG&E representatives, Holyoke Water Works Manager, and a visual assessment of the roadways and sidewalks. Through these discussions and assessments, infrastructure needs were identified (see Map 44).

**High-Appleton Study - Map 44:  
Infrastructure Projects**



## *Electric services*

Due to the gas moratorium, all development will need to be all electric. To achieve this and the desire for a visually appealing environment, the following electric projects are likely to be needed:

- Installation of the Newton Street overhead primary service to an underground conduit
- Addition of one or two new circuits

### ***Water service***

Holyoke Water Works has not identified any water lines needing replacement and considers the water service to be “new.” However, given that several of the water lines date back to the 1880’s, it is reasonable to anticipate that the older water lines will need to be replaced within the near future.

### ***Sewer service***

The City Engineer has indicated that they have no indications of sewer lines failing or collapsing. However, he also indicated that the City plans to do investigation into the sewer lines and that may result in development of improvement projects. Given that the sewer lines are 100 years old, it is reasonable to anticipate that some lines are in need or will need replacement or rehabilitation within the near future. The City Engineer has suggested that any rehabilitation will likely be in the form of slip lining.

### ***Roadways and Sidewalks***

Upgrading High street is the only roadway project currently being planned in the area. This project is to be undertaken by MassDOT. However, as noted in the section “*Infrastructure*,” this project is being revised and is likely to be delayed at least several years.

A visual assessment of the area identified several streets which need, at a minimum, resurfacing. Approximately half of the area’s sidewalks need to be reconstructed. Further, half of the sidewalks appear to be in “fair” or “poor” condition. Thus, the following projects are suggested as being necessary for the area’s redevelopment:

- Resurfacing of Essex and Worcester Streets
- Sidewalk reconstruction program for substandard sidewalks
- Construction of a sidewalk along Newton Street
- Newton Street Complete Street Project

### ***Parking Facilities***

Implementation of the concepts will require additional parking to satisfy the needs of the new residents and comply with the City’s parking requirements. How can and will this additional parking be provided?

The initial Concept Plan and Land and Building Use Plan (Maps 40 and 42) were developed with consideration of the need for parking as a paramount concern. As a result, all three municipal

parcels along Newton Street between Appleton and Essex were identified for parking to serve the redevelopment of properties along High Street. Therefore, under the initial Concept Plan and Land and Building Use Plan, the following surface parking area improvements would be necessary:

- Refurbish/reconstruct the existing parking lots on Newton Street (should provide at least 30 parking spaces)
- Construct a new parking lot on Newton Street using the 3 contiguous city-owned parcels (should provide at least 60 parking spaces)
- Construct a new parking lot at the corner of Cabot and Newton Streets to serve the Newton Street Row Houses (probably approximately 12 parking spaces)

This approach sets aside an opportunity to develop additional multifamily along Newton Street. Utilizing the municipal parcels on Newton Street for surface parking would result in the lost opportunity to realize an additional 30,000 square feet of multifamily housing.

To realize the opportunities visualized in the alternative Concept Plan and Land and Building Use Plan (see Maps 41 and 43), the issue of parking needs must be resolved. What options should be explored to address this need? Some ideas for meeting the needs include:

- Construct two-story parking facility as a public facility with the space above the facility leased on a long-term basis or development rights sold to allow construction of 2-3 levels of apartments.
- Construct a multistory parking garage on the lots owned by Key Bank to serve the development of the housing on Newton Street and the general public. Consider long-term lease of some spaces to the owners of the multifamily and mixed-use developments.
- Explore the possibility of shared use parking with the U-Haul facility for some or their parking areas along Newton Street.
- Recognizing that this is an urban neighborhood, obtain a special permit for reduction of parking requirements under Section 6.1.7 of the Zoning Ordinance based on
  - the availability of the existing public parking facilities:
    - Suffolk Street Municipal Parking – Located on Suffolk Street
    - Ernest Proulx Municipal Parking Facility – Located on Dwight directly across Heritage State Park & City Hall
  - The proposed construction and use of a shared use parking facility on Newton Street



- The unique nature of the mixed-used development

*How many parking spaces will be required?* This is a bit challenging as there are the requirements of local regulations and the requirements imposed by the housing market.

Regulatory required parking. Section 6.1 sets forth the off-street parking regulations and references the “TABLE OF OFF-STREET PARKING STANDARDS”. This table lays out the following relevant parking standards:

1. Single-family dwelling - 2 spaces for each dwelling unit
2. Two-Family dwelling - 2 spaces for each dwelling unit
3. Multifamily dwelling - 2 spaces for each dwelling unit up to 50 units and 1.5 for each dwelling unit in excess of 50

Under the multifamily dwelling standard, the 60 parking spaces suggested for the surface parking lot would only be sufficient for 30 dwelling units. It is likely that either of the plans would require a combination of new parking facilities and a special permit for reduction of parking requirements.

*Market required parking.* Some markets require more parking spaces than a local community may require. As household income levels increase, unless the population is mobility restricted, the reliance on the private automobile can be assumed to increase – particularly in the absence of a high level of public transit. It can be informative to look at what other developments in the area provide.

- Winn Development’s proposed 88 unit unit 55+ apartment development has not began yet. However, the available information indicates it will have 88 dwelling units and 91 parking spaces. Thus, the ratio of parking to dwelling units is almost 1:1.
- The Cubit on Race and Main Streets has 18 dwelling units, approximately 22,000 square feet of other use space and 43 parking space. The ratio of parking to dwelling units is slightly over 2:1. However, a portion of the parking spaces are presumed to be provided for the non-residential uses.

It is apparent from discussions with various persons during the SWOC process that the city would like to see at least some of the new housing to be less “income restricted.” As the target households have a higher income (perhaps 120% or more of AMI), there should be consideration to providing a higher level of parking – or at least not seek any relief from the regulatory requirements. However, this should be a decision made by the developer and not the City.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations regarding the Concept Plan and projects are presented in the following categories:

- General
- Infrastructure
- Individual Opportunities

### ***General***

1. *Development should reflect the area's cultural/historic character.* Development should reflect the cultural identity of the area and not impose a “stereotypical” character. As described in the “*Study Area Residents and Their Housing*” and “*Land Use and Environmental Conditions*” sections,
  - Residents of the larger neighborhood are predominately Latino/Hispanic with Puerto Rican heritage being dominant
  - Some of the buildings reflect the residents’ heritage
  - Buildings in this area are predominately from the late 1800’s/early 900’s. While they have been largely modified over the past 100+ years, development should respect this unique era
2. *Landscaping.* Trees and landscape elements can enhance area aesthetically while also reducing the heat islands and addressing stormwater reductions.
  - Landscaping should be incorporated into all development projects
  - An urban tree planting plan should be developed for the area
  - Parking areas should be a particular area where landscaping is used to screen the area as well as break up expanses of asphalt
  - Community Preservation Act should be considered for funding implementation of a landscaping/urban tree plan
3. *Housing, Income, and Home Ownership.* There is a need for housing which meets the range of household incomes, and which affords an opportunity for households to own their home. Home ownership can provide stability to a neighborhood.
  - Redevelopment of row houses should focus on providing ownership opportunities
  - Some of the multifamily housing should offer ownership opportunities
  - Programs should be examined to assess the ability to provide housing which meet a diverse range of incomes – not just at or under 80% of AMI.
4. *Tax Foreclosure.* Nine properties have overdue amounts which are at least 50% of their assessed values. Such properties are likely to remain delinquent with little if any likelihood of the City collecting the overdue amounts. Such properties are deteriorated and will continue to adversely impact the area. Accordingly,

- The City should foreclose on such properties
  - Priority for foreclosure should be placed on the properties with the highest ratio of overdue assessments to assessed values
  - Tax foreclosures impact the Tax Overlay which can impact General Revenues; the City should consider using ARPA funds, to the extent permitted, to offset this impact. ARPA funding could provide a unique opportunity to foreclose on a considerable number of properties without impacting the General Fund
  - Disposal of such redeemed properties should be through the Holyoke Redevelopment Authority and consistent with the adopted plan for the area
5. *Maintenance of demolition sites.* Demolition of buildings can lead to undesirable reuses which adversely impact adjoining properties and the general area. An area becoming a hang out or drug congregation area or a place where vehicles are trashed or repaired is an example of such an impact. Conversely, if effectively managed such vacant sites can become an asset and benefit adjoining and nearby properties. Thus,
- Prior to demolition of a building, the City should develop a reuse plan (interim and long term)
  - Area property owners/institutions should be engaged to maintain vacant properties
  - Consider using an annual license for interim uses – such as a park or outdoor dining areas.
  - Interim uses should not involve such “improvements” or uses which could hinder long-term reuse.
6. *Ownership Barriers.* Some properties, due to the fragmented ownerships or due to the ownership entity, are not viable for acquisition and redevelopment in their current ownership.
- The Newton Street Row Houses and commercial properties on High Street between Essex and Cabot Streets are of particular note.
  - The City should consider incorporating such properties into their Urban Renewal Plan for acquisition and disposal.
7. *Regulatory Revision.* Development opportunities are most impacted by the Zoning Ordinance and the Stormwater Management Ordinance and Regulations. In particular, the Stormwater Regulations have requirements which are more stringent than the standards set forth in the Stormwater Ordinance – such as the requirement for redevelopment projects to reduce post development runoff by 25% over pre-development runoff. Sometimes these laws and regulations pose barriers to development or create confusion. Such barriers and confusion will discourage developers. Thus, the City should
- Revise the Zoning Ordinance to allow by right redevelopment of row house lots which pre-date the Zoning Bylaw
  - Revise the Zoning Ordinance to reduce the parking requirements for multifamily and mixed used developments in the downtown neighborhood subject to specified conditions regarding proximity to municipal parking facilities and public transportation

- Bring the Stormwater Regulations in consistency with the Stormwater Ordinance or revise the Stormwater Ordinance to reflect the more stringent standards detailed in the Stormwater Regulations
- Consider relaxing the 25% reduction standard for downtown redevelopment projects

***Infrastructure Recommendations***

Generalized costs for the infrastructure projects range from \$1,025,000 to \$ 10,525,000. The extremely wide range is associated with the significant span in the costs to install new electric circuits. As noted in the section “*Infrastructure*,” depending on the number of units to be built or developed, there could be a need for 1 or 2 new circuits. To run a new circuit could range from \$500,000 to \$5 Million. Excluding this potential item, the identified infrastructure projects are estimated to total around \$ 525,000 (see Table 8).

<b>Table 8</b>	
<i>Project</i>	<i>General Estimated Cost</i>
Sidewalk reconstruction/construction	\$ 75,000
Underground electric service	\$ 200,000
Complete Street – Newton Street	\$ 200,000
Roadway resurfacing	\$ 50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$525,000 *</b>
*No estimates are available for the parking infrastructure or sewer upgrades.	

The identified projects do not include any water or sewer line projects based on input from the Holyoke Water Works Manager that the system is “new” and the City Engineer that there are no identified sewer system improvement needs at this time.

Based on the input from City officials and input provided during the assessment process, the following recommendations are offered regarding infrastructure:

- Prospective developers should have a thorough evaluation of the relevant utility infrastructure before engaging in detailed project planning
- Any project opening up a roadway should include consideration of replacing the underground infrastructure
- Evaluate the feasibility of locating electric utilities into the alleyways between Newton Street and High Street
- Funding through MassWorks and the Complete Streets programs should be pursued
- A greening of the roadway corridors (landscaping) should be implemented as part of an urban tree planting plan

## ***Recommendations Regarding Individual Projects***

*Mixed Use along High Street anchored at High @ Appleton.* This proposal entails combining several development methods - new development, rehabilitation, and conversion of vacant building space. The parking requirements could pose a barrier, particularly when combined with the stormwater regulations. The vacant lots on Newton Street would only provide sufficient space for 55-60 parking spaces which would be sufficient only for 27 to 30 dwelling units. Similarly, the three paved lots associated with 378 High Street could accommodate perhaps 30-32 spaces – sufficient for 15-16 dwelling units. While Section 6.1.7 of the Zoning Ordinance provides a means for obtaining a special permit to reduce the parking requirements for a development, this introduces uncertainty into the project development process and makes the “opportunity” riskier. Several recommendations apply to this particular opportunity:

- The three existing buildings included in this area are within a designated National Historic District; thus, historic tax credits could be explored as a source of financial support.
- Combine the city owned properties on High Street (394 and 400) with the 3 parcels on Newton Street between Appleton and Essex Streets into a single redevelopment project with the following:
  - Buildings front in High in approximate alignment with the existing building fronts
  - Parking be accessed from Newton Street
  - Parking developed with joint use agreements between the adjoining owners or as municipal lots
- Revise the Zoning Bylaw to reduce the parking requirements for multifamily developments in the downtown neighborhood where there are municipal or shared use parking spaces within “walking” distance. Alternatively, there will need to be a Special Permit for relief from the parking requirements granted early in the project development process.
- Parking for the development would need to be on the properties along Newton Street.
- The City should pursue funding opportunities (perhaps, MassWorks) to fund the parking infrastructure for the High Street Mixed-Use and potential Newton Street Multifamily development (the alternatives depicted on Maps 41 and 43).

*Newton Street Row Houses.* The 22 single family row houses were noted by nearly every SWOC process participant as significant for the area – negative by some and positive by others. They are generally viewed as an opportunity either for rehabilitation or redevelopment. It is generally agreed that they are unique for the area due to the character of some of the homes, affordability, and their small size. Being affordable at present, they offer a potential area for developing owner-occupancy in the area. Several particular issues cast a cloud over the potential opportunity for the row houses:

- Fragmented ownership and their unknown structural conditions make defining a reuse plan challenging.

- The City’s Zoning Ordinance restricts redevelopment options or imposes additional hurdles to redevelopment.
- Their average assessed value is \$40,841. At such a low value, the units are affordable, but it would be difficult to financially undertake the significant rehabilitation that is warranted. By comparison, the row houses on Street are approximately twice the value of the Newton Street row houses and sit on lots approximately double the area of the Newton Street row houses.

Accordingly, several recommendations are offered regarding the Newton Street Row Houses:

- Before any definitive plan can be developed for these row houses, an extensive interior and exterior assessment of each structure is needed.
- The status of firewalls needs to be assessed – their existence and their condition.
- The City should assist in this aggregation of ownership – at least by foreclosing on tax delinquent properties and perhaps by including the parcels in the Urban Renewal Plan for acquisition and transfer.
- The City should revise the Zoning Ordinance to would allow “by right” the redevelopment of row houses on lots which predated the Zoning Ordinance.
- If it is determined that rehabilitation is not feasible or redevelopment is the most viable option and development as single-family lots is not viable, a condominium form of ownership with the housing being constructed in a row house style (similar to the approach taken at 472-294 Maple Street).
- To maintain affordability and offer a potential for redevelopment or rehabilitation, some subsidization is essential; thus, the City should
  - Offer any municipally owned parcels to a development at a nominal cost
  - Consider the use of Community Preservation Act funding to subsidize the revitalization
  - Explore the feasibility of CDBG funds, possibly a Section 106 Loan Guarantee to fund the development at a low rate
- Whether rehabilitation or redevelopment, the primary focus should be to make the “restored” housing units, owner-occupied and not rental.
- Off-street parking should be provided for the “restored” housing – if redevelopment is to take place, a redevelopment site plan should be developed which incorporates “pockets” of parking spaces for residents. These pockets should serve only 4-6 dwelling units reserving the on-street parking for visitors.

*New 2- and 3- family Housing.* There are three vacant parcels on Newton Street adjoining the playground which could be redeveloped for housing. Two additional, contiguous lots have buildings which may not be viable for rehabilitation.

- Redevelop these parcels as a combination of 2- and 3- family housing with off-street parking

*Commercial Space.* As noted above, the commercial buildings and land along High Street between Essex Street and Worcester Place should be renovated, redeveloped, and or developed for commercial uses. Areas between 408 High Street and Essex Street should be retained for commercial purposes. The principal issues in this area relate to building conditions, ownership barriers, and parking.

- A façade improvement program should be established to assist viable businesses to upgrade their facades
- A commercial rehabilitation program covering more extensive renovations than a façade improvement should be established
- Outdoor patio space should be accommodated wherever possible
- The City will likely need to take actions to resolve ownership barriers
- Redevelopment and new development should be in alignment with the fronts of the commercial buildings along High Street
- While expanses of asphalt are not desirable, if redevelopment of the existing commercial buildings is to be achieved, development of the vacant parcels as parking lots may be essential. If such is to occur, the parking lots should be landscaped and somewhat “enclosed” to screen the asphalt to the maximum extent practicable.
- If areas for parking are developed, redevelopment of the commercial buildings at 446-490 High Street should include some housing on upper floors.

*U-Haul Site.* Differing opinions were offered during the SWOC process regarding the U-Haul complex. There is no doubt that the community at large benefits from having a large facility available. All would agree that the facility is unlikely to go anywhere but will remain anchored to this location. The most significant concern was regarding the scale and appearance of the facility including the large expanse of asphalt. There is legitimate concern building may serve as a deterrent to residential development within the study area. Thus,

- Incentives should be developed in consultation with the owner of the U-Haul facility to “tone down” the appearance of the facility as it faces Newton Street and Appleton Street.
- Implementation of a Newton Street Complete Street project should include landscape which somewhat “screens” the facility
- Development projects will need to present their “front” and have their units looking in the direction of High Street to the maximum extent practicable
- IF this facility were to relocate, the City should seek to have this facility redeveloped into a mixed-use or multifamily development.

*Teen Center.* During the SWOC interviews, there was a suggestion that the vacant parcels along Newton Street abutting the playground could be developed for a teen center as an addition to the park. While a playground/park fits well into the middle of a residential neighborhood and a teen center can serve the neighborhood’s youth, it would seem that a teen center would also serve youth from outside the neighborhood with additional vehicular traffic which might be disruptive to redevelopment of the area. Thus, consideration should be given to a teen center being located adjacent to the playground on the periphery of the study area.

- Demolish the building at 115 Cabot Street
- Evaluate the incorporation of a teen center into a mixed-use building on this site or redevelop this as a teen center.
- Alternatively, consider and evaluate the potential for locating the teen center within a mixed-use building as a commercial store front on High Street.

*Food Truck sites.* Food Trucks are today's version of yesterday's street vendors – just more mobile and larger. Providing space for their operation requires being sensitive to concerns of abutting businesses and residents but also to “brick and mortar” restaurants.

- Consider using vacant lots on High Street as temporary locations for operation of food trucks
- Promote food truck “plaza” development as temporary uses, primarily associated with special events
- Provide space for food truck operations on City land/parking lots in conjunction with entertainment venues.