



Holyoke

Comprehensive Plan

UPDATE
2026

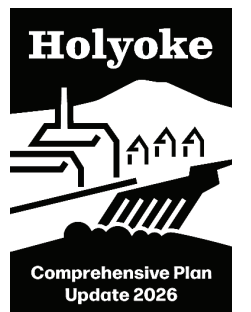
Holyoke
Comprehensive Plan
Update 2026

Holyoke

**Comprehensive
Plan Update 2026**

PREPARED FOR THE
City of Holyoke

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
Holyoke Planning Board
Office of Planning and Economic Development





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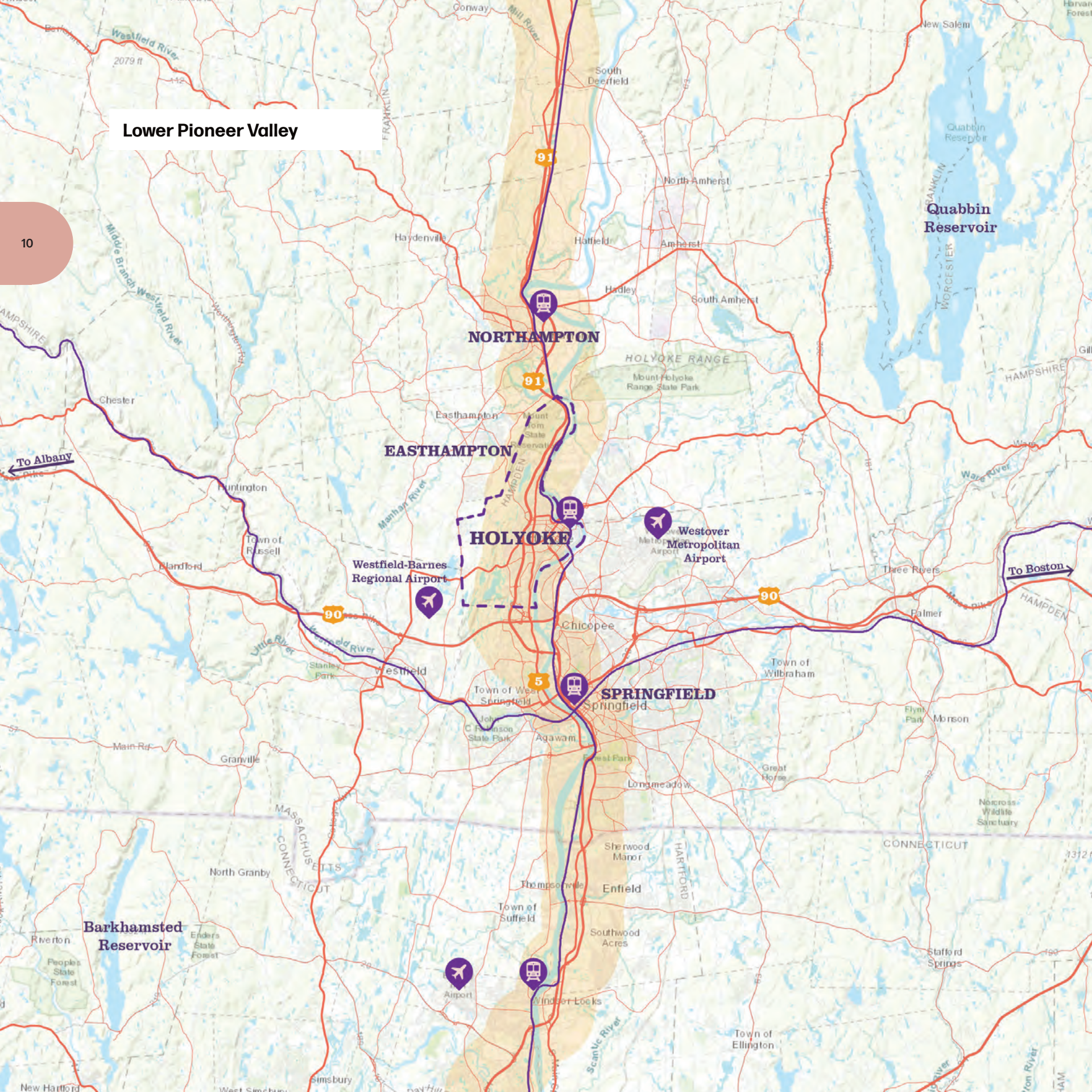
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Introduction



Letter from the Mayor

Holyoke stands at a pivotal moment in its history. For more than two decades, the city has operated under a master plan created for a very different era. This latest Comprehensive Plan represents a renewed commitment to intentional growth, transparent governance, and a stronger future for every neighborhood, resident, and business in the City of Holyoke.

From the beginning of my administration, I prioritized creating an updated roadmap for Holyoke’s future grounded in data, public engagement, economic opportunity, and long-term sustainability. Over the past two years, the Holyoke Planning Board, together with the Department of Planning and Economic Development, community stakeholders, and outside consultants, has worked collaboratively to develop a plan that reflects the city’s current challenges and opportunities with a climate resiliency twist. This plan resulted from one of the most robust public engagement efforts Holyoke has undertaken in recent years. Stakeholders contributed ideas through public meetings, surveys, workshops, and targeted outreach initiatives. Recognizing that no engagement process can reach every resident equally, the City pursued creative and inclusive strategies to gather feedback and ensure broad participation across Holyoke’s diverse communities.

The plan establishes a modern framework for growth that aligns land use, housing, transportation, economic development, environmental stewardship, infrastructure, and neighborhood preservation with the city’s long-term vision. It also serves as the foundation for a multi-phase modernization of Holyoke’s zoning ordinances and development processes. As part of this effort, the City has begun implementing targeted zoning updates designed to align outdated regulations with the Comprehensive Plan’s goals. These updates are not isolated or reactive. Rather, they represent deliberate first steps toward simplifying processes, reducing unnecessary red tape, eliminating inconsistencies and spot zoning, and making Holyoke more competitive for responsible development and investment.

My administration has consistently emphasized fiscal responsibility, modernization, and operational reform. Initiatives such as the Municipal Finance Modernization Act, investments in infrastructure and parks, downtown revitalization efforts, housing development initiatives, public safety collaboration, and support for small businesses and the arts have all reinforced a broader vision of a city preparing itself for long-term success. This Comprehensive Plan builds on those efforts by creating a clear and actionable policy framework for the next generation. At its core, this plan positions Holyoke to compete and thrive while preserving the character and identity that residents value deeply. It recognizes the importance of balancing economic growth with neighborhood stability, encouraging investment while protecting quality of life, and embracing innovation without losing sight of community history and culture.

This plan is the beginning of an ongoing commitment to thoughtful planning and shared accountability. Its success will depend on continued collaboration between residents, city government, businesses, institutions, and community partners. Together, Holyoke will continue building a city that is more vibrant, equitable, resilient, and prepared for the future, because....you get what you plan for!

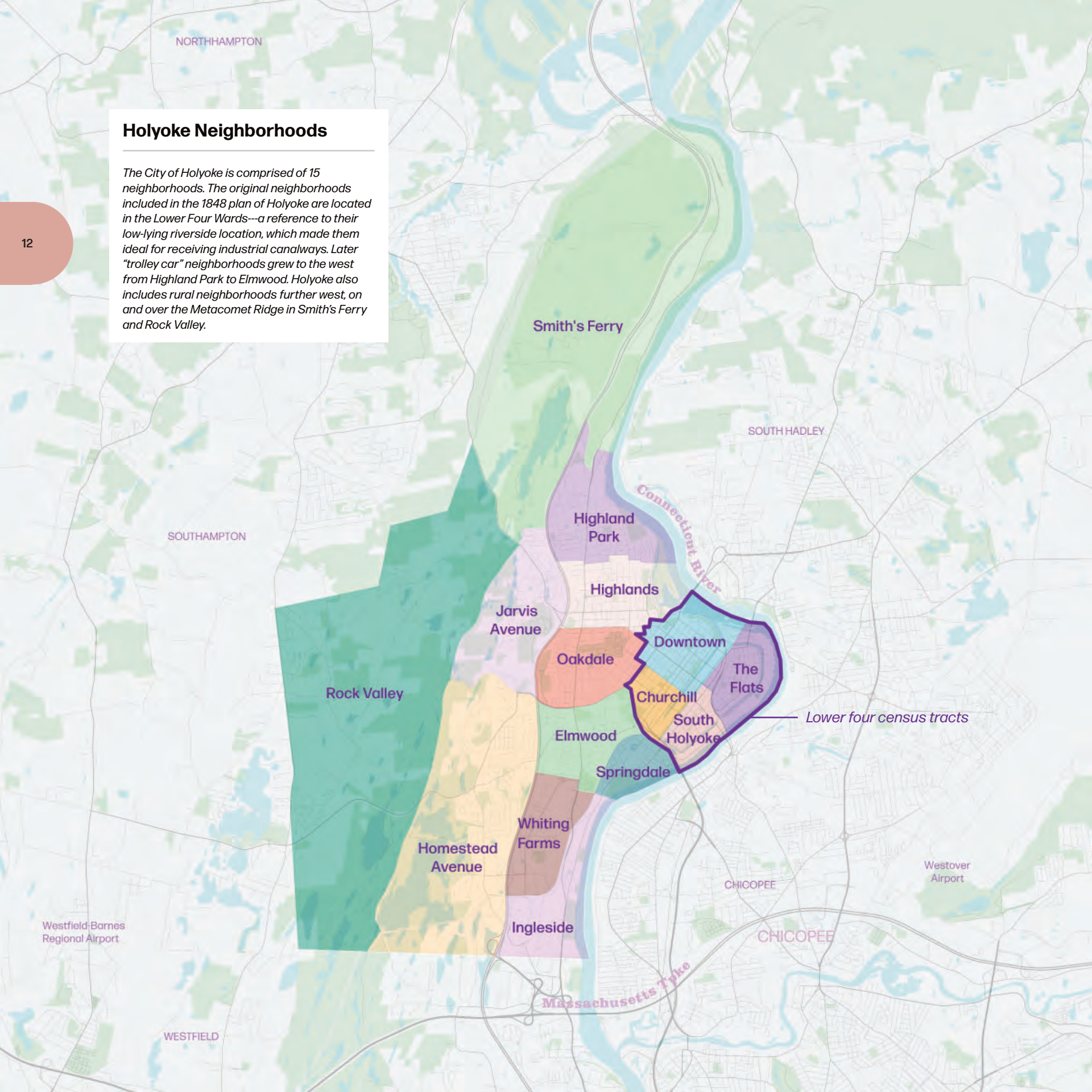


Sincerely,

Joshua Garcia
Mayor

Holyoke Neighborhoods

The City of Holyoke is comprised of 15 neighborhoods. The original neighborhoods included in the 1848 plan of Holyoke are located in the Lower Four Wards---a reference to their low-lying riverside location, which made them ideal for receiving industrial canalways. Later "trolley car" neighborhoods grew to the west from Highland Park to Elmwood. Holyoke also includes rural neighborhoods further west, on and over the Metacomet Ridge in Smith's Ferry and Rock Valley.



Foreword

What you are holding in your hands is a guidebook, for a trip through time we’re all embarking on together: part road map and part Suggested Attractions.

Time is a dimension, and as fellow citizens and members of the same community we travel through it together. Like any community getting ready for a road trip- that most American of all ways to travel- we’ve spent the last two and a half years talking to each other about where we want to go, what routes we’ll take to get there, what we’ll need for it, and what we might want to do and look at along the way.

It’s not written in stone, of course. There are unavoidable blank spots on our maps. Here be dragons: we cannot predict the future perfectly. (The last time we drew a map for this trip, in the 1999 Holyoke Master Plan, the internet was at its infancy, there were no smart phones and our future was supposed to be brick-and-mortar retail and office parks.) In a rapidly changing world, we’re explorers too, not only road trippers.

So, we can’t know what we’ll find as we go. We can’t be too confident of even what we do know; we’ll need to be flexible, and ready to respond to changing circumstances. As with any road trip, we may find a bridge we intended to cross washed out, forcing us to go back and find a way around. We’ll have disagreements along the way about what the fastest route is, or whether to take a side trip that isn’t even in the guidebook. But this Comprehensive Plan is still a guide for the road ahead,

however necessarily flawed and incomplete. It’s a book of suggestions, not mandates; a look at where we are now, a destination, and a set of potential strategies to help us get there.

Holyoke drew up this map as a community. It’s the product of deep conversations among Holyoke’s citizens over the past two years: our business people, our volunteers, our kids, our families from the newest residents to Holyokers that have called our community home for generations, English speakers, Spanish speakers and more: the many voices that come together to create the extraordinary community that is Holyoke. Throughout this conversation we’ve had the help of information developed by our professional consultants at Agency. Together we have looked at where Holyoke is now and where -and who- we want to be as a city.

If you are one of the many whose part in that conversation helped bring this plan into being, know that you have the thanks of a grateful city. And if you were unable to participate in this part of the conversation, whether the outreach done did not reach you or whether you are brand new to our community, know that you will have many more opportunities: your thoughts and knowledge will be needed in the days and years to come, as we take this road together.

Our city’s founders began this adventure; it’s for us to continue it. Welcome to the road.

Lauren Niles
Planning Board Chairperson

Mimi Panitch
Former Planning Board Chairperson

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“A city that inspires, in constant growth, creating opportunity for all.”

– Mayor Joshua Garcia

Updating the Comprehensive Plan

Holyoke’s comprehensive plan is a vital tool for shaping the city’s future. Under Massachusetts law, every city with a Planning Board must make and maintain a Comprehensive Plan, “designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality” (M.G.L. Ch. 41, Section 81D).

Holyoke has long honored this state requirement, and the city’s last Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1999, stands as a testament to what sustained civic effort can achieve. That

“The 2026 update renews the City’s strategic framework for long-term physical, policy, and programmatic development.”

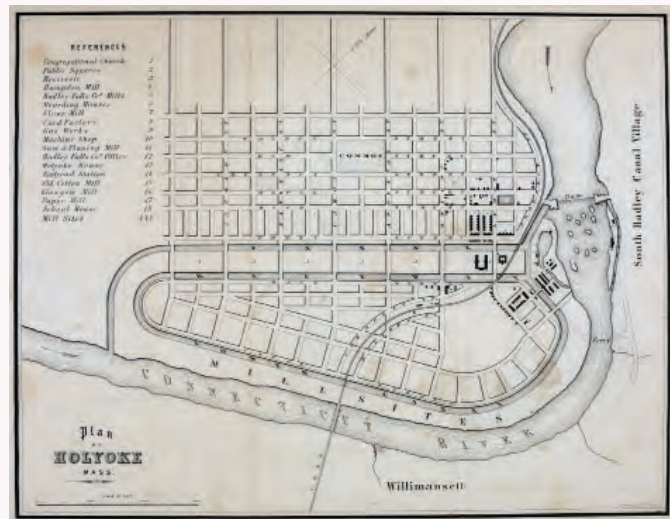
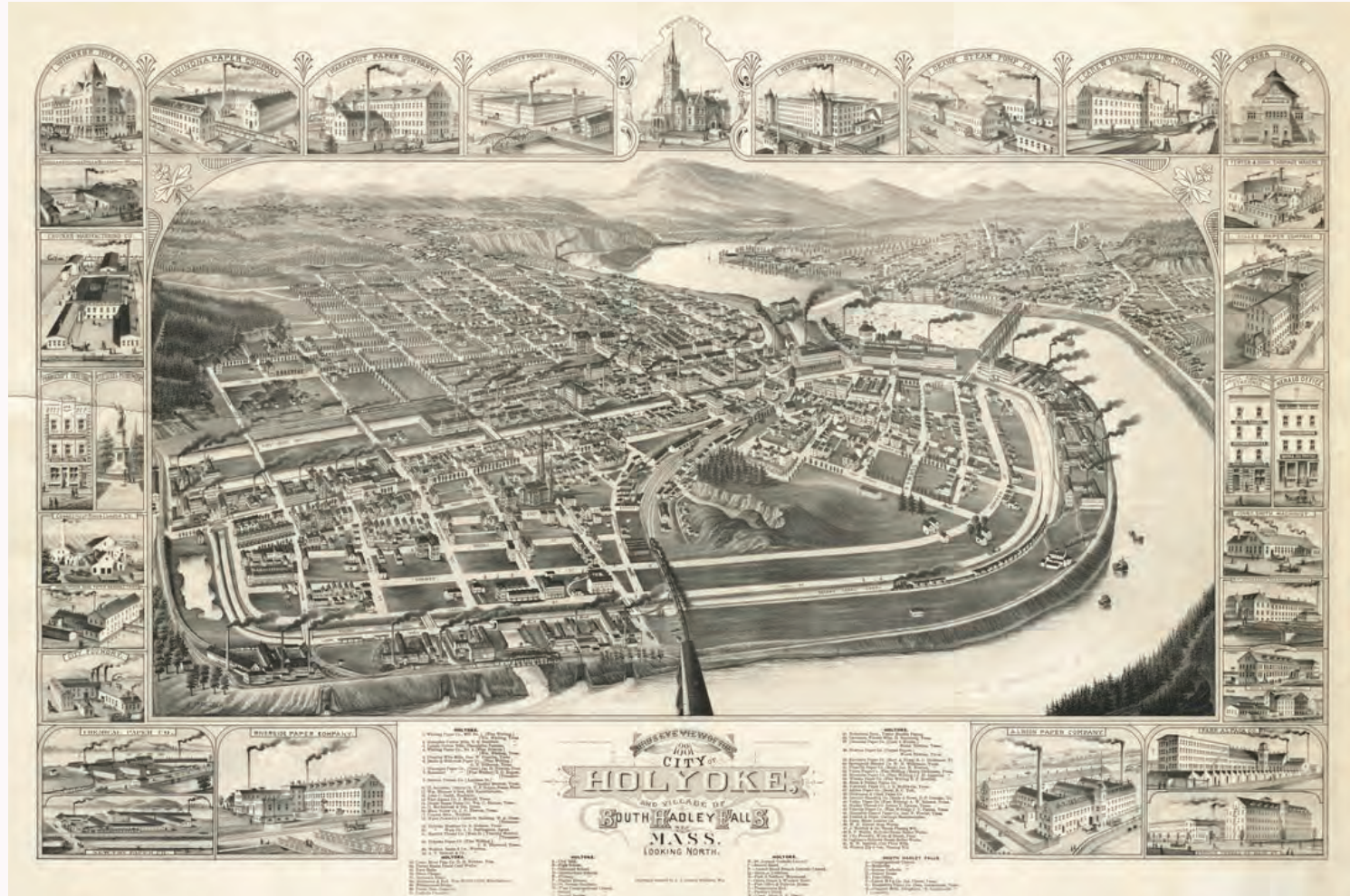
plan was the product of wide and deep consultation among citizens, business and professional and government leaders, religious and charitable institutions, community activists, and professional advisors—the work of years, and a genuine milestone in the city’s history. But it was adopted at the edge of a world about to change beyond recognition: crafted on the cusp of the internet and mobile communications, it captured a Holyoke, and a set of expectations for the future, that belong to another era. A quarter-century later, it is time to write the next chapter.

This 2026 update renews the City’s strategic framework for long-term physical, policy, and programmatic development. It envisions an aspirational future for Holyoke, charts clear pathways for reaching it, and—most importantly—is rooted in

the voices of the people who call this city home, ensuring that Holyoke evolves in a way that truly reflects the values and needs of its residents and businesses.

The result is the product of extraordinary collaborative effort. Led by the Office of Planning & Economic Development (OPED), in partnership with the Office of the Mayor and the Holyoke Planning Board, the process unfolded over roughly a year (Spring 2024–Summer 2025) through three phases—Listen and Learn, Envision Aspirational Futures, and Identify Implementation Pathways—with residents, business owners, and local organizations serving not as an audience but as true co-creators, and with particular care given to engaging BIPOC and historically underrepresented communities. A Community Plan Committee convened at key milestones to help steer the work; eleven focus groups and interviews drew on the knowledge of staff and experts across the city; and four Community Listening Sessions alongside nine pop-up meetings, held at family- and youth-friendly venues across Holyoke, brought together roughly 500 residents who helped shape this plan in person. Few planning efforts can claim such breadth of participation, and Holyoke is stronger for it.

This Update proudly addresses each of the core elements required by Section 81(D): Holyoke’s overall goals and policies for its future growth and development; our plans for land use; our housing goals and needs; our strategies for economic development; our cultural, historical, and natural resources and how to preserve and manage them; our open space and recreational areas; our systems for transportation and circulation, as they exist and as we envision them; the public services we provide and aspire to provide; and, above all, a clear roadmap for turning these shared aspirations into reality.



Carrying Forward the Legacy of a Planned City

Most of New England developed organically. By contrast, Holyoke was founded on a plan, and a vision of industrial power and progress. In 1848, a group of industrial investors known as Boston Associates saw the potential of harnessing the natural power of the Connecticut River where it bends and falls 53 feet to power a newly efficient array of paper mills.

To execute their vision, they hired engineer Philander Anderson and gave him the task of designing the new city. Anderson conceived of the Holyoke Dam, which diverted water from the Connecticut River into a series of terraced industrial canals, which powered the city's paper mills. He laid out a network of railways running parallel to these canals to provide the mills with easy access to freight to take products to markets. A number of these industrial railroads still operate today under the names of Pioneer Valley Railroad and Pinsley Railroad.

Anderson laid out Holyoke's streets in a then-futuristic urban grid pattern – a unique feature that distinguishes Holyoke's streets from the cow path roads of New England. North/south streets were named for trees (Sycamore, Locust, Linden, Oak, Beech, Pine, Walnut, Elm, Chestnut, Maple), and east/west streets were named for Holyoke's early industrialists (Lyman, Dwight, Appleton, Cabot, Sargeant, Jackson), as well as for local Massachusetts counties (Hampden, Suffolk, Essex, Hampshire, Franklin).

top: Bird's eye view of Holyoke and its notable buildings in 1881, by A.F. Poole

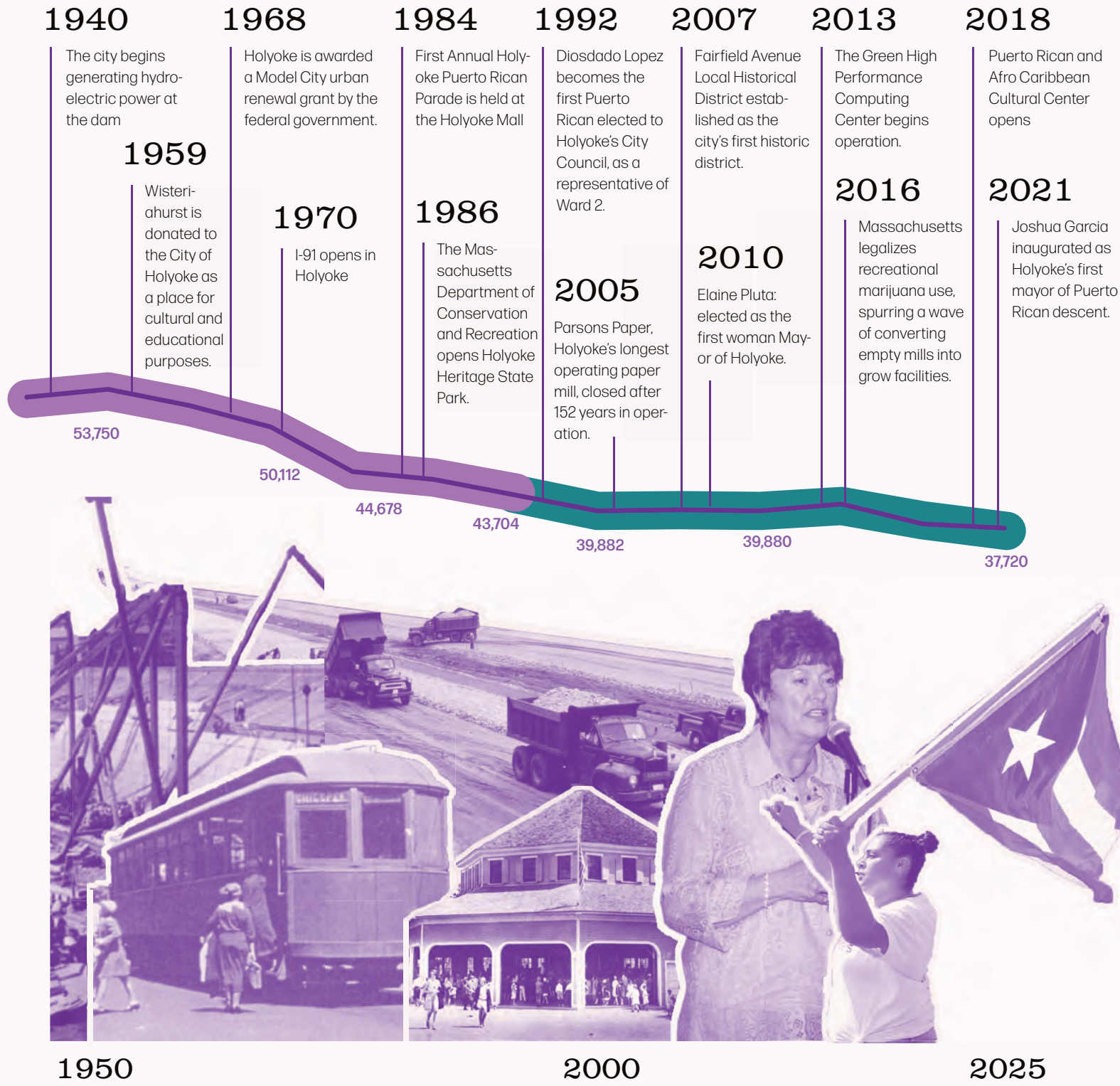
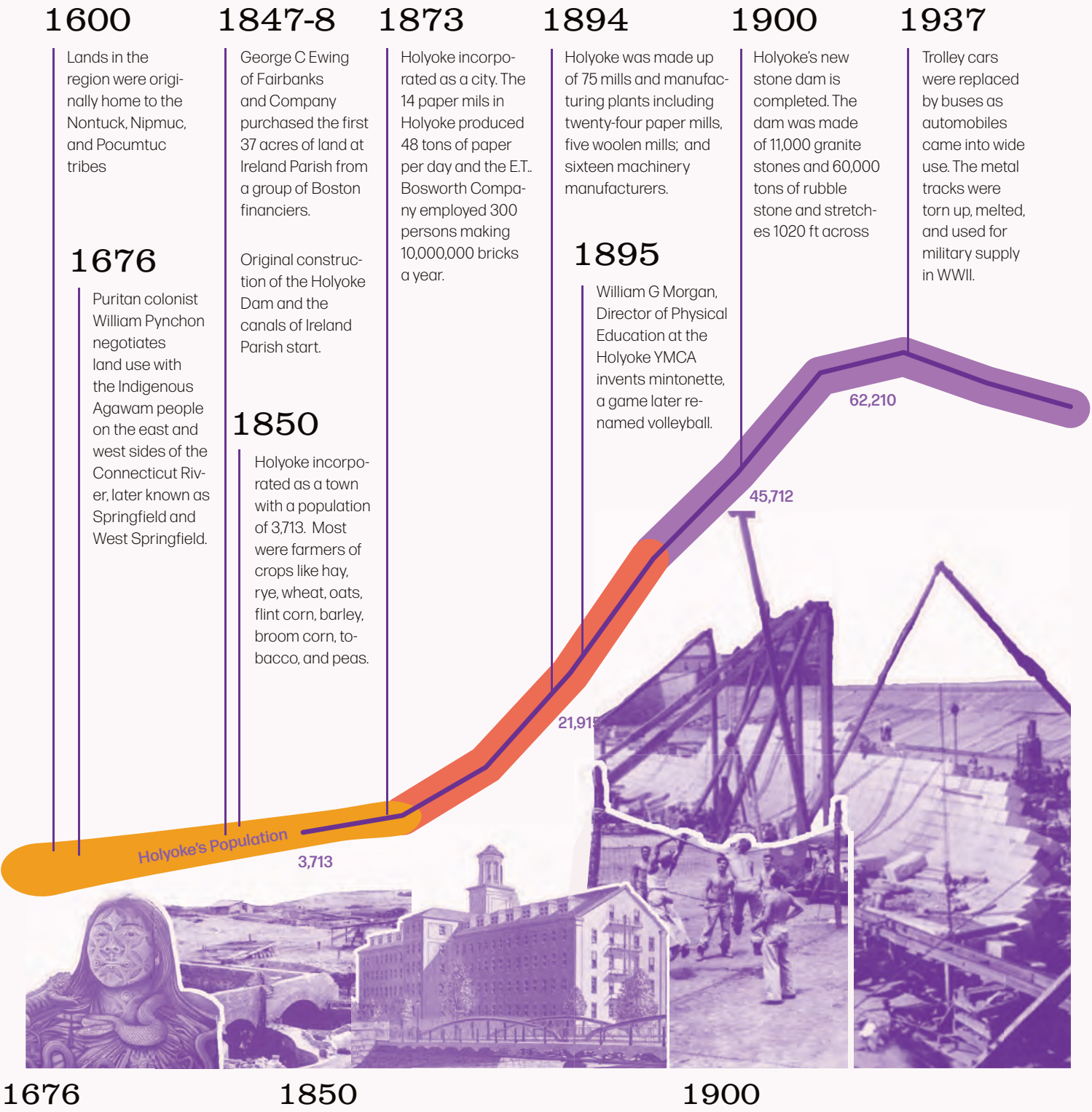
bottom left: Early plan of Holyoke, its canal system and roads, drafted by the Hadley Falls Company in 1853 and designed by Philander Anderson and assistant Samuel Chase.

bottom right: Mural depicting the founding of Holyoke, painted by Sante Graziani in 1954 and located in the Holyoke Public Library.

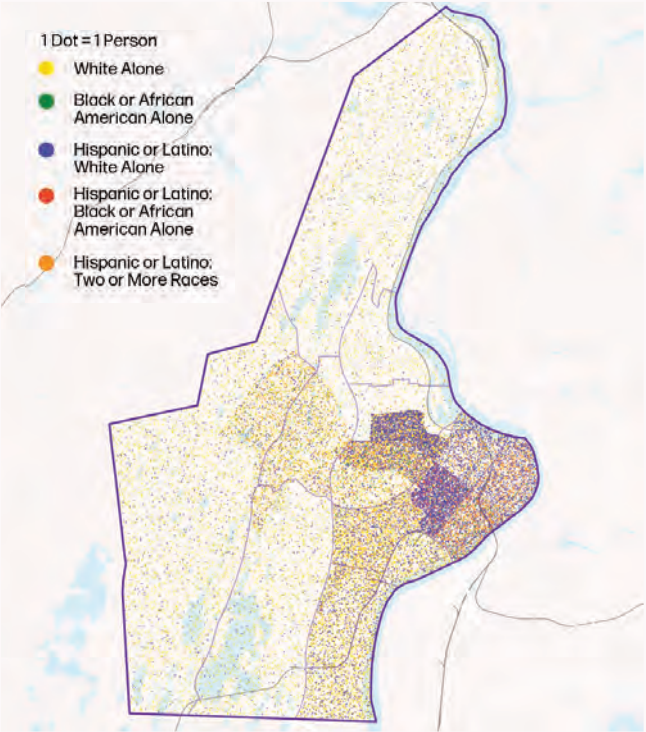
The development of Holyoke in the mid-to-late 1800s predated the modern urban planning profession. It was Holyoke, and similar industrial projects, that provided inspiration and new concepts to early planning movements like the Garden City Movement, the City Beautiful Movement, and Modernism. These movements in turn led to the establishment of the urban planning profession in the 1920s.

It was these developments that ushered in tools such as zoning, and the eras of urban renewal, and suburbanization. All of these had a major impact on the city, and not all of those impacts were as positive as hoped. Now in the 2020s, time has given us the perspective we need to revisit those impacts, to re-evaluate, and to make corrections where we can. Today Holyoke's urban planning call to action is to return to our roots, reviving our industrial economy, looking to what advantages changes in technology may offer us as they did to our founders, while rising to new challenges like resiliency in the face of climate change.

Holyoke Timeline, in Brief



Population Density
x Race and Ethnicity

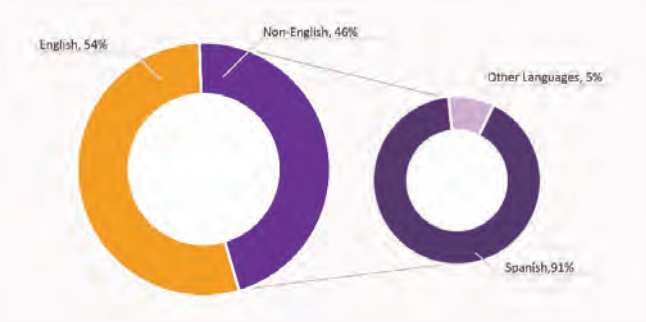


Historical Holyoke, 1827

Map of the Ireland Parish of Springfield in 1827, prior to the founding of industrial Holyoke in 1848.

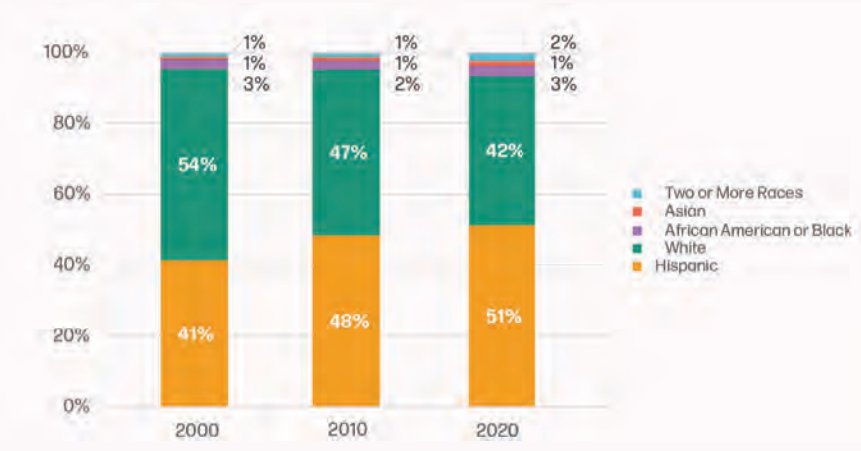


Language Spoken at Home



Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020 five-year estimates

Population x Race and Ethnicity



Continuing a Legacy of
Welcoming New Americans

The land that would become Holyoke was never empty of people. The original inhabitants were the Pocomtuc, so called for their river: “swift, shallow, sandy stream” in the original Mohican. The Pocomtuc lived in agrarian communities along the fertile banks of the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers. The region provided game and fish as well, and the river served as a major inland transportation route.

The Pocomtuc were effectively gone by the time of the arrival of Irish settlers in the region in roughly 1655, decimated and driven out by epidemic disease and by involvement in wars among European colonial powers, most notably King Philip’s War of 1675-1678. Today, most descendants of the Pocomtuc reside far away in the Saint Francis Abenaki reserve outside of Montreal.

By 1655 Irish colonists had claimed lands, and early accounts refer to one John Riley as the first permanent settler of what was then called “Ireland Parish.” Ireland Parish remained a predominantly agrarian community until the Industrial Revolution, and the founding of the industrial Holyoke we know today.

The establishment of that Holyoke in 1848 accelerated Irish immigration to the area. Nor were the Irish alone: the area attracted job-seekers from a broad swath of Europe. But during that period, Irish immigrants and their descendants comprised the largest demographic in Holyoke. It was they who built much of the early city’s infrastructure, including the dams, canals, and factories and they did so despite anti-Irish sentiment and discrimination. In the face of systemic injustice, Holyoke’s Irish would largely build the early labor movement in the city’s textile and paper mills.

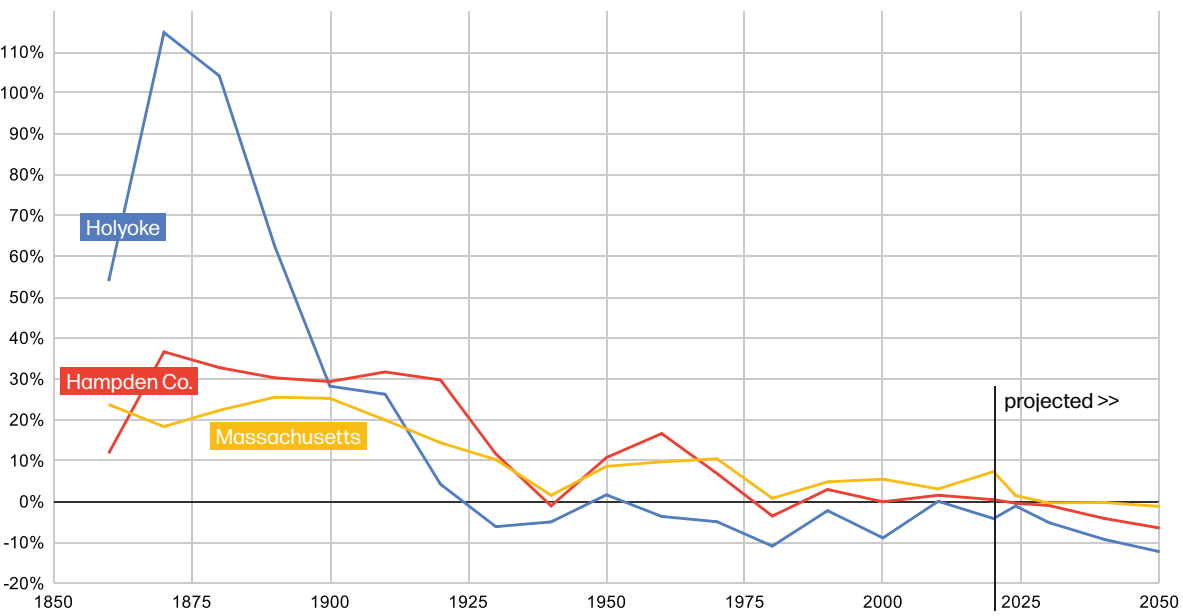
The pace of immigration from Europe slowed in the later half of the 18th and early 19th centuries. But in 1898, American victory in the Spanish-American War brought Puerto Rico under U.S. control. American colonial trade policy had a powerful negative impact on the island’s farmers, which in turn drove Americans from Puerto Rican to migrate to the Pioneer Valley, whose then-celebrated tobacco fields needed these skilled workers.

These migrants were enthusiastically encouraged by the region’s leaders. Typical were the words of Springfield Mayor William Hayes, welcoming the newcomers: “You will never again be subjects, and...it is my pleasure and my honor to extend to you the welcome of the city of Springfield and its people.”

The flow of American migrants from Puerto Rico increased with labor shortages. In the 1900s it was Puerto Rican hands that revived tobacco farming in the region. By 1960, Puerto Rican labor had moved from the agricultural sector into manufacturing, the service industry, and small businesses; members of the community excelled in local leadership.

In 1965, the United States passed the Hart-Celler Act. Hart-Celler ended a quota-based American immigration system that had favored Western European immigrants and discriminated against would-be immigrants from the Global South. The result was to open the country, and Holyoke, to immigrants from a far broader range of nations and cultures. While the Holyoke community continues to be predominantly Puerto Rican in heritage, the city’s composition is ever evolving and continuing to diversify.

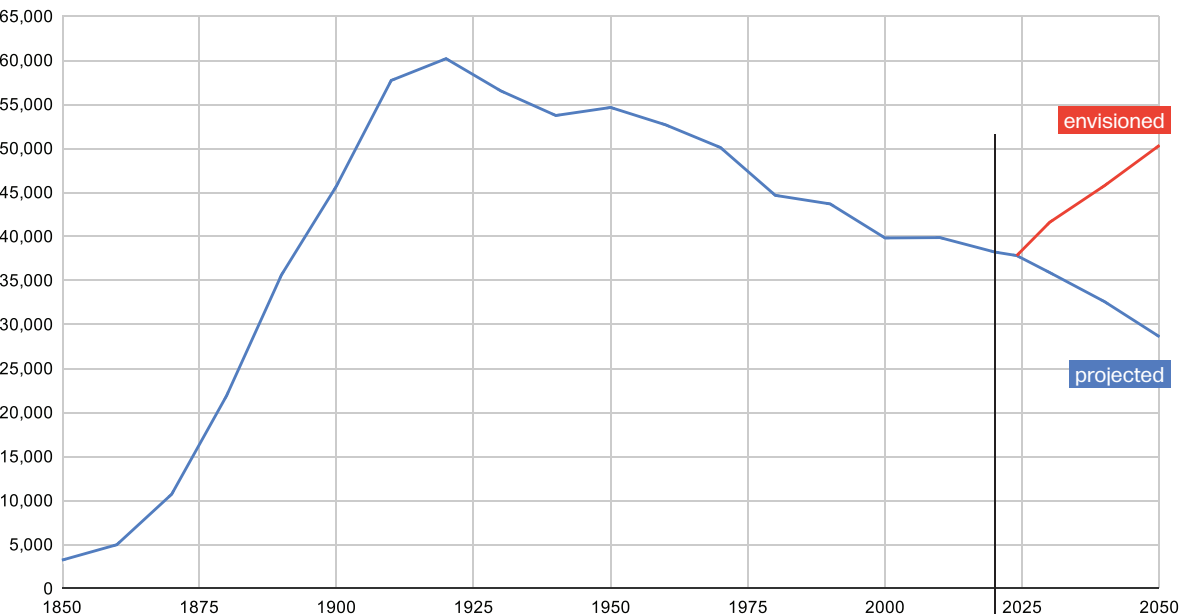
Population Percent Change: Holyoke, Hampden Co, Massachusetts 1850 - 2050



Comparative Growth Rate

Holyoke experienced explosive growth in its early years as an industrial boomtown, exceeding the growth of the county and the Commonwealth many times over. Growth in all three geographies has cooled off over the decades and is projected to become negative in the future. But, the chill has been felt more severely in Holyoke.

Holyoke Historic and Projected Population vs. Growth Goal



Sources: US Census Bureau Decennial Census and American Community Survey, UMass Donahue Institute UMDI-V2024 Population Projections

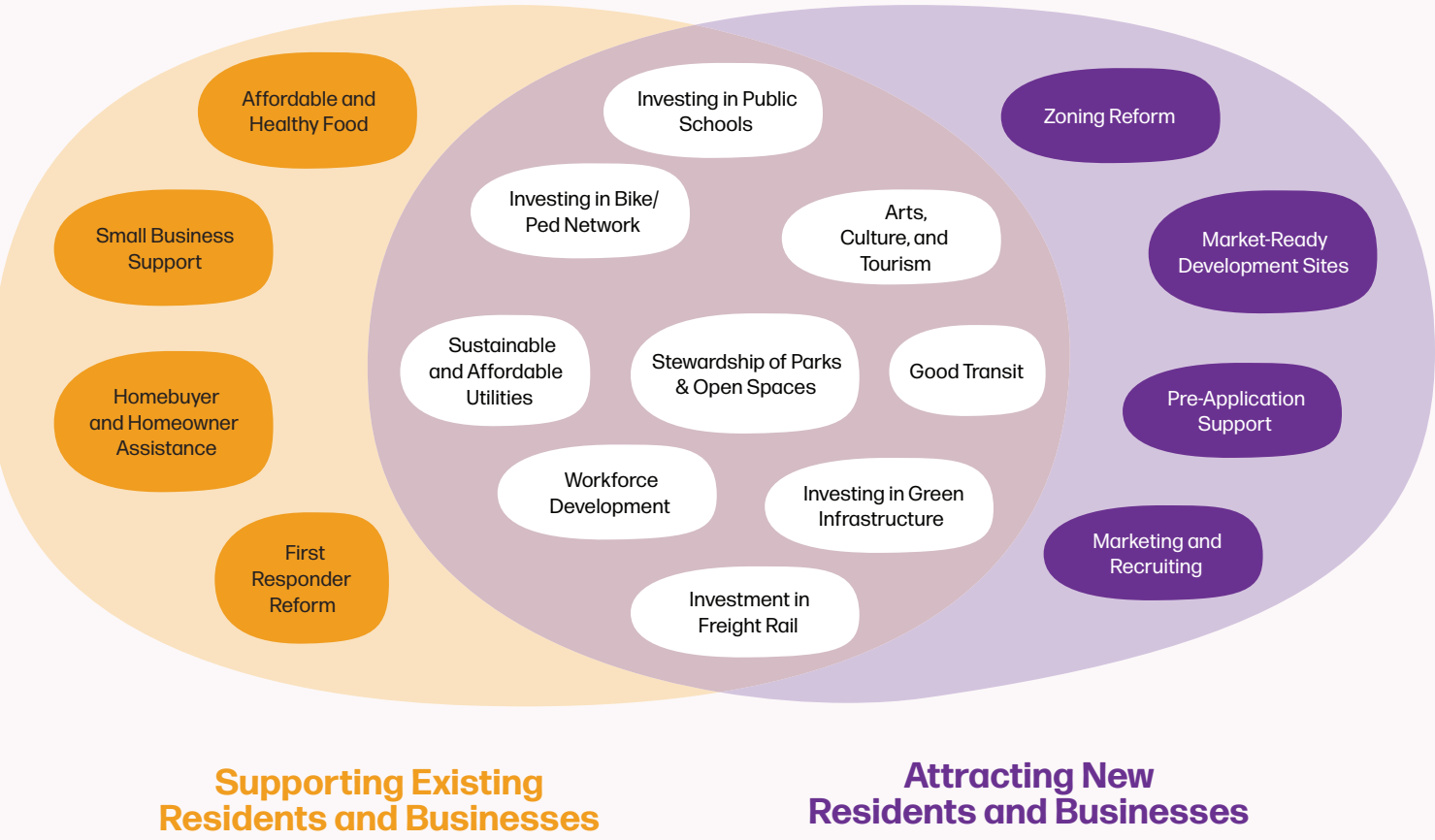
Fostering a Population Rebound

Following its Victorian Era industrial boom, Holyoke has experienced population decline for the past century, and the UMass Donahue Institute predicts this trend will continue. The Comprehensive Plan's strategies for economic development, housing, social services, and infrastructure aim to restore growth to the Paper City. Ten percent growth per decade would regrow the city to 50,000 by 2050.

Growing Back to 65,000 Holyokers

Holyoke's Comprehensive Plan is a roadmap for today - and for the next decades to come. The plan recognizes current population trends and challenges, as well as imagines policy and reinvestment strategies that can incentivize greater growth and attract people to Holyoke to live, work, and play. In 2025, Holyoke's population was recorded as 37,291 residents, well below its peak in the early twentieth century. **This plan balances that shift with an ambition to promote increased growth back to 65,000 people and reverse patterns of a shrinking population.**

The City of Holyoke has a legacy of diversity in its demographic composition. Despite being a relatively small city, reaching a peak estimated population of 65,286 in 1916, Holyoke had the 3rd highest foreign born population in the 1890 census, due to its culture for industrial laborers. In recent years the city's demographics have adapted to waves of migration and immigration. The plan embraces Holyoke's diversity as one of its greatest assets and opportunities for the future.



Building on Related Plans

This Comprehensive Plan weaves in a wide variety of planning efforts that have been developed in the years since the 1999 Master Plan. The City has led some of these projects, such as the 2024 Downtown Parking Study, while others have been conducted through partnerships with State and Federal agencies (e.g. the 2024 High and Maple Street Corridor Improvements Study), and still more have been led by community-based organizations (e.g. La Placita de Holyoke 2023).

Each of these looks at some particular aspect of the City in detail, and adds granularity to the overall vision and strategies set forth in the body of this Plan. They should be considered as part of it, and we incorporate them herewith.



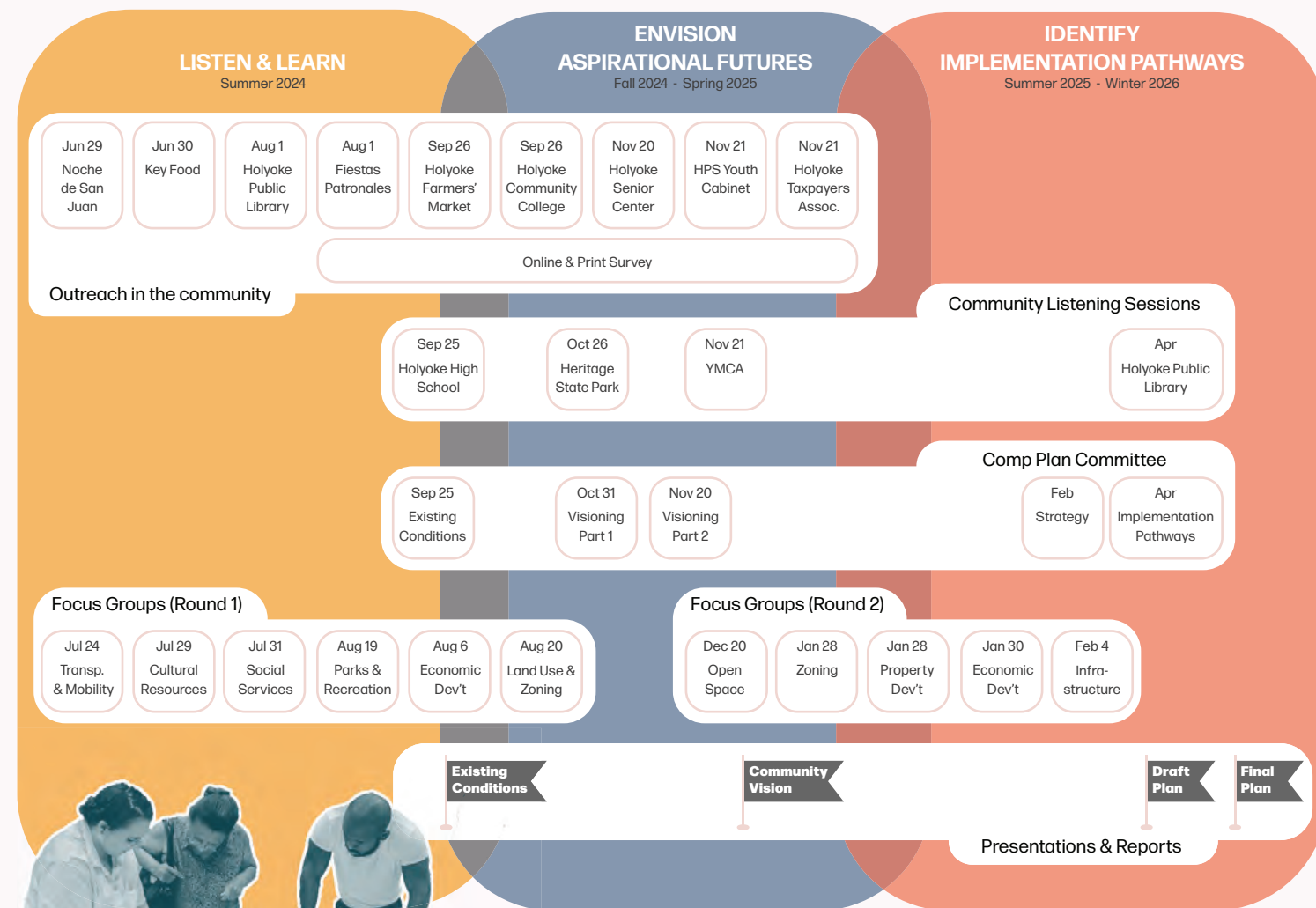
Community Resilience Building Workshop: Summary of Findings2018	Connecting the Secret Stream: An Action Plan to Expand the Green Infrastructure Network in the Day Brook Watershed2019	Urban Renewal Plan2020	Main Street – Springdale Corridor2021
Whiting Street Reservoir Committee Study Report2022	Holyoke Historic and Cultural Tourism Plan2022	Assessing the Field of Capital for Business in the Paper City2023	High and Maple Streets Corridor Improvements2024
Holyoke Downtown Parking Study2024	Accelerating Inclusive Growth in the Pioneer Valley2024	Connect Construct Create2016	La Placita de Holyoke2023

9
Pop-ups

11
Focus Groups

4
Community
Listening Sessions

1,000+
Community comments
received



500+
Holyokers Reached

Planning process

Holyoke's Comprehensive Plan was created over the course of approximately a year, with extensive engagement and direction from Holyoke residents. These consultations began in the Spring of 2024 and concluded in Summer 2025. The process followed three phases of plan development: 1.) Listen and Learn (engagement and analysis of current conditions and needs); 2.) Envision Aspirational Futures (creation of project themes, vision statement, and goals); and 3.) Identify Implementation Pathways (development of actionable recommendations, implementation strategies, and on-the-ground test cases).

Community Engagement

An effective plan can only be built from a solid understanding of the city as it exists. No one knows the city the way Holyoke's residents, business owners, and local organizations do. They are the co-creators of this plan: it could not have been built without their perspectives and insights.

To obtain those insights required deep consultation among many constituencies. In order to obtain community buy-in and keep engagement from underrepresented voices high, much of the public engagement process focused on visions of an optimistic future, highlighting community assets and emphasizing interactive elements. Particular attention was paid to connecting to and including communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), as well as reconnecting with previously engaged and committed entities. Strategies included the following elements:

Community Plan Committee

In consultation with the mayor's office and OPED, individuals with important roles in the city, and with deep knowledge of its culture and history, were identified and appointed to

a Community Plan Committee. This Committee was tasked with contributing its own knowledge of the city to help steer the project forward. The Committee met four times, at significant milestones in the planning process, to consult on its overall direction, to help identify and recruit additional community voices as needed, and to help craft strategies for implementation.

Interviews and Focus Groups

For a deeper look at key elements of how Holyoke currently functions, focus groups were held with city staff, experts in relevant topics, advocates, and partners. These eleven conversations provided deeper understanding of elements from zoning issues to the role of the arts and culture in Holyoke's life, from the city's history to questions of infrastructure, transportation, opportunities for economic development, and preservation of open space.

Community Participation

To ensure that the community was able to raise concerns and contribute ideas directly, and independently of structured prompting or direction from either officials or consultants, we held four Community Listening Sessions and nine pop-up meetings, distributed across the city. Approximately 500 members of the Holyoke community joined one or more of these sessions and helped to directly shape the plan in person. These sessions were held during the project visioning period and during early iterations of the draft plan.

The listening sessions were held in locations across the city, with particular attention to ensuring family- and youth-friendly venues: Holyoke High School, Heritage State Park, the YMCA, and the Holyoke Public Library.

Planning process (cont.)

The nine separate pop-up meetings were held at local community events across Holyoke. They provided less formal opportunities for community members to meet the planning team, talk about its goals, and to contribute their voices in a casual setting. In Holyoke's doing so, they provided a particular opportunity to engage new voices, and for the city's children and youth to take an active part in steering their future.

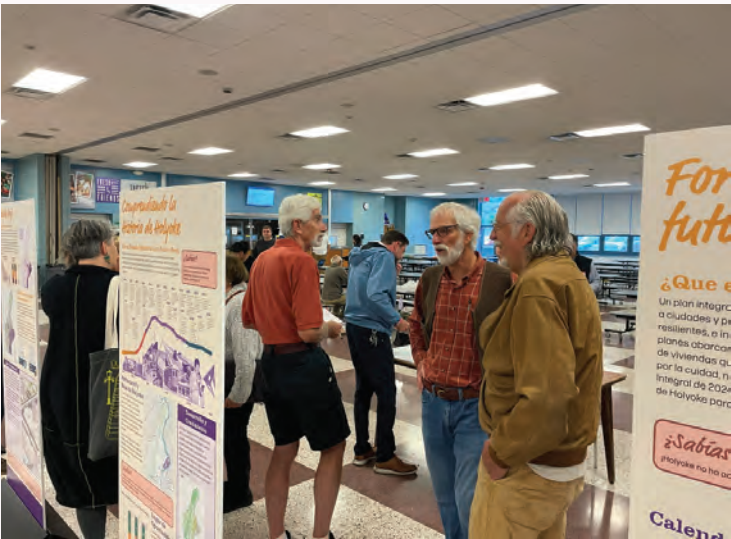
In these meetings, Holyoke residents and other interested parties were invited to share their “dream for Holyoke” and to map assets and challenges across the city.

Locations for pop-ups and events included:

- Noche de San Juan at Carlos Vega Park
- Key Food Marketplace
- Community Field Park
- Holyoke Public Library
- Fiestas Patronales at Heritage State Park
- Holyoke Farmers Market at the Holyoke Medical Center
- Holyoke Community College Student Center

Online Access and Engagement

In addition, an online survey (available in both English and Spanish) expanded opportunities to participate beyond in-person events. Respondents were able to weigh in on their own time via any digital device.



Community Listening Sessions

Four community sessions were held at Holyoke High School, Heritage State Park, the YMCA, and the Holyoke Public Library. Residents of all backgrounds weighed in with their aspirations for Holyoke's future.



Focus Groups & Comprehensive Plan Committee

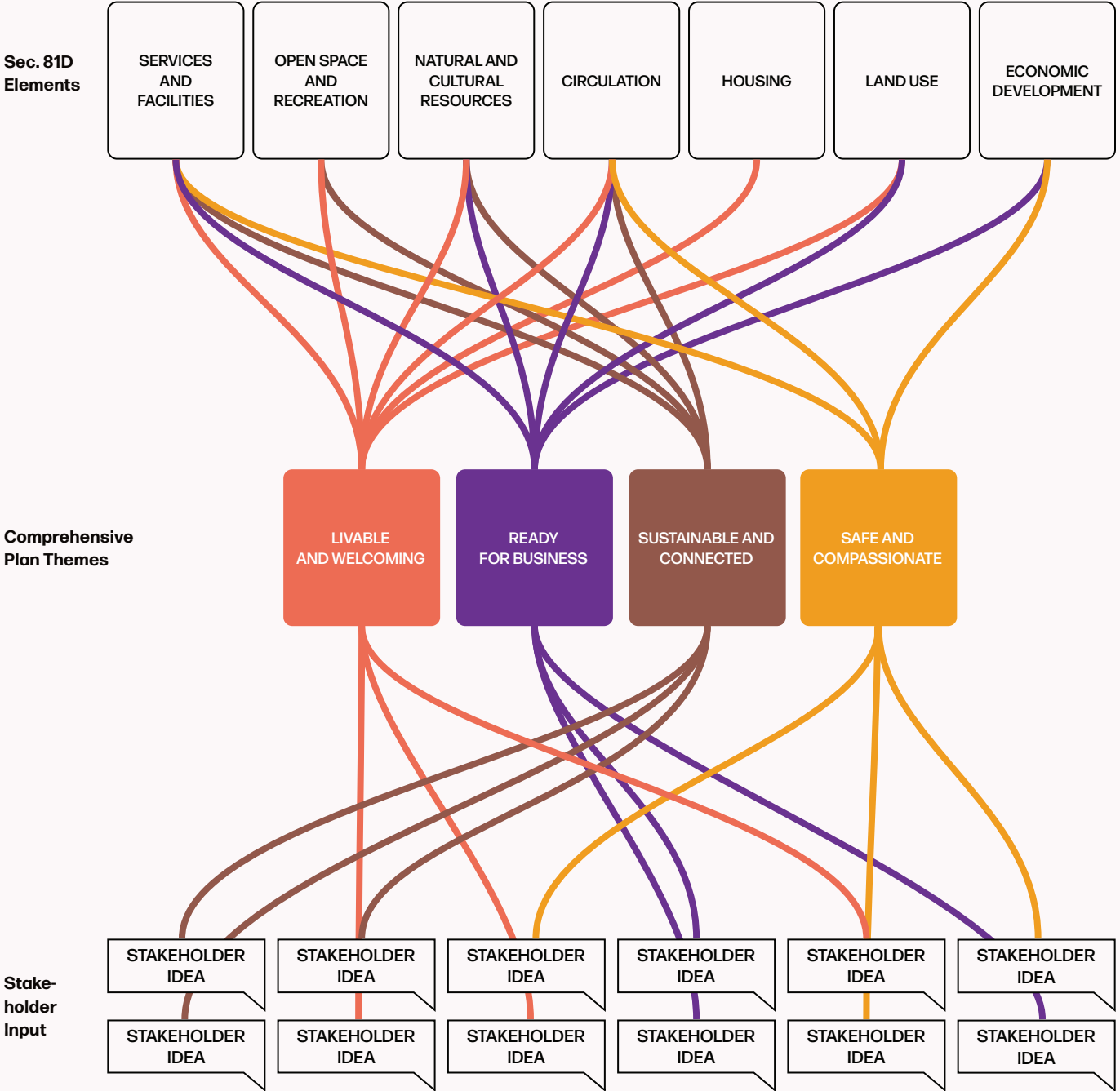
Eleven focus groups were held in two rounds through which organizational stakeholders were engaged in in-depth ideation sessions on specific topic areas. Also, a Comprehensive Plan Committee was formed to guide the development of the plan at key milestones along the way.



Pop-Ups

A Spanish-speaking engagement team popped up at nine locations around Holyoke. From Key Foods to Fiestas Patronales and many places in between, the team met residents where they already gathered, creating opportunities to discuss Holyoke's future in Spanish.

Cross-Reference of Input, Elements, and Themes



Planning Framework

Community-Driven Themes

A set of four fundamental themes emerged from this consultation process, together with the consultant team’s research and analysis, and the deep knowledge contributed by longtime City experts. This Comprehensive Plan is organized around these themes. They are both aspirational and achievable: they reflect the city’s expressed desires, and the path that it has already begun to take.

Holyoke is:

- 1. Livable and Welcoming
- 2. Ready for Business
- 3. Sustainable and Connected
- 4. Safe and Compassionate

The recommendations that follow are organized into chapters reflecting these themes. Together, they tie together the various functional areas of the city, elevating the values and ideas that community members hold dear.

For each theme, this plan provides a set of **goals** that reflect the community’s desired outcomes or aspirational futures for Holyoke within that theme. The goals are buttressed with **strategies** for translating the desired outcomes into approaches to realizing them. These strategies are broken down further into specific **actions**—policy amendments, capital projects, and programmatic improvements that are the first steps toward implementing the Comprehensive Plan.



Planning Framework (cont.)

The Comprehensive Plan Framework establishes a long-term vision for guiding growth and investment in Holyoke while preserving the character and strengths that define the community. Building on extensive public engagement and technical analysis, the framework outlines a coordinated strategy for land use, economic development, housing, mobility, and neighborhood revitalization.

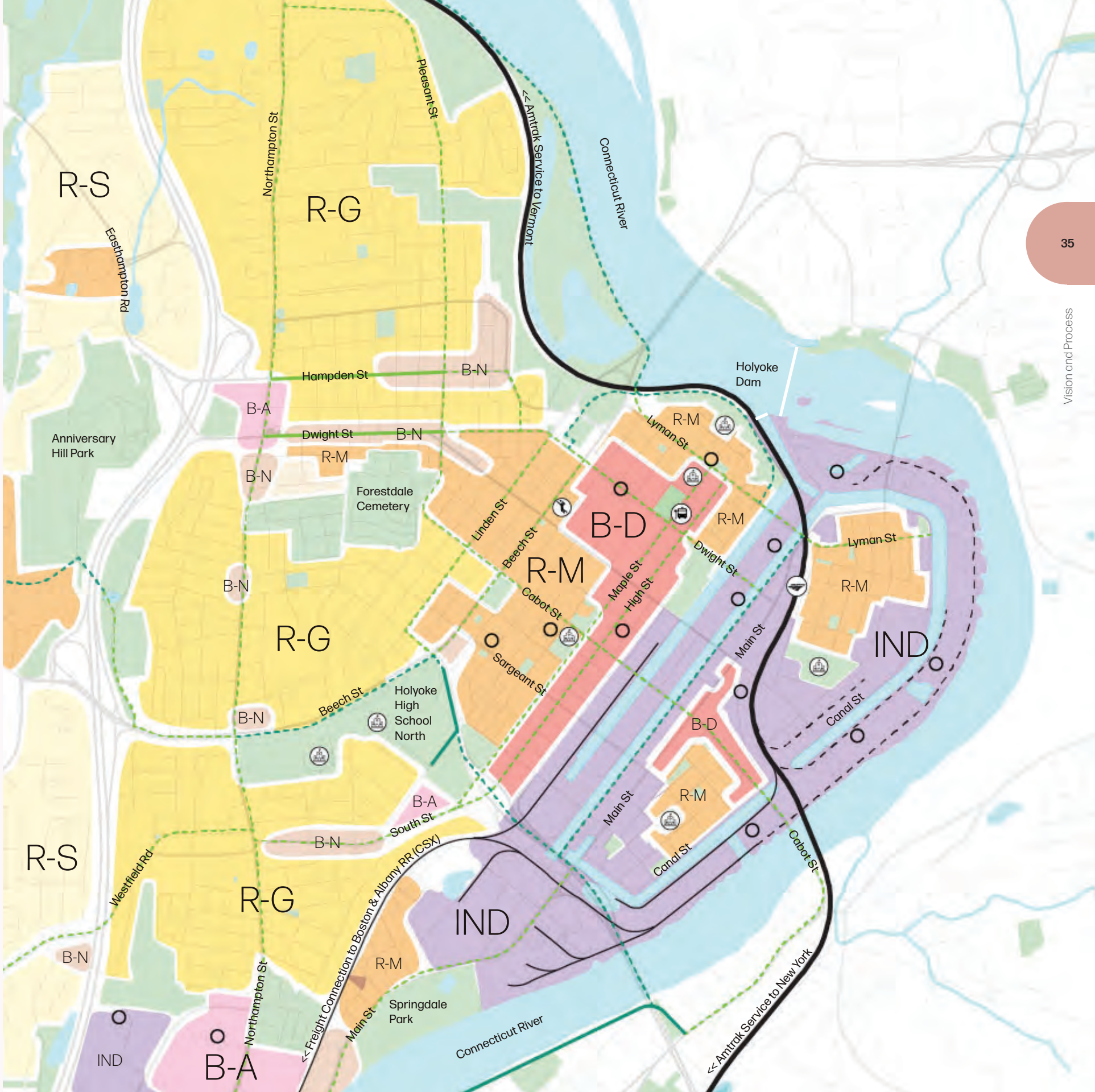
Central to the framework is a future land use strategy that balances preservation with thoughtful growth. Recommendations emphasize protecting Holyoke’s historic built fabric and established neighborhood patterns while accommodating gentle increases in density through context-sensitive design. The framework encourages housing and mixed-use development that complements the scale and character of surrounding areas, supports walkability, and expands housing choice for residents of varying incomes and household types.

The plan also identifies a series of opportunity sites positioned to attract new investment and job-creating development. These locations include underutilized commercial and industrial properties, strategic redevelopment areas, and sites with strong access to transportation and infrastructure. Recommendations focus on leveraging these assets to support business growth, strengthen the local economy, and expand employment opportunities for Holyoke residents.

To better connect people to jobs, services, schools, and recreation, the framework envisions a citywide active transportation network that prioritizes safety, accessibility, and convenience. Proposed improvements include expanded bicycle infrastructure, safer pedestrian crossings, traffic-calming measures, and enhanced transit connections designed to make walking, biking, and transit practical and attractive options for everyday travel throughout the city.

Legend

IND	Industrial Area		Holyoke Public School		Passenger Rail
B-D	Downtown Business Area		YMCA		Freight Rail (dashed line = inactive)
B-N	Neighborhood Business Area		Amtrak Station		On-Street Bike Lane (dashed line = proposed)
B-A	Arterial Business Area		Holyoke Transit Center		Off-Street Trail (dashed line = proposed)
R-M	Middle Density Residential Area		Development Opportunity Site		
R-G	Gentle Density Residential Area				
R-S	Suburban Residential Area				
Park/Civic Area	Park/Civic Area				



From Plan to Action

The strategies in the Holyoke Comprehensive Plan are intended to guide the decisions the city will be faced with in the future, around transportation issues, around supporting economic development, around how best to enhance neighborhoods, shape reinvestment in amenities like parks and trails, and how to manage emergent risks like climate change. It will also help to inform our conversations around all these issues as Holyoke faces its future together. For this is not a conversation that ends with this plan.

In the future, the Plan is meant to serve as a tool to align community input, partner efforts, and private development with the City’s goals. It will support coordination of capital projects, policies, and programs to ensure that the combined impact of future actions is greater than individual efforts.

In the immediate future the plan will be used to guide a major update to the Zoning Ordinance, a priority project for the City. Accordingly, the plan takes a close look at changes that are needed to align current land use with the zoning code, and to examine zoning changes that will support plan goals. These projected changes include consolidation and clarification of zoning districts, expansion of successful zoning changes adopted in the recent past, and exploration of the possibilities that could be created by changes to parking standards, design standards, and landscaping standards. The Comprehensive Plan does not directly change the Zoning Ordinance or allocate funding, but sets up those changes to occur through future processes, including ordinance revisions.



Attendees of an open house in Fall 2024 place pins on a map of Holyoke as part of an interactive feedback activity. Photo credit: Hive Public Space

Internal Actions



- Align Comp Plan with municipal priorities
- Motivation of staff and leadership
- Build buzz around the Comp Plan



LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

- Zoning ordinance amendments
- Design and historic guidelines
- Annual budget
- Utilize tax incentives



EXECUTIVE ACTIONS

- Capital improvement schedules
- Build and align staff capacity
- Interdepartmental coordination



DEPARTMENTAL ACTIONS

- Update programs and practices
- Developer pre-application consultation
- Targeted plans
- Prompt constituent response

External Actions



- Apply for State and Federal Grants
- Conduct fundraising campaigns



MARKETING

- Publicist to get favorable coverage
- Employer attraction
- Pitch Holyoke at industry events



Holyoke is...

Livable and Welcoming!

housing
for all

access to
healthy food

cared for
parks

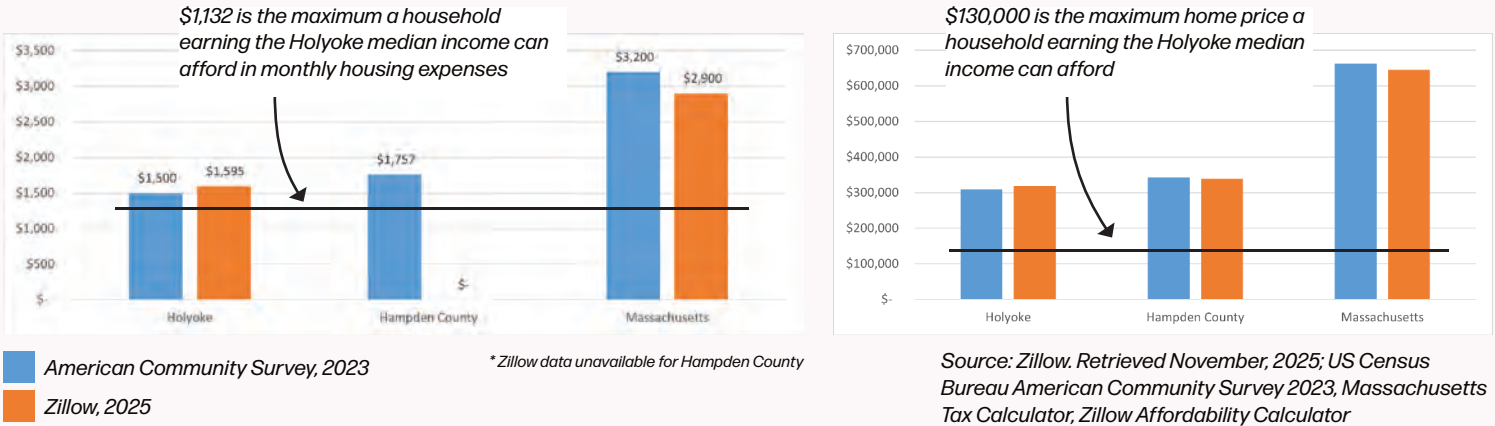
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Holyoke is...

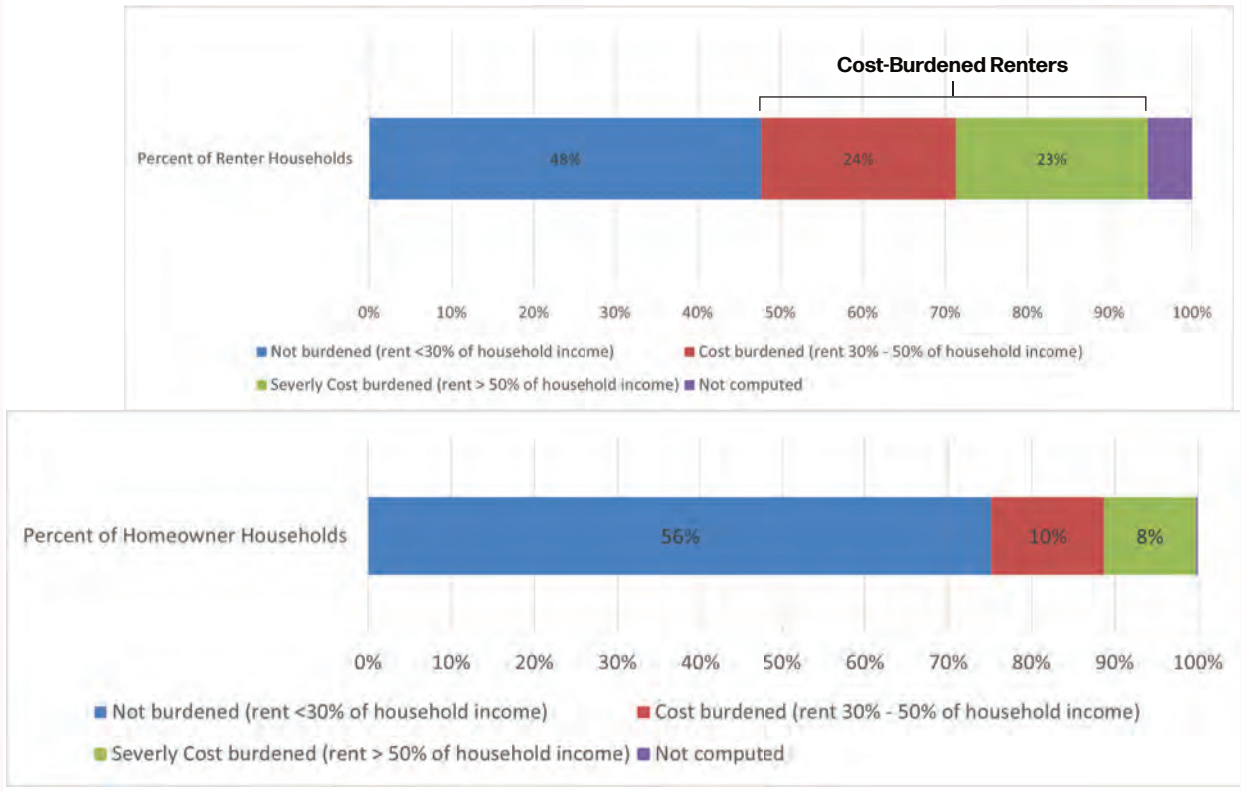
Livable and Welcoming

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Average Rent and Home Value



Cost-Burdened Households



Zillow data is based on current listings and includes asking rents for vacant units. Alternatively, US Census ACS data is based on survey responses from a set of households and thus is representative of all occupied units, including subsidized and rent-controlled housing units. In summary, Zillow data represent what someone looking to rent a unit in Holyoke might expect to pay based on apartments that are actively being marketed, while ACS data show the average gross rent paid by all households in Holyoke (whether or not on the market).

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2023 5-year estimates. Tables B25070 and B25091

Current conditions, trends, and opportunities

Housing affordability

Housing in Holyoke is relatively inexpensive as compared to housing in the region and the state. Average rent in Holyoke is \$1,500, compared to almost \$3,200 in the state. The average home value in Holyoke is \$309,805, less than half the state average of \$662,254.

This does not mean that it is affordable, either in the technical sense or as a practical matter. Homeownership is relatively low: only about 42 percent of households are owner occupied in the City, compared to about 62 percent in the county and state. A relatively small share of Holyoke's homeowners, 18%, are housing cost burdened, defined as spending more than 30% of their income on housing expenses. However, about half of the City's renters are cost-burdened, and 23% are severely cost-burdened, with 50% or more of their income going to housing expenses.

Housing stock

Holyoke's housing stock is older and denser than the state average, reflecting its heritage as a planned city with a distinctive urban character.

Buildings of five or more residential units contain about 40% of the city's housing units, as compared to about 20% statewide, while only about a third are single-family detached, compared to over 50% statewide. Holyoke has preserved a high percentage of its older housing: about 65 percent of homes in the City were built before 1960, compared to 49 percent statewide.

Holyoke is following a strategy of revitalizing its downtown and neighborhoods through the construction of new affordable and

market-rate housing, emphasizing the renovation of its historic mills and buildings wherever possible. New development, which follows the city's urban renewal plan, has occurred at Library Commons, the Farr Alpaca building, Open Square, Cubit, South Holyoke Homes, and along upper High and Maple Streets. Overall, 334 new units of housing are nearing completion in the downtown. To ensure Holyoke residents benefit from economic development over the long-term, the goal is to create an equal number of affordable and market-rate units, utilizing state programs.

Development Landscape

The City faces the same housing crisis that is apparent statewide. To meet its housing goals, Holyoke needs more housing, at every price point. Developers are drawn to Holyoke's historic mills, walkable downtown, low electric rates and enormous potential. Its low rents and the realities of high development costs everywhere present challenges for development or redevelopment of market-rate housing, however, particularly in its urban core. Subsidies and other creative strategies are essential to make such projects viable and affordable. Developers find willing partners in the Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED) to help guide them on how to leverage those subsidies to make good projects happen.

In addition to subsidies, the City has an opportunity to facilitate development by making certain zone changes to its Zoning Ordinance, where often-overlooked details of setbacks, maximum lot coverage, height, and similar seemingly minor requirements can have a significant impact on what can be built, where it can be built, and the cost of a given project. These details are discussed more fully in the following sections.

Goals for a Holyoke that is Livable and Welcoming



Goal 1.1
Holyoke is a sought-after and affordable place to live

Holyoke is a desirable and competitive choice for a broad range of households. A true city rather than a bedroom community, it attracts and keeps families with school-aged children, seniors who want to maintain independence, young creatives, and households in between. A wide range of housing types are available, and housing units are appropriately-sized, well-maintained, and within budget. In its neighborhoods daily goods and services are available close to home. It is safe and pleasant to walk throughout the city. Holyoke maintains its strong sense of itself as a community, then as now, and residents old and new feel a sense of social and cultural belonging.



Goal 1.2
Design standards that foster housing for all

Holyoke's zoning ordinance is a tool for encouraging the construction of housing types that make for healthy, social, and sustainable communities. Holyoke embraces the 2024 Affordable Homes Act. Tiny homes and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), are key tools in the city's strategy for providing high quality housing that is within reach for Holyokers.



Goal 1.3
Design standards match Holyoke's existing built fabric

Holyoke's zoning ordinance encourages infill development patterns that harmonize with existing neighborhoods. Recognizing the desirability and high functionality of its original urban character, it embraces and builds on the city's original late 1800s layout that helped to make Holyoke a sought-after city in its earlier years. Its walkable, mixed-use, and human-scale form is an increasingly valuable legacy, and its zoning ordinance encourages development consistent with it.



Goal 1.4
Preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic and obsolete buildings

Holyoke supports its distinctive built environment, and the people who live and work in it. It recognizes the importance of keeping residents in their homes. The city supports homeowners who are doing their best to keep up with maintenance. When the responsibility of maintaining a historic home comes with additional costs, financial support is available to do repairs the right way.

The City invests in their preservation with funding and tax tools. It works with developers who have the courage to take on the challenge of adaptive reuse of these structures to find creative, ad hoc solutions that are often necessary to preserve them, and with them, the City's distinctive streetscapes and character.



Goal 1.5
Affordable and healthy food in schools and neighborhoods

Climate pressures and supply chain disruptions underscore Holyoke's strength in advancing local food security. The city builds on the agricultural knowledge of its Puerto Rican community, supported by groups like Nuestras Raices, which expands access to fresh food while educating residents on farming, nutrition, and sustainability. Holyoke benefits from its position within a region capable of producing food locally and sustainably.

Holyoke Public Schools provides free, healthy meals to students, addressing food insecurity and offering a scalable platform to support families.

The City's healthy bodega initiative further improves neighborhood access to nutritious, affordable food options.



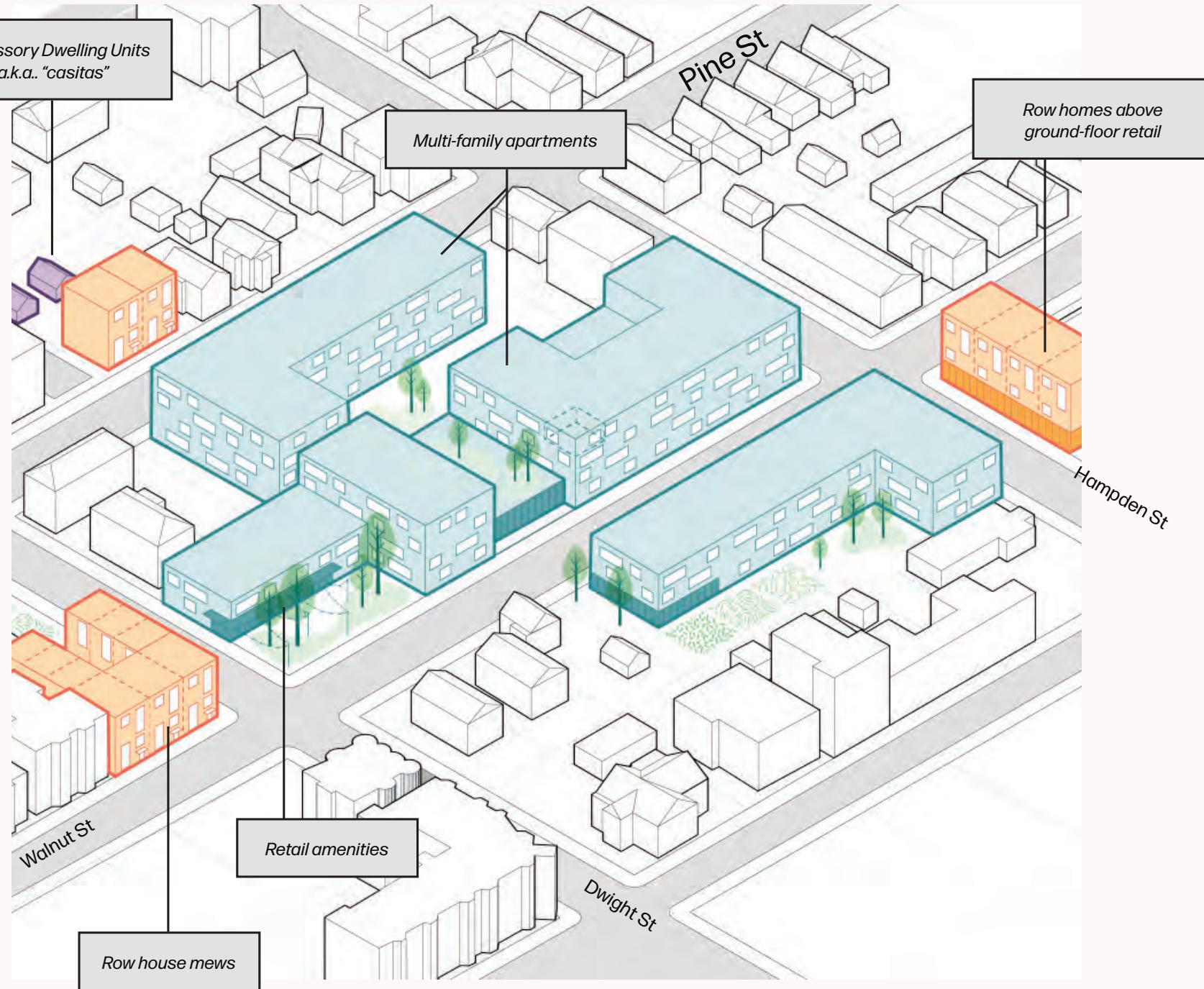
Goal 1.6
Stewardship of parks and open spaces

Parks and open spaces are essential to a thriving urban environment, providing "third spaces" for social, cultural, and recreational life. They offer safe places for youth, venues for events, and opportunities for community gardening. Environmental benefits include cooling urban heat islands, reducing flooding, and improving water quality, while features like canals enhance the city's historic character. These spaces also boost quality of life and attract visitors, supporting the local economy. Holyoke should maintain, rehabilitate, and expand its park network, and consider establishing a parks conservancy to leverage philanthropic funding and strengthen long-term investment.

SCENARIO

Dwight Street Redevelopment

Reforming dimensional and parking standards in the Zoning Ordinance to support mixed-used, urban development patterns, the City can unlock suppressed potential to construct new housing in central Holyoke.



GOAL 1.1

Holyoke is a sought-after and affordable place to live



Kendrick Place
Amherst, MA



STRATEGY 1.1.1:

Adjust parking and dimensional requirements to make it easier to build housing in central Holyoke

Holyoke's Downtown Residential (DR) zoning is designed to support a proven urban pattern in which housing and small-scale commercial uses coexist, reflecting the city's historic development and offering residents convenient access to amenities. This mixed-use environment has increased downtown's appeal and provides flexibility to help address housing shortages across income levels. Given its success, Holyoke should consider expanding the DR district to support continued revitalization.

At the same time, current zoning requirements—especially the mandate for two off-street parking spaces per dwelling unit—can significantly constrain development. When combined with setback standards, these requirements often make it difficult to build on smaller lots, particularly in the city's lower-income census tracts. Even where development is feasible, the cost of providing parking can limit the production of housing that is affordable to a broad range of residents.

To better enable housing development and increased density in appropriate areas, Holyoke should reform its dimensional and parking standards, as outlined in Sections 5.2 and 6.1 of the Zoning Ordinance. Reducing these regulatory barriers would support more inclusive, flexible, and economically viable residential development in downtown neighborhoods.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

Examples of this strategy in action are marked by this symbol.



First-time home buyers
Rafael Rivera and Sheila Velazquez purchased their first home in Holyoke with support from OneHolyoke Community Development Corporation and federal funding the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).



Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Home Rehab Program
The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) administers and manages housing rehabilitation programs for select communities in Hampden and Hampshire Counties. These programs assist low- to moderate-income homeowners by providing Deferred Payment Loans (DPLs) to correct code violations and improve living conditions.

GOAL 1.1

Holyoke is a sought-after and affordable place to live ^(CONTINUED)

STRATEGY 1.1.2:
Expand the reach of existing homebuyer assistance programs

Access to housing depends not only on supply, but on helping residents remain in their homes. Homeownership promotes stability, supports long-term financial planning, and enables wealth-building. Yet many first-time buyers—especially those with low to moderate incomes—face barriers such as limited savings for down payments and closing costs, even when they can afford monthly ownership expenses. Financial education and counseling can help buyers assess readiness, navigate the process, and reduce foreclosure risk.

Homebuyer assistance programs address these challenges by offering down payment grants, low-interest or deferred loans, and closing cost support, along with counseling. These tools help first-time buyers succeed, strengthening neighborhoods and expanding equitable access to housing.

Holyoke already benefits from programs like the Holyoke Housing Authority’s Borrower’s Assistance Program, which provides up to \$4,999, and MassHousing’s Mortgage program, which offers up to \$30,000 in deferred assistance. Expanding and investing in these programs would further enhance housing stability, equity, and community strength.

City Stewards: OCD, Tax Collector
External Partners: HHA, MassHousing, philanthropic foundations, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), local banks
Funding Sources: HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements

STRATEGY 1.1.3:
Expand the reach of existing home repair assistance programs

Maintaining the habitability of existing homes is essential to addressing Holyoke’s housing challenges. Much of the city’s older housing stock—often passed down through generations—functions as naturally occurring affordable housing, but can be difficult for homeowners, particularly those on fixed incomes, to maintain. Preserving these homes helps retain critical housing supply, supports residents in staying in place, and sustains neighborhood stability and appeal.

Homeowner financial assistance programs offer a practical solution. Typically structured as revolving loan funds, they provide low- or no-interest financing for essential repairs, energy efficiency upgrades, and improvements such as accessory dwelling units. As loans are repaid, funds are replenished and made available to future borrowers, extending long-term impact.

Programs like those administered by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission demonstrate this model, offering deferred payment loans for lead abatement, HVAC repairs, and other critical needs. While not currently available in Holyoke, they could be expanded or adapted locally. Investing in similar programs would be a cost-effective strategy to preserve housing, support residents, and strengthen communities.

City Stewards: OCD, Tax Collector
External Partners: PVPC, philanthropic foundations, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), local banks
Funding Sources: HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements

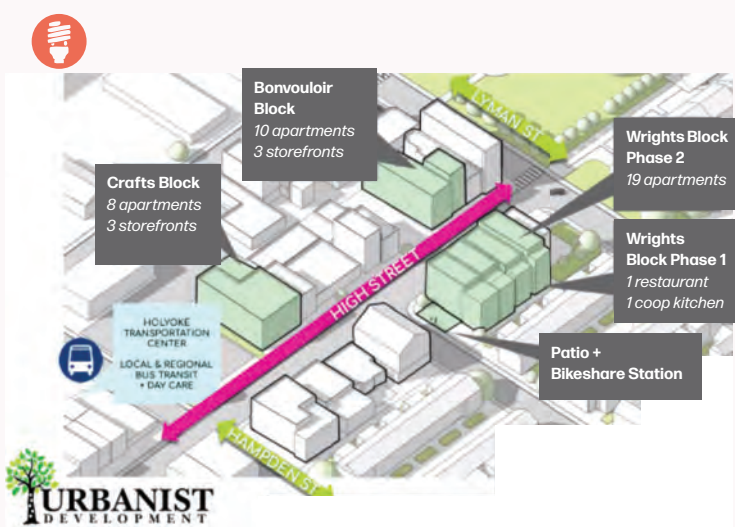
HOLYOKE CASE STUDY
Appleton Mill

In 2025, Winn Development recently-completed the first phase of a \$55.3 million redevelopment of the former Farr Alpaca Mills into 88 units of affordable housing for people 55 and older.



HOLYOKE CASE STUDY
High Street Apartments

Urbanist Development has secured \$2 million through the state's Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) for the construction of 19 new apartments on High Street. The new residential units will sit above an event ballroom, a brunch restaurant, and a shared community cooperative kitchen.



GOAL 1.1

Holyoke is a sought-after and affordable place to live (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY 1.1.4:
Update and Expand Holyoke's participation in the Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP)

Holyoke should expand its participation in the Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) to support market-rate housing and neighborhood revitalization. While affordable housing is essential, a balanced mix of housing types strengthens communities. Development—especially in dense areas or through rehabilitation—can be financially challenging.

HDIP addresses this by offering temporary property tax exemptions on the increased value from improvements, ranging from 10% to 100% for five to 20 years. Though complex to implement, it is a powerful incentive.

To expand participation, Holyoke must designate Housing Development Zones, prepare development plans, and secure state approval. Project-specific agreements and tax credit applications also require approval.

Holyoke's current HD Zone, established in 2012, covers a limited area. Expanding these zones would encourage reinvestment, increase housing supply, and support building preservation without permanently reducing tax revenue.

City Stewards: OPED, Tax Collector
External Partners: Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities
Funding Sources: local tax abatement





Chapter 40A Reform

On July 9, 2026, Governor Maura Healey signed into law sweeping amendments to the state's Zoning Act (M.G.L. Chp 40A Sec 10), which governs zoning variances. The reform replaces the state's old "substantial hardship" standard—which required applicants to prove a hardship tied to unique physical property conditions like soil, shape, or topography—with a new, more flexible "practical difficulty" standard.

In addition, zoning boards are now required to "weigh the benefits to the appellant or petitioner and to the public interest, including the interest in supporting the production of housing."

Beyond the major change to the variance standard, another revision to Sec 10 entitles applicants to request use variances — explicitly prohibited under many local zoning bylaws — if the use they are seeking is a residential one.

These reforms to the Zoning Act lower the hurdle to acquiring variances to local zoning for the purposes of developing housing.



Cozy Homes, Holyoke

Two low-carbon, energy-efficient tiny homes—donated by UMass DesignBuild and now permanently sited at 800 Dwight Street—give OneHolyoke a compact, sustainable model for affordable homeownership in Holyoke.

GOAL 1.2

Design standards that foster housing for all

STRATEGY 1.2.1:

Integrate Accessory Dwelling Units and tiny houses into the Zoning Ordinance to comply with or exceed the Massachusetts Affordable Communities Act

In 2024, Massachusetts passed the Affordable Communities Act, requiring that municipalities allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as of right in all zoning districts that permit residential uses.* The legislation is specific: it allows for one ADU per parcel, and requires inter alia that it contains no more than 900 square feet of dwelling space.

The Affordable Communities Act thus allows for a significant increase in housing density: any property owner in an affected zone who has sufficient space may construct one. But Holyoke may further expand housing opportunities by making it easier to cluster these tiny homes on larger parcels, or adjust setback and parking requirements to make it possible to site them on small and otherwise unbuildable parcels.

This form of housing is particularly desirable in certain neighborhoods: its form factor means that it can be added without disrupting the flow of low-density neighborhoods. OneHolyoke CDC and UMass DesignBuild have joined together to build three such houses that provide proof of concept: the "8th Sister" at 150 E Dwight St, and the "Hygge House" and "Paper House" at 800 Dwight St. These attractive homes now fill what were vacant spaces in Holyoke's streetscape.

The city can encourage further development along this model by adjusting its Zoning Ordinance to go further than the Affordable Communities Act does, and allow the construction of multiple small houses as of right in what are now low-density residential zones

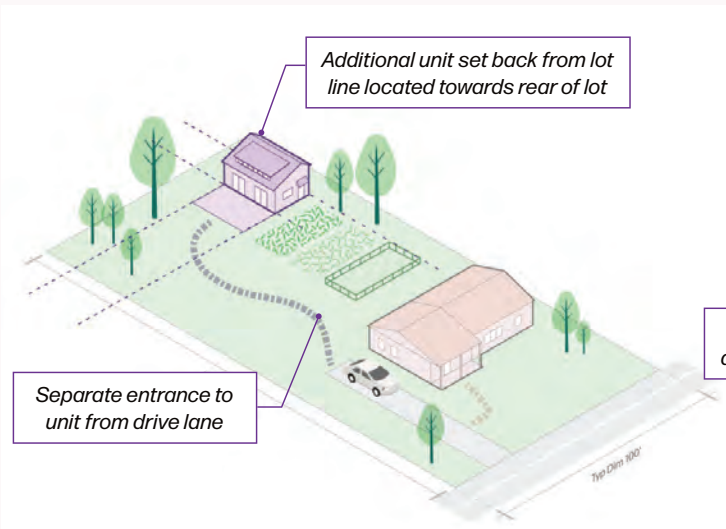
City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



Right: An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) in Holyoke's Oakdale neighborhood

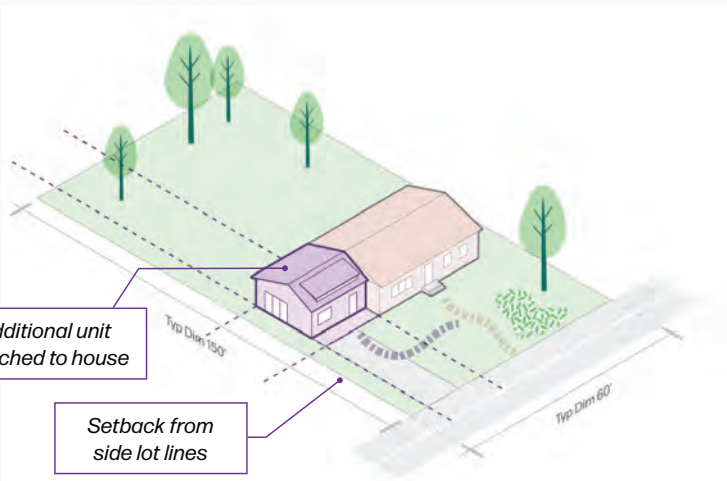
SCENARIO

Detached ADUs



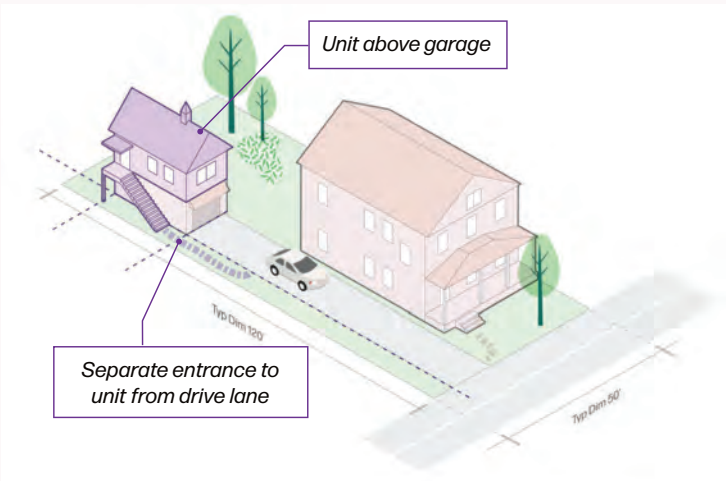
Typical zoning: Agriculture and single-family residence zones (RA)
Typical lot size: 200' x 100' / 20,000 Sq. Ft.

Attached ADUs



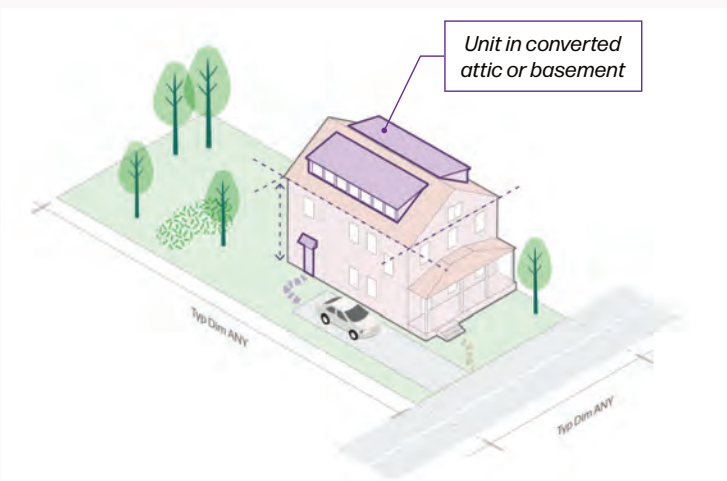
Typical zoning: Single-family residence zones (R-1, R-1A)
Typical lot size: 150' x 60' / 9,000 Sq. Ft.

Carriage House ADU

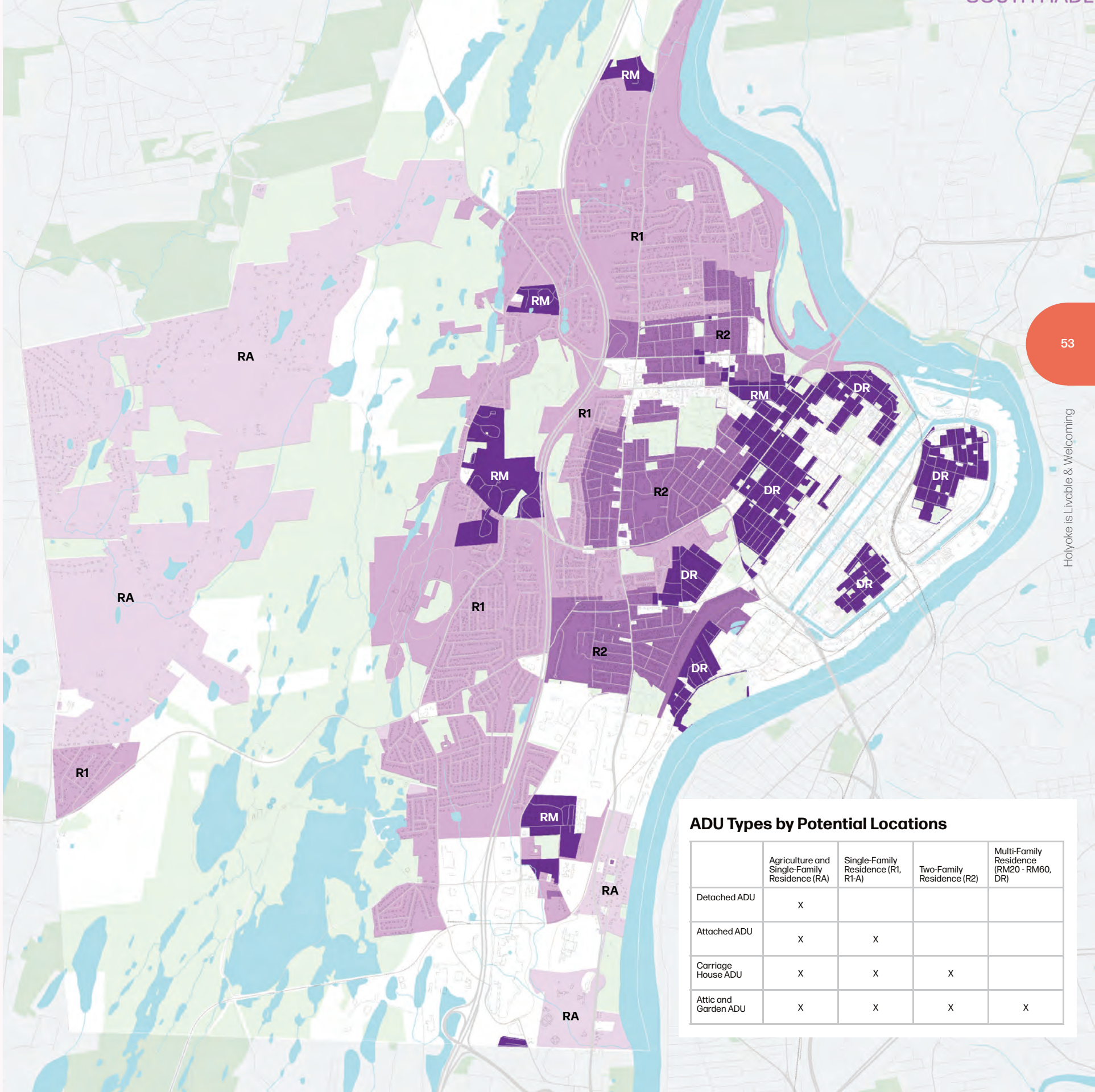


Typical zoning: Two-family residence zones (R-2)
Typical lot size: 120' x 50' / 6,000 Sq. Ft.

Attic and Garden ADU



Typical zoning: Multi-family residence zones (RM-20, RM-40, RM-60, DR)
Typical lot size: variable



ADU Types by Potential Locations

	Agriculture and Single-Family Residence (RA)	Single-Family Residence (R1, R1-A)	Two-Family Residence (R2)	Multi-Family Residence (RM20 - RM60, DR)
Detached ADU	X			
Attached ADU	X	X		
Carriage House ADU	X	X	X	
Attic and Garden ADU	X	X	X	X

GOAL 1.3

Design standards match Holyoke's existing built fabric

What might appear to be insignificant technical adjustments to Holyoke's zoning ordinance can have a very significant impact on development. The strategies in this section identify these desirable technical amendments and target them for action.

STRATEGY 1.3.1:

Align minimum lot size requirements with the sizes of existing parcels

Holyoke's historic urban fabric reflects development on small lots, with many downtown buildings occupying parcels under 5,000 square feet. While the Downtown Business (BC) district accommodates this pattern, other zoning districts now require much larger lot sizes—typically 6,000 to 10,000 square feet—rendering many older buildings nonconforming and making smaller parcels effectively unbuildable. This prevents new development that aligns with neighborhood scale and character.

Amending minimum lot size and setback requirements would unlock these constrained properties, enabling infill development in areas where infrastructure already exists. This approach supports housing and economic growth without requiring outward expansion—an important consideration given limited undeveloped land.

Smaller lot standards also encourage housing types suited to smaller households and aging residents. Aligning zoning with the city's existing built environment would preserve neighborhood character while removing unnecessary barriers to development and adaptive reuse.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



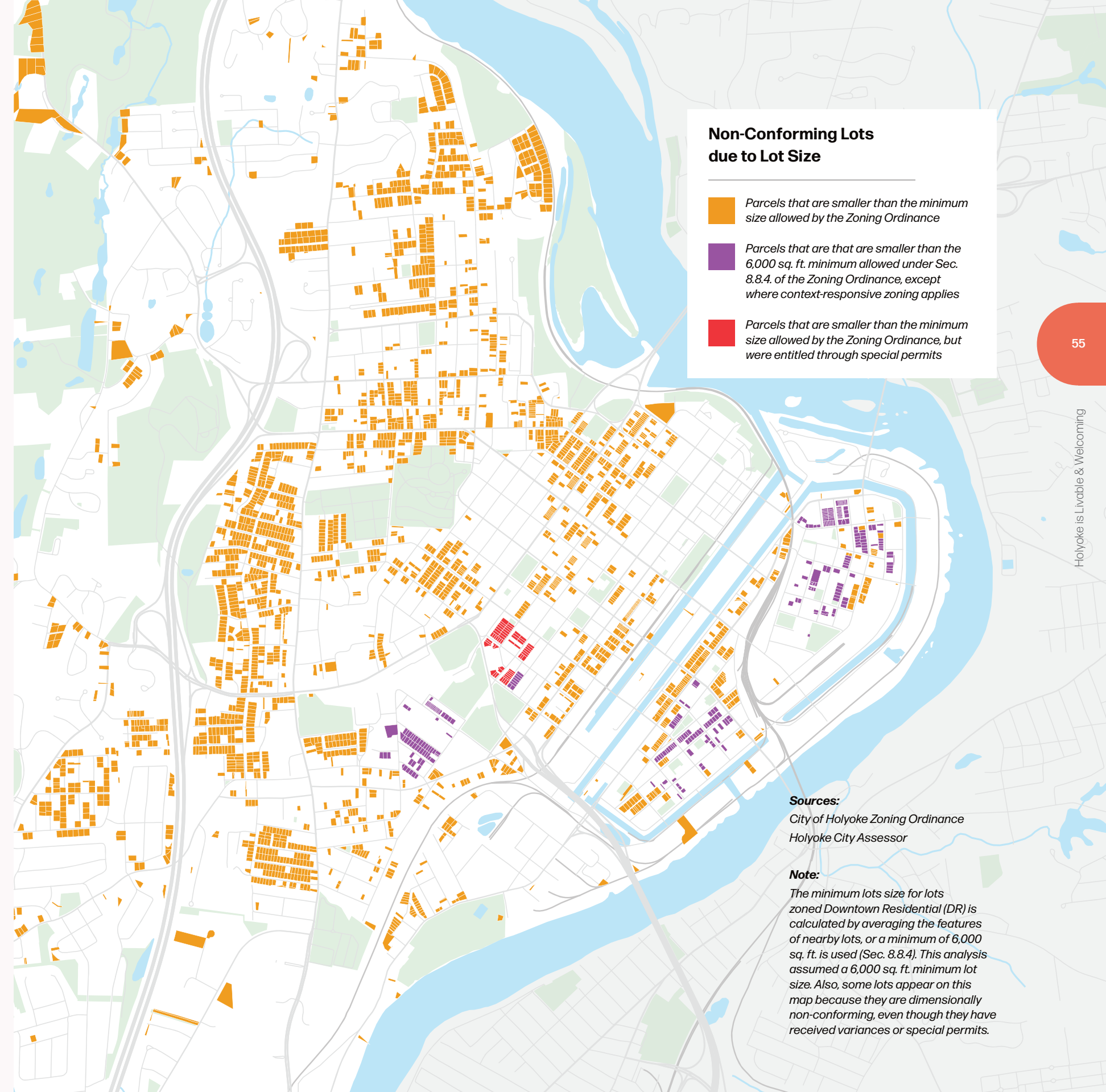
HOLYOKE CASE STUDY:

688 High Street

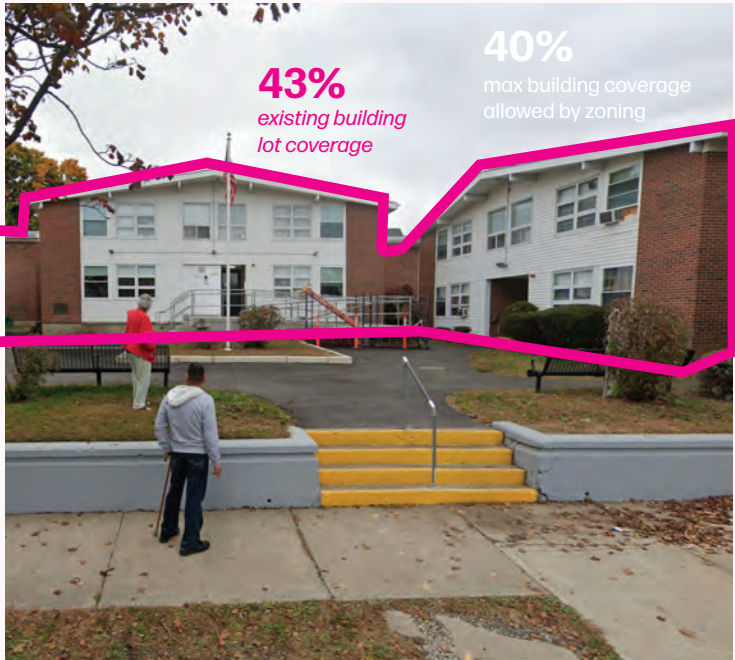
Location: Churchill

Year Built: 1890

Zoning: Business Highway



Design standards match Holyoke’s existing built fabric (CONTINUED)



HOLYOKE CASE STUDY:
121 Nonotuck Street
Location: The Highlands
Year Built: 1970
Zoning: Multifamily Residence - 40 units/acre (RM-40)
Special District: North Hampton St Overlay District

STRATEGY 1.3.2:
Increase allowable lot coverage in the urban core in selected areas where certain anomalies exist for historical reasons where parcel sizes are smaller than today’s average

The Zoning Ordinance’s current building lot coverage ratio requirements create a similar problem. Our current lot coverage rules can make it difficult to build or rehabilitate desirable housing in neighborhoods with smaller parcel areas, which might be large enough for home development if coverage standards were relaxed to match existing housing.

Making this adjustment would not disrupt neighborhoods; instead, it would allow for new development that matched the scale and character of surrounding homes. It would also remove regulatory barriers that may prevent reinvestment in older properties. By matching what’s already on the ground, Holyoke can promote both preservation and smart growth within well-served, walkable areas.

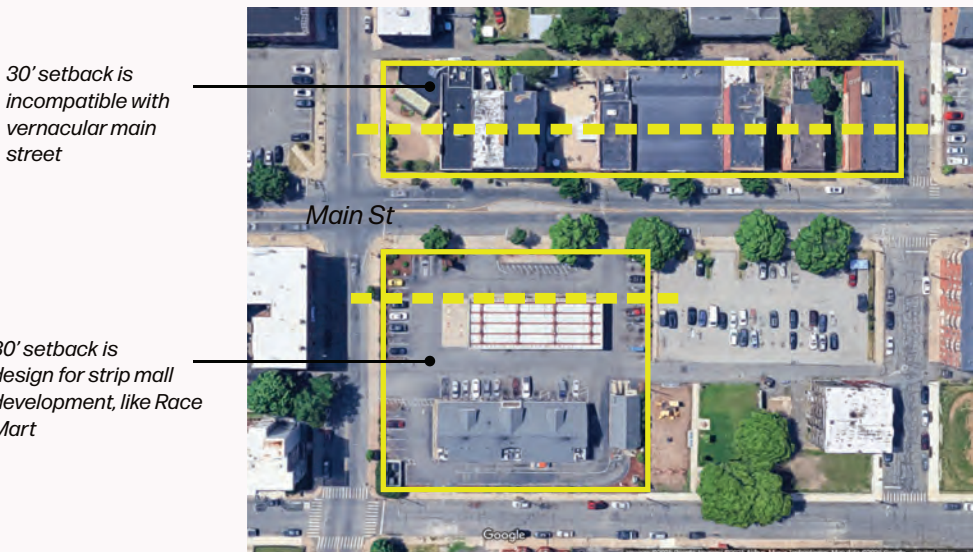
City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

STRATEGY 1.3.3:
Replace minimum setbacks with build-to lines that match abutting structures

Replacing minimum setbacks with build-to lines that match abutting structures helps maintain a consistent streetscape and enhances the visual cohesion of a neighborhood. This approach promotes walkability by keeping buildings close to the sidewalk, encouraging active frontages and pedestrian engagement. It also reduces ambiguity for builders and designers, offering clearer guidance that reflects the existing context. By prioritizing alignment, build-to lines support more predictable, harmonious development in both historic and evolving areas.

Setback reform can be accomplished by amending the dimensional standards of certain zoning districts or by rezoning parcels to existing zoning districts that feature build-to lines that match abutting structures, such as Downtown Business (BC).

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



Main Street was built with no setbacks to be pedestrian-oriented

30 feet
minimum setback required by zoning

0 feet
existing setback



HOLYOKE CASE STUDY:
Main Street
Location: South Holyoke
Year Built: 1900s
Zoning: Business Highway (BH)
Special District: None

Design standards match Holyoke’s existing built fabric (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY 1.3.4:
Reduce frontage requirements in residential zones, especially Two-family Residence (R2)

The same considerations above apply to the minimum frontage requirements in our ordinance. Holyoke was built out with narrow lots that have fostered compact, walkable neighborhoods and allowed for a broad diversity of housing types within neighborhoods, including smaller, more affordable homes. By reforming the zoning ordinance to align frontage requirements with the existing built fabric, the city can facilitate the reuse of historic or undersized parcels that are currently unbuildable by right. This change would work with the other strategies set forth in this section to encourage infill development, make constructive use of available land, and preserve neighborhood character while doing so

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



HOLYOKE CASE STUDY:
29 Brookline Ave
Location: Oakdale
Year Built: 1920
Zoning: Two-Family Residence (R-2)



HOLYOKE CASE STUDY:
95 Linden St
Location: Downtown
Year Built: 1930
Zoning: Multifamily Residence - 20 units/acre (RM-20)

STRATEGY 1.3.5:
Increase height limit in residential multifamily and mixed-use zones

Typical apartment buildings in Holyoke’s lower four census tracts are 4 to 6 stories tall. However, two of our three Residential Multifamily (RM) zones, Multi-Family - RM(20) and Multi-Family RM(40) limit structures to three stories, unless a special permit is granted by City Council. The same is true of the Multifamily Residential and Professional Office (RO) zone.

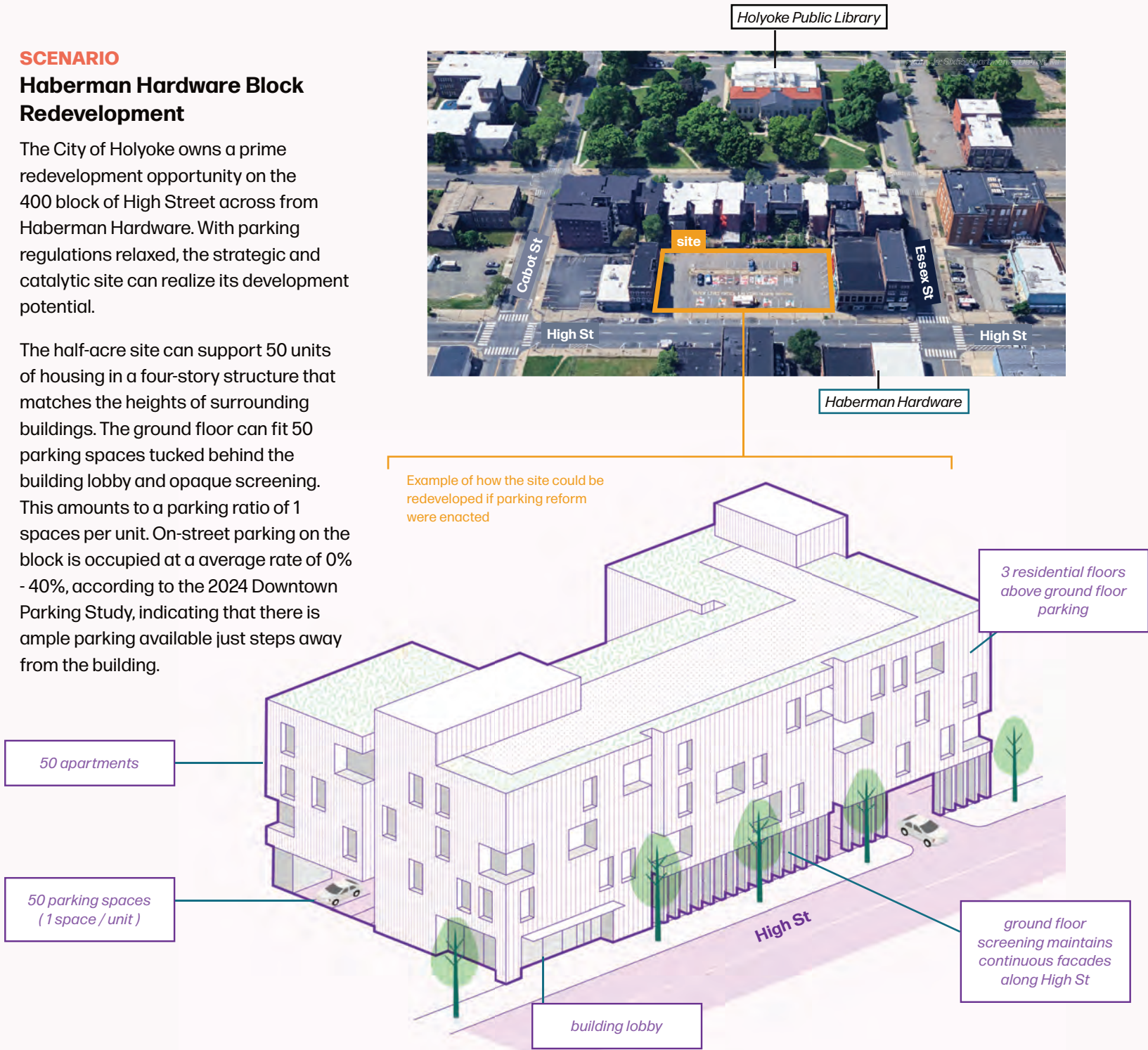
In some instances, this requirement means that new buildings must be shorter than what is already there. The discrepancy thus makes no sense in terms of preserving neighborhood character. Permitting higher structures as-of-right, instead of through discretionary special permitting processes, makes it easier for developers to finance construction, since more units allow for a larger potential cash flow once the building is completed. This technical change will increase the marketability of properties within the affected zones, and encourage desirable residential development.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

SCENARIO
Haberman Hardware Block Redevelopment

The City of Holyoke owns a prime redevelopment opportunity on the 400 block of High Street across from Haberman Hardware. With parking regulations relaxed, the strategic and catalytic site can realize its development potential.

The half-acre site can support 50 units of housing in a four-story structure that matches the heights of surrounding buildings. The ground floor can fit 50 parking spaces tucked behind the building lobby and opaque screening. This amounts to a parking ratio of 1 spaces per unit. On-street parking on the block is occupied at a average rate of 0% - 40%, according to the 2024 Downtown Parking Study, indicating that there is ample parking available just steps away from the building.



GOAL 1.3

Design standards match Holyoke’s existing built fabric (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY 1.3.6:
Relax parking regulations

The full benefits of the changes discussed in previous sections can only be realized if Holyoke accompanies them with reductions in its minimum off-street parking requirements for new construction.

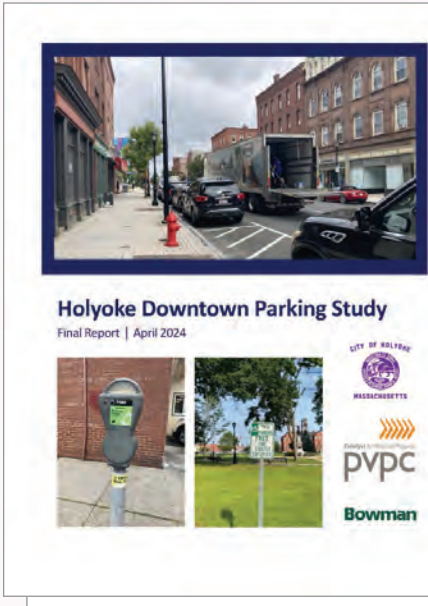
This is not a new insight, and it is fully supported by pre-existing research. Action 2.1 of the 2024 Downtown Parking Study recommends that the city not only amend the zoning ordinance to reduce or eliminate parking minimums, but consider implementing parking maximums.

Current zoning requires a baseline of two spaces per dwelling unit on residential properties, and one space for every 300 square feet on commercial properties. This is excessive for neighborhoods characterized by small lots, where the city seeks to enhance its walkable urban character, and it creates significant obstacles to development. The city’s typical lot size is too small to accommodate the parking required by the zoning ordinance, requiring developers or redevelopers to either acquire auxiliary lots and then pave them over for parking, incurring additional expense while making those lots unavailable for higher-valued uses, or else to obtain a discretionary special permit to reduce parking requirements. Moreover, the additional expense must be passed along to residential and commercial property owners. Easing these requirements would create flexibility for property owners, developers and city planners, reducing expenses and risk, and allowing market demand and site capacity to inform the amount of parking that is realistically required or desirable for a project.

Experience elsewhere offers further evidence that reducing parking requirements in urban environments promote development without harming neighborhood livability or commercial success. Cities including Hartford, CT, Bridgeport,

CT, Hudson, NY, and Central Falls, RI have successfully reduced or eliminated parking minimums in recent years, to considerable positive effect. Making this change would work in synergy with changes in our ordinance’s dimensional requirements to unlock substantial development potential. There is no reason for Holyoke to further delay exploring this concept.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



Holyoke Downtown Parking Study
This study evaluated existing parking supply, demand, and management practices within the downtown core. It is a valuable resource for guiding policy, operations, and future investments that support accessibility, economic activity, and long-term district health.

GOAL 1.4

Preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic and obsolete buildings

Strategies 1.4.1: Establish a local tax stabilization program for commercial redevelopment of obsolete buildings

Rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of older buildings provides a clear benefit to the city, and many developers are eager to bring beautiful old buildings back to life. But doing so can be prohibitively expensive. Tax stabilization is a strategy to help make rehabilitation economically feasible.

Tax stabilization targets the tax burden that results when rehabilitation raises a building's assessed value and thus results in a sudden, often substantial, hike in property taxes. It works via an agreement between the city and a developer to reduce property taxes for a set period of time. Instead of paying taxes on the full value of the improved property immediately, the developer pays taxes in the first year based on only a part of the increase in value. The percentage increases over a set period of time.

This tax structure lowers the immediate cost of the project, and reduces financial risk to the developer. This lowers the financial risk of the project, making it more likely to succeed;

this in turn makes it easier for the developer to obtain financing for the project. In return, Holyoke benefits from new investment, job creation, and long-term tax revenue growth once the stabilization period ends. Where the program is well designed, it costs the City little or nothing: forgoing some tax revenue in the early years may be what makes it possible for the redevelopment to happen at all.

Although tax stabilization is available for residential development through the Commonwealth's Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP), no such resource exists for commercial development. By offering tax stabilization for the commercial redevelopment of obsolete buildings, Holyoke can breathe new life into more of its historic buildings and spare as many as possible from demolition.

City Stewards: OPED, Tax Collector, Holyoke Historical Commission
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: local tax abatement

Top Opposite: Providence Revolving Fund
This Providence, Rhode Island program offers home repair financial and technical assistance to seniors, historic preservation financing, and small business loans.

Bottom Opposite: Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act
OPRA provides property tax exemptions for commercial and mixed-use buildings that are undergoing redevelopment in designated disadvantaged areas.

Strategies 1.4.2: Expand the reach of existing home repair assistance programs

Holyoke has long recognized the value of offering support to owners of our historic houses. These houses make an essential contribution to the character and beauty of our old neighborhoods. But owners may find it financially burdensome to maintain these houses, particularly where they have remained within a family for generations. The Professional Office Overlay District (POOD) found on Northampton Street represents one attempt to help preserve and maintain these houses. It has been successful as far as it goes, but Holyoke would benefit from further efforts.

Earlier in this chapter, this Plan Update recommends establishing a homeowner financial assistance program to support affordable housing. The same program can also help owner-occupants of historic houses maintain their homes in line with preservation standards, which often require specific materials and techniques that can be costly. Grants, low-interest loans, or tax credits can offset expenses for approved repairs, such as restoring original windows, roofing, or masonry. This support ensures that historic character is preserved while reducing the financial burden on property owners, especially those with limited incomes. By enabling proper upkeep, these programs protect neighborhood integrity, prevent deterioration, and support long-term property values, contributing to the cultural and economic vitality of Holyoke neighborhoods.

City Stewards: OPED, OCD, Tax Collector, Holyoke Historical Commission
External Partners: PVPC, philanthropic foundations, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), local banks
Funding Sources: HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements



Providence Revolving Fund
Providence, RI



Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act
State of Michigan

Affordable and healthy food in schools and neighborhoods

STRATEGIES 1.5.1:
Launch a Healthy Bodega Initiative

In a number of Holyoke’s neighborhoods, day-to-day grocery shopping often relies on small neighborhood stores that can be easily accessed on foot. These stores make up an essential part of the urban fabric. Because of issues with market structure and wholesale distribution, they often struggle to maintain an inventory that reliably includes fresh fruit, vegetables, and other perishable and/or low-profit-margin items.

A so-called Healthy Bodega Initiative (HBI) can help improve access to a broad range of healthy and desirable food options within communities that follow this pattern. A HBI is a community-based program that partners with these small stores, providing owners with support that can range from provision of refrigeration equipment to help with marketing materials to guidance on sourcing desirable new inventory.

HBIs often involve collaboration between public health agencies, community organizations, and local governments. They can also include educational components like cooking demonstrations, signage, or nutrition workshops to encourage healthier choices among customers.

These initiatives have been successful in helping to address food insecurity, in reducing diet-related health issues, and in promoting equity in food access, without intrusive or disruptive transformations of neighborhood shopping and street use patterns.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), Holyoke Food Policy Council (HFPC)
External Partners: food-oriented CBOs like Nuestras Raices, Chamber of Commerce, HCC Culinary Institute
Funding Sources: philanthropic grants, in-kind partnerships

STRATEGIES 1.5.2:
Partner with Holyoke Public Schools and its cafeteria contractor to provide healthy and nutritious meals to youth

Food insecurity remains a significant challenge in Holyoke, and the Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) meal program is a critical tool in addressing it. Nutrition is closely tied to academic success, making high-quality school meals essential to both student well-being and educational outcomes.

HPS currently contracts with Sodexo, but meal quality could be strengthened through a comprehensive nutritional audit. This should include reviewing menus, ingredients, portion sizes, and preparation methods, while assessing key metrics such as calories, sodium, sugar, and fiber against national guidelines. Input from students, families, and staff can help gauge satisfaction and identify preferences.

The audit should also examine food sourcing and kitchen capacity. Based on findings, improvements could include expanding scratch cooking, increasing fresh and locally sourced foods, reducing processed items, limiting exposure to harmful substances like PFAS, and incorporating culturally relevant meals.

Partnerships with nutrition experts and community organizations can help implement changes that balance quality, cost, and student engagement.

City Stewards: Holyoke Food Policy Council (HFPC), OPED, HPS
External Partners: Sodexo, philanthropic foundation, food-oriented CBOs like Nuestras Raices, HCC Culinary Institute
Funding Sources: philanthropic grants, in-kind partnerships



Nuestras Raíces
Nuestras Raíces is a grassroots urban agriculture organization in Holyoke, MA, focused on creating healthy environments, celebrating “agri-culture,” and advancing a just and sustainable future. They do this by engaging in community gardening, urban farming, and related initiatives that promote food justice and community development.

Stewardship of parks and open spaces

STRATEGIES 1.6.1:

Coordinate Holyoke’s Comprehensive Plan and its Open Space and Recreation Plan

In 2026, the City released its 10-year Open Space and Recreation Plan for guiding the system over the next decade. It will provide key support to this Comprehensive Plan, and these plans should be read in conjunction with each other. They are intended to support each other, and should be implemented accordingly.

City Stewards: Parks and Recreation, Dept. of Conservation & Sustainability, DPW
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

STRATEGIES 1.6.2:

Improve internal coordination and focus on parks maintenance

Strained resources have meant that Holyoke’s parks have suffered from lack of maintenance over the years. To ensure that all parks are safe, clean, and welcoming for everyone, the Department of Public Works and Park and Recreation will take measures to strengthen internal coordination in order to streamline maintenance efforts and respond more efficiently to community needs. These efforts are already underway.

The City will also make it a priority to ensure that maintenance efforts and resources are distributed equitably, with priority in the immediate future going to parks in underserved neighborhoods. This is a necessary measure to promote fairness and access for all residents.

City Stewards: Parks and Recreation, DPW
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: Gateway City Parks Program

STRATEGIES 1.6.3:

Lower barriers of access to Holyoke’s open space and recreation offerings

Holyoke is fortunate in its parks, open space, and recreational offerings, which range from neighborhood parks with green space and ball courts to pools, a skate park, Community Field and Anniversary Field, and walking or running trails around two reservoirs. Its bounds include state-owned resources such as Mt. Tom State Reservation. Thus, its residents have a variety of choices for outdoor activities, from watching raptors at Mt. Tom to fishing for shad in the Connecticut River to the new CPA-funded playground at Kennedy Park.

Barriers remain to making these resources fully available to all Holyoke’s residents. Many are unaware of what programming is available, and where to find it in Holyoke’s city-wide network of parks and open space. Moreover, transportation to and from these spaces is a barrier for many. Holyoke will look for opportunities to break down these barriers and ensure that residents can take full advantage of Holyoke’s green spaces. Possibilities include targeted efforts to inform residents of events and programming within its parks, and about its network of recreational spaces. Where there is financial assistance available for recreational activities, the city will work to ensure broad awareness of those opportunities, along with any help that people may need to take advantage of them.

Improving access to our parks and open spaces is an important part of this work. The City intends to explore ways to improve parking and pedestrian conditions around its parks. Many of its parks are in dense urban areas not originally

designed for car-dependent transportation patterns. In these areas parking is limited, and may impact access during times of high demand. Improvements in road conditions and traffic patterns and speed can also be designed and made to make access both more attractive and safer for those accessing these spaces by foot or bicycle.

City Stewards: Parks and Recreation, OCD, Conservation & Sustainability
External Partners: Recreational program providers
Funding Sources: Gateway City Parks Program



STRATEGIES 1.6.4:

Connect Holyoke to its waterways, such as with a canal- or riverfront park or walkway

Holyoke’s waterways present a significant placemaking opportunity. To take advantage of them, Holyoke will design and construct more ways people can access and enjoy its canals and riverfront. This process is already underway in some parts of downtown. The existing Canal Walk is a beginning; much more can be done, especially as the area attracts more residents and small businesses. Benches, plantings, and water features can all contribute to the project. The canal systems in Lowell and Providence, and parks like NY’s High Line and Atlanta’s Beltline provide models of how once-blighted or abandoned old urban spaces can be assets driving both quality of life and urban growth.

Holyoke is a riverfront community, but its system of flood walls and other barriers limit access to the Connecticut River through most of downtown. Further study is needed to identify ways the city can create more immediate access to the riverfront, which would be a significant amenity for the city.

City Stewards: Parks and Recreation, DPW, Conservation & Sustainability
External Partners: Holyoke Gas & Electric
Funding Sources: Gateway City Parks Program, PARC Program

Ashley Reservoir, Holyoke MA

As a recreational amenity, the Ashley Reservoir provides accessible open space with scenic water views, supporting passive recreation, physical activity, and overall community well-being.

Holyoke is...

Ready for Business!

support for entrepreneurs and startups

buildings and sites ready for development

connected by highways & rail

inexpensive & abundant renewable utilities

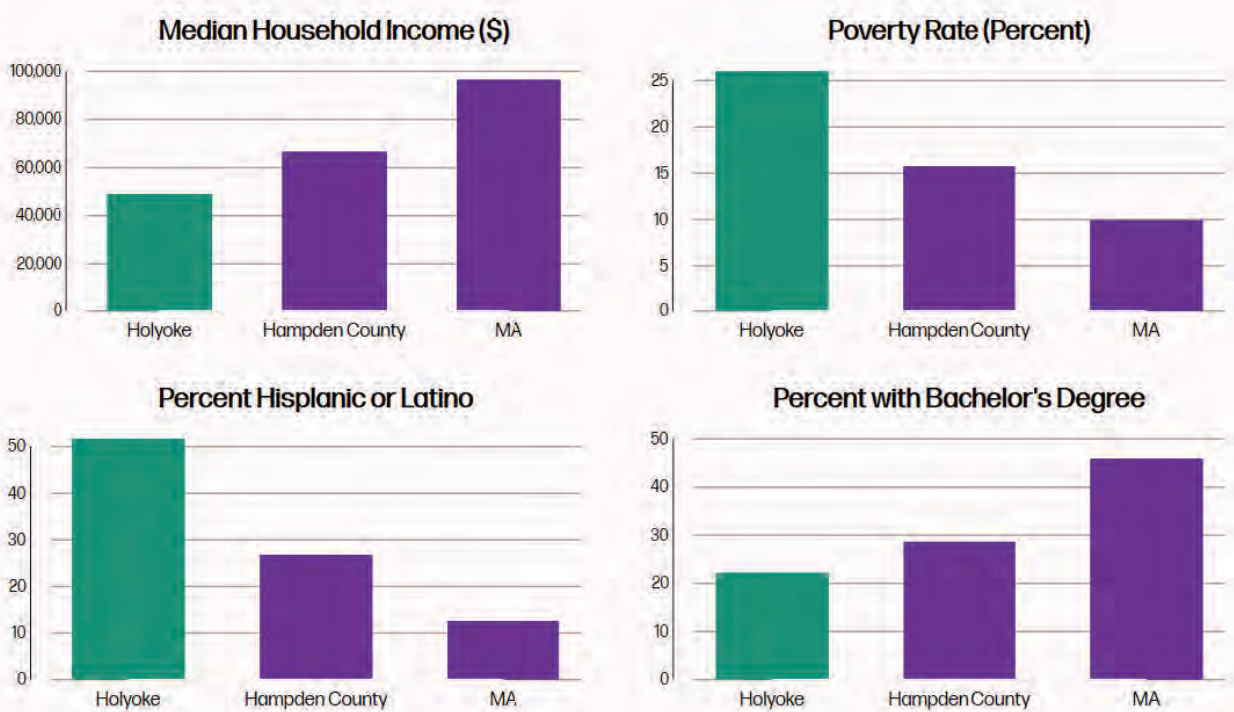
economic opportunity for Holyokers

Holyoke is...

Ready for Business

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Socioeconomic Conditions in Holyoke and Comparison Areas in 2022



	Total Population	Percent White Alone	Median Household Income	Poverty Rate	Percent with a Bachelor's Degree
Holyoke	38,210	43%	\$49,007	26%	22%
Chicopee	55,441	68%	\$63,866	15%	23%
Lowell	114,737	46%	\$73,008	17%	28%
Lynn	100,653	36%	\$70,046	14%	22%
Pittsfield	43,730	79%	\$66,859	14%	34%
Westfield	40,794	81%	\$78,307	9%	33%
Hampden County	464,575	60%	\$66,619	16%	29%
Massachusetts	6,984,205	69%	\$96,505	10%	46%

Select Holyoke indicators in comparison to peer cities, Hampden County, and the Commonwealth

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2022 five-year estimates

Current conditions, trends, and opportunities

Holyoke is a city in transition, navigating significant challenges while showing encouraging signs of renewal and growth. The city has a unique and promising economic foundation that includes traditional businesses such as family-owned restaurants and local shops, an array of highly-skilled artisans practicing in the city, manufacturing, and new clean technology industry startups and businesses. This cleantech sector includes products, services, and innovations designed to reduce environmental impact, lower resource use, and decrease emissions while supporting economic growth. It spans renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro), energy storage, electric vehicles, green buildings, water and waste-management technologies, recycling, sustainable materials, and efficiency-focused industrial processes.

“The cleantech (clean technology) industries include products, services, and innovations designed to reduce environmental impact, lower resource use, and decrease emissions while supporting economic growth.”

Holyoke offers a unique set of advantages for business. Its hydroelectric power, generated from its own dam and provided through its own municipally-owned utility, is the least expensive in the region, and perhaps the most reliable in the Commonwealth. Its location at the intersection of the region's principal north-south and principal east-west traffic arteries give it strategic access to all of New England. These assets position Holyoke well for economic revival.

Despite recent encouraging developments, Holyoke continues to be held back by persistent economic disparities. While the city has prosperous neighborhoods and poverty rates have

improved in recent years, the median household income in Holyoke is \$49,000, one of the lowest in Massachusetts and only 51% of the state average. Roughly one in four residents live below the poverty line, more than double the state average. Although Holyoke is a net employer, the health care and social assistance sectors dominate employment in Holyoke, accounting for 36 percent of the city's jobs. These sectors have seen substantial growth over the last decade, but tend to offer lower-paying jobs. The same is true of the retail and education sectors, also key sources of employment in Holyoke. The city's residents are disproportionately employed in important but low-wage sectors.

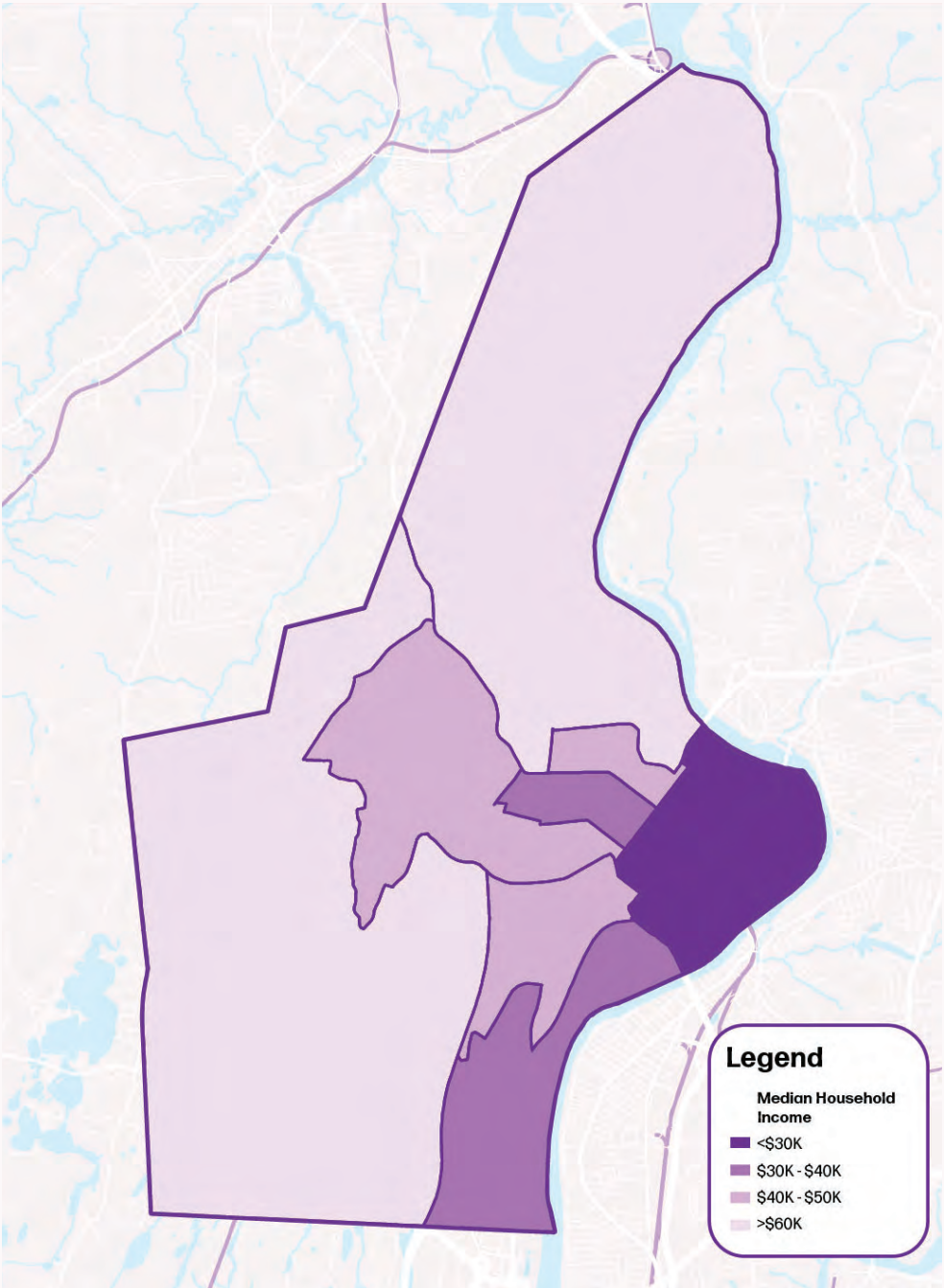
Economic development is not a magic bullet for inequality, but it is a key part of the solution: it generates new revenue at the same time that it creates new opportunities for city residents. Holyoke must make it a priority.

Businesses want to be in Holyoke. To unlock the city's full potential, Holyoke must make it easier for them to do so. Businesses and developers throughout the region praise Holyoke's dedicated staff, but observe that confusing and sometimes inefficient city processes and gaps in information can create obstacles to growth. Meanwhile staff struggle with systemic roadblocks and communication issues. Holyoke will reform its internal systems to build the efficient, coordinated city processes that are essential to attracting and retaining investment; and it need not compromise its commitment to safety and livability in order to do so.

The foundation is in place, including a diverse population, rich cultural heritage, strong infrastructure, ample sites with redevelopment opportunities, and growing economic development momentum. With thoughtful leadership and sustained action, Holyoke can transform its potential into reality and create a future of inclusive growth and opportunity.

Median Household Income by Ethnicity and Location

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020 five-year estimates



Recent/Notable Economic Development Successes

Sources: Baystate Health, MassLive, City of Holyoke

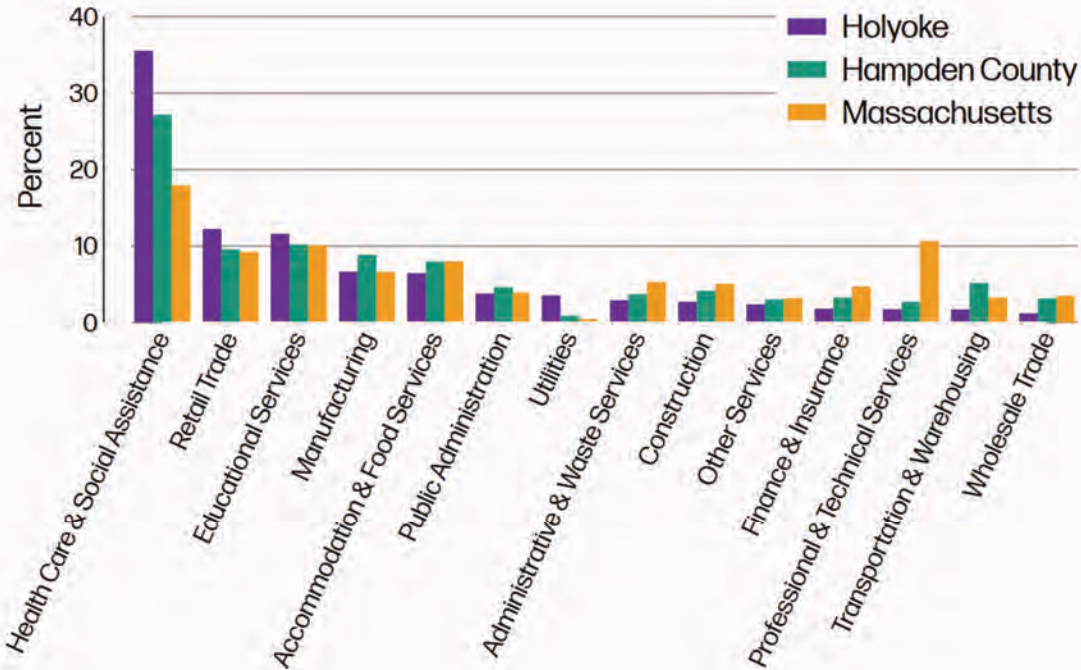
Notable Employers	Investment Size (sq ft)	Investment Scale (\$)	Jobs
Amazon Distribution	145,000	\$6,000,000	400 +
Aegis Energy Services	40,000	\$10,000,000	95
Marcotte Ford	16,024	\$5,000,000	130
STEAM Building Rehab	85,000	\$2,000,000	5
The Cubit	52,500	\$6,000,000	4
Gary Rome Hyundai	35,000	\$2,050,000	50 +
Ingleside Square	142,532	\$6,000,000	200-300
Rise / GTI	42,000	\$8,000,000	30
Easthampton Savings Bank	2,400	\$1,000,000	7
Baystate Kindred	23,230	\$72,000,000	200
Clean Crop Technologies	15,000	\$1,200,000	50

Neighborhood Businesses

Paper City Fabrics	Fame
Paper City Clothing	Comfort Bagel
Gran Cocina	Ground Up Grain

Share of Employment by Sector in 2022 - Holyoke, Hampden Co, Massachusetts

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, ES202.



Goals for a Holyoke that is Ready for Business



Goal 2.1 An ecosystem of economic development initiatives that fosters growth in the cleantech industries

By leveraging its existing assets such as clean, affordable energy, strong infrastructure, and innovation hubs, the city aims to position itself as a regional leader in clean technology, innovation, and advanced manufacturing. Strategies include targeted marketing campaigns, the development of incubator and innovation spaces, and strengthened local partnerships. These efforts are designed to attract new investments, expand existing businesses, and showcase Holyoke as a hub of innovation and opportunity.



Goal 2.2 World-class resources to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups

Holyoke's economy will thrive with a business environment that encourages small-business entrepreneurship and streamlines start-up processes. Holyoke will make strong connections with local educational institutions and entrepreneurship organizations to grow the business base. Holyoke will also work to continue the efforts of MassDevelopment TDI to form a business improvement district in downtown Holyoke.



Goal 2.3 A vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism

Holyoke will become a vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism by leveraging its unique local assets and cultural diversity. The city will strengthen its role in the regional food economy and create new opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Complementing these efforts, Holyoke will promote its rich arts, museums and cultural venues through targeted marketing to attract visitors from across the Pioneer Valley and beyond.



Goal 2.4 Aligning workforce training with employer needs for Holyoke job opportunities

Holyoke is building a robust, inclusive workforce development network to ensure all residents have access to meaningful career pathways. By connecting local colleges, public schools, and employers, the city aims to align education and training programs, particularly in sectors with strong job growth and openings like cleantech, culinary arts, and advanced manufacturing. Strategic partnerships with organizations such as MassHire, Holyoke Community College, and local businesses will support residents of all ages and abilities in developing skills for high-quality, local employment.



Goal 2.5 A portfolio of buildings and sites that are market-ready for redevelopment

Holyoke is committed to creating a portfolio of market-ready buildings and development sites to attract investment and accelerate revitalization across the city. Through strategic planning, site assessments and partnerships, the city will prioritize key parcels, including the former Mt. Tom Coal Fired Power Plant, K-Mart Plaza, and downtown storefronts, for redevelopment. By reducing financial uncertainty through feasibility studies, cost estimates, and pursuit of state funding, Holyoke aims to generate a diverse set of sites and buildings that are attractive and viable for private developers.



Goal 2.6 Strong governance of economic development policy and initiatives

To fully realize its economic development potential, Holyoke is focused on building strong, coordinated governance that can effectively implement strategic initiatives. This includes expanding staff capacity, fostering inter-departmental collaboration, and strengthening relationships with key employers and developers. The city also aims to modernize (and simplify) its zoning and permitting to create a more efficient environment, accessible, fair, and easy to navigate for residents and business alike. Through clear communication, collaboration, accountability, and proactive leadership, Holyoke will ensure its economic development efforts are cohesive, responsive, fair, and impactful.

GOAL 2.1

An ecosystem of economic development initiatives that fosters growth in the cleantech industries

STRATEGY 2.1.1:
Create a marketing campaign that highlights Holyoke’s proven advantages and opportunities for emerging cleantech businesses, highlighting past successes

Holyoke will produce marketing materials that highlight Holyoke’s innovation/cleantech economy successes, including the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center and Clean Crop Technologies. These marketing strategies will be reinforced as appropriate by targeted materials for potential clean-tech businesses that could be good fits for Holyoke that emphasize what particular opportunities and advantages the city can offer them. These targeted materials may emphasize Holyoke’s clean, low-cost energy; workforce development opportunities, infrastructure access including water and sewer capacity, potential strategic partnerships, and affordable properties.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Greater Holyoke Chamber
Funding Sources: Mass Office of Business Development, MassEcon

STRATEGY 2.1.2:
Create a start-up cleantech incubator and innovation space

The city will partner with FORGE, a non-profit incubator for manufacturing startups, to support the creation of a start-up incubator space or innovation center focused on cleantech, similar in concept to the Berkshire Innovation Center. Such a center is an effective way to reduce costs for new innovative businesses, foster collaboration, and provide technical support and information for start-ups. It is from these small innovative businesses, based on new ideas, that the successes which power our economy and change our world often grow, and we can make Holyoke the best place for them to fulfill their potential.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: FORGE
Funding Sources: MassDevelopment

STRATEGY 2.1.3:
Continue annual cleantech and innovation events

To further strengthen the city’s identity and effectiveness as a center for emerging ideas and industries, Holyoke will build on the Hardtech Holyoke event by partnering with FORGE, a non-profit incubator for manufacturing startups, and with local businesses, to establish an annual convention or conference focusing on clean technology and innovation. By doing so, Holyoke can work toward national recognition by creating an event that will reliably attract innovators to meet, collaborate, and exchange ideas here, and build Holyoke’s reputation as one of the nation’s centers for emerging ideas and technology.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: FORGE
Funding Sources: Local universities, foundations

STRATEGY 2.1.4:
Pursue cleantech/climate tech opportunities

The state’s economic development priorities currently emphasize climate technology. Holyoke will take advantage of the opportunity this presents by focusing efforts on collaboration with regional and state economic development leaders. The city will leverage its contacts and expertise to identify and pursue cleantech and climate tech opportunities. These partnerships can help build on the city’s existing successes and assets, contributing to growth in these targeted sectors.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Western Mass EDC, MOBD, Mass CEC
Funding Sources: Mass Clean Energy Center (MassCEC)

Clean Crop Technologies
Clean Crop Technologies moved to Holyoke in 2019 and is in the process of expanding its operations to a new 15,000 SF facility. The company specializes in advanced treatment for foods and agricultural products (seeds) that reduce molds, pathogens, and bacteria, increasing shelf life and reducing food waste. Its high-tech solutions are up to 10 times more energy efficient than other methods and do not produce harmful byproducts.



GOAL 2.2

World-class resources to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups

STRATEGY 2.2.1:

Create a one-stop-shop for small business permitting and regulations

Holyoke will streamline and modernize its support systems for existing and incoming businesses, developers, and entrepreneurs. The city will offer comprehensive and streamlined information on business licensing, permitting and regulatory processes, funding opportunities, and important contacts, via a single office that will be able to help local business and innovation community navigate the city's oversight systems easily and rapidly.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Greater Holyoke Chamber

Funding Sources: MA Urban Agenda Grants

STRATEGY 2.2.2:

Strengthen partnerships with regional business development organizations

Holyoke has strong relationships with regional organizations such as the Western Mass Economic Development Council (EDC). These organizations and relationships help to support business growth and innovation, and the city will continue to strengthen those relationships and seek value from them. It also will continue to strengthen its relationship with the region's Anchor Collaborative which focuses on procurement opportunities for diverse businesses: an often-critical support function that is particularly amenable to collaborative solutions.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Western Mass EDC, Anchor Collaborative
Funding Sources:

Western Mass EDC (opposite page, bottom)
 Western Mass Economic Development Council board members gather at Fame Eatery in Holyoke. Western Mass EDC works to strengthen the regional economy of Western Massachusetts by providing businesses with resources, support, and networking to expand, relocate, and grow while promoting investment, quality job creation, and improved economic vitality across the region.

STRATEGY 2.2.3:

Establish a High Street business improvement district (BID)

A Business Development District can provide critical support revitalization efforts. Holyoke can build vibrancy in business districts by addressing issues of waste management and cleanliness, storefront improvements, public safety, support for special events, and other enhancement initiatives. Holyoke will partner with MassDevelopment and stakeholders to form a Business Improvement District (BID) in the Holyoke Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) district, and take advantage of the opportunities the program offers.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED),
External Partners: MassDevelopment, Anchor Collaborative, Holyoke Chamber of Commerce, Western Mass EDC
Funding Sources: MassDowntown Initiative



Greater Holyoke Chamber (above)

Since its founding in 1890, the Greater Holyoke Chamber has focused on strengthening the local economy by providing resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses, facilitating networking and visibility, and advocating for local enterprises.

Western Mass
 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



GOAL 2.3

A vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism

STRATEGY 2.3.1:

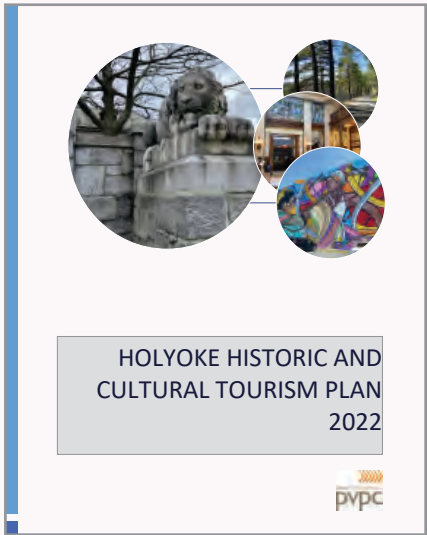
Promote Holyoke’s arts, culture, and culinary assets to boost regional tourism

Although it is not widely known, Holyoke has a strong, growing, and distinctive arts scene. It also has unique events, cultural institutions, and a food scene that differs from any other in the Pioneer Valley. These relatively undiscovered cultural resources present a rich opportunity for growth.

To take advantage of this opportunity to attract regional visitors, increase local spending, and elevate Holyoke as a unique destination for cultural tourism and community experiences, Holyoke will build a marketing and promotional plan to re-introduce the city as an undiscovered arts and culture center, offering experiences that cannot be found anywhere else in the Valley.

These efforts will build upon the strategies developed in the 2022 Holyoke Historic and Cultural Tourism Plan. They may include building marketing and communications capacity, pursuing cultural and historical designations for key Holyoke assets, strengthening event offerings through partnership and advocacy, and using placemaking to build a strong community.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Mass Cultural Council, HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute
Funding Sources: Mass Cultural Council



Holyoke Culture and Tourism Plan

The Holyoke Historic and Cultural Tourism Plan outlines a strategy to leverage the city’s industrial heritage, arts assets, and diverse cultural institutions to attract visitors, strengthen local identity, and drive economic development.

Armour Yard, Holyoke

Armour Yard is an outdoor community gathering space decorated with large murals painted on 40-foot shipping containers produced by Beyond Walls. The area hosts Mondays at Armour Yard, weekly summer events with food trucks, live music, and drinks.



GOAL 2.3

A vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism (cont.)

STRATEGY 2.3.2:
Expand presence in the regional food industry ecosystem

Holyoke has a strong existing role in the area’s food ecosystem. Already important, these systems will only become more important in the years to come. The report “Accelerating Inclusive Growth in the Pioneer Valley” provides guidance as the City partners with such local businesses and regional organizations as the University of Massachusetts food science department and Western Mass EDC to expand its role in the emerging food industry cluster in the Pioneer Valley, which includes a proposed regional food production, storage, and distribution facility.

Holyoke’s strengths - its industrial know-how, diverse culinary background, and abundant green energy - put it in a particularly strong position to grow the food processing, urban farming, and other food innovation industries.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Western Mass EDC, UMass, WMFPC, HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, Nuestras Raices/La Finca, Freight Farms
Funding Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development

Gran Cocina, Holyoke MA



Valley Malt and Ground Up Grain Holyoke MA



Gran Cocina, Holyoke (top)

Gran Cocina is a shared-use, commercial community kitchen that provides certified kitchen space, licensing help, training, and event/meal spaces for food entrepreneurs and the public. This model lowers the barrier for food entrepreneurs in the area and provides access to equipment and space that many small-scale food creators couldn’t otherwise afford.

Valley Malt and Ground Up Grain, Holyoke (bottom)

Valley Malt is a craft malting and milling company located in a historic mill that uses 100% Northeast-grown grains, powers its operations with hydroelectric energy, and emphasizes sustainable packaging and local supply chains. Ground Up Grain is an artisan bakery and social enterprise that produces small-batch breads and pastries while creating inclusive workforce opportunities and strengthening the local food economy



Holyoke Downtown Parking Study (2024)

The Comprehensive Plan's district parking strategy aligns with the 2024 Holyoke Downtown Parking Study, especially:

Strategy 1: implement a streamlined, modern, adaptable, and accessible parking system

- Action 1.1: Consolidate time limit regulations to streamline the system and ensure available on-street parking near businesses, especially along the High Street corridor
- Action 1.2: Update meter pricing to encourage turnover and shift long-term parking to off-street lots and garages
- Action 1.3-A: Develop an RFP to select a vendor to provide consistent parking meter technology across Downtown Holyoke
- Action 1.3-B: Designate a body to oversee parking payment and enforcement system
- Action 1.4: Ensure consistent enforcement of parking regulations
- Action 1.5: Expand the enforcement area to cover areas with higher parking utilization
- Action 1.6: Improve signage and pavement marking as needed to clearly delineate public parking
- Action 1.7: Ensure the quantity and location of accessible parking spaces meets the community's needs
- Action 1.8: Identify additional locations for electric vehicle charging in both on-street and off-street parking spaces

Strategy 2: Update City policies and programs to support an efficient parking district

- Action 2.1: Amend the zoning code to further reduce or eliminate parking minimums and implement parking maximums
- Action 2.2: Facilitate shared parking programs to optimize off-street private parking
- Action 2.3: Implement a Parking Benefit District program
- Action 2.4: Implement resident sticker programs in dense residential areas
- Action 2.5: Develop a downtown employee permit program
- Action 2.6: Consider alternative uses for underutilized parking to activate public space

Strategy 3: Enhance the downtown streetscape to improve the overall business environment

- Action 3.1: Improve sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting between public parking and Downtown destinations to promote a park and walk environment
- Action 3.2: Improve wayfinding around major parking generators
- Action 3.3: Use flex posts of other deterrents to discourage illegal parking and improve pedestrian visibility
- Action 3.4: Provide additional mobility options to reduce reliance on driving to access downtown, lowering demand for parking

GOAL 2.3

A vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism^(cont)

STRATEGY 2.3.3:

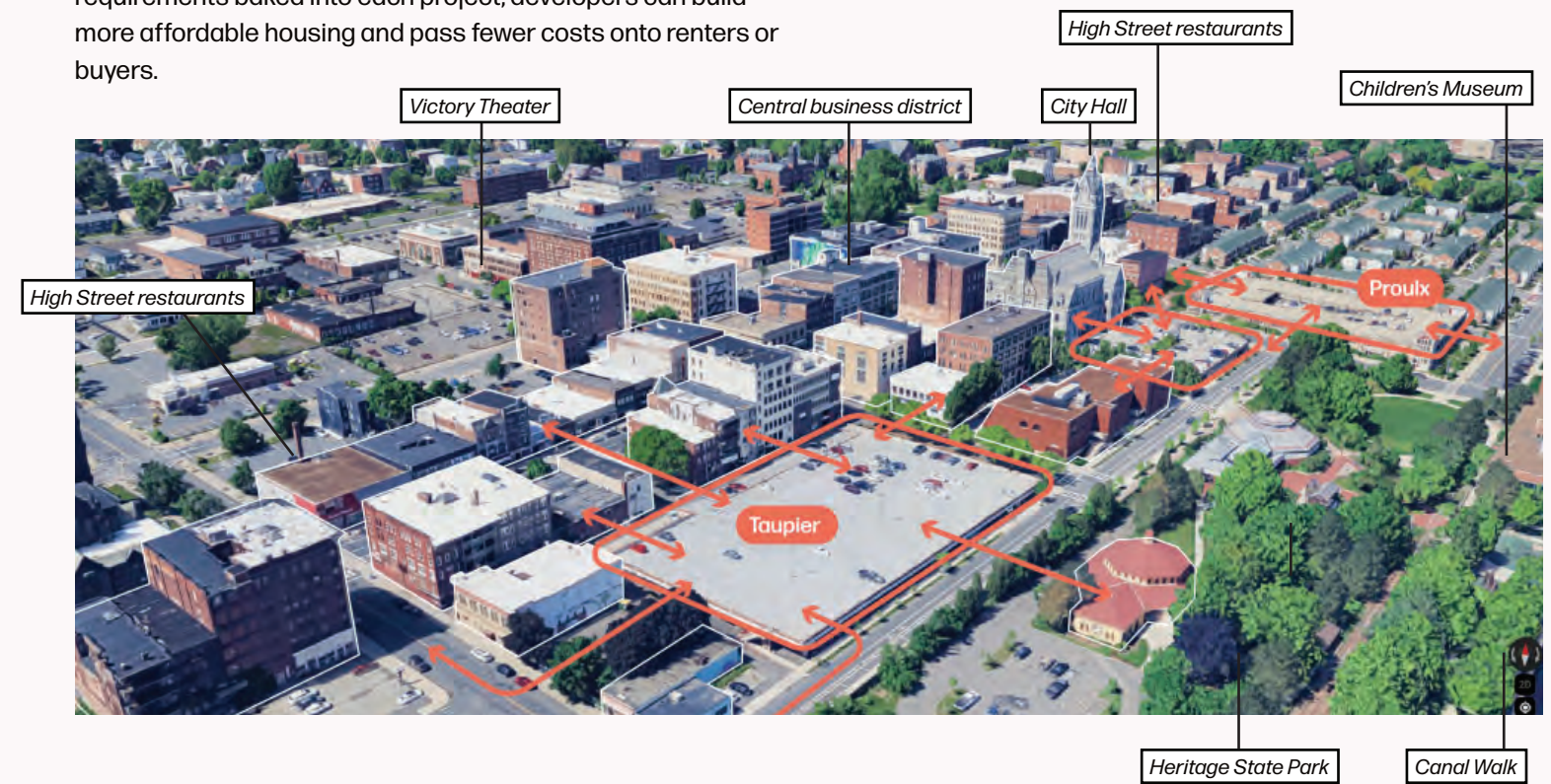
Adopt district parking

A district parking policy offers a smarter, more efficient way to manage parking demand by centralizing it rather than requiring each development to meet parking needs individually. Shared municipal lots or garages make better use of space, reducing the inefficiencies of underused, site-specific parking. District parking is also monetizable—cities can generate revenue through user fees, helping to fund maintenance and other services.

Removing the burden of building parking from individual developments improves project feasibility, allowing more proposals to “pencil out” financially. Without costly parking requirements baked into each project, developers can build more affordable housing and pass fewer costs onto renters or buyers.

District parking also encourages a “park once and walk” environment, supporting pedestrian-friendly districts where people can access shops, services, and housing without needing to re-park. This promotes walkability, better land use, and compact urban growth.

City Stewards: OPED, DPW
External Partners: City Council
Funding Sources: free





GOAL 2.4

Aligning workforce training with employer needs for Holyoke job opportunities

STRATEGY 2.4.1:
Facilitate career pipelines through local partnerships

For Holyoke to fully benefit from a strong and successful business environment, its residents must have the skills its employers are looking for. To that end, Holyoke will foster stronger relationships between institutions like Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College and the local business community. The city will partner with the MassHire Holyoke Career Center to increase awareness and access to training and education programs that lead to tangible employment outcomes. This includes targeted outreach to underrepresented communities and support services that help residents overcome barriers to employment. These partnerships will focus on career-oriented training that supports job growth in emerging sectors such as food innovation, cleantech, and advanced manufacturing.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: MassHire, Holyoke Community College, Springfield Technical Community College
Funding Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

STRATEGY 2.4.2:
Strengthening Holyoke public schools and workforce/career opportunities

Holyoke will work with local employers in cleantech, trades, and advanced manufacturing to develop structured career pathways for students in Holyoke public schools, including the Holyoke High Dean Tech Campus.

These partnerships will provide students with specific skills and expertise by means of hands-on learning, apprenticeships, and direct access to high-wage employment opportunities after graduation. Holyoke will also coordinate efforts between MassHire and Holyoke Public Schools to integrate workforce training, internships, and career exploration opportunities into the student experience, ensuring Holyoke employers of a reliable stream of high-value employees and ensuring that students graduate with the tools they need to move immediately and successfully into high-wage jobs.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), Holyoke Public Schools
External Partners: MassHire, Holyoke Community College,
Funding Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

STRATEGY 2.4.3:
Support culinary arts and food industry training for career readiness

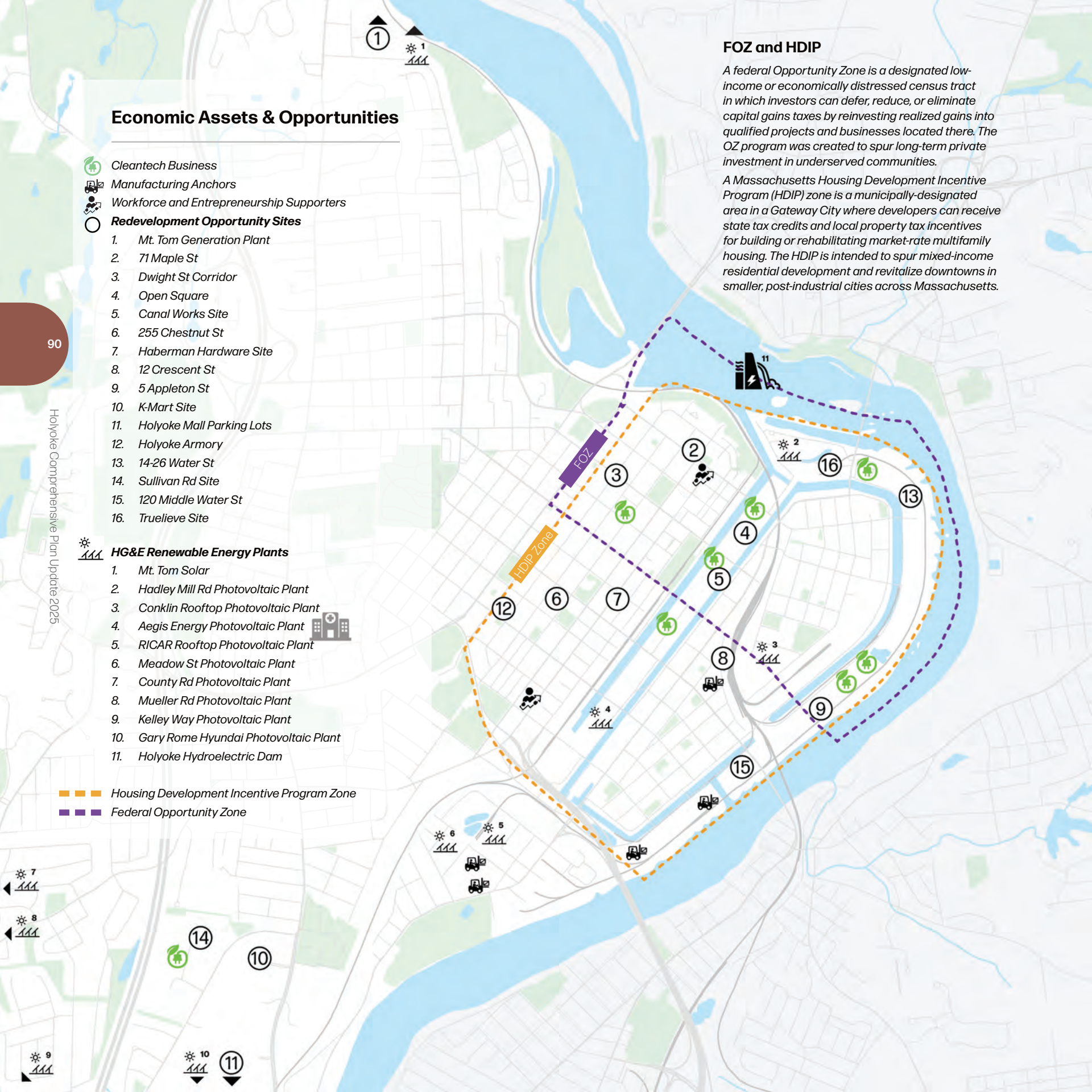
The City will continue to collaborate with local culinary programs, including Holyoke Community College's Culinary Arts Center, Springfield Technical Community College's Workforce Development Center, and Holyoke Public Schools' Culinary Arts Program to offer accessible, industry- relevant training that prepares residents for employment in the region's growing food and hospitality sectors.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), Dean Tech, Holyoke Public Schools
External Partners: Holyoke Community College, Springfield Technical Community College
Funding Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

The Mt. Tom site was the home to the last coal-fired generation plant in Massachusetts, which closed in 2014. The 90-acre site is owned by ENGIE and zoned for industrial use, though currently remains vacant. The site is located between Route 5 and the Connecticut River and it has both truck and freight rail access.



Site of the former Mt. Tom Coal Plant
Holyoke, MA



GOAL 2.5

A portfolio of buildings and sites that are market-ready for redevelopment (cont.)

STRATEGY 2.5.2:
Activate vacant storefronts and underutilized parcels in downtown Holyoke

Holyoke will identify and catalogue key vacant parcels and storefronts in strategic downtown locations including High Street, Main Street, Dwight Street, and the canal areas. With a portfolio of properties where activity could contribute to new urban vitality and help to encourage development around them, the city will seek funding through programs such as the Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program to bring promising sites back into use. It will continue to cultivate partnerships with property owners, developers and entrepreneurs to revitalize these spaces with new business, cultural, and community uses. As these properties come back into use, the neighborhoods around them will become more desirable, and begin to attract new development organically.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
Funding Sources: Vacant Storefronts Program (MA)

STRATEGY 2.5.3:
Reduce redevelopment risk by securing cost estimates and pre-development funding

Redevelopment of brownfields and of sites with legacy infrastructure is expensive, and current valuation of Holyoke properties may make purely private financing of such projects difficult. To facilitate private investment, Holyoke will study its underutilized properties, including those identified by Holyoke Redevelopment Authority in the Urban Renewal Plan, and create detailed cost estimates for environmental remediation,

infrastructure upgrades, and other site preparation needs at each site. When appropriate, the city will apply for Site Readiness, Underutilized Properties, and other grant programs to help advance sites towards market-ready status for private development.

City Stewards: Holyoke Redevelopment Authority
External Partners: MassDevelopment
Funding Sources: One Stop for Growth (MA)

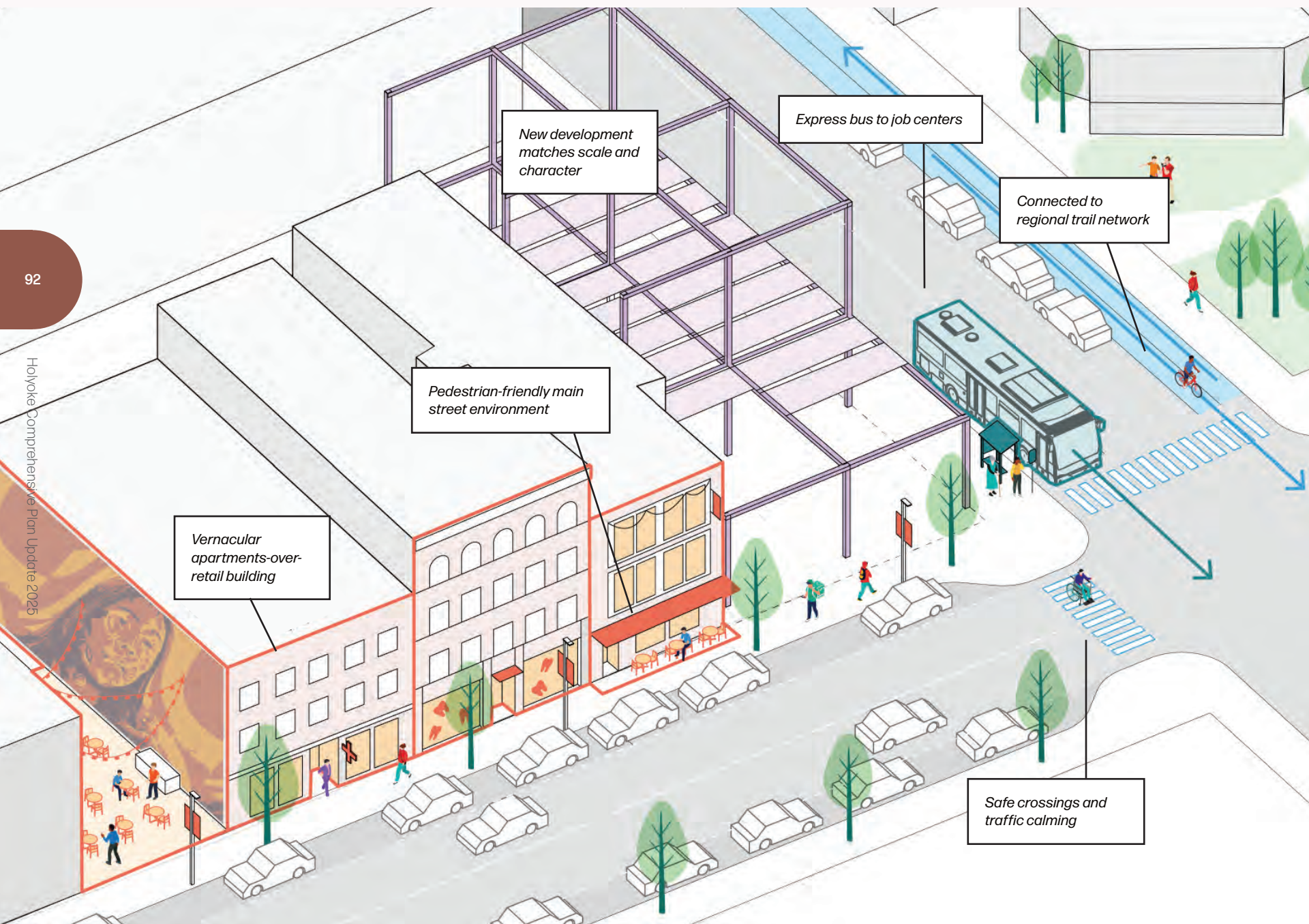
STRATEGY 2.5.4:
Form an Ingleside 2050 working group for strategic planning

The Ingleside commercial/retail corridor has been an anchor of Holyoke's economy, but the city has no vision or plans for its future in a rapidly changing world. Holyoke will convene a working group of public and private stakeholders to develop a long-term vision for the Ingleside area, including the Holyoke Mall and the former K-Mart plaza. This group will assess opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment, economic diversification, improved mobility, and resilience to ensure the area remains a vibrant economic center and evolves with vibrant uses in the decades ahead. This work will include an evaluation of zoning opportunities that help existing retails remain while boosting competitiveness in the modern economy.

City Stewards: Holyoke Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (HEDIC), Office of the Mayor, OPED
External Partners: The Pyramid Companies, local neighborhood and business groups
Funding Sources: free

SCENARIO
Main Street Redevelopment

By aligning the Zoning Ordinance to support vernacular development patterns, new investment in Main Street can match the scale and character of the existing commercial corridor



GOAL 2.5

A portfolio of buildings and sites that are market-ready for redevelopment (cont.)

STRATEGY 2.5.5:
Align the Zoning Ordinance to support vernacular development patterns

Holyoke's Zoning Ordinance has evolved erratically, and its last major overhaul was planned for a world before the internet, where brick and mortar retail, pre-internet physical office centers, and manufacturing were expected to be the city's principal economic engines. The zoning patterns that served that vision of the city are no longer suited to Holyoke. Amending the Zoning Ordinance for the needs of the present will contribute to revitalization, address areas where the current ordinance is an obstacle to desirable development, and create the conditions for a more attractive and more functional city.

Holyoke's new zoning will reflect the historic scale, form, and function of the city's various neighborhoods. Where appropriate, this will include strategies such as allowing mixed-use buildings, smaller lot sizes, minimal setbacks, and pedestrian-friendly design that reflects traditional storefronts and residential above-retail layouts. As well as creating attractive and functional urban neighborhoods, this updated zoning can also ease restrictions on adaptive reuse and infill development that match local architecture. Holyoke has already taken steps towards this strategy in the incremental rezoning of Main Street to Downtown Business (BC) from Highway Business (BH).

Rezoning is not solely about uses and dimensional requirements. Zoning amendments will also address design standards for commercial signage and lighting, protecting the public against nuisances such as excessive glare and intrusive signage while ensuring legitimate business needs are met. They will address and update noise ordinances. The rezoning project will be an opportunity to examine other similar

issues, and address problems that have emerged and gone unaddressed over the years.

Such amendments support vibrant, walkable streetscapes, local businesses, and housing diversity while preserving the unique identity of each neighborhood. Thoughtful zoning reform encourages stable and strong neighborhoods, and appropriate growth that honors the area's historic character and community needs.

City Stewards: OPED, City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

STRATEGY 2.5.6:
Streamline permitting by eliminating duplicative or outdated special permits

Holyoke will conduct a comprehensive review of its special permit requirements to eliminate redundancies or overly restrictive policies. It will add efficiency by reassigning special permit granting authority to bodies that have the technical expertise to best evaluate applications. By streamlining permitting processes, the city will reduce administrative burdens on businesses and developers, promote a more reliable and professional business climate, and accelerate timelines for key projects.

City Stewards: OPED, City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free

Business Zoning Reform Areas



Neighborhood Business

Intent: foster pedestrian-oriented “main street” environments along commercial corridors in residential areas. Commercial doors open on to the sidewalk and parking is tucked in the rear. Apartments are encouraged above retail storefronts.

Existing zones for further study:

- Limited Business (BL)
- General Business (BG)
- Professional Office Overlay District (POOD)
- Multifamily Residence and Professional Offices (RO)

Downtown Business

Intent: Reinforce Holyoke’s role as a transit-oriented regional job center, and hub for culture and entertainment uses. Expand downtown business zoning along the segment of High Street that is currently zoned Business Highway (BH).

Existing zones for further study:

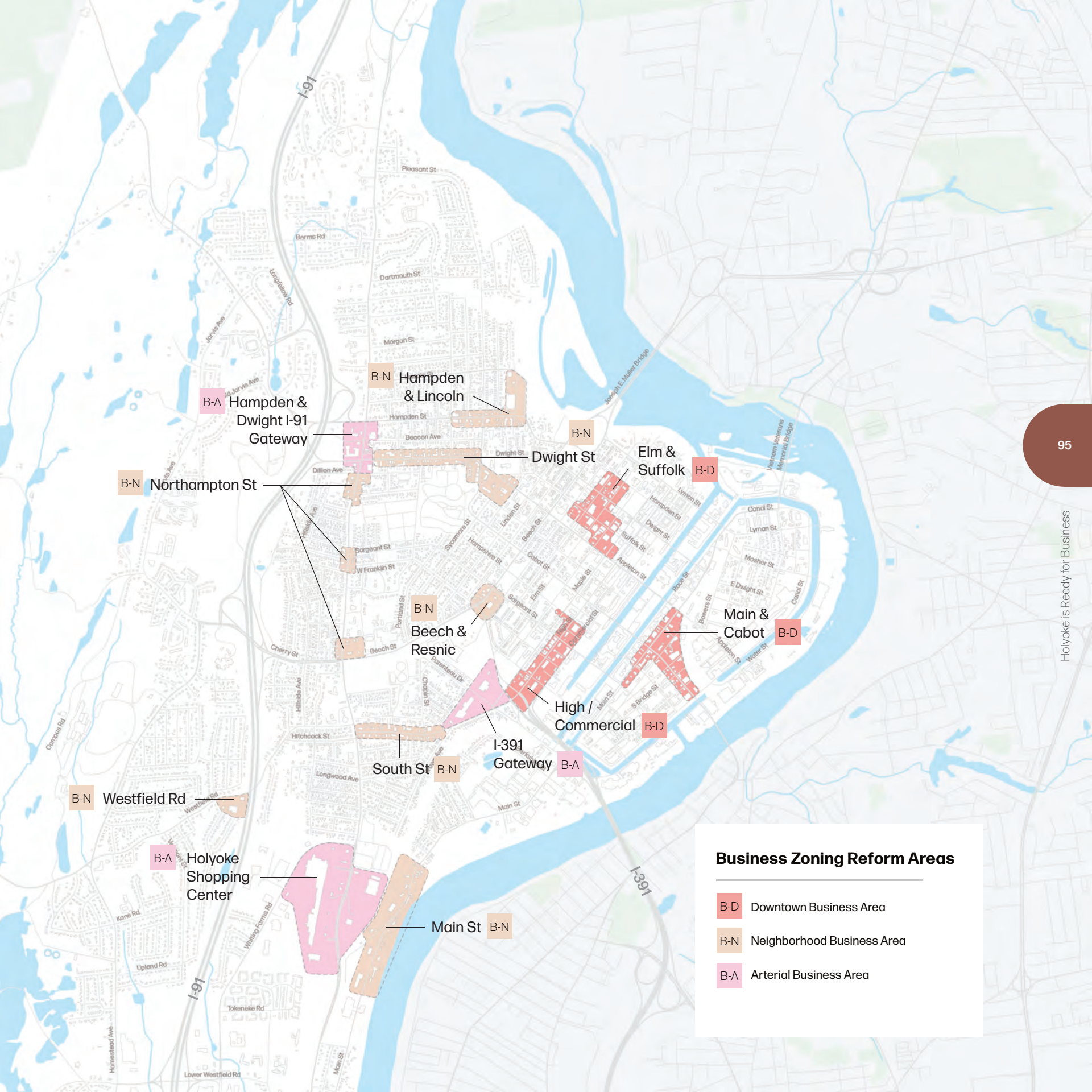
- Downtown Business (BC)

Arterial Business

Intent: Recognizing that cars will likely continue to play a role in many shopping trips made in Holyoke, Arterial Business seeks to craft design standards for car-oriented commercial along arterial streets, shopping malls and shopping plazas, provision of trees to counter surface parking lots’ contribution to the heat island effect and pedestrian facilities

Existing zones for further study:

- Highway Business (BH)
- Shopping Center (SC)



Business Zoning Reform Areas

- B-D Downtown Business Area
- B-N Neighborhood Business Area
- B-A Arterial Business Area

Strong governance of economic development policy and initiatives

STRATEGY 2.6.1:

Expand capacity to lead and implement economic development initiatives

To realize the city's economic potential, Holyoke will pursue creative and sustainable strategies to increase staff and organizational capacity. This includes leveraging grants, partnerships, and shared service models to ensure the city has the expertise and resources to lead complex projects, pursue funding opportunities, and coordinate across multiple stakeholders.

City Stewards: Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)
External Partners: Western Mass Economic Development Council
Funding Sources: MA Urban Agenda Grants

STRATEGY 2.6.2:

Strengthen relationships with key employers and developers

Holyoke will prioritize open, consistent lines of communication with major employers and developers who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to (and investment in) the city. Through regular engagement and collaborative problem-solving, the city will work to understand their evolving needs and support initiatives (and creative solutions) that contribute to job creation, redevelopment, and inclusive growth.

City Stewards: OPED, Office of the Mayor
External Partners: HEDIC, HRA
Funding Sources: free

STRATEGY 2.6.3:

Garner cross-departmental support for economic development efforts

With leadership from the Mayor, the city will create structured processes and internal trainings to integrate economic development and customer service considerations across departments. These efforts will ensure city staff are aligned on priorities, encourage interdepartmental collaboration, and reinforce a culture that is supportive of economic development and private investment while maintaining regulatory standards.

City Stewards: Mayor's Office, OPED, Fire Department, Building Department
External Partners: HEDIC, HRA
Funding Sources: free

STRATEGY 2.6.4:

Discourage prolonged vacancy through enforcement tools and vacancy fees

To promote activation of long-vacant buildings, Holyoke will explore implementing vacancy fees or other penalties that create meaningful disincentives for property owners who warehouse their buildings, leaving them unused and unavailable. This strategy will help reduce or eliminate any financial benefits such as tax write-offs that owners might currently derive from hoarding these properties, encouraging their rehabilitation or sale and supporting broader downtown revitalization goals.

City Stewards: OPED, BOH, City Council
External Partners: N/A
Funding Sources: free



Clockwise from top left:
Mayor Joshua Garcia addressing a constituent;
Eric Nakajima, Director of the Office of Planning
and Economic Development; City Council in
session; Mayor Garcia, Chief of Police Brian
Keenan, and Judge Tina Westcott Cafaro.



Holyoke is...

Sustainable and Connected!

climate-resilient green spaces

frequent and reliable transit

inspiring canal walk

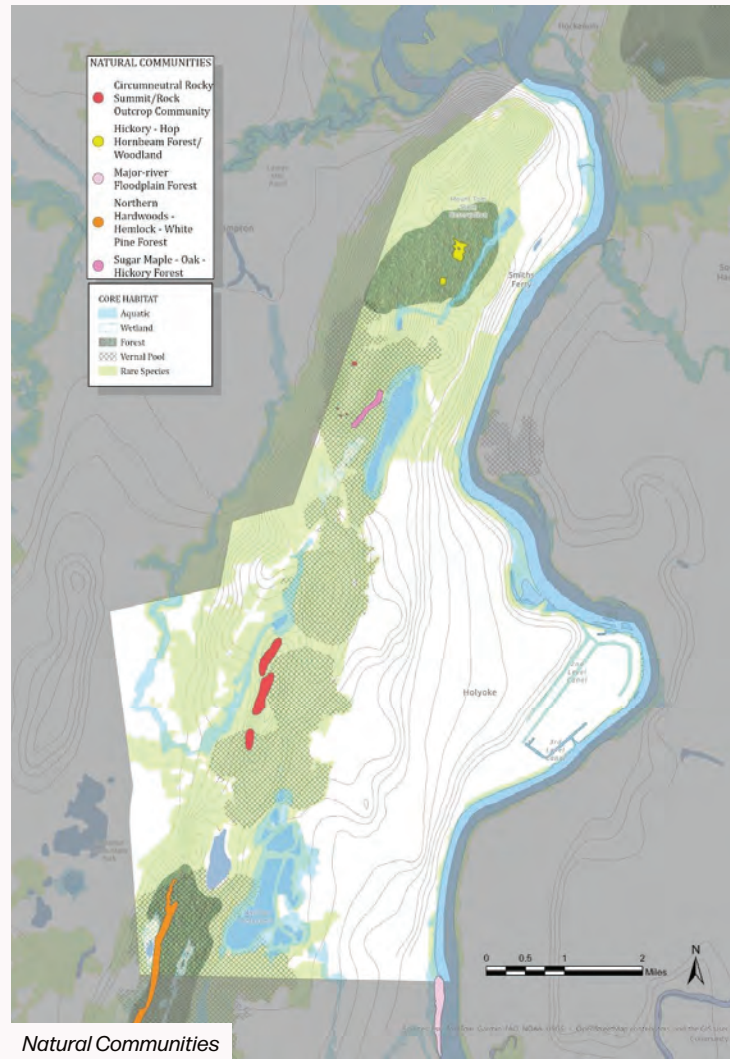
protected environment

3

Holyoke is...

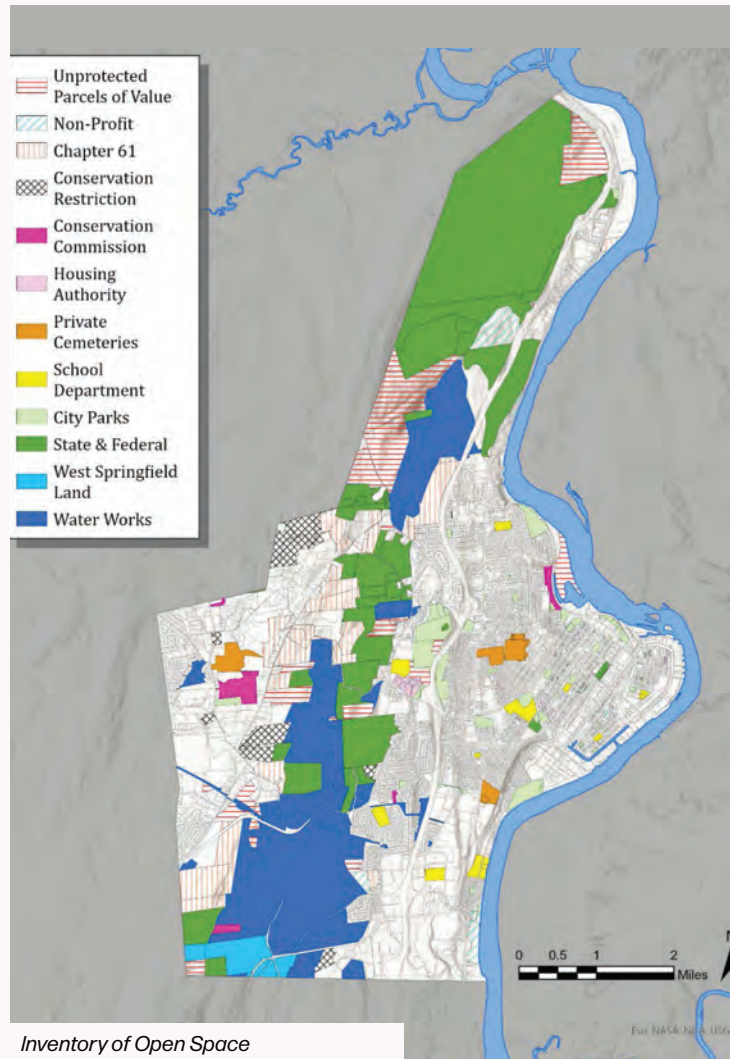
Sustainable and Connected

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Natural Communities

Map Source: OSRP



Inventory of Open Space

Current conditions, trends, and opportunities

From the mountains in the west, to the river in the east, Holyoke’s geography underscores both its vulnerabilities and opportunities for resilience and prosperity. The city is fortunate to feature verdant state parks, protected reservoirs, and an expansive riverfront that should be protected for the benefit of residents and visitors. These features will be key assets in response to the stresses of climate change, and are opportunities to build tourism for the city.

Holyoke is planning for a future that is both sustainable and resilient. With the effects of climate change becoming more visible, the City is taking proactive steps to protect its residents, infrastructure, and natural resources. At the same time, Holyoke’s transportation network offers opportunities to improve safety, connectivity, and access for all. Together, these strengths position Holyoke to grow in a way that is environmentally responsible, equitable, and proactive.

Positioned for a green and resilient future

Holyoke is in a strong position to face the challenges of climate change, thanks to its natural resources and solid infrastructure. Holyoke Water Works enjoys an abundant supply of freshwater from its Tighe-Carmody, Mclean, Ashley, and Whiting Street Reservoirs. These reservoirs supply the city with nearly 2 billion gallons of capacity. And, Holyoke Water Works offers one of the lowest water rates in all of Massachusetts at \$0.47 per 100 gallons.

The city already uses locally generated hydroelectric power and has an updated wastewater treatment system guided by its new Integrated Management Plan. There are still combined sewer systems that can overflow during heavy rains, but about 60% of the system has been separated to better manage stormwater and reduce flooding, and work on separating the remaining parts of the system is underway.

As the climate changes, Holyoke expects more heat and heavier rainfall, which has the potential to exacerbate existing infrastructure and community issues. Holyoke’s dense urban downtown is particularly at risk for the heat island effect. The need to implement strategies to ameliorate the threat is urgent. Among the most useful will be the introduction of more greenery. Expanding green spaces provides critical help to cool neighborhoods, as well as being a source of beauty and comfort. With its existing low-carbon energy sources and forward-thinking planning, Holyoke is unusually well positioned to build a sustainable and resilient future.

Well-connected with numerous transportation options

Holyoke’s dense downtown street grid and existing canal walk infrastructure are key assets as the City looks to promote non-vehicular travel – so-called active transportation – within City limits. To fully unlock the economic and lifestyle potential of active transportation within Holyoke, it must be transformed into a functional network. High vehicular accident rates within Holyoke currently create both the perception and reality of danger for pedestrians and bicycles. These dangers can be addressed via enhancements to walking, bicycling, and transit infrastructure, improving safety for all, improving quality of life for anyone without a vehicle, and providing a whole new transportation option for Holyokers and for the region.

Located at the confluence of several highways and freight rail lines, Holyoke is well connected for potential future industrial endeavors. Holyoke can leverage these freight corridors for future potential shipping and manufacturing industries.

Goals for a Holyoke that is Sustainable and Connected



Goal 3.1
Safer and welcoming networks of streets, canals, and greenways

Holyoke’s sidewalk network downtown provides walkable connections, but deferred maintenance and fast traffic pose safety concerns. Improvements to the street network will focus on enhancing the pedestrian experience for residents and visitors alike. Improvements may range from routine sidewalk upgrades to world-class landmark projects.



Goal 3.2
Abundant green spaces that reduce climate hazards

Holyoke is projected to be impacted by increased heat and precipitation in the coming decades, which will disproportionately impact its dense urban downtown. Introducing nature-based solutions such as green infrastructure and increased tree plantings will help mitigate those issues, among other benefits.



Goal 3.3
Leverage the available capacity of Holyoke’s utilities

Holyoke is fortunate to have access to abundant clean water and a large unused capacity at its Water Pollution Control Facility. The City will explore ways to utilize these assets to generate revenue. This can include selling off wastewater treatment capacity or drawing new industrial customers.



Goal 3.4
Powered by renewable, inexpensive, abundant, and locally-controlled utilities

The City is well positioned to embrace a greener future, thanks to the hydroelectric power produced via the dam. As the owner of its utilities, the city will prioritize maintaining its infrastructure strategically by exploring ways to fill demand gaps, such as for residential fiber optic internet service.



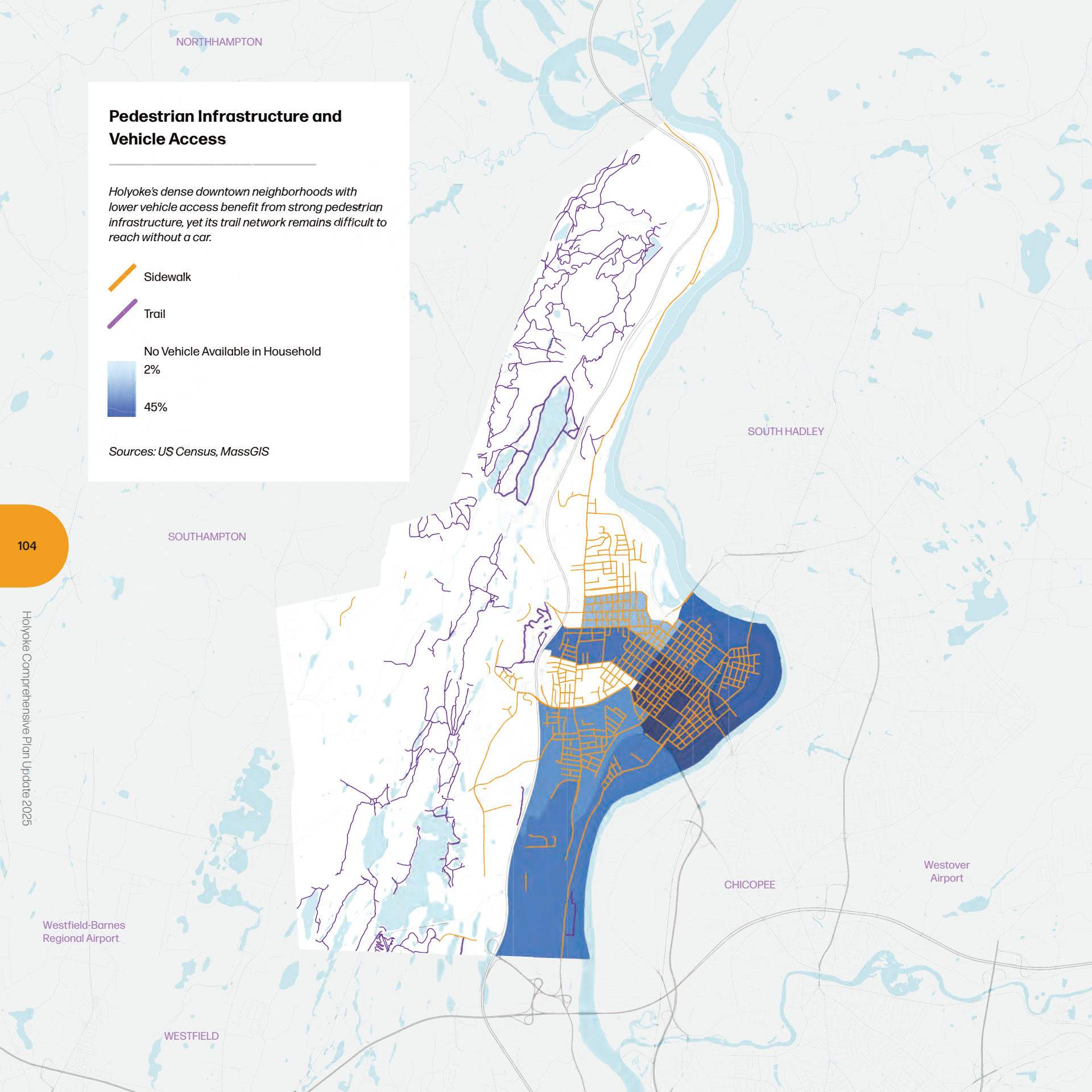
Goal 3.5
Connected to markets with Class 1 freight railroads

Holyoke has direct access to freight railroad corridors through its existing rail spurs. These rail spur tracks have potential to provide future industrial companies direct access to shipping networks, reducing costs for product distribution. The City will leverage these assets by preparing them for use and incorporating them into economic marketing materials.



Goal 3.6
Frequent, reliable, and dignified transit service

As part of the Pioneer Valley Regional Transit service area, Holyoke residents can take the bus throughout the region, but current schedules, service hours, and roadway traffic limit the reliability of existing routes. With PVRTA, Holyoke will explore options for frequency increases, expanded service hours, and prioritization within the roadway network.



GOAL 3.1

Safer and welcoming networks of streets, canals, and greenways

STRATEGY 3.1.1: Implement recommendations from prior transportation studies

In 2016, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) completed a bike and pedestrian planning study for Holyoke. Its recommendations have not aged. Holyoke can implement the low-cost and quick build pilot projects from this 2016 plan to generate momentum to continue expanding active transportation networks.

A recent parking study found that Holyoke's downtown has more parking lots than it currently needs. This now-underused, paved space could be repurposed as placemaking assets to incorporate green infrastructure and promote a vibrant downtown. Implementation of these recommendations will support safer cycling and walking, and the creation of a more walkable and attractive business district.

City Stewards: Department of Public Works; HBPC
External Partners: PVPC
Funding Sources: Safe Routes to School; Shared Streets and Spaces; Complete Streets Grants

STRATEGY 3.1.2: Identify and close gaps in active transportation networks

Holyoke's roadways currently discourage pedestrian and bicycle use. High automotive traffic volume and excessive speed make them feel dangerous for anyone on foot or bicycle, particularly at certain spots, and these gaps where there is no safe passage available create invisible but very real dead ends for foot and bicycle traffic. To create a functional citywide network for this active transportation, Holyoke will identify these gaps and make use of traffic calming strategies. The City will address design issues at intersections and key corridors to connect existing sidewalks while promoting safer traffic speeds.

As Holyoke expands its active transportation network, new gaps will become apparent. The city will continue to study and review how its transportation network functions which will allow it to identify opportunities for ongoing investments both locally and regionally. Priority connections to study include connections to parks and open spaces, schools, and community centers and gathering places.

This will be an ongoing project, but study should begin immediately. Early identification of spots where intervention has the potential to make for significant performance improvements will maximize Holyoke's funding opportunities for these projects, and facilitate work with industrial, institutional, and regional partners.

City Stewards: Department of Public Works; HBPC
External Partners: PVPC; MassDOT
Funding Sources: Safe Routes to School; SS4A; MassWorks

Examples of this strategy in action are marked by this symbol.



Lowell Canal Walk
Lowell's Canal Walk reactivated nearly six miles of historic mill-era canals and riverfront with landscaped trails featuring themed self-guided interpretive walks. Lowell provides a model for how Holyoke can expand its emerging network of canal walks.



**Holton Viaduct
Marsupial Bridge**
The Holton Street Viaduct Marsupial Bridge (2004-05) transformed unused space beneath an existing viaduct into a pedestrian/bike path linking Milwaukee neighborhoods. Similar infrastructure beneath I-90 and I-391 could link Holyoke to the Connecticut River Bikeway.



GOAL 3.1

Safer and welcoming networks of streets, canals, and greenways ^(cont.)

STRATEGY 3.1.3:
Build out connections to regional and local trails through landmark projects

Holyoke can build on existing bicycle and pedestrian paths to create a network that functions both as a practical transportation option and as an amenity and tourist attraction. The City is situated between several regional trails, including the Manhan Rail trail in Easthampton and the Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway in Chicopee. Holyoke's geographic position within the region allows the City to connect these trails, drawing more recreational users into Holyoke. Leveraging regional planning efforts can help to build out the necessary connections, not only promoting state goals for healthier (and less fossil-fuel dependent) quality of life, but also enhancing Holyoke's appeal as a destination and a place to live.

Holyoke can also use its canal system to expand recreation and destination options for residents and visitors. The Canal Walk can function both as a tourism draw and as an active transportation option for residents.

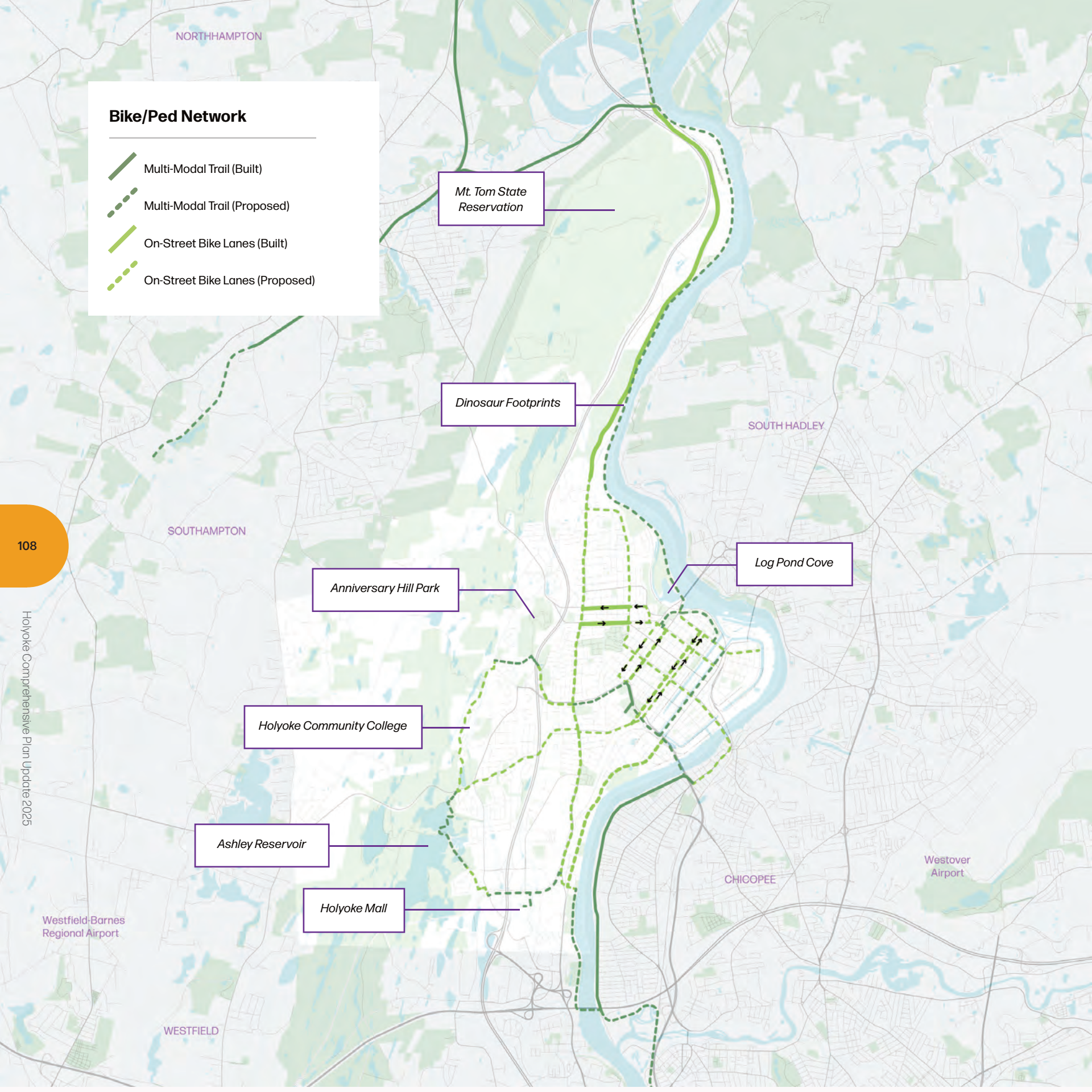
Holyoke's existing crossings of the Connecticut River provide further opportunities for the City to leverage existing bridge infrastructure and to create active transportation connections. Cantilevered or "marsupial" bridges dedicated to active transportation would improve access for people outside of motor vehicles without requiring new structures. These enhanced bridges should be tied to the existing Canal Walk and can function as landmarks within Holyoke and the broader region.

City Stewards: DPW, HBPC, Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission
External Partners: PVPC, MassDOT Mass Trails
Funding Sources: SS4AStrategyY 3.1.4

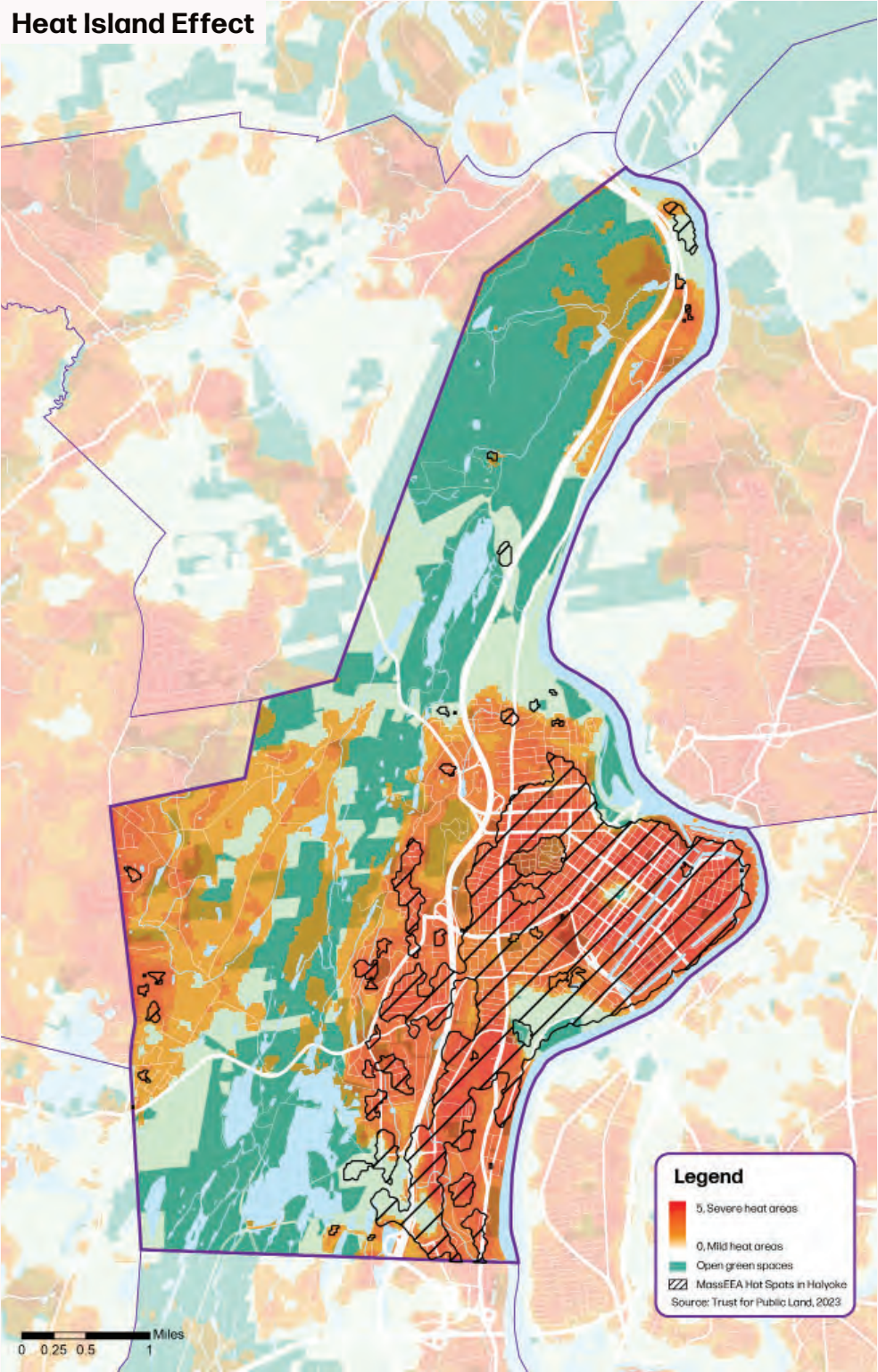
STRATEGY 3.1.4:
Introduce universal maintenance and upgrade policies for existing and planned infrastructure

Holyoke can improve consistency in street projects and maintenance by adopting clear design standards and policies for active transportation improvements. These include snow removal along shared-use paths and universal design guidelines for Complete Streets upgrades. All street and infrastructure maintenance projects should incorporate Complete Streets elements, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, transit accommodations, and streetscape and green infrastructure elements. Incorporating these standards across all City projects will minimize public disruption, save design time, and avoid duplicative spending.

City Stewards: DPW, HBPC, Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission
External Partners: PVPC, MassDOT
Funding Sources: Complete Streets Grants, Affordable Green Neighborhoods Grant



Heat Island Effect



Tree Planting Programs

Holyoke is actively working to grow the density of its tree canopy and reduce the urban heat island effect through tree planting programs like the Greening the Gateway Cities Program (GGCP) and the Holyoke Urban Forest Equity Plan



John Street

GOAL 3.2

Abundant green spaces that reduce climate hazards

STRATEGY 3.2.1:

Install green stormwater infrastructure in publicly-owned properties, streets, and parks. Prioritize areas that experience nuisance flooding.

Holyoke is facing a need to upgrade large parts of its legacy infrastructure, and is taking advantage of the opportunity to incorporate green infrastructure into these ongoing projects. It will continue to do so in future infrastructure projects. Green infrastructure is key to sustainability: it improves stormwater control, provides water filtration, and helps with urban heat reduction.

To ensure that Holyoke moves toward green infrastructure wherever possible, the City should codify achievable standards for development projects to incorporate it into their sites. The City can also establish standards for incorporating green infrastructure into streetscape and other capital projects. When adopting these standards, the City should be sure to establish maintenance protocols and associated crew training to ensure the proper stewardship of green stormwater infrastructure investments.

City Stewards: Planning, Conservation & Sustainability; DPW
External Partners: n/a
Funding Sources: MassDEP Non-point Source Competitive Grants; MassWork Infrastructure Grants; MVP Grant Program

STRATEGY 3.2.2:

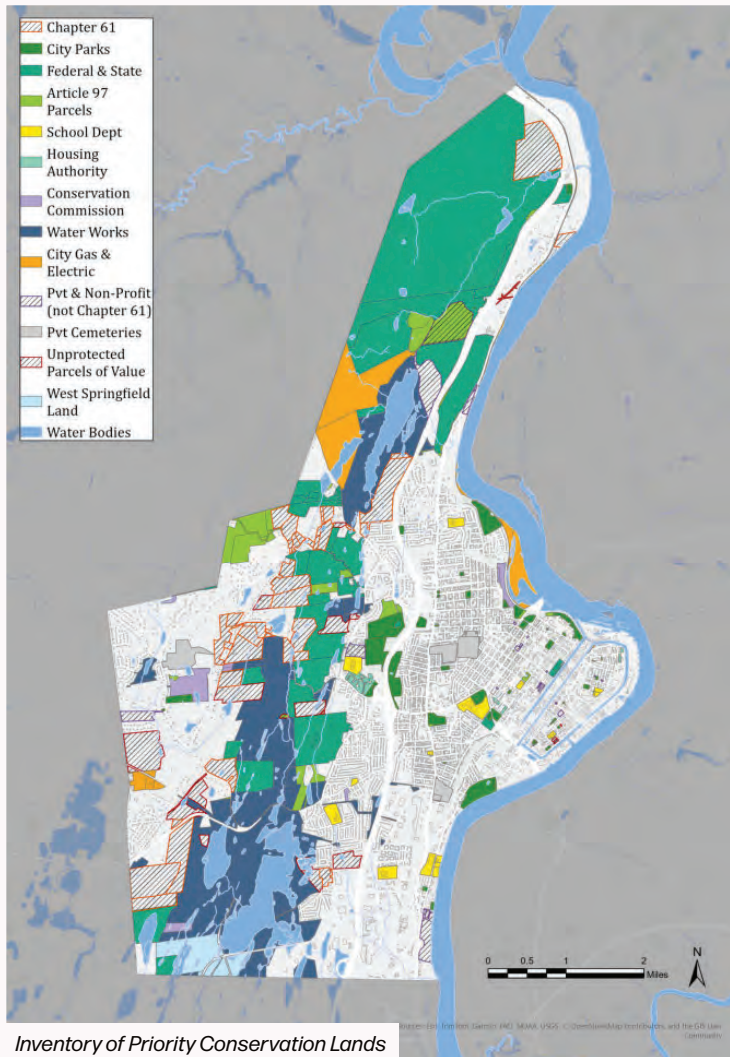
Reduce the effects of extreme heat by expanding tree canopy in tandem with green infrastructure projects

As part of its resilience strategy, the City will continue its expansion of its tree canopy that was put forth in its existing Urban Forest Equity Plan. The strategies and priority areas for canopy expansion established in that plan do not need updating. They target the densest areas of the city, which both experience the highest temperatures in Holyoke and are where people walk the most. Tree canopies reduce heat both by providing shade and by reducing the absorption of heat by the built environment.

Tree canopy expansion can be integrated into green infrastructure projects, but these are also useful projects in their own right.

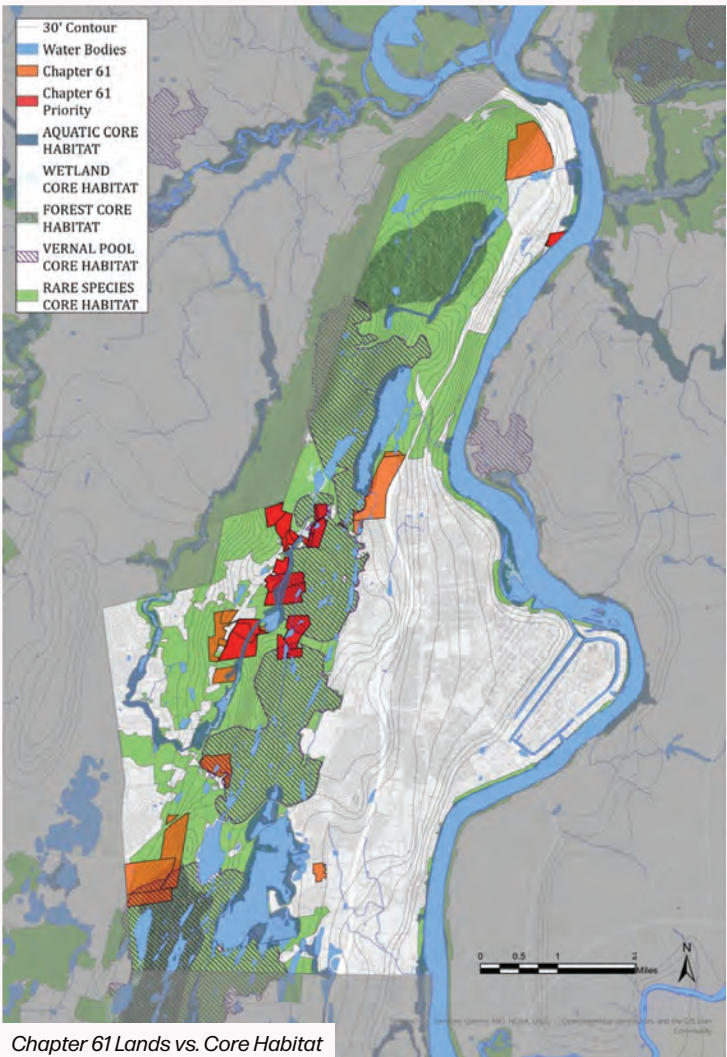
City Stewards: Planning, Conservation & Sustainability; DPW
External Partners: n/a
Funding Sources: Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants

Proposed Natural Resources



Inventory of Priority Conservation Lands

The 2025 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for Holyoke identifies key parcels for conservation and recreational development, aiming to enhance community access to green spaces and preserve natural resources.



Chapter 61 Lands vs. Core Habitat

Conservation efforts should focus on key core and priority habitat areas to protect regional wildlife and preserve species.

GOAL 3.2

Abundant green spaces that reduce climate hazards (CONTINUED)

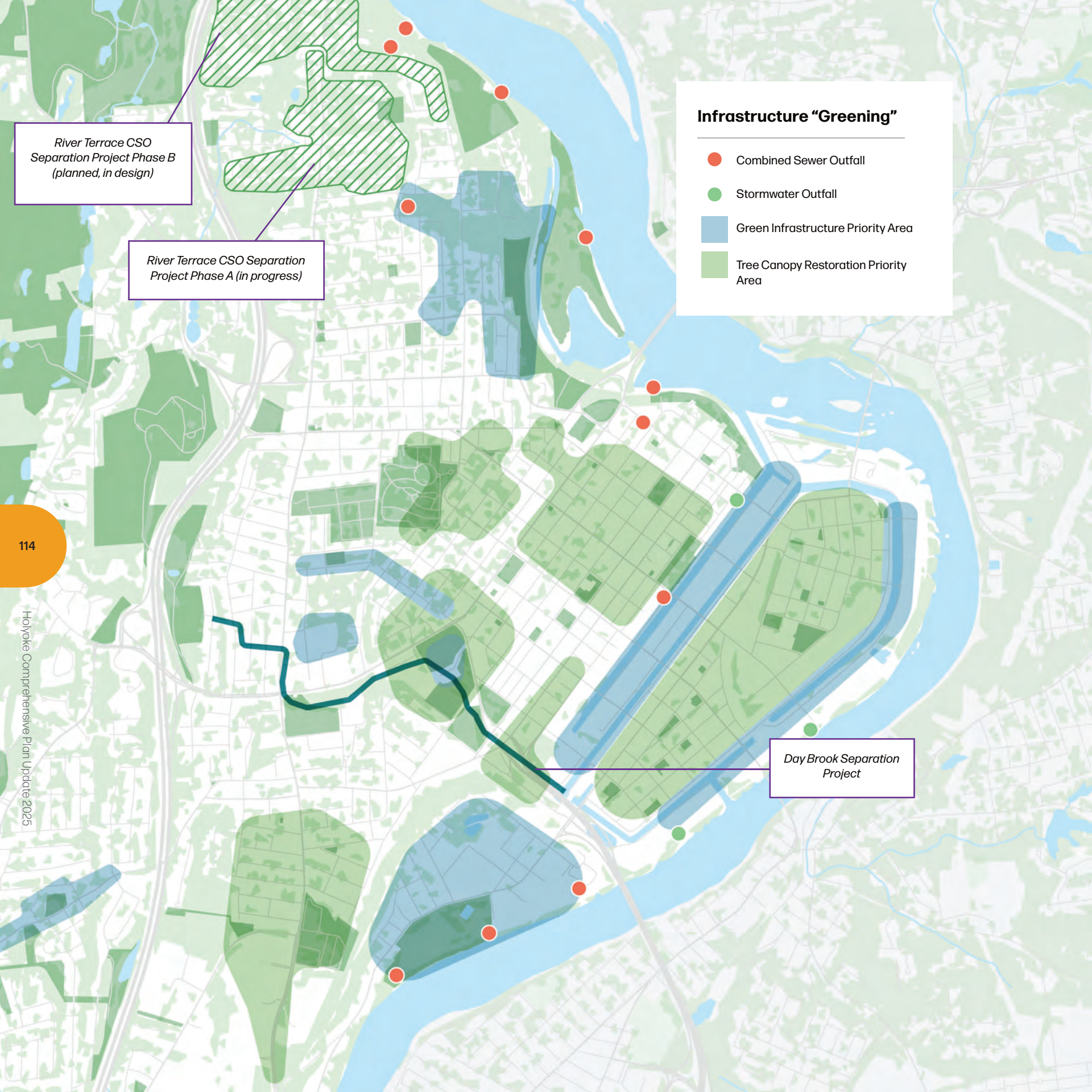
STRATEGY 3.2.3: Acquire parcels of high recreational, ecological, and conservation value.

Holyoke will aim to increase the amount of recreational, ecological, and conservation land under City ownership. Using the priority parcels identified in the 2025 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), the City will focus on acquiring land that strengthens neighborhood access to open space, protects sensitive natural areas, and supports long-term climate resilience.

Approximately 531 acres of privately owned land in Holyoke are currently enrolled in the state's Chapter 61 program, making them key candidates for future acquisition as they become available. To act quickly when these opportunities arise, the City could establish an emergency land acquisition fund. Accessibility should also be an important factor in acquisition decisions, emphasizing parcels that can be reached safely and conveniently by residents, including those living downtown without access to a car.

The City will explore partnerships to aid in the management of this land as it is acquired, including the Kestrel Land Trust and The Trustees of Reservations. Future use of the acquired parcels should carefully balance conservation and recreation programming, ensuring these parcels remain refuges for wildlife and resilience tools as well as recreational assets.

City Stewards: Holyoke Office of Parks and Recreation, Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development
External Partners: Kestrel Land Trust and The Trustees
Funding Sources:



GOAL 3.3

Leverage the available capacity of Holyoke’s utilities

STRATEGY 3.3.1:
Coordinate with the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the Integrated Management Plan (IMP)

Holyoke’s Integrated Management Plan for its wastewater system should be implemented through careful capital projects planning. This effort should also emphasize the City’s goal to maintain a state of good repair for its infrastructure. When feasible, the City can conduct a system-wide conditions analysis so it can better strategize its capital projects and practice proactive maintenance, rather reactively repairing system failures as they happen.

City Stewards: Holyoke Water Works (HWW), DPW
External Partners: City Council
Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Streets Grants

STRATEGY 3.3.2:
Continue separating sewer infrastructure from stormwater drainage infrastructure

Holyoke will continue its success in separating its combined sewer systems, of which 60% has already been separated. This will continue to reduce Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) during heavy precipitation events, meeting its goal of 85% separation by 2030, protecting water quality and public health. Much of this will be accomplished by implementing the new Integrated Management Plan the City has for its wastewater system.

City Stewards: Holyoke Water Works (HWW), DPW
External Partners: City Council
Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Streets Grants

Holyoke Moves Forward to Eliminate Wastewater Discharges Into Connecticut River

Posted on September 9, 2024

HOLYOKE — The City of Holyoke continues to eliminate combined sewer overflows (CSO) that cause discharges into the Connecticut River. The Holyoke wastewater system now prevents around 70 percent of solid waste from bypassing the treatment plant during heavy rains. According to Mary L. Monahan, chair of the City’s Board of Public Works, Holyoke was recently awarded \$10 million in 2% interest loans (and some principal forgiveness) from the Commonwealth’s State Revolving Fund and a \$2 million federal earmark for the River Terrace Sewer Separation project that will increase that reduction level to 85 percent, meet the current national requirements and put the city in full compliance with the Clean Water Act. The city will be bidding this project this fall.

Monahan noted that Holyoke is not the only CSO community discharging untreated wastewater into the Connecticut River as a result of rain events, such as the rain that fell last Friday. CSO communities are required to notify the public when a CSO event occurs. Holyoke doesn’t have a local daily newspaper that meets the required notification timeline, so Holyoke notifies residents via emails, City website updates, and TV news outlets. Unless Holyoke is subject to a unique localized heavy rain event, Monahan stated, other CSO communities in the area, including Springfield and Chicopee, are likely experiencing their own CSO overflows as well. They just have different notification procedures.

Eliminating Wastewater Discharges

Holyoke continues to implement its Long Term Control Plan to eliminate combined sewer overflows. The City aims to separate 85% of their combined sewers by 2030, with 60% separated so far, which will help reduce wastewater discharges.

GOAL 3.3

Leverage the available capacity of Holyoke’s utilities (cont.)

STRATEGY 3.3.3:
Prioritize water capacity and pressure for new development

While Holyoke’s abundance of clean supply can be sold to nearby communities, it can also be a draw for future users. Per its economic development goals, Holyoke will seek to attract new industries by advertising its abundant clean utility systems, and it is possible that new industrial users will be water-intensive ones. As the city prioritizes asset management going forward, it should utilize a dual approach of reserving water capacity and maintaining consistent water pressure throughout its system. This can mean investment in water main upgrades and pressure zones, especially in areas targeted for industrial or residential growth or water conservation programs that will reduce unnecessary demand, preserving capacity for future users.

City Stewards: DPW, Office of Planning and Economic Development, HEDIC
External Partners: WesternMass Economic Development Council
Funding Sources: MassWorks infrastructure Program, Massachusetts Clean Water Trust Grants

STRATEGY 3.3.4:
Capitalize on excess waste water treatment capacity and charge adjacent municipalities to process their waste water

Holyoke’s Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF) is built to handle 17.5 million gallons per day (mGPD), but is currently operating at 5-6 mGPD, meaning roughly 65% of its capacity is available. This excess capacity can generate new revenue and promote regional collaboration through Holyoke offering treatment services to adjacent municipalities. By entering into inter-municipal agreements, the city could treat wastewater from neighboring communities at a negotiated rate. This approach maximizes the value of existing infrastructure, spreads operational costs more efficiently, and strengthens regional environmental outcomes. Agreements should include clear terms on capacity limits, maintenance responsibilities, and cost-sharing for future improvements. By capitalizing on its available capacity, Holyoke can support regional cooperation while generating revenue for maintaining and modernizing its treatment facilities.

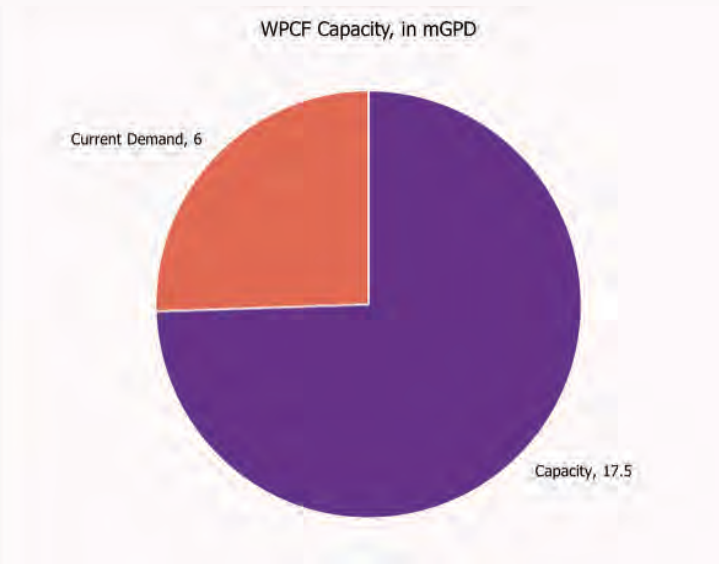
City Stewards: DPW, Office of Planning and Economic Development
External Partners: Partner municipalities, PVPC
Funding Sources: MassWorks infrastructure Program

Holyoke Water Pollution Control Facility
Holyoke’s Water Pollution Control Facility was originally designed to serve a much larger customer base, which means it still operates today with significant excess capacity. This makes the facility a powerful asset the City can leverage to support future economic development or generate renewable power.

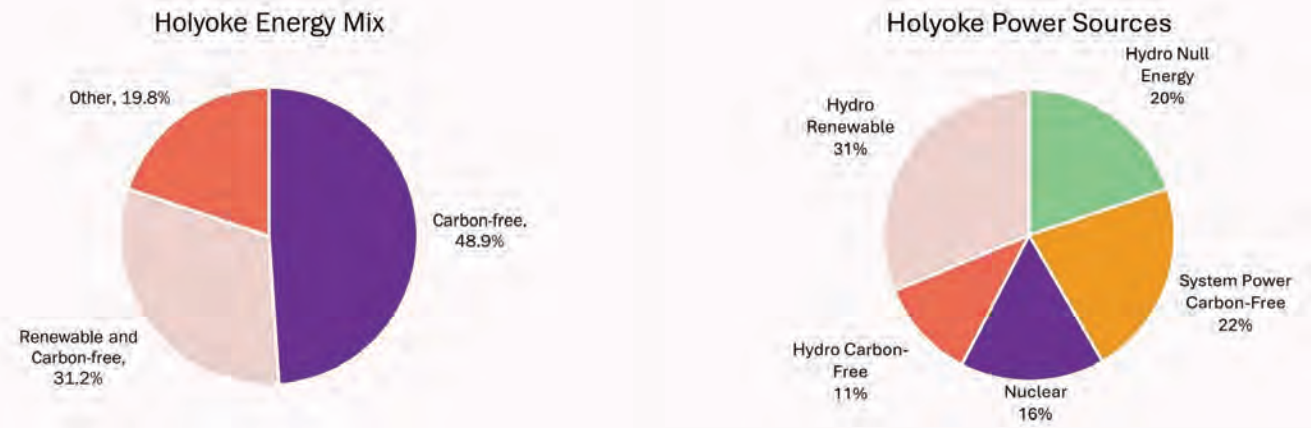
STRATEGY 3.3.5:
Produce renewable power at the Holyoke Water Pollution Control Facility

Holyoke will explore producing renewable power at its wastewater treatment plant by investing in technologies that generate energy from the treatment process. It will explore anaerobic digestion, a process that breaks down organic waste to produce bio-gas, which can be used to generate electricity or heat on-site. As it pursues these opportunities, the city will carefully balance renewable energy production with its responsibility to maintain reliable and sufficient wastewater treatment capacity for future users. This approach will support sustainability goals while ensuring the system remains strong and ready for growth.

City Stewards: DPW, HG&E
External Partners: Mass DOER, Veolia
Funding Sources: Mass DOER Competitive Grants



Power Sources and Energy Mix in Holyoke



Leader in Clean Energy
Holyoke is uniquely positioned with its own hydroelectric dam, providing a local source of clean, renewable power. This asset positions the City to be a leader in sustainability, and acts as an economic development asset.

GOAL 3.4

Powered by renewable, inexpensive, abundant, and locally-controlled utilities

STRATEGY 3.4.1:
Improve external marketing and storytelling materials related to Holyoke’s existing utility capacity for large businesses

Holyoke’s locally-generated clean energy and significant wastewater treatment plant capacity are assets that could help attract businesses, as are its underused industrial sites. Building external-facing marketing materials that tell the story of these assets in a way that appeals to business would be both an infrastructure and economic development asset.

City Stewards: DPW, OPED, HG&E, HWW
External Partners: Veolia
Funding Sources: Mass DOER Green Communities Grants

STRATEGY 3.4.2:
Incorporate resilience into future stormwater infrastructure planning and update operations and maintenance guidelines as needed to support resilience

To prepare for more frequent and intense storms, Holyoke should incorporate resilience planning into applicable future infrastructure planning. This means using the latest rainfall projections to plan future projects and continuing efforts to separate combined sewer overflows (CSOs), which will help reduce flooding and protect water quality. As these improvements are made, the City will also update maintenance practices to ensure the system continues to perform well under changing conditions.

City Stewards: OPED, Conservation & Sustainability, DPW, HWW
External Partners: Veolia
Funding Sources: Community Clean Energy Resiliency Initiative, Mass MVP Program

STRATEGY 3.4.3:
Expand fiber optic network to residential neighborhoods

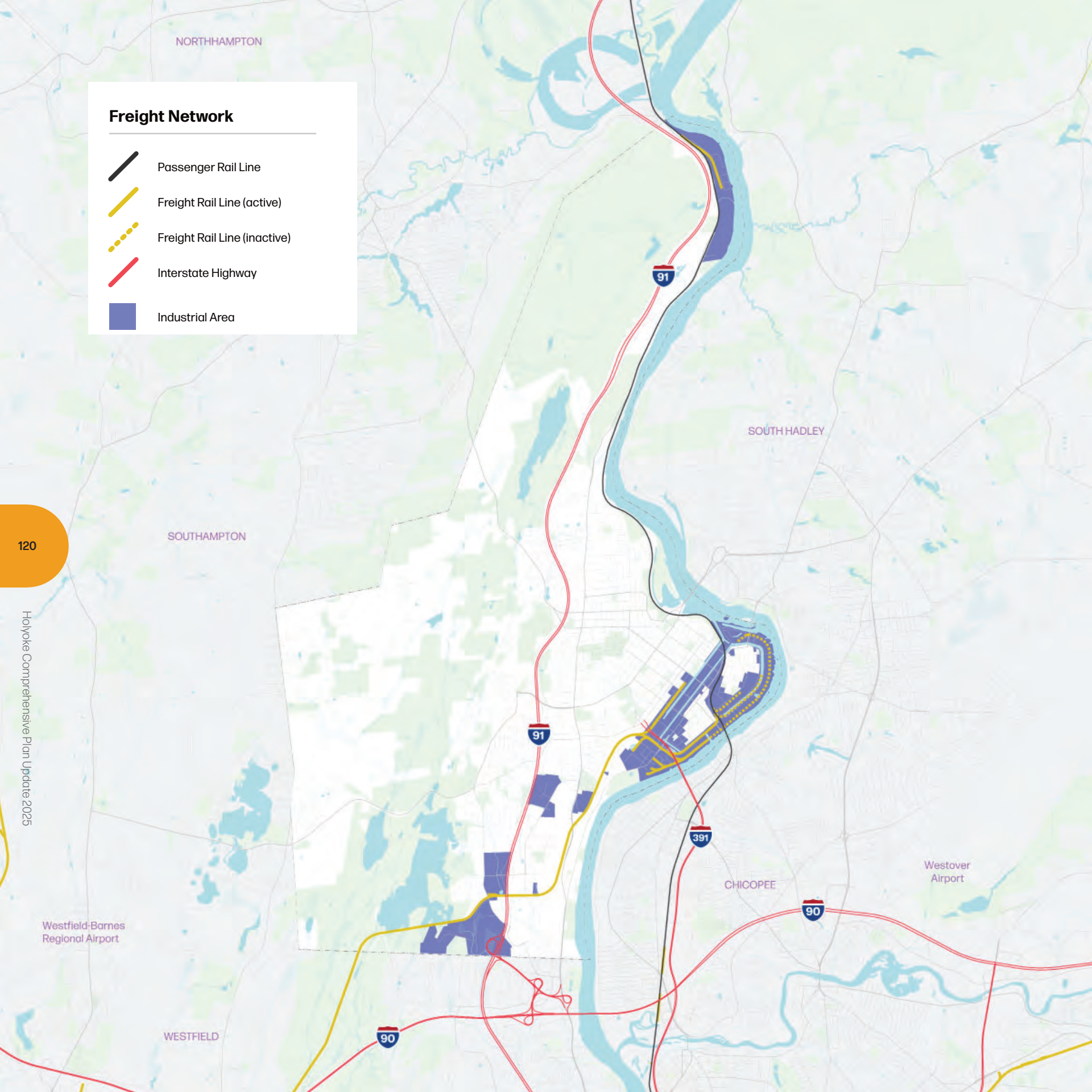
Fiber optic internet access has become key infrastructure for a first-world community. However, Holyoke Gas and Electric’s fiber optic network has remained largely unavailable to residential customers due to the high cost of expanding the fiber system to support it. To address the need for fiber optic access, the City can explore options such as leveraging demand aggregation to deploy the network in neighborhoods that are inclined to adopt it. It can also work with regional agencies and experts to explore approaches to buildout that have been successful in other communities.

City Stewards: OPED, HG&E
External Partners:
Funding Sources: Mass Municipal Fiber Grant Program

STRATEGY 3.4.4:
Prioritize state of good repair in all utility systems.

Holyoke’s legacy infrastructure is at high risk from age and neglect across large sections of the city, and a long-term goal is to bring it back to a state of good repair across all systems. As part of its new wastewater treatment plant management contract, the City is conducting a conditions analysis of its wastewater system. It can do the same for its water systems. With an inventory of the state of these infrastructure systems, the City will be able to prioritize repairs, and address issues before they become urgent problems.

City Stewards: Holyoke Gas & Electric, DPW, Holyoke Water Works
External Partners: Veolia
Funding Sources: MassWorks infrastructure program



GOAL 3.5

Connected to markets with Class 1 freight railroads

STRATEGY 3.5.1:
Deploy Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP) grant to extend Water Street spur and repair rail bridge between Sargeant St and Hamilton St

Holyoke can offer industries a rare transportation advantage via the Pioneer Valley Railroad (PVRR), which can provide Class 1 freight railroad service. To take full advantage of this asset will require improvements and upgrades to the rail system. A proposal to extend an existing short spur from a freight mainline and upgrade an existing rail bridge to accommodate heavy rail loads has been developed, and the state has awarded an IRAP grant to help fund the work. The IRAP grant program exists to help applicants invest in industry-based freight rail improvements such as these. Although the grant has been awarded, further progress pursuant to it has lagged. Given the potential economic benefits along the Water Street corridor that would come with these upgrades, Holyoke can and should work with the Pioneer Valley Railroad and state authorities to move this and related projects forward.

City Stewards: OPED
External Partners: MassDOT, PVRR
Funding Sources: Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP)

STRATEGY 3.5.2:
Deploy Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant to improve speeds and increase weight capacity

Holyoke’s freight rail access could be central to the City’s industrial future, but many of its existing spur tracks suffer from deferred maintenance, limiting its speed and weight capacities. Repairing these tracks and bringing them back to their full capacity is key to realizing the system’s potential,

and to preserving this key asset for the future. The work is expensive, but CRISI grants, available for capital projects that improve short-line railroad infrastructure and installation of safety programs or technology, can be pursued to defray some or all of these costs. Holyoke should explore these and other grants. The city is a strong candidate for them, well able to demonstrate the economic benefits that improvements to its freight rail lines would confer.

City Stewards: OPED
External Partners: MassDOT, Federal Railroad Administration, PVRR
Funding Sources: Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)

STRATEGY 3.5.3:
Feature freight rail access in business recruitment materials, emphasizing it as a feature that makes Holyoke a green place to do business.

Holyoke’s existing infrastructure is a valuable asset to retailers and manufacturers who rely on freight rail access, but businesses need to know about it before they can take advantage of it, or consider Holyoke as a location based on it.

Freight rail enables significant savings on shipping and receiving, as well as benefiting the community by reducing the need for expensive and high-emissions heavy motor vehicle traffic in the city center. Highlighting this feature in marketing efforts will promote industry recruitment, particularly when coupled with Holyoke’s existing renewable utility capacity.

City Stewards: OPED, Greater Holyoke Chamber
External Partners: Western Mass EDC, PVRR
Funding Sources: existing operating budgets

Local Success Stories

These local examples demonstrate the viability and impact of modern, freight-served industrial development in Massachusetts



The Muffin Plant

Flour arrives by rail. Then, it is pneumatically-conveyed from a rail spur directly into three 85,000-lb silos

Muffin Plant. Lawrence, MA
Commercial bakery, Muffin Town, received a \$270,000 Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP) grant in 2019, which it used to build a rail spur at its Muffin Plant in Lawrence. The facility handles an estimated 150 additional rail cars annually, reducing truck traffic by approximately 450 to 600 annual trips and supporting the employment of an additional 10 people

Casella Recycling Facility. Holyoke, MA
Casella operates a resource management and recycling facility on Main Street in Holyoke, MA, focused on sorting, processing, and diverting materials from the waste stream. By using rail transport, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 truck trips are eliminated annually.



Casella Sorting Facility

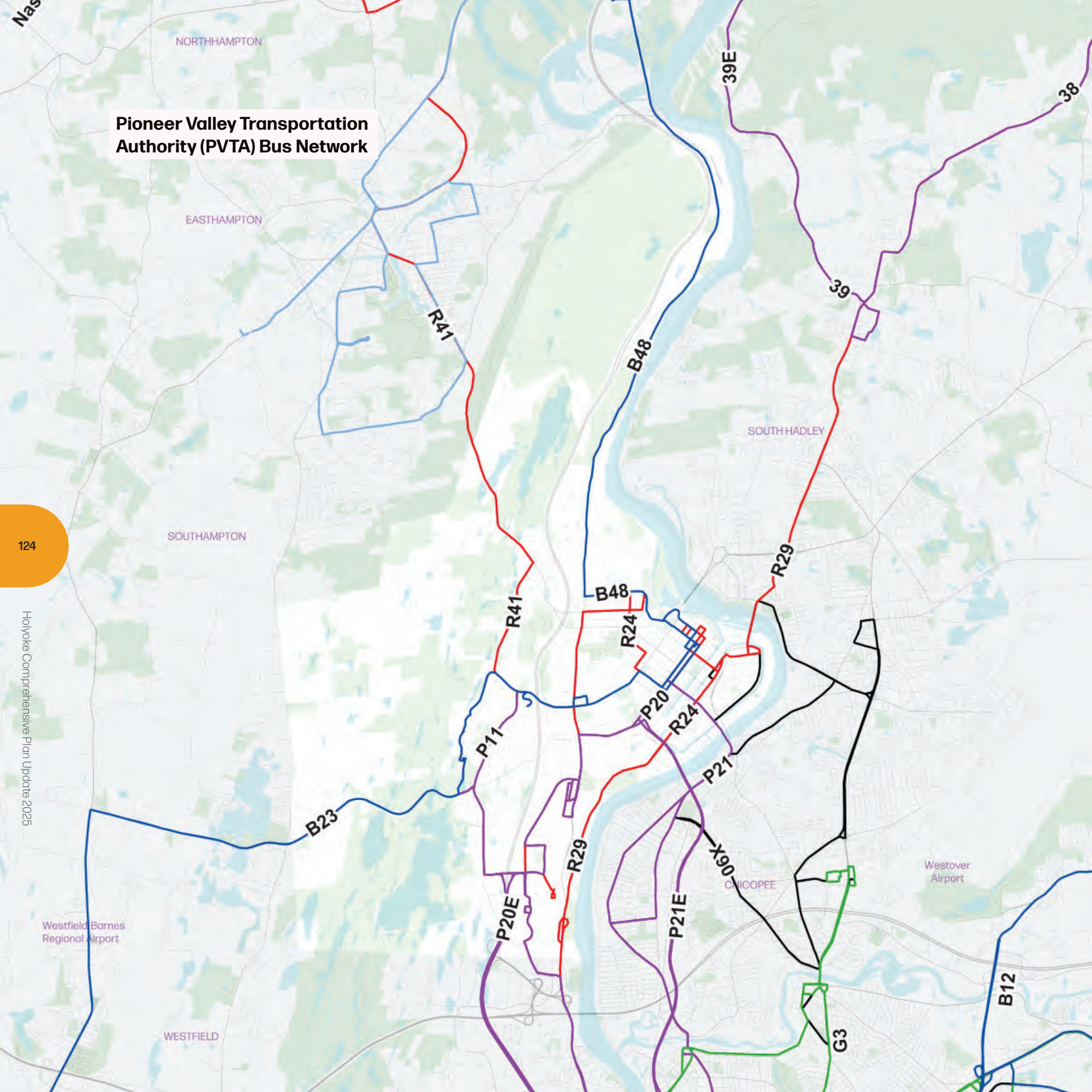
Collection trucks bring waste to Casella's facility on Main Street, where it is sorted, loaded onto trains, and shipped to recycling facilities.

10,000
truck trips
eliminated
annually



Muffin Town
is a local, family-owned brand





Pioneer Valley Transportation Authority (PVTA) Bus Network

GOAL 3.6

Frequent, reliable, and dignified transit service

STRATEGY 3.6.1:

Improve bus frequency to a bus every 15 minutes during peak hour on major routes

Holyoke's residents utilize transit to access jobs, schools, and errands. Frequent transit allows for flexibility and increases residents' trust that they can get where they need to go. Holyoke can work with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority to improve service frequency by identifying funding and staffing opportunities and increasing route efficiency.

City Stewards: OPED
External Partners: PVTA
Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces;
Complete Street Grants

STRATEGY 3.6.2:

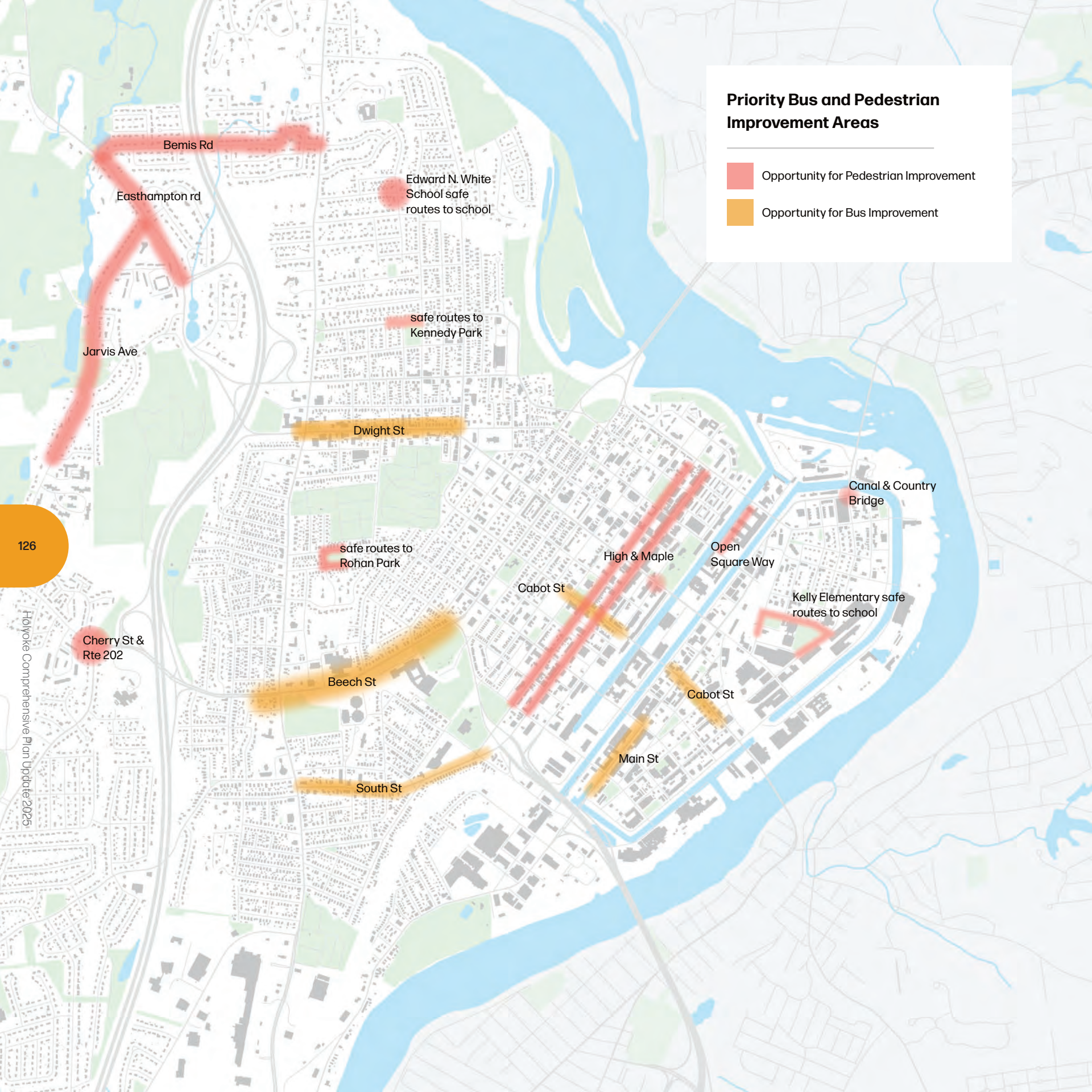
Extend service hours into the evening to serve shift workers, especially on routes that serve the Holyoke Mall

Currently, many PVTA routes cease operations before 10pm on weekdays and before 6pm on weekends. Workers on shift outside of these operating hours may not be able to rely on transit, limiting job access to those able to afford a private car. Holyoke can work with the PVTA to identify funding and staffing opportunities to extend these service hours, particularly on routes serving the Holyoke Mall, a key job center for Holyoke residents.

City Stewards: OPED
External Partners: PVTA, The Pyramid Companies
Funding Sources: Shared Streets and Spaces;
Complete Street Grants



MeVa
Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority re-branded as MeVa Transit, adopting a vibrant design inspired by Old San Juan and local mill-era motifs. Clearer stop markers, bilingual information, simplified maps, and bold, consistent graphics now make riding easier to navigate.



GOAL 3.6

Frequent, reliable, and dignified transit service (CONTINUED)

STRATEGY 3.6.3:

Improve travel times by creating bus lanes and/or reconfiguring bus stops along key travel corridors in conjunction with complete streets projects

Holyoke can work with the PVTa to identify pinch points along key travel corridors and reconfigure City streets to improve reliability and travel times. Providing bus only lanes, relocating and enhancing bus stops, and installing bus queue jumps at key intersections reduces the impacts of private motor vehicle traffic on bus routes and riders.

City Stewards: DPW
External Partners: PVTa, MassDOT
Funding Sources: Complete Street Grants

STRATEGY 3.6.4:

Improve bus stop design to improve comfort and accessibility

Many of PVTa's bus stops lack signage, benches, shelters, or other amenities. These amenities improve transit system legibility and promote the dignity of transit riders. Holyoke can invest in enhancements to bus stops to promote transit use and reinforce transit options.

City Stewards: DPW
External Partners: PVTa, MassDOT
Funding Sources: Complete Street Grants



Electric Buses

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTa) is actively transitioning its Pioneer Valley fleet to zero-emission battery electric buses. Backed by tens of millions in federal and state funding, the agency is replacing older diesel buses, installing dozens of high-speed charging stations, and upgrading maintenance facilities in Springfield.

Holyoke is...

Safe and Compassionate!



high-quality
public education



accessible
social programs

INTAKE CENTER

Old San ... BERY



clean, vibrant,
& safe downtown



care-oriented
first response

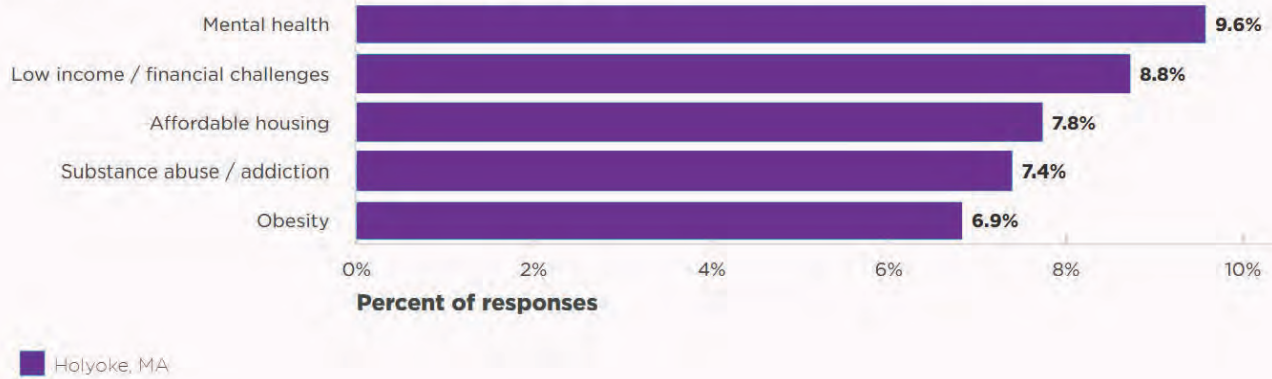
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Holyoke is...

Safe and Compassionate

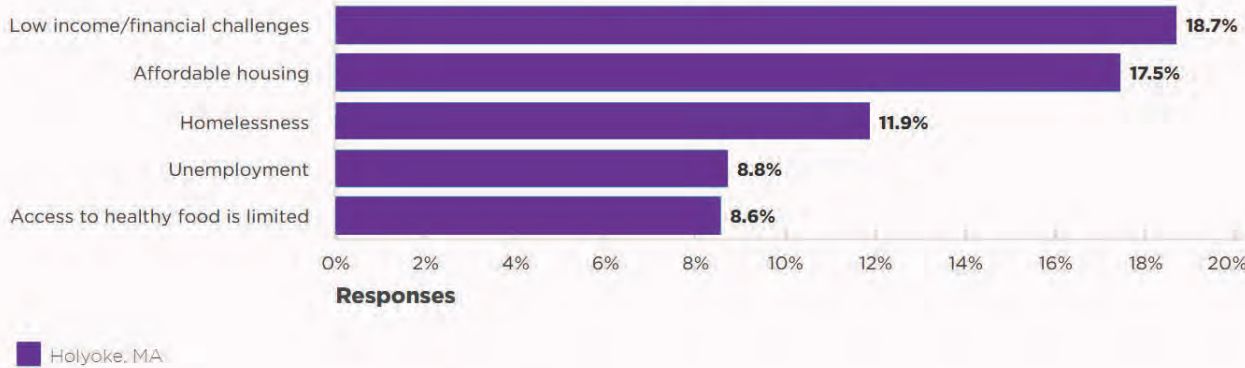
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Choose the top five health-related concerns that you believe are the most common in the community where you live.



Sources: CHNA Survey, Holyoke Medical Center, 2022

Choose the top five environmental-related concerns that you believe are the most common in the community where you live.



Sources: CHNA Survey, Holyoke Medical Center, 2022

Current conditions, trends, and opportunities

Holyoke is comprised predominantly of communities of color, and it has deep cultural and historical ties to the Puerto Rican diaspora. While the city’s overall population has declined slightly over the past two decades, the Latino community has grown significantly and now represents Holyoke’s largest ethnic group. Concentrated in the Flats, South Holyoke, and downtown neighborhoods, Latino residents form the cultural backbone of the city, and Spanish is spoken in 41% of households.

Unlike many gateway cities, only 6% of Holyoke residents are foreign-born, and half of those immigrants arrived before 2000. The city faces economic challenges, with median household income roughly half the Massachusetts average. Central Holyoke experiences high poverty rates and is home to larger, younger households, many led by single parents.

Educational attainment has improved in recent years as more residents complete high school and earn college degrees, while the share of residents without a high school diploma has declined. Despite this progress, health and quality-of-life challenges remain. Residents cite access to safe housing, nutritious food, quality education, and stable employment as critical factors shaping health outcomes. Community-based organizations play a central role in addressing these needs. In 2022, local partners launched the Holyoke HUB, a coalition of organizations working together to provide coordinated support for residents facing complex social, economic, and health challenges.

Puerto Rican Cultural District

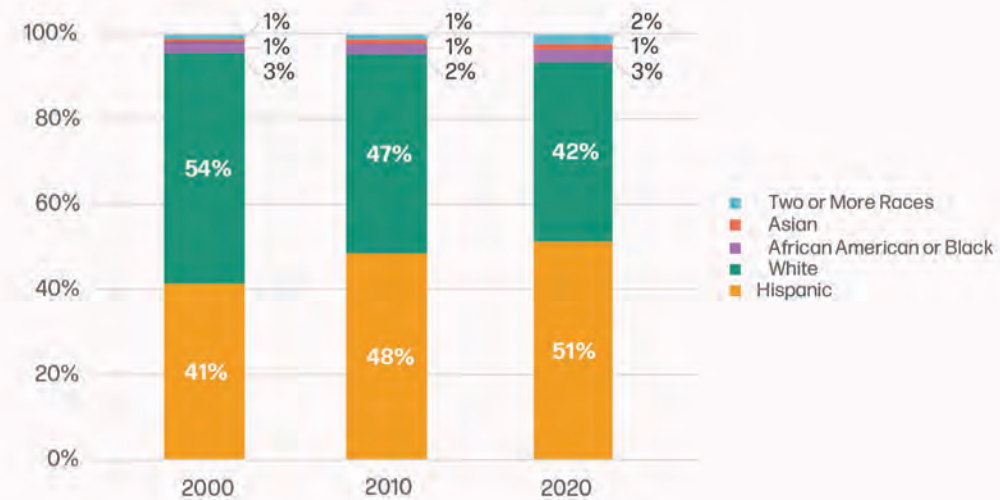
Holyoke has the highest concentration of Puerto Rican residents outside Puerto Rico and is home to one of only two Puerto Rican Cultural Districts in the United States, designated by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in 2024. Stretching along Main Street between I-391 and Lyman Street, the district celebrates Puerto Rican culture through local businesses, food, arts, and public realm improvements. In 2026, the district was selected for MassDevelopment’s Transformative Development Initiative, creating new opportunities for state investment and implementation of community priorities.



La Cultura es Poder
This mural, created by Colectivo Moriviví and located on Main Street in the Puerto Rican cultural district, pays tribute to Boriquen heritage and resilience, intertwining ancestral traditions like bomba dance with local Holyoke icons.

Race and Ethnicity Over Time

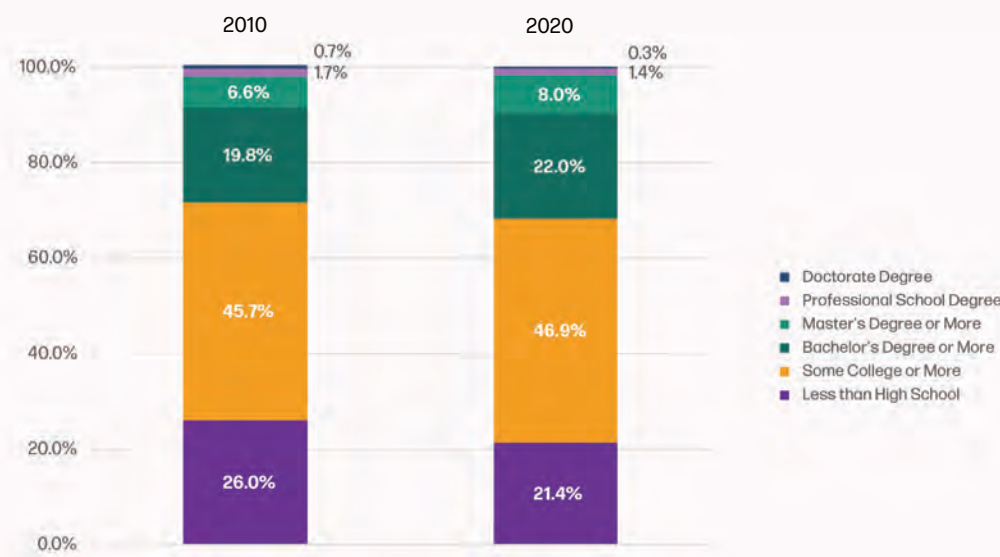
The Hispanic-identifying community of Holyokers continues to grow as a share of the overall population. In 2010, it became the majority ethnic group, and by 2020 it had accounted for more than half of the population.



Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2000,2010, 2020 five-year estimates

Educational Attainment

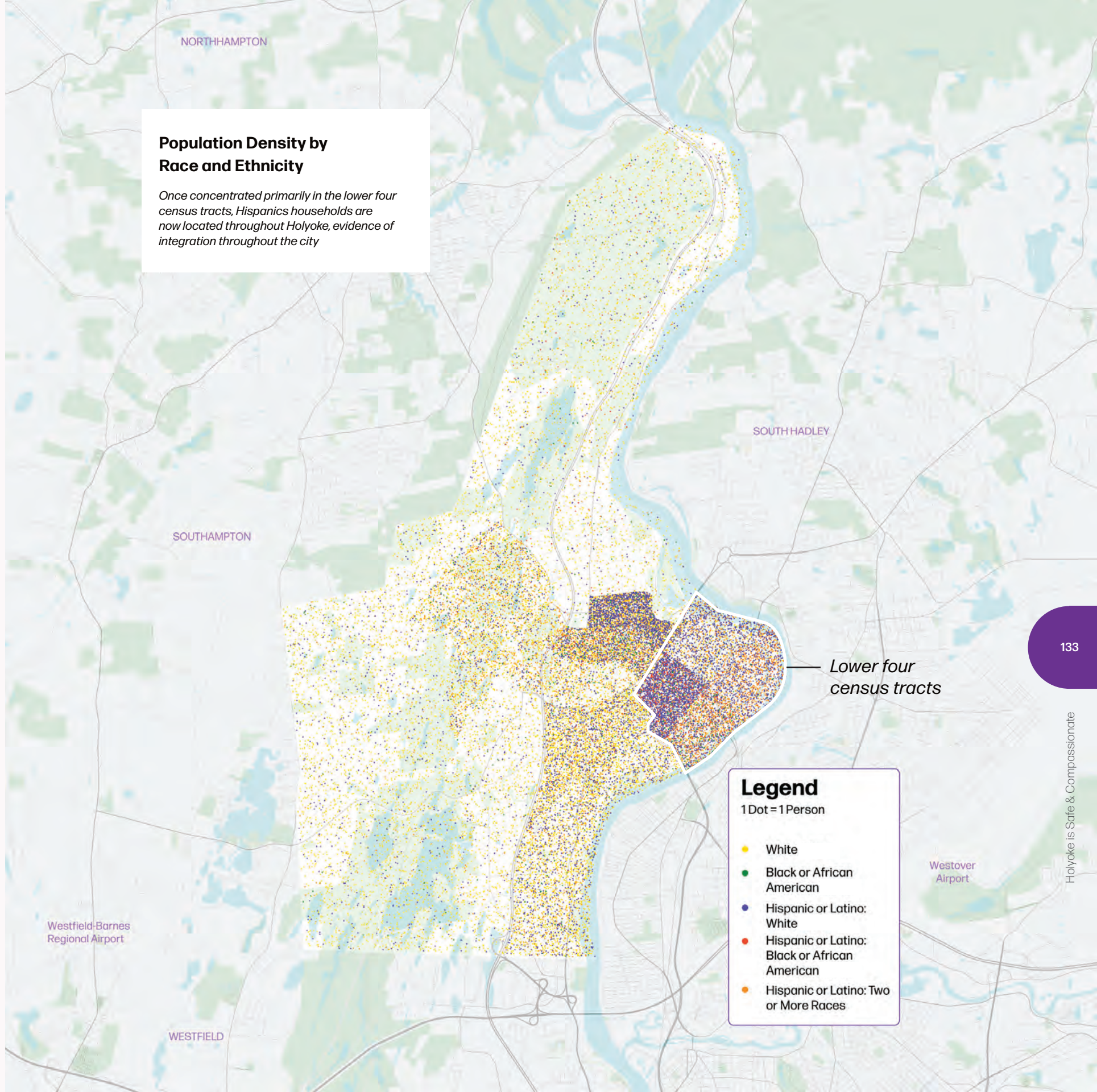
In the last decade, strides have been made in increasing education attainment. Bachelor degree attainment is up more than 2% and the high school dropout rate is down over 3%. Trends are moving in the right direction.



Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2010, 2020 five-year estimates

Population Density by Race and Ethnicity

Once concentrated primarily in the lower four census tracts, Hispanics households are now located throughout Holyoke, evidence of integration throughout the city



Legend
1 Dot = 1 Person

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino: White
- Hispanic or Latino: Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino: Two or More Races

Goals for a Holyoke that is Safe and Compassionate



Goal 4.1
High quality, sought-after public education

Holyoke recognizes that good public schools are essential to workforce development and the retention of students from all demographics. Holyoke Public Schools have exited receivership and resumed local control of its education system. HPS can form partnerships with local institutions to bring additional funding, technical assistance, and operational support for governance and pedagogy to advance HPS into a system of choice.

The goals are that families who have the option to move to the suburbs or send their children to private school opt instead for HPS, that Holyoke families across all demographics will benefit from high-quality education as a community of learners, and HPS will become attractive to more school choice families across the region.



Goal 4.2
Crime is prevented through community first public safety practices

Holyoke continues to strike a balance between compassionate care and enforcement of the law. Holyoke will continue and expand on efforts to improve its public safety practices; this vision can include the following efforts: Licensed social workers participate in co-patrols and serve as first responders to individuals in crisis, connecting those in need to the care that is available so that issues can be resolved off the streets and in professional care environments.

Compassion does not mean that business owners nor residents have to tolerate destructive social behaviors. The other half of co-patrol involves police officers who practice community policing principles. Through foot patrols, officers get to know residents and workers, building trust and gaining nuanced understanding of recurring issues. The officer's presence is a deterrent to crime. Yet, when incidents do occur, the issuance of citations and arrests send a clear message that Holyoke will not tolerate illegal behavior.



Goal 4.3
Easy access to social programs

The City can redouble its partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to deliver social services to residents through trusted platforms. Holyoke enjoys an ecosystem of CBOs that have put in the work to build relationships within communities and tailor services to meet the needs of their constituents. Whether that looks like offering intake in Spanish, omitting paperwork barriers, or simply being open in convenient locations and times—these organizations know their constituents well.

The City will continue to forge and sustain relationships with the CBOs and leverage their platforms to spread awareness of and grow participation in City services.



Goal 4.4
A clean, safe, and vibrant downtown

Like Pittsfield, North Adams, and other Western Massachusetts peers, Holyoke is moving into a future where it will be known for its vibrant downtown. A Business Improvement District (BID) could steward the public realm with clean and green services, and activate the streets with regular pop-ups, festivals, and ciclovias. With increasing numbers of people walking the sidewalks, shopping, dining, and promenading, little room will be left for malfeasance, and the City can respond more quickly to any nuisances that do occur. Holyoke taxpayers will see their government working for them, cynicism will be replaced by civic pride, and downtown will be fully restored as the heart of Holyoke.

Menu

Boston

NEWS

LOCAL NEWS

NATIONAL NEWS

POLITICS

OBITUARIES

CRIME

KAREN READ

TRAFFIC

Kristian Campbell

LOCAL NEWS

Holyoke Public Schools on track to leave receivership, return to local control in 2025

A provisional decision was announced to transition the district, which has been in receivership since 2015, to local control by July 1.



The Mayor of Holyoke Joshua A. Garcia and Superintendent/ receiver Anthony Soto at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education morning meeting where they received the news. (Jinathus Wiggo /Globe Staff)

By Molly Farrar
October 30, 2024
3 minutes to read

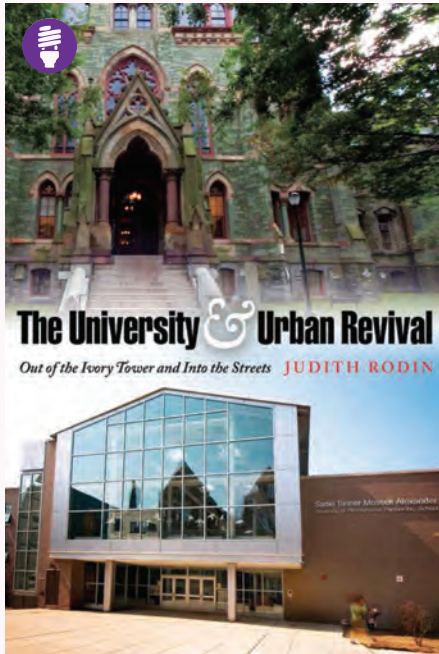
After a decade under the state's control, Holyoke Public Schools will potentially be removed from its receivership status next year, a provisional decision the state announced Tuesday.

Holyoke schools were placed in receivership status in 2015, as the district was chronically underperforming and wasn't showing improvement over time. Holyoke had the **lowest graduation rate** in the state and one of Massachusetts's highest dropout rates at the time. Since then, the state reported progress including an improved graduation rate, reduced out-of-school suspension rate, and expansion of pre-K.

Holyoke currently enrolls about 4,900 students across 10 schools. The district is also building a new middle school to open next fall.



Holyoke Public Schools
2025 was a banner year for HPS. It exited state receivership in July and celebrated the opening of Peck Middle School in September, marking a momentous turning point in for the system.



Penn Alexander School, Philadelphia, PA.
A partnership between a local university and the School District of Philadelphia to establish a desirable, public K-8 school was the centerpiece of successful initiative to transform once beleaguered West Philadelphia into a thriving community.



GOAL 4.1

High quality, sought-after public education

STRATEGY 4.1.1:
Partner with institution(s) to enhance K-12 education in Holyoke Public Schools

On July 1, 2025, Holyoke Public Schools exited state receivership and returned to local control of its public education system. This transition is an opportunity to reset and regenerate the system—and outside resources can bolster such an effort. Institutions that share an interest in improving learning outcomes in HPS are logical partners: local universities, local employers, and philanthropies. Partnering with such organizations can bring funding for operations and capital projects and technical assistance for teacher training, pedagogy, and school administration.

City Stewards: Holyoke Public Schools
External Partners: philanthropic foundations, HCC, local universities
Funding Sources: grants and technical assistance from external partners

STRATEGY 4.1.2:
Implement best practices in pedagogy and administration

HPS’s return to local control presents an opportunity to strengthen and expand best practices in public education. Key priorities include recruiting and retaining effective teachers based on classroom performance and student outcomes, alongside continued investment in educators trained in culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (CLSP). Strong, visionary administrative leadership will likewise be essential to advancing student success. Equally important is the provision

of high-quality learning environments that support student well-being through features such as natural light and passive ventilation. Finally, access to healthy, nutrient-rich meals remains a critical component of student achievement, ensuring that all students are equipped to focus, learn, and thrive in the classroom.

City Stewards: Holyoke Public Schools
External Partners: philanthropic foundations, HCC, local universities, Sodexo
Funding Sources: grants and technical assistance from external partners

STRATEGY 4.1.3:
Foster economic connectedness among students that cuts across class lines

Growing up in an interclass community improves children’s socioeconomic outcomes and gives them a better shot at rising out of poverty. A 2022 study published in *Nature*⁷ found that, for poor children, living in an area where people have more friendships that cut across class lines significantly increases how much they earn in adulthood. Researchers say economic connectedness is a better predictor of a community’s upward mobility than any other characteristic studied. HPS can foster interclass peer-to-peer student interactions by boosting enrollment of students from middle-class and families with college-educated parents or guardians.

City Stewards: Holyoke Public Schools
External Partners: philanthropic foundations, HCC, local universities
Funding Sources: grants and technical assistance from external partners

7 Social Capital I: Measurement and Associations with Economic Mobility

GOAL 4.2

Crime is prevented through community first public safety practices

STRATEGY 4.2.1: Institute alternative, community-based first responder services for non-violent incidents

Police officers need not be the first responders to non-violent behavioral health incidents. Instead, two-person response teams composed of a licensed social worker and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) can be the first responders who are best-trained to provide appropriate care and referrals to service providers for greater Holyoke’s most vulnerable populations. These teams relieve police officers of burdensome caseload and allow police to focus on other matters.

City Stewards: Holyoke Police Department
External Partners: EOPSS, OGR, philanthropic foundations and community-based organizations
Funding Sources: opioid settlement funds, Medicaid, state and federal grants, philanthropic and non-profit partners

STRATEGY 4.2.2: Strengthen community-based policing

Through community policing, Holyoke can build stronger relationships between police and the community, and focus policing on preventing crime before it happens rather than reactive enforcement. Community policing works by shifting the role of law enforcement from strictly enforcing laws to actively engaging with the community to prevent crime and solve problems collaboratively. Officers are assigned to specific neighborhoods long-term to build trust and familiarity. They attend community meetings, school events, and local gatherings to connect with residents. Police work with community members to identify and prioritize local issues. Together, they develop tailored solutions. The goal is to create safer neighborhoods through mutual respect, accountability, and shared responsibility for public safety. Success is measured not just by arrests, but by improved relationships, reduced fear of crime, and increased community satisfaction.

Massachusetts municipalities have access to several active grant opportunities for community policing, primarily managed by the state’s Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and the Office of Grants and Research (OGR).

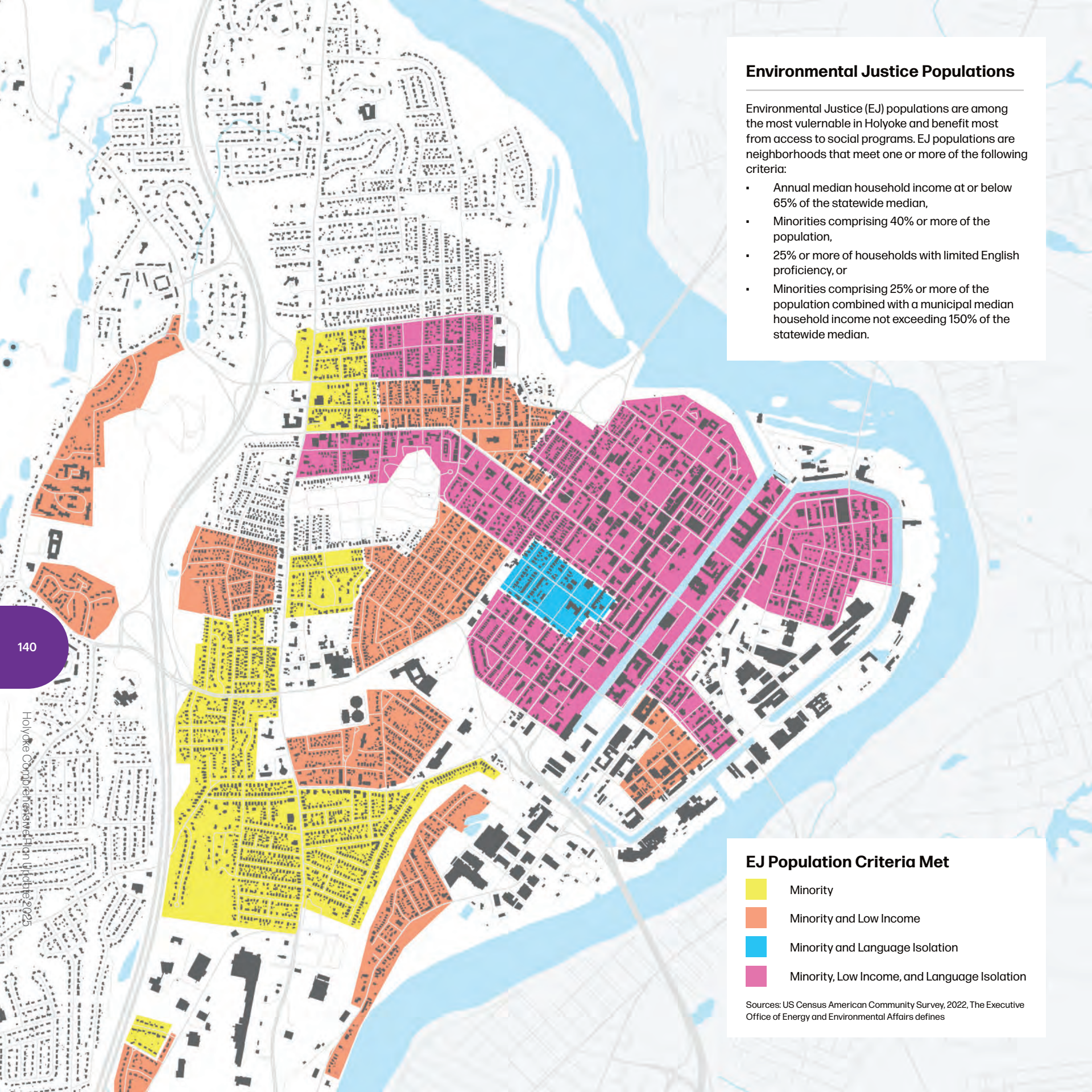
City Stewards: Holyoke Police Department, MA State Police
External Partners: EOPSS, OGR
Funding Sources: free



Community Alternative Response Emergency Services (CARES). St Paul, MN
When non-violent mental health crises and behavioral emergencies occur in St. Paul, MN, two-person response teams comprised of Fire Dept medical technicians and licensed social worker are the first responders.



University City District Safety Ambassador Program. Philadelphia, PA
The University City District Safety Ambassador Program features uniformed professionals who provide services like vehicle lockouts and walking escorts, act as a deterrent to crime, and promote safety within the Philadelphia neighborhood. They also serve as the “eyes and ears” of the community, patrolling and reporting suspicious activities.



Environmental Justice Populations

Environmental Justice (EJ) populations are among the most vulnerable in Holyoke and benefit most from access to social programs. EJ populations are neighborhoods that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Annual median household income at or below 65% of the statewide median,
- Minorities comprising 40% or more of the population,
- 25% or more of households with limited English proficiency, or
- Minorities comprising 25% or more of the population combined with a municipal median household income not exceeding 150% of the statewide median.

EJ Population Criteria Met

- Minority
- Minority and Low Income
- Minority and Language Isolation
- Minority, Low Income, and Language Isolation

Sources: US Census American Community Survey, 2022, The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs defines

GOAL 4.3

Easy access to social programs

STRATEGY 4.3.1: Redouble partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to deliver social programs

Holyoke enjoys an ecosystem of trusted CBOs with deep community ties and a proven track record of culturally competent service delivery. These organizations are often better-positioned than local government to interact directly with support-seekers from vulnerable communities.

The City can partner with Holyoke’s CBOs to address community needs in areas such as housing, food security, mental health, youth development, and so on. Funding agreements will be needed to provide financial support to CBOs to implement targeted programs that align with community priorities.

The CBO and City can collaborate on program design, working jointly to tailor services for specific populations, ensuring relevance and accessibility. Both parties should maintain ongoing communication through sharing data, holding regular meetings, and engaging in joint planning to improve outcomes and ensure accountability.

City Stewards: Holyoke Community Development Department, Holyoke Board of Health
External Partners: Community-based organizations
Funding Sources: in-kind partnerships



Enlace de Familias de Holyoke
Enlace is a community-based organization that provides family support, youth programs, leadership development, and advocacy to strengthen Holyoke residents and neighborhoods.

GOAL 4.4

A clean, safe, and vibrant downtown

STRATEGY 4.4.1:
Complete the formation of a High Street Business Improvement District (BID) to enhance the stewardship of this commercial corridor

Efforts to establish a downtown BID are already underway, and awareness and support among local property and business owners is growing. Next, the structure of the BID must be defined: its boundaries, its funding sources, its governance structure, and its service plan. BIDs are typically funded through special assessments paid by property owners within the defined BID boundaries. Grants, sponsorships, and event revenues can supplement the special assessments. Projecting how much revenue can be expected will help craft a realizing service plan, which typically consists of: cleaning and beautification, safety and security patrols, marketing and events, business support services, and capital improvements (e.g., lighting, signage).

City Stewards: Holyoke Redevelopment Authority, City Assessor
External Partners: GHC, PVTA, property owners
Funding Sources: tax abatements, philanthropic grants

STRATEGY 4.4.2:
Quickly resolve citizen complaints about nuisances and blight

A study of a clean and green program in Newark found that where the program had been implemented, residents felt more secure than residents in other areas, tended to perceive that crime had been reduced, and had more favorable opinions of the police, while officers walking beats in those areas held more favorable attitudes toward the citizens in their neighborhoods. This study became the basis for “Broken Window Theory” (Wilson and Kelling, 1982), which argued that visible signs of disorder and neglect—like broken windows, graffiti, or litter—signal that no one is in control and can encourage further crime, while fostering cynicism among residents who feel their tax dollars are wasted by an unresponsive city government.

Though the theory has too often been cited to justify harmful over-policing, it holds a key lesson for Holyoke: quickly resolving nuisance complaints is a fast, low-cost way to reduce perceptions of crime and foster favorable attitudes between residents and city government. Holyoke’s own Flex Squad—a multi-department initiative pairing Public Health, Building, Police, Fire, and Public Works to conduct block-by-block sweeps, issue citations for code violations, and address litter and blight—puts this principle into practice.

City Stewards: Holyoke Building Department, Department of Public Works, Holyoke Police Department, Board of Health Flex Squad
External Partners: n/a
Funding Sources: annual budget



Business Improvement District. Holyoke, MA
Discussions are underway in the business community and within City Hall about the establishment of a Business Improvement District in Downtown Holyoke.



OneHolyoke #KeepItClean2k5. Holyoke, MA
Annually on Earth Day, OneHolyoke CDC kicks off a community cleanup campaign that continues with monthly volunteer cleanups throughout the summer.

Implementation Pathways

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Plans are Prologue

Urban planner, Jerold Kayden quipped “to plan is human; to implement, divine.”

While the 2025 Holyoke Comprehensive Plan Update has no illusions of making heavenly achievements, good work needs to be done to take its recommendations off the page and into the community where it can be felt in tangible ways. In this chapter, city stewards, external partners, and funding sources are identified for each proposed goal and strategy. They are nested as shown in the diagram below. A glossary of abbreviations is also included.

Plans are not meant to gather dust on a shelf. Plans are prologue to realizing bold dreams.

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
1.1. This is an overarching goal	1.1.1. This is a strategy for achieving the goal	This is the City department that will lead the strategy	This is an external partner that will be involved in carrying out the strategy	This is the funding source that will support the strategy
	1.1.2. This is a second strategy for achieving the goal	This is the City department that will lead the strategy	This is an external partner that will be involved in carrying out the strategy	This is the funding source that will support the strategy
	1.1.2. This is a third strategy for achieving the goal	This is the City department that will lead the strategy	This is an external partner that will be involved in carrying out the strategy	This is the funding source that will support the strategy

Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Name
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CRISI	Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements
DPW	Holyoke Department of Public Works
EOLWD	Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development
EOPSS	Massachusetts Executive office of Public Safety and Security
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
HBD	Holyoke Building Department
HCC	Holyoke Community College
HEDIC	Holyoke Economic Development and Industrial Corporation
HFD	Holyoke Fire Department
HFPC	Holyoke Food Policy Council
HPD	Holyoke Police Department
HPS	Holyoke Public Schools
HRA	Holyoke Redevelopment Authority
HWW	Holyoke Water Works
IRAP	Industrial Rail Access Program
Mass CEC	Mass Clean Energy Center
Mass DEP	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
Mass DOER	Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources
Mass DOT	Massachusetts Department of Transportation
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Casino Springfield
MOBD	Massachusetts Office of Business Development
OCD	Holyoke Office of Community Development
OGR	Massachusetts Office of Grants and Research
OPED	Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development
PVRR	Pioneer Valley Railroad
PVTA	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority
SS4A	Safe Streets for America
STCC	Springfield Technical Community College
WMFPC	Western Mass Food Processing Center
Western Mass EDC	Wester Mass Economic Development Council

Holyoke is...

Livable and Welcoming

1

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
1.1. Holyoke is a sought-after and affordable place to live	1.1.1. Adjust parking and dimensional requirements to make it easier to build housing in central Holyoke	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.1.2. Expand the reach of existing homebuyer assistance programs	OCD, Tax Collector	HHA, MassHousing, philanthropic foundations, CDFIs, local banks	HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements
	1.1.3. Expand the reach of existing home repair assistance programs	OCD, Tax Collector	PVPC, philanthropic foundations, CDFIs, local banks	HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements
	1.1.4. Update and Expand Holyoke's participation in the Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP)	OPED, Tax Collector	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	local tax abatement
1.2. Design standards that foster housing for all	1.2.1. Integrate Accessory Dwelling Units and tiny houses into the Zoning Ordinance to comply with or exceed the Massachusetts Affordable Communities Act	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
1.3. Design standards match Holyoke's existing built fabric	1.3.1. Align minimum lot size requirements with the sizes of existing parcels	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.3.2. Increase allowable lot coverage in the urban core in selected areas where certain anomalies exist for historical reasons where parcel sizes are smaller than average	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.3.3. Replace minimum setbacks with build-to lines that match abutting structures	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.3.4. Reduce frontage requirements in residential zones, especially Two-family Residence (R2)	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.3.5. Increase height limit in residential multifamily and mixed-use zones	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free
	1.3.6. Relax parking regulations	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), City Council	n/a	free

Holyoke is...

Livable and Welcoming (cont.)

1

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
1.4. Preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic and obsolete buildings	1.4.1. Establish a local tax stabilization program for commercial redevelopment of obsolete buildings	OPED, Tax Collector, Holyoke Historical Commission	n/a	local tax abatement
	1.4.2. Expand the reach of existing home repair assistance programs	OPED, CDD, Tax Collector, Holyoke Historical Commission	PVPC, philanthropic foundations, CDFIs, local banks	HUD, philanthropic grants, tax abatements
1.5. Affordable and healthy food in schools and neighborhoods	1.5.1. Launch a healthy bodega initiative	OPED, Holyoke Food Policy Council (HFPC)	food-oriented CBOs like Nuestras Raices, Chamber of Commerce, HCC Culinary Institute	philanthropic grants, in-kind partnerships
	1.5.2. Partner with Holyoke Public Schools and its cafeteria contractor to provide healthy and nutritious meals to youth	OPED, Holyoke Food Policy Council (HFPC)	Sodexo, philanthropic foundation, food-oriented CBOs like Nuestras Raices, HCC Culinary Inst.	philanthropic grants, in-kind partnerships

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
1.6. Stewardship of parks and open spaces	1.6.1. Coordinate Holyoke's Comprehensive Plan and its Open Space and Recreation Plan	Parks and Recreation, DPW, Conservation & Sustainability	n/a	free
	1.6.2. Improve internal coordination and focus on parks maintenance	Parks and Recreation, DPW	n/a	Gateway City Parks Program
	1.6.3. Lower barriers of access to Holyoke's open space and recreation offerings	Parks and Recreation, OCD, Conservation & Sustainability	Recreational program providers	Gateway City Parks Program
	1.6.4. Connect Holyoke to its waterways, such as with a canal- or riverfront park or walkway	Parks and Recreation, DPW, Conservation & Sustainability	Holyoke Gas & Electric	Gateway City Parks Program, PARC Program

Holyoke is...

Ready for Business

2

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
2.1. An ecosystem of economic development initiatives that fosters growth in the cleantech industries	2.1.1. Create a marketing campaign that highlights Holyoke's economic development successes and locational advantages	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Greater Holyoke Chamber	Mass Office of Business Development, MassEcon
	2.1.2. Create a start-up cleantech incubator and innovation space	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	FORGE	MassDevelopment
	2.1.3. Continue annual cleantech/innovation events	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	FORGE	Local universities, foundations
	2.1.4. Pursue cleantech/climate tech opportunities	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Western Mass EDC, MOBD, Mass CEC	Mass Clean Energy Center (MassCEC)

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
2.2. World-class resources to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups	2.2.1. Create a one-stop-shop for small business permitting and regulations	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Greater Holyoke Chamber	MA Urban Agenda Grants
	2.2.2. Strengthen partnerships with regional business development organizations	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Western Mass EDC, Anchor Collaborative	free
	2.2.3. Establish a High Street business improvement district (BID)	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	MassDevelopment, Anchor Collaborative, Holyoke Chamber of Commerce, Western Mass EDC	MassDowntown Initiative
2.3. A vibrant hub for arts, culture, food, and tourism	2.3.1. Promote Holyoke's arts, culture, and culinary assets to boost regional tourism	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Mass Cultural Council, HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute	Mass Cultural Council
	2.3.2. Expand presence in the regional food industry ecosystem	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Western Mass EDC, UMass, WMFPC, HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, Nuestras Raices/La Finca, Freight Farms	Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development
	2.3.3. Adopt district parking	OPED, DPW	Holyoke City Council	free

Holyoke is...

Ready for Business (cont.)

2

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
2.4. Aligning workforce training with employer needs for Holyoke job opportunities	2.4.1. Facilitate career pipelines through local partnerships	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	MassHire, Holyoke Community College (HCC), Springfield Technical Community College (STCC)	Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)
	2.4.2. Strengthening Holyoke public schools and workforce/career opportunities	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), Holyoke Public Schools	MassHire, Holyoke Community College	Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)
	2.4.3. Support culinary arts and food industry training for career readiness	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED), Holyoke Public Schools (HPS)	Holyoke Community College (HCC), Springfield Technical Community College (STCC)	Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
2.5. A portfolio of buildings and sites that are market-ready for redevelopment	2.5.1. Develop a site plan for the Mt. Tom site with key public-private partners	OPED, HEDIC	MassDevelopment; Westmass Area Dev Corp, Holyoke Chamber of Commerce	Site Readiness Grants (MA)
	2.5.2. Activate vacant storefronts and underutilized parcels in downtown Holyoke	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Massachusetts Downtown Initiative	Vacant Storefronts Program (MA)
	2.5.3. Reduce redevelopment risk by securing cost estimates and pre-development funding	Holyoke Redevelopment Authority	MassDevelopment	One Stop for Growth (MA)
	2.5.4. Form an Ingleside 2050 working group for strategic planning	HEDIC, Office of the Mayor, OPED	The Pyramid Companies, local neighborhood and business groups	free
	2.5.5. Align the Zoning Ordinance to support vernacular development patterns	OPED, City Council	n/a	free
	2.5.6. Streamline permitting by eliminating duplicative or outdated special permits	OPED, City Council	n/a	free

Ready for Business (cont.)

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
2.6. Strong governance of economic development policy and initiatives	2.6.1. Expand capacity to lead and implement economic development initiatives	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Western Mass Economic Development Council	MA Urban Agenda Grants
	2.6.2. Strengthen relationships with key employers and developers	OPED, Office of the Mayor	HEDIC, HRA	free
	2.6.3. Garner cross-departmental support for economic development efforts	Mayor's Office, OPED, Fire Department, Building Department,	HEDIC, HRA	free
	2.6.4. Discourage prolonged vacancy through enforcement tools and vacancy fees	OPED, BOH, City Council		free

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Holyoke is...

Sustainable and Connected

3

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
3.1. Safer and welcoming networks of streets, canals, and greenways	3.1.1. Implement recommendations from prior transportation studies	DPW, HBPC	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)	Safe Routes to School; Shared Streets and Spaces; Complete Streets Grants
	3.1.2. Identify and close gaps in active transportation networks	DPW, HBPC	PVPC, MassDOT	Safe Routes to School, SS4A, MassWorks
	3.1.3. Build out connections to regional and local trails through landmark projects	DPW, HBPC, Parks & Recreation, Conservation Commission	PVPC, MassDOT, Mass Trails	Safe Streets for America (SS4A)
	3.1.4. Introduce universal maintenance and upgrade policies for existing and planned infrastructure	DPW, HBPC, Parks & Recreation, Conservation Commission	PVPC, MassDOT	Complete Streets Grants, Affordable Green Neighborhoods Grant
3.2. Abundant green spaces that reduce climate hazards	3.2.1. Install green stormwater infrastructure in publicly-owned properties, streets, and parks. Prioritize areas that experience nuisance flooding.	OPED, Conservation Commission, DPW	n/a	MassDEP Non-point Source Competitive Grants, MassWork Infrastructure Grants, MVP Grant Program
	3.2.2. Reduce the effects of extreme heat by expanding tree canopy in tandem with green infrastructure projects	OPED, Conservation Commission, DPW	n/a	Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants
	3.2.3. Acquire Parcels of High Recreational, Ecological, and Conservation Value	OPED, Parks & Recreation	Kestrel Land Trust and The Trustees	

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
3.3. Leverage the available capacity of Holyoke's utilities	3.3.1. Coordinate with the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the Integrated Management Plan (IMP)	Holyoke Water Works (HWW), DPW	City Council	Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Streets Grants
	3.3.2. Continue separating sewer infrastructure from stormwater drainage infrastructure	Holyoke Water Works (HWW), DPW	City Council	Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Streets Grants
	3.3.3. Prioritize water capacity and pressure for new development	DPW, HEDIC, OPED	Western Mass Economic Development Council	MassWorks infrastructure Program, MassClean Water Trust Grants
	3.3.4. Capitalize on excess waste water treatment capacity and charge adjacent municipalities to process their waste water	DPW, HG&E	Mass DOER, Veolia	free
	3.3.5. Produce renewable power at the Holyoke Water Pollution Control Facility	DPW, HG&E	Mass DOER, Veolia	Mass DOER Competitive Grants

Holyoke is...

Sustainable and Connected (cont.)

3

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
3.4. Powered by renewable, inexpensive, abundant, and locally-controlled utilities	3.4.1. Improve external marketing and storytelling materials related to Holyoke's existing utility capacity for large businesses	DPW, OPED, HG&E, HWW	Veolia	Mass DOER Green Communities Grants
	3.4.2. Incorporate resilience into future stormwater infrastructure planning and updates operations and maintenance guidelines as needed to support resilience	OPED, Conservation & Sustainability, DPW, HWW	Veolia	Community Clean Energy Resiliency Initiative, Mass MVP Program
	3.4.3. Expand fiber optic network to residential neighborhoods	OPED, HG&E		Mass Municipal Fiber Grant Program
	3.4.4. Prioritize state of good repair in all utility systems.	HG&E, DPW, HWW	Veolia	MassWorks infrastructure program

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
3.5. Connected to markets with Class 1 freight railroads	3.5.1. Deploy Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP) grant to extend Water Street spur and repair rail bridge between Sargeant St and Hamilton St	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	MassDOT, PVRR	Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP)
	3.5.2. Deploy Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant to improve speeds and increase weight capacity	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	MassDOT, FRA, PVRR	Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)
	3.5.3. Feature freight rail access in business recruitment materials, emphasizing it as a feature that makes Holyoke a green place to do business.	OPED, Greater Holyoke Chamber	Western Mass EDC, PVRR	Existing operating budgets
3.6. Frequent, reliable, and dignified transit service	3.6.1. Improve bus frequency to a bus every 15 minutes during peak hour on major routes	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)	Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Street Grants
	3.6.2. Extend service hours into the evening to serve shift workers, especially on routes that serve the Holyoke Mall	Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED)	PVTA, The Pyramid Companies	Shared Streets and Spaces, Complete Street Grants
	3.6.3. Improve travel times by creating bus lanes and/or reconfiguring bus stops along key travel corridors in conjunction with complete streets projects	Department of Public Works (DPW)	PVTA, MassDOT	Complete Street Grants
	3.6.4. Improve bus stop design to improve comfort and accessibility	Department of Public Works (DPW)	PVTA, MassDOT	Complete Street Grants

Holyoke is...

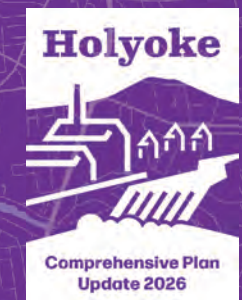
Safe and Compassionate

4

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
4.1. High quality, sought-after public education	4.1.1. Partner with institution(s) to enhance K-12 education in Holyoke Public Schools	Holyoke Public Schools (HPS)	philanthropic foundations, HCC, local universities	grants and technical assistance from external partners
	4.1.2. Implement best practices in pedagogy and administration	Holyoke Public Schools (HPS)	philanthropic foundations, HCC, local universities, sodexo	grants and technical assistance from external partners
	4.1.3. Foster economic connectedness among students that cuts across class lines	Holyoke Public Schools (HPS)	philanthropic foundations, HCC local universities	grants and technical assistance from external partners
4.2. Crime is prevented through community first public safety practices	4.2.1. Institute alternative, community-based first responder services for non-violent incidents	Holyoke Police Department (HPD)	EOPSS, OGR, philanthropic foundations and community-based organizations	opioid settlement funds, Medicaid, state and federal grants, philanthropic and non-profit partners
	4.2.2. Strengthen community-based policing	Holyoke Police Department (HPD), MA State Police	EOPSS, OGR	free

Goal	Strategy	City Stewards	External Partners	Funding Sources
4.3. Easy access to social programs	4.3.1. Redouble partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to deliver social programs	CDD, Holyoke Board of Health	Community-based organizations (CBOs)	in-kind partnerships
4.4. A clean, safe, and vibrant downtown	4.4.1. Complete the formation of a High Street Business Improvement District (BID) to enhance the stewardship of this commercial corridor	Holyoke Redevelopment Authority, City Assessor	GHC, PVTA, property owners	tax abatements, philanthropic grants
	4.4.2. Quickly resolve citizen complaints about nuisances and blight	Holyoke Building Department, DPW, Holyoke Police Dept., Board of Health Flex Squad	n/a	annual budget

Holyoke
Comprehensive Plan
Update 2026



PREPARED FOR THE
City of Holyoke

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
Holyoke Planning Board
Office of Planning and Economic Development