

AT THE CROSSROADS

A Plan for Sustainability in Fields Corner

Prepared for Viet-AID
May 2012

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

11.436: Greenhouse Residential Neighborhood Plan
Spring 2012

Final Report
Prepared for Viet-AID, Boston
May 2012

Instructors

James Buckley
Patricia Molina Costa

Students

Viktorija Abolina
Elena Alschuler
Caroline Bird
Brian Daly
Jay Gordon
Melissa Higbee
Ksenia Mokrushina
Adi Nochur
Dan Rinzler
Erica Simmons
Michael Tuori
Dong Wang

Thank you

IIndira Alvarez, City of Boston
Zack Boyd, Next Step Living
Evelyn Darling, Fields Corner Main Street
Eric Gardner, New Ecology, Inc.
My Lam, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Bruce Ledgerwood, Low Income Energy Affordability Network
Lourdes Lopez, Renew Boston
Josh Lynch, Next Step Living
David MacLellan, Action for Boston Community Development
Henry McGovern, Next Step Living
Harvey Michaels, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Alison Moronta, Jamaica Plain NDC
Long Nguyen, Viet-AID
Mihir Parikh, A Better City
Nam Pham, Viet-AID
Karl Seidman, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Amy Stitely, MIT Community Innovators Lab
Bradford Swing, Renew Boston
Joel Wool, GreenDorchester
Martin Walsh, Massachusetts State Representative
Aspasia Xypolia, Viet-AID

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2012 Greenhouse Practicum was a semester-long collaboration between Master in City Planning students in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT and Viet-AID, a community development corporation in the Fields Corner neighborhood of Dorchester. This report contains our final proposals for promoting sustainability and equity in Fields Corner, and identifies key roles that Viet-AID can play in implementing this vision.

We used a sustainability framework that upholds the principles of Economic Opportunity, Social Equity and Inclusiveness, and Environmental Health and Livability, to guide our proposals in the following areas:

Existing Housing

Programs that address housing quality and increase residential energy efficiency can improve health and comfort, as well as reduce household energy costs. We propose that Viet-AID build upon its existing efforts in these areas, construct innovative partnerships, and design and advocate for housing quality and energy efficiency programs, policies and regulations.

New Housing

New reasonably priced, energy-efficient, and transit-accessible multifamily housing on infill sites in Fields Corner can: help protect low-income renters from rising rents and displacement; increase civic engagement among low-income renters; increase disposable income,

savings, and health; preserve access to the T for low-income renters; and activate vacant and underutilized lots. Our analysis shows that there are several vacant sites in Fields Corner that are highly suitable to be developed as affordable housing in the short term.

Economic Development

Commercial and economic development programs can: enhance the vibrant and diverse neighborhood character of Fields Corner; generate wealth for local residents and business owners; and provide the community with access to daily goods and services. Our proposals are centered on improving the quality of local retail spaces and providing entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for Fields Corner residents.

Public Realm

Improvements in the public realm can: increase access to the commercial core; increase accessibility and mobility for neighborhood residences; enhance public spaces; promote sustainable modes of transportation; and enable transit-oriented development by integrating transit into the neighborhood. Our proposals are intended to provide ideas of what a sustainable, vibrant, and diverse Fields Corner could be, and to spark conversations about the public realm.

[1] Introduction



Sustainability is gaining increasing currency as a comprehensive framework for developing holistic solutions to economic, social and environmental challenges. But what does sustainability actually look like on the ground at a neighborhood level, and what can community organizations do to make sustainability a reality? We have explored these questions as part of the “GreenHouse” practicum in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT. This report presents the results of our three months of research in Fields Corner, a mixed-income, multi-racial neighborhood in the Dorchester section of Boston. Our client is Viet-AID, a community development corporation that operates in Fields Corner and serves the Vietnamese community in Greater Boston. Our goal is to develop a vision for a neighborhood sustainability plan for Fields Corner and to explore ways in which Viet-AID can use its unique capacities to spearhead implementation.

This introductory section details the sustainability framework we used to guide our work and gives an overview of the history of Fields Corner and the current challenges and opportunities facing the neighborhood. Based upon this initial analysis, subsequent sections present a range of proposals that Viet-AID can implement in the areas of Existing Housing, New Housing, Economic Development and the Public Realm. We hope that our recommendations will provide Viet-AID with a comprehensive framework to promote a vision for Fields Corner as a vibrant, diverse and sustainable neighborhood.

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

In urban communities across the country, efforts to promote sustainability often focus on establishing dense mixed-use communities near public transit, known as transit-oriented development (TOD), as a way to increase pub-

lic transit use and neighborhood walkability, reduce auto-related pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and support economic development. Fields Corner's proximity to a transit station on the MBTA's Red Line connecting to downtown Boston clearly presents powerful opportunities for this kind of development. At the same time, pursuing TOD and neighborhood improvements in Fields Corner could overshadow the needs of longtime community residents and lead to displacement in some cases. Fields Corner is at a crossroads: can it develop as a vibrant, diverse, and truly sustainable community, tapping into its resources of density and transit to jumpstart the local economy, or will that process displace the very community that is trying to improve its neighborhood? To ensure favorable outcomes for all, a truly sustainable framework

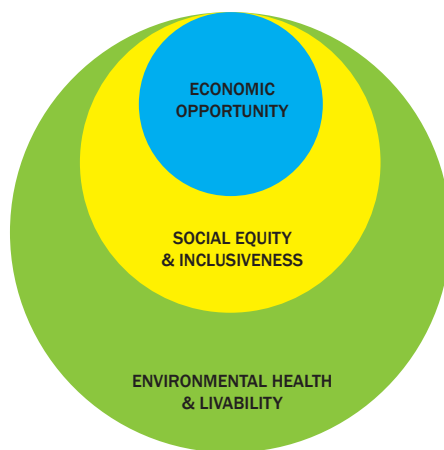


Figure 1.1. Sustainability framework

for a neighborhood like Fields Corner must simultaneously lift up three principles:

Economic Opportunity: Creating local jobs and generating local wealth.

Social Equity and Inclusiveness: Maintaining affordability and engaging diverse communities

Environmental Health and Livability: Reducing harm from pollution and improving the physical environment.

Sustainability calls for linking these principles together in an integrated fashion, as depicted in Figure 1.1. This model positions the economy as embedded in society and society as embedded in the environment, showing that any activity pursued in one of these spheres impacts the other spheres as well. It acknowledges that all social and economic activities operate within environmental limits, highlighting the need to develop “framework[s] whereby all new commercial and residential projects reflect to the greatest extent possible the principles and practices of ecological sustainability, as well as social, environmental and economic justice.”¹

These three principles stand at the core of the analysis and proposals we present for

1 Williams, Orrin and Cassandra Robbins, “59th Street Green Business District: Proposal and Work Plan” (Chicago: Center for Urban Transformation, March 2009).

Viet-AID and Fields Corner. We have selected four specific areas of action for Viet-AID to consider:

Existing Housing: Improving the quality, comfort and energy efficiency of existing housing stock to cut household costs and enhance livability;

New Housing: Assessing opportunities for developing new multifamily workforce housing that is high quality, energy efficient and reasonably priced;

Economic Development: Increasing economic activity in the commercial core and increasing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for residents;

Public Realm: Promoting sustainable modes of transportation and increased access and use of public space.

Creating avenues for community engagement and participation is also central in promoting sustainability in Fields Corner. Because sustainable activities depend on the most local of knowledge, implementation requires coordinated efforts between Viet-AID and other neighborhood-, city-, and state-level stakeholders.

HISTORY OF FIELDS CORNER

Fields Corner owes its name to brothers Isaac and Enos Field, owners of a general store at the crossroads of Adams Street and the Dorchester Turnpike in the early 19th Century. Primarily rural during its early settlement, development and new technologies were by mid-century rapidly transforming the surrounding area into a “streetcar suburb”



Historic photos from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cityofbostonarchives>

of Boston. From the neighborhood’s early days, public transit has shaped Fields Corner. By the 1880’s, several key streetcar lines joined at Fields Corner and in 1927 the Fields Corner rail station was built above existing railroad lines.² In *Streetcar Suburbs*, Sam Warner claims that, in general, Dorchester’s suburban grid led to a lack of a sense of community or neighborhood; however, he cites Fields Corner as one of several clusters where an actual center existed around transit links.³

Seeing new land made accessible by the streetcars, middle class Bostonians sought out green space and healthier living within commuting distance of the city. New arrivals built houses in a range of styles, and income levels varied from street to street; the houses were generally well built and no large pockets land remained undeveloped.⁴ The diversity of housing types in Fields Corner today, and especially the prominence of triple-deckers, emerged from the streetcar-fueled early development pattern.

As the suburbs continued to expand outward from Boston, areas closer to the city center – like Fields Corner – were divided into smaller lots for cheaper and denser housing that

served new immigrants and working class families. Irish and Italian households populated the area in the early twentieth century. By the 1940’s and 1950’s, African Americans migrating from the Southern states became the largest new population. Discrimination supported by the Federal Housing Administration and local restrictive covenants forced segregated development, leaving neighborhoods like Fields Corner with high rates of poverty and a deteriorating economic base, housing stock, and infrastructure.

In the face of these challenges, Fields Corner’s residents have worked to create a sense of community and place. The neighborhood has always been home to a diverse population. The Irish and African Americans were joined in the second half of the century as Latino and Cape Verdean immigrants moved into Dorchester and Fields Corner. In the 1980’s and 1990’s Vietnamese immigrants began to establish businesses in the area; by the 1990’s, Fields Corner was home to many Vietnamese Americans and was considered the economic and cultural center for Vietnamese in the Boston area.⁵

2 Arthur J. Krim, *Three-Deckers of Dorchester: An Architectural Historical Survey*, (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1977), 13.

3 Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962), 158.

4 Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, 67.

5 “People, Places and Planning in Boston,” accessed April 30, 2012, <http://planningboston.org/people/vietnamese/>.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

STUDY AREA BOUNDARIES

Fields Corner's boundaries can be considered to be as broad as the area between Ashmont, Washington, and Bowdoin Streets in Dorchester in Boston, and as narrow as the business district along Dorchester Avenue. For the purposes of this study, we are defining Fields Corner as the area within a one-half mile radius around the Fields Corner T station. An easy walk from the T station, this

area is most likely to benefit from and be impacted by, transit-oriented development. We have used the five census tracts that roughly correlate with this ½-mile radius (tracts 916, 917, 920, 921 [921.01 in 2010], and 922) for our data analysis (See Fields Corner study area census tracts).

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

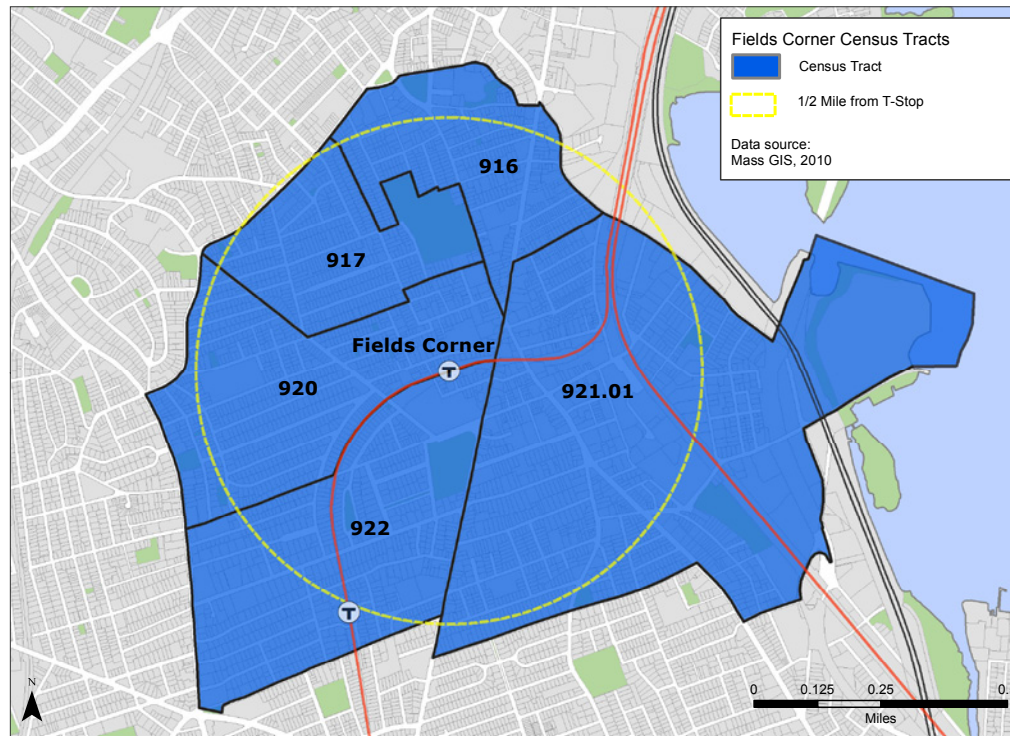
As we have seen, Fields Corner stands out for the racial and ethnic diversity of its residents.

African Americans and people of African descent make up by far the largest percentage of the population, followed by a fairly even distribution of people who identify as Asian, Latino or Hispanic, and White. Of the Asian population, the vast majority is Vietnamese American, in striking contrast to the distribution in Boston as a whole and reflecting Fields Corner's role as the center for Vietnamese Americans in the Boston Area. Fields Corner's diversity is linguistic as well as racial; languages other than English are spoken in more than half the homes in Fields Corner. Fields Corner is a neighborhood of families; while the city of Boston overall is dominated by young adults, Fields Corner has a more evenly distributed population that includes many children and older adults.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The median income of a household in Fields Corner is below the Boston average; in 2010, the Fields Corner median household income was \$43,386, as compared to the Boston median income of \$51,914.¹ Between 2000 and 2010 the average income level dropped and the percentage of people living in poverty rose by 8.25%. The trend was significantly more pronounced in Fields Corner than in Boston as a whole, which saw an increase of only 1.75%.

Figure 1.2. Fields Corner study area census tracts



1 American Community Survey, 2010.

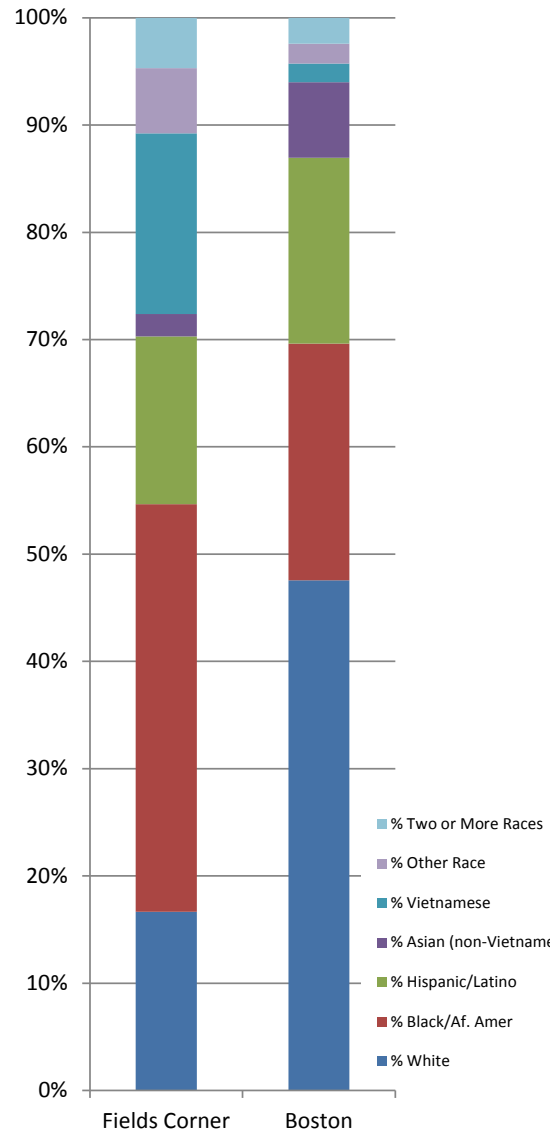


Figure 1.3. Racial diversity.
Source: American Community Survey (2011)

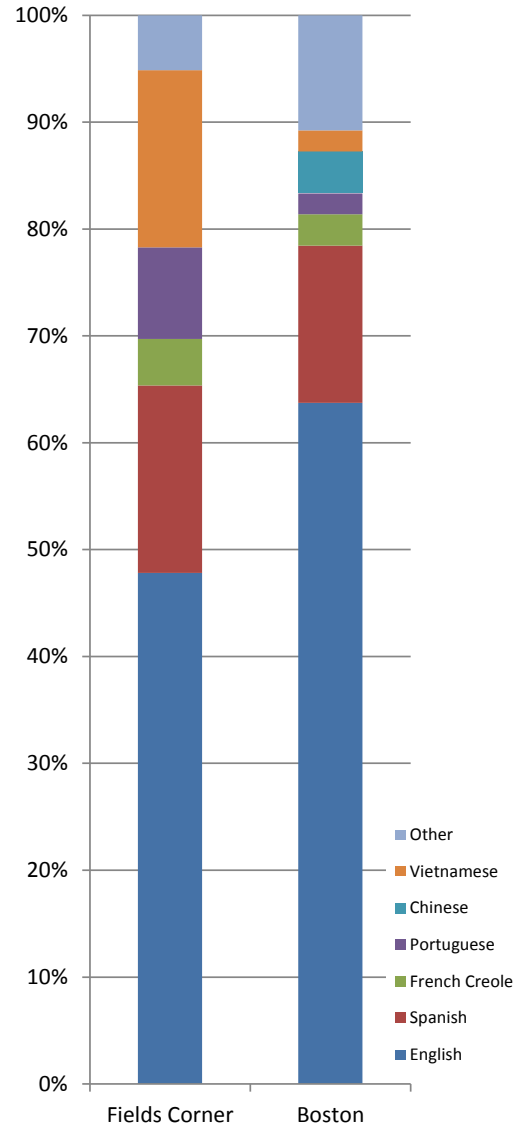


Figure 1.4. Language spoken at home.
Source: American Community Survey (2010)

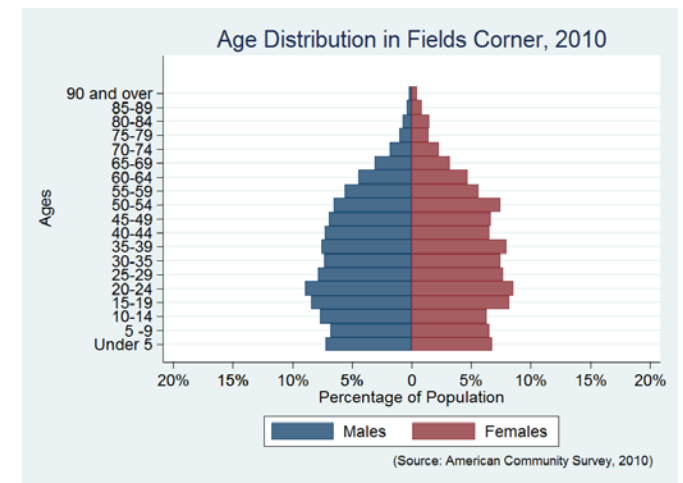
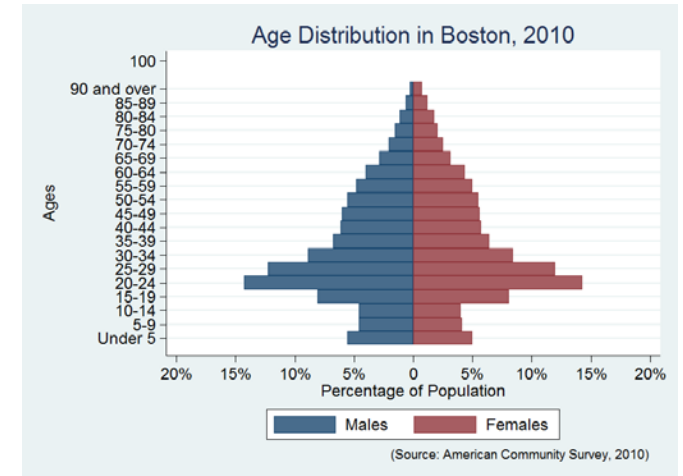


Figure 1.5. Age distribution, Boston and Fields Corner

In 2010, roughly 18% of the working age population in Fields Corner was unemployed (See Table 1.1). More Fields Corner residents worked in the service, production and transportation, and construction industries than in Boston as a whole, and fewer were employed in management, business, science and the arts.

HOUSING

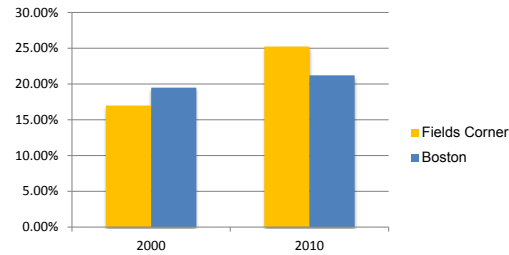


Figure 1.6. Percentage of Population at or below poverty level.
Source: 2000 US Census and 2010 American Community Survey

Approximately 6900 households reside in the five census tracts of Fields Corner, of which approximately two thirds rent their homes. Rising rents trigger significant concern in Fields Corner. Most renting households in Fields Corner are rent-burdened, which means they dedicate more than 30 percent of their incomes to rent each month. Instances of severe rent burden, where households pay

Table 1.1. 2010 unemployment rates. (population over 16 years old).

Location		
Fields Corner Census Tracts	916	19%
	917	23%
	920	18%
	921.01	9%
	922	21%
City of Boston		9%
Boston Metro Region		7%

Source: American Community Survey, 2010

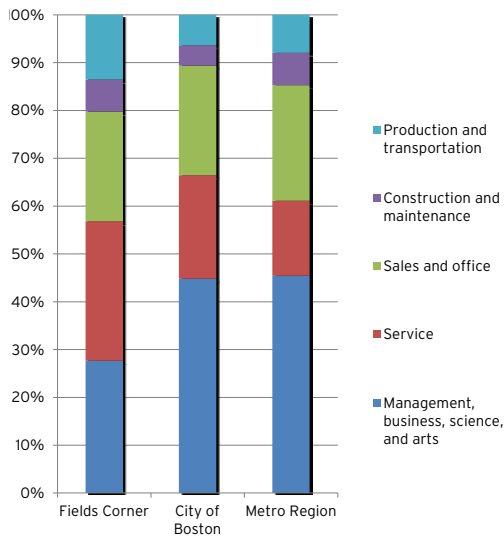


Figure 1.7. Occupations of residents of Fields Corner, Boston, and the metro region, 2010
Source: American Community Survey, 2010

more than half of their incomes on rent, have increased dramatically in recent years, and now represent nearly 40 percent of renting households in the neighborhood. In addition, low-income Fields Corner renters are much more likely to be rent-burdened. Although Viet-AID and has developed multiple affordable housing over the past several years, the demand among low-income people for high quality housing with stable, affordable rents in Fields Corner increasingly outpaces supply. Viet-AID's leadership in housing development will be crucial to meeting this need, and for helping low-income renters gain a foothold in an increasingly unaffordable neighborhood.

The predominance in Fields Corner of "triple-deckers," the three-story, three-family buildings so characteristic of Dorchester, represents another resource with the potential to support sustainable and equitable development.

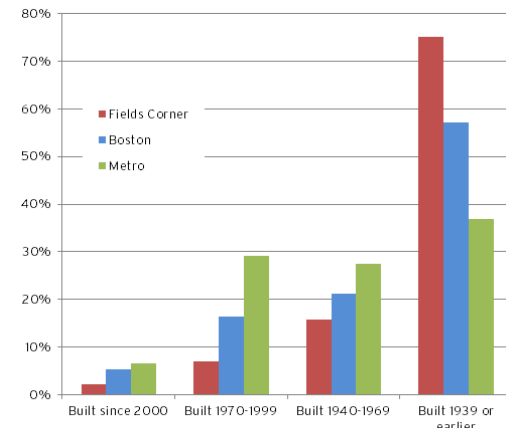


Figure 1.8. Residential units (year built). Source: American Community Survey, 2010

Triple-deckers preserve a level of density that today's zoning laws do not permit, a fact recognized by Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development: "'If we have four three-deckers on 12,000 square feet and could only get two on that amount of land now,' [department director Evelyn] Friedman said, 'we are losing six units. So it's very important to us to sustain them.'"¹

Triple-deckers in Fields Corner have the potential to offer affordable, energy-efficient housing near transit. However, many triple-deckers are currently in poor repair. Owners and renters are faced with the challenges of maintaining and heating an aging housing stock; most of the residential units in Fields Corner were built before 1939 (See Figure 1.8). One theme that we heard repeatedly in our conversations in Fields Corner was the problem of absentee landlords, with complaints including both high rents and poorly maintained buildings.

T STATION AND THE COMMERCIAL CORE

Fields Corner has the benefit of a T station, multiple major bus lines, and a commercial center all in close proximity to one another. The proximity of the T to many homes offers the potential for residents to commute and travel by train without the cost and environ-

mental impacts of driving. The presence of the commercial core also encourages neighbors to meet some of their retail needs within walking distance of their homes. Many of the businesses in Fields Corner are independently and locally owned, creating opportunities for local employment and allowing for stores and restaurants that cater to the wide range of ethnicities in Fields Corner.

The proximity of the T to the business core also provides Fields Corner with the opportunity to attract visitors from beyond the immediate vicinity. Fields Corner already serves as a regional center for the Vietnamese community, but the neighborhood's restaurants and specialty shops have the potential to serve a broader market as well. The potential of the neighborhood to be an economically vibrant area is currently limited, however, by



¹ Abby Goodnough, "Hard Times for New England 3-Deckers," New York Times, 19 Jun. 2009, A1.



the high numbers of unused buildings and spaces.

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Fields Corner is a walkable neighborhood in many respects, but the accessibility and physical connections between areas could be improved. The T Station lacks a visual connection with the commercial core, making it difficult for new visitors to find their way.

The bus thoroughway tying the station to the commercial center is not pedestrian-friendly, and the train's overpass creates barrier that divides the business district into two. The generally narrow sidewalks present potential barriers both to accessibility for the disabled and to creative uses of sidewalks such as tree planting.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Low-income communities of color often face higher levels of environmental hazards and less access to environmental benefits than do residents of more affluent neighborhoods. According to measurements taken by The Dorchester Environmental Health Coalition (GreenDorchester), air particulate levels are higher in Fields Corner, which is near both Interstate 93 and Dorchester Ave, than in neighboring communities (See Figure 1.9). Air particulates can lead to increased rates of asthma, which is a significant public health concern in Dorchester. Hospitalization rates for asthma are nearly a third more frequent for children under 5-years old in Dorchester than in Boston as a whole.¹

Indoor environmental issues, linked to the quality and care of old housing, pose a concern in Fields Corner as well. Mold in homes can cause asthma, while dust and chips from old paint can cause lead poisoning. Dorchester is one of the few remaining pockets in Boston where lead poisoning in children is still a widespread issue.² Another indoor environmental issue is energy efficiency. Low

1 "Dorchester Health Initiative," Tufts Medical Center, accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/AboutUs/CommunityHealthPrograms/DorchesterHealthInitiative>.

2 "Mayor Menino, Nonprofits Launch New Push To Eliminate Childhood Lead Poisoning by 2010," accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/default.aspx?id=3682>.

energy efficiency is a drain on environmental resources, as well as on already strained household budgets. Many houses in Fields Corner are old and poorly insulated and landlords may see little incentive to invest in improvements.

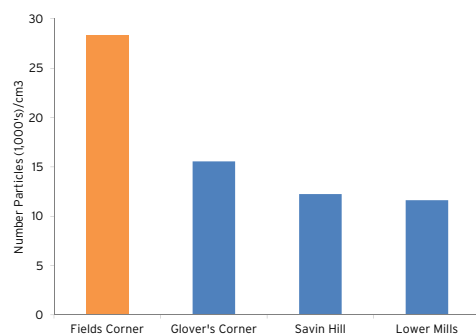


Figure 1.9. Concentrations of ultrafine particulates by neighborhood.
Source: Dorchester Environmental Health Coalition, 2010

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND PLACES

In working to promote vibrant communities, planners often talk of “sense of place”—the sense that a neighborhood has its own character and identity, distinct from other places. In Fields Corner, elements that give the neighborhood its character include the eclectic mix of architecture, the ethnic make-up of the population, and the sense of history—both the local history and that brought by immigrants from other lands. Connections between people and the neighborhood, as well

as between people within the neighborhood, also create the sense of place. Resources in Fields Corner that can contribute to this sense of place include a public library, several public parks, neighborhood-serving restaurants and businesses, gathering places for young people and the elderly sponsored by nonprofits and government agencies, and several local groups working to actively engage the community in Fields Corner and Dorchester as a whole.

While numerous community organizations operate in Fields Corner, Viet-AID has expressed a concern that many of these programs still do not reach the low-income and/or non-English speaking residents who live in the area. Barriers of language and culture, as well as the stresses of long work hours, full households, and day-to-day responsibilities all make community engagement a challenge in Fields Corner.

MOVING FORWARD: COLLABORATION AND VISION

Fields Corner has borne a sense of identity since its early days as a highway crossroads. Today, numerous groups and individuals work to strengthen the sense of place in Fields Corner and to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. As Viet-AID seeks to help shape a neighborhood vision for a vibrant, diverse, and sustainable Fields Corner, it is imperative that the effort happens in collaboration with other organizations. Collaboration

is not merely an issue of capacity building; for change to happen on a neighborhood-wide scale, the people and organizations of Fields Corner must have ownership of the process.

Viet-AID is well established and respected in the neighborhood and is unique in its ability to access and support the Vietnamese-American community. It has a strong track record of building high-quality housing that is accessible to families living in Fields Corner. It has a history of providing a range of essential services to the community, including making its community center available for neighborhood events. Viet-AID’s strengths position it to bring people together around a vision for a neighborhood plan for sustainability.

Other organizations will bring different strengths and capacities to the collaboration. Dorchester House, for example, has deep roots in the community and strong programs and partnerships in the realms of health, economic development, and community engagement. Fields Corner Main Streets works closely with the businesses and other organizations in the community core. Kit Clark Senior Services supports elders in the community, and Dorchester Youth Collaborative helps keep the young involved and connected. Greater Four Corner Action Coalition has a stronger connection to the African American community and is committed to community organizing and activism. GreenDorchester focuses on sustainability through the lens of

the environment, and the Five Streets Civic Association is a neighborhood-initiated effort to improve the quality of life in Fields Corner. These are only some of the organizations with which Viet-AID already works and that are already working to create a sustainable Fields Corner.

Viet-AID can approach sustainability from many different angles. In the sections that follow, we will introduce four areas related to the principles of sustainability in which Viet-AID can have a particularly strong impact: New Housing, Existing Housing, Economic Development, and the Public Realm. In each section we will examine existing neighborhood conditions, provide a vision for increasing neighborhood-level sustainability, and propose programs that Viet-AID can implement in both the short and long term.

[2] Existing Housing



This section includes proposals to upgrade existing housing stock in Fields Corner through two focus areas: improving housing quality and promoting energy efficiency. Our short-term proposals are focused on sustaining and building Viet-AID's momentum for addressing the most pressing residential housing quality and energy efficiency issues in Fields Corner through solidifying current programs and strengthening existing partnerships. Our long-term proposals recommend a more ambitious and far-reaching role for Viet-AID to play in constructing innovative partnerships, as well as in designing and advocating for housing quality and energy efficiency programs, policies, and regulations.

Improvements in housing quality and energy efficiency in existing housing in Fields Corner can substantially promote economic opportunity, social equity and inclusiveness, and environmental health and livability of the neighborhood.

Housing quality and energy efficiency improvements can cut household spending and increase the discretionary income of local residents. For example, household energy costs pose significantly greater burden on lower-income households. In the United States, lower-income households, while consuming 15 percent less energy on average, typically spend 16-26 percent of their total annual income on residential energy costs, 4-6 times higher than the national average.¹ Some elderly people living on fixed incomes spend up to 35 percent of their annual income on energy.² Greater energy efficiency of existing housing can significantly reduce spending on operational energy for families in Fields Corner. For example, the US Department of

1 Oppenheim, Jerrold. "Comment of Low-Income Weatherization and Fuel Assistance Program Network and Massachusetts Energy Directors Associations." Presented to Department of Public Utilities, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, September 10, 2007.

Power, Meg. "The Burden of FY 2008 Residential Energy Bills on Low-Income Consumers." Economic Opportunity Studies. March 20, 2008. http://www.opportunitystudies.org/repository/File/energy_affordability/Forecast_Burdens_08.pdf. Accessed May 7, 2009.

Department of Energy. "Reducing the Energy Burden on Needy Families." 2007. <http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/weatherization/reducing.cfm>. Accessed December 1, 2008.

2 Sarin, Amit. 2009. "Equitable Economic Energy Efficiency: Creating Good Jobs in Low-Income Efficiency Programming." Master in City Planning Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Energy concludes that weatherization services save participating households an average of \$437 annually.³

Upgrading existing housing stock is also a great opportunity to organize and engage landlords and tenants. The problem of absentee landlords is a significant barrier to implementing housing quality and energy efficiency improvements in Fields Corner. Absentee landlords systematically fail to comply with municipal housing codes and neglect tenants' right to a healthy and safe home.⁴ Meanwhile, it is poor and immigrant communities that often find themselves in old, substandard houses. Often, they don't complain about housing quality to municipal code enforcement agencies because they fear retaliation from their landlords or they are unaware of the housing quality issues and the ways they can be addressed. Therefore, landlord outreach and tenant organizing can create a more inclusive and equitable platform for communication, while keeping in check potential gentrification processes that can accompany housing quality upgrade programs.

In addition, housing quality and energy efficiency programs can have major positive impacts on health, comfort, and overall quality of life. These are key to ensuring neigh-

3 Department of Energy. "Weatherization Assistance Program." 2012.

4 "Code Enforcement Toolkit," PolicyLink. http://www.policylink.org/site/c.1kIXLbMNJrE/b.5137351/k.29BE/Why_Use_it.htm

borhood livability and fostering residents' attachment to Fields Corner. Fields Corner is faced with considerable challenges of outdated housing stock, deteriorating housing quality and, inefficient residential energy usage. Improved housing quality and energy efficiency can improve environmental sustainability and livability in Fields Corner.

Given the considerations of economic opportunity, environmental health and livability, social equity and community engagement,



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

Economic Opportunity

- Cut housing maintenance and medical costs as a result of improved housing quality and indoor air quality.
- Reduce household spending on utilities through improvements in residential energy efficiency.
- Increase discretionary income.

Social Equity and Inclusiveness

- Prevent gentrification and displacement through organizing tenants and engaging landlords.
- Promote community engagement by building stronger connections among different groups of residents.

Environmental Health and Livability

- Improve public health, comfort, and overall life quality for Fields Corner residents.
- Establish a better neighborhood image, and foster a stronger attachment to the Fields Corner community among existing residents.

we propose that specific objectives of existing housing improvement and energy efficiency programs supported by Viet-AID should be:

- Revitalizing residential areas of Fields Corner through improving its housing quality, energy efficiency and value, thus fostering greater community commitment and feeling of security;
- Improving overall quality of life for Fields Corner residents through making existing houses more affordable, livable and comfortable.
- Improving public health in Fields Corner through addressing indoor air quality problems;
- Improving housing affordability through addressing energy inefficiency issues;
- Making sure that housing quality and energy efficiency improvements do not engender gentrification and displacement processes.

Viet-AID can achieve these objectives through:

- Educating and engaging tenants, landlords, and wider community
- Fostering stronger connections with other organizations implementing energy efficiency and housing quality programs;

- Taking on more strategic roles of initiating new and creative local housing upgrade activities;
- Promoting visibility and reputation of Viet-AID in the area of residential energy efficiency and upgrade, thus increasing its capability to leverage more funding sources and build new partnerships for housing programs.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING PROFILE

The existing housing stock in Fields Corner is predominantly renter-occupied, multifamily, and outdated.

Renter-Occupied

According to the 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, approximately 8,000 housing units are located in the five census tracts of Fields Corner, and 87.3 percent of all these units are occupied. Roughly two-thirds (65.8 percent) of all occupied housing units in Fields Corner are renter-occupied and one-third (34.2 percent) are owner-occupied.

Multi-Family

In terms of housing types, triple-deckers are ubiquitous in the Fields Corner neighborhood. In the five-tract area, 54.8 percent of existing housing has three or four units. Single-unit attached housing and 2-unit housing account for 15.6 percent and 15.7 percent of the total housing stock, respectively. There are also a number of multi-family residential buildings in the neighborhood, including Viet-AID developments such as 1460 Dorchester Avenue.

Aging Stock

Fields Corner is faced with a significant challenge of an aging housing stock and deteriorating housing quality. Roughly 16.1

percent of all buildings within the five-census tract study area were constructed in the 19th century. Approximately 75 percent of residential units were built before 1939. Among the newly constructed properties in Fields Corner (built after 1990s), only about half are housing while the rest are mostly commercial buildings or hospital facilities.

Many of the buildings in the neighborhood, including a large percentage of old housing stock, have never undergone a substantial retrofit. More than two-thirds (67.6 percent) of all buildings within the study area have never been remodeled since their initial construction, and another 11.4 percent have only been remodeled before 1990.

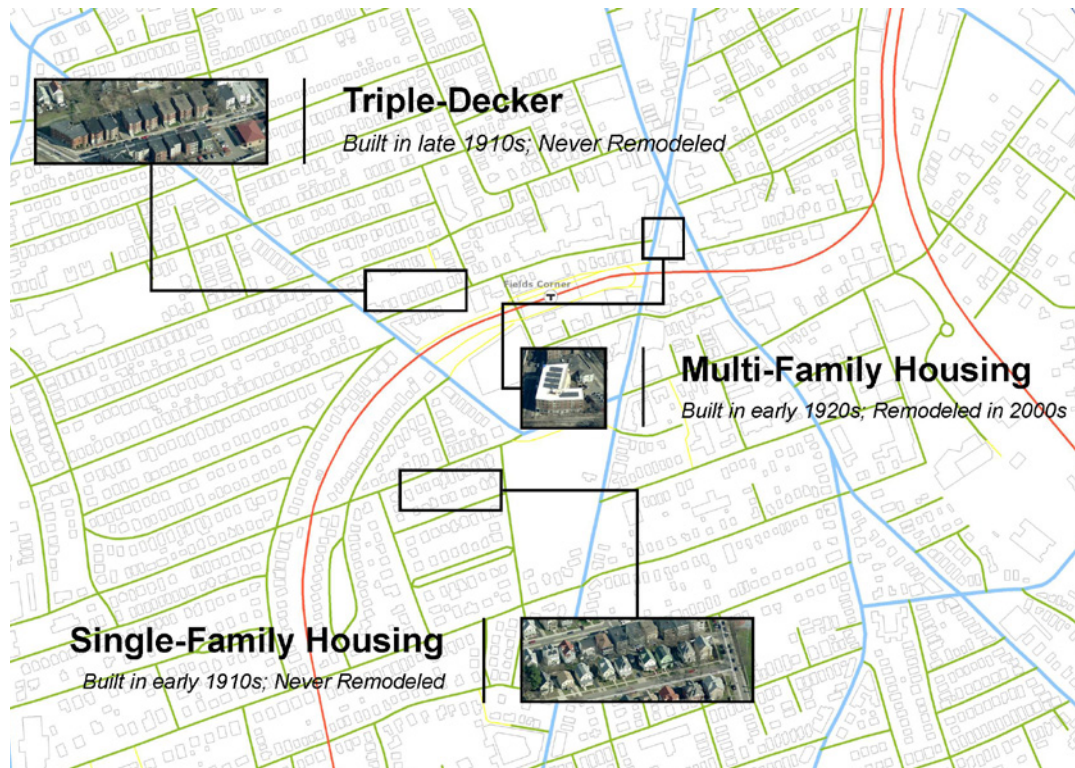


Figure 2.1. Typical housing stock in Fields Corner

Figure 2.2. Building ages in Fields Corner

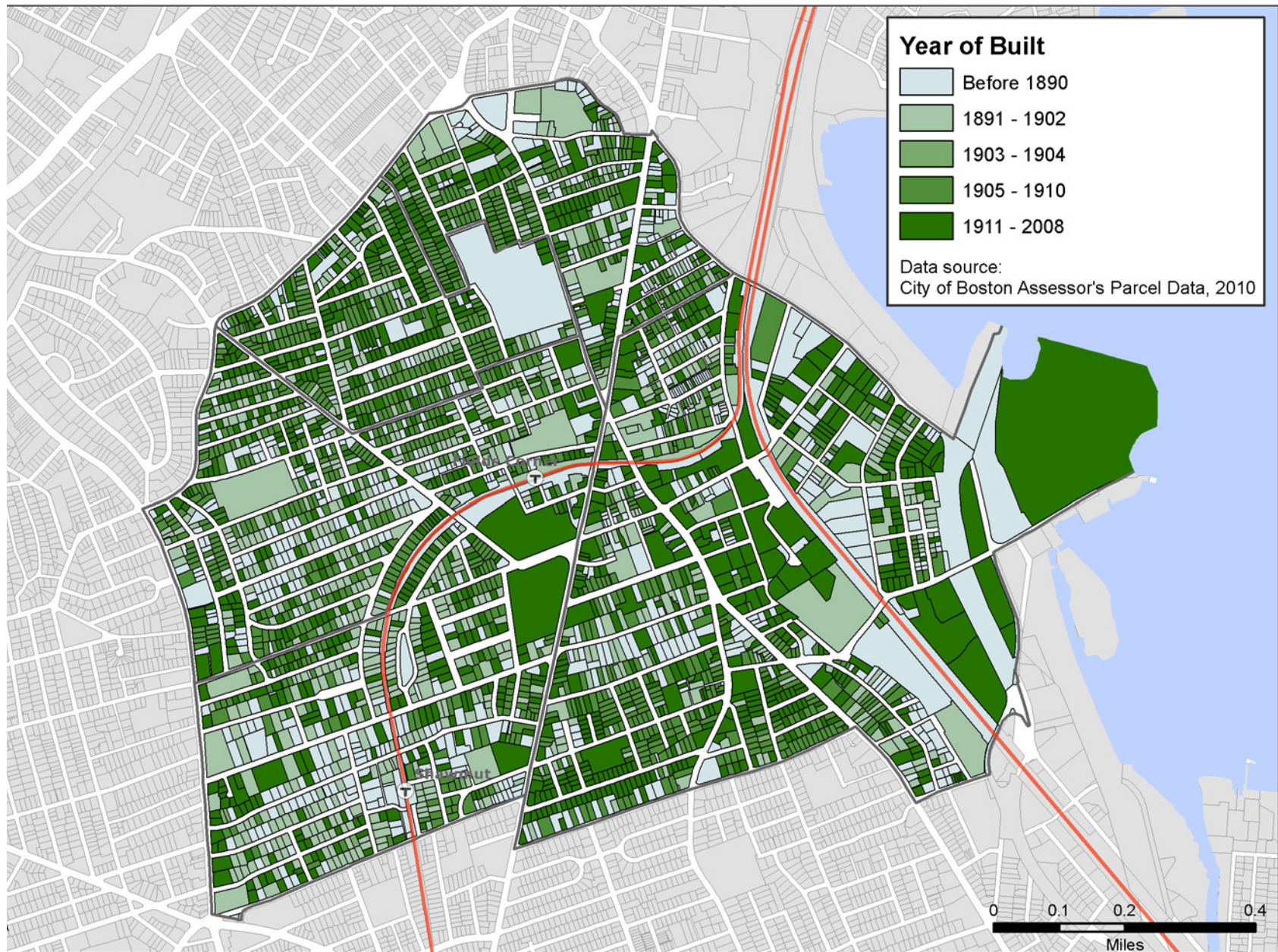
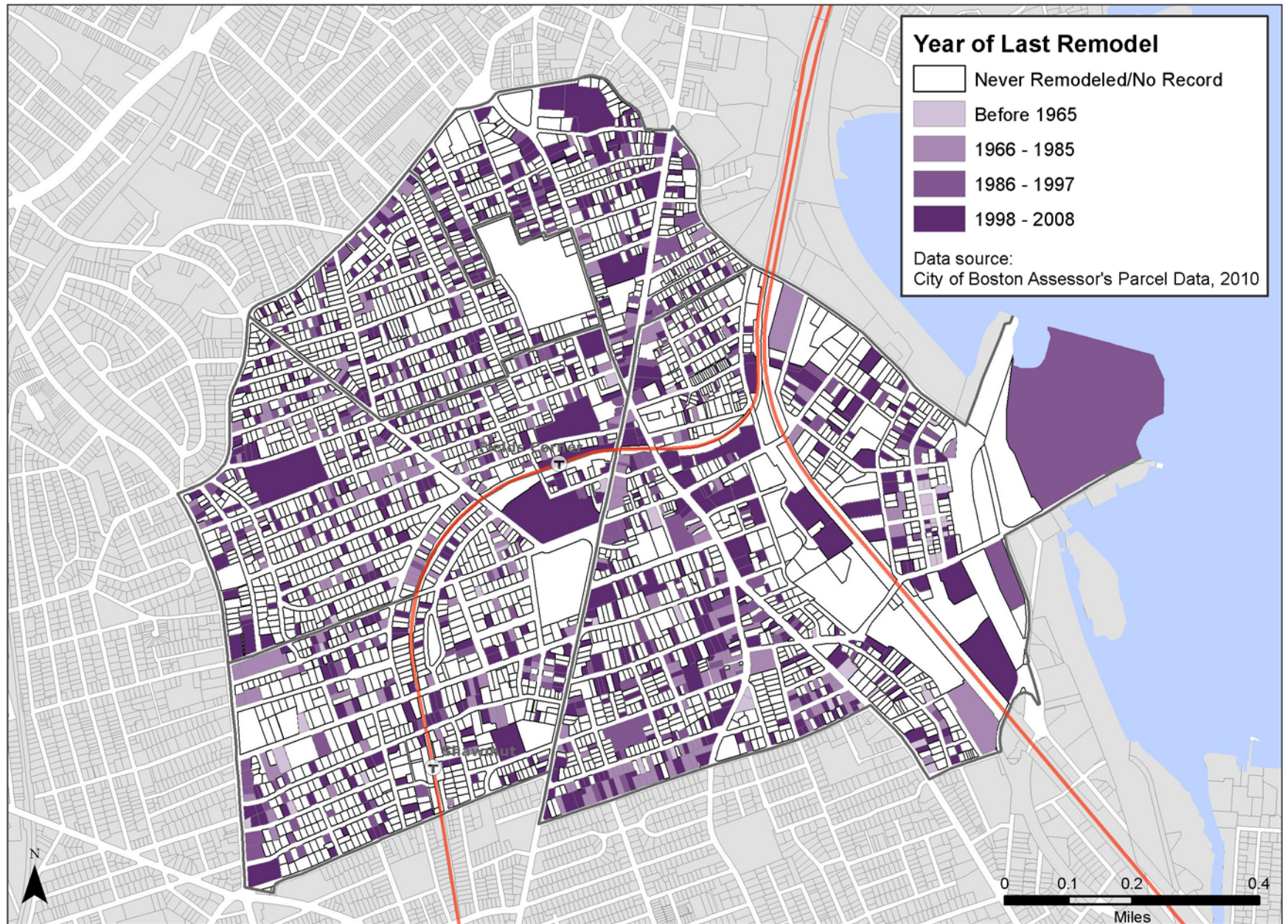


Figure 2.3. Year of last remodeling of buildings in Fields Corner



Energy auditors working in the neighborhood have found the following pervasive housing quality issues in Fields Corner: knob and tube, moisture, asbestos, combustion and structural safety.¹ Old houses also suffer from issues of fire safety, vermin and roaches infestation, mildew, and ground contamination. As a result, residents of such homes suffer from poor indoor air quality and the associated health issues such as asthma, low level of comfort, and high maintenance costs.

NEIGHBORHOOD ENERGY PROFILE

The outdated housing stock in Fields Corner leads to poor energy performance of residential buildings. For example, in all occupied housing stock in the five census tracts of Fields Corner, 27.1 percent are using less efficient heating fuels such as fuel oil and kerosene, compared to 19.9 percent in Boston and 7.1 percent nationwide.

Energy Efficiency improvements present a considerable energy cost savings potential for Fields Corner residents. According to an estimate by Next Step Living, a typical household living in the surrounding area can save on average \$420 per year through energy efficiency retrofits.

¹ Next Step Living, personal communication, May 3, 2012

VIET-AID'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Viet-Aid has already been engaged in promoting neighborhood energy efficiency by playing multiple roles through various channels. As a major affordable housing developer in the area, Viet-Aid has been incorporating sustainability framework and energy efficiency objectives in its property development agenda. Funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's (ARRA) Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG), Viet-Aid has also established collaborative relationships with several city- or community-level organizations to provide information and assistance to energy efficiency and weatherization program applicants.

STRATEGIES

SHORT-TERM PROPOSALS

Housing Quality

In the short run, it is important to build momentum to address the most pressing housing quality issues that residents in Fields Corner face. This will require bringing together various housing quality stakeholder groups such as tenants, landlords, housing code and public health authorities, community health organizations, hardware shop owners, and others. Importantly, it is critical to coordinate housing quality improvement programs with energy efficiency retrofit and

Case Study 1: Boston's Healthy-Pest Free

Housing Initiative¹ uses some innovative public awareness and community outreach and organizing approaches. Within the framework of this program, Boston Housing Authority residents serve as community health advocates promoting safe and effective pest control techniques among their housing neighbors. The initiative includes a public information campaign involving dissemination of comprehensive brochures for residents, called "What You Need to Know About Pests and Pesticides to Protect Your Family's Health." The brochure is available in a variety of languages. Posters also communicate key messages. Health advocates educate shop owners about the health risks associated with selling illegal and restricted pesticides. An initiative called "Pesticide Buybacks" was held in multiple locations, and offered residents education and supplies in return for their pesticides. Residents are also trained in safe pest control practices.¹

¹ Healthy-Pest Free Housing Initiative. <http://www.bphc.org/hpfhi/AboutUs/Pages/home.aspx>

weatherization efforts.¹ Viet-AID could communicate to program applicants that there are important synergies between these two types of housing upgrade activities and they need to be pursued in a coordinated and integrated manner.

Tenant Education and Organizing. It is important to involve tenants in code enforcement and housing quality improvement programs and initiatives, since they are the ones who suffer from substandard housing quality and experience health and comfort issues.² They can also tell personal stories of the conditions that could make a substantial difference in communications with landlords. To hedge against gentrification-related displacement, tenants must be organized to pressure both landlords (to make improvements to their properties) and city agencies (to enforce housing code more effectively). To help organize tenants around code enforcement and housing quality issues, Viet-AID can:

- Raise awareness about housing quality and related health issues among tenants by disseminating brochures and posters, holding public meetings, and addressing this issue on cable TV and local newspapers.

1 Bradford Swing, Director, Renew Boston Program, City of Boston, personal communication, April 28, 2012

2 "Code Enforcement Tool," Policy Link.. http://www.policylink.org/site/c.1kIXLbMNJrE/b.5137355/k.9572/Key_Players.htm

- Communicate these issues through community organizers
- Raise the awareness of the larger community through innovative programs similar to Greensboro Healthy Homes Coalition's bus tour.

Working with Landlords. Landlords also need to be educated about housing quality issues. To do this, Viet-AID can use the same outreach channels as described above. Using rent-related measures could be another option. Another strategy that worked in other communities is reaching an agreement with landlords to reimburse tenants for the cost of needed housing repairs through reductions in rent. Rent abatements can also work in communities where tenants continue to live in properties with code violations.

Working with Boston Code Enforcement Authorities. In cases where Viet-AID has evidence that housing codes are not enforced systematically in Fields Corner, it might consider:

- Partnerships and collaborations with housing code authorities that draw attention to housing issues in Fields Corner;
- Regular inquiry with tenants about their living conditions and communication with code enforcement authorities on the behalf of tenants who cannot complain themselves (e.g. language barriers).

Case study 2: Greensboro Healthy Homes Coalition, a collaboration of non-profits, businesses, and government organizations committed to reducing housing related illnesses and injuries in Greensboro, NC, works with immigrant communities when they encounter unsafe housing conditions, and assists them in communicating with their landlords to get the necessary repairs. The Coalition coordinates with the City of Greensboro's Lead Safe Housing and BetterBuildings programs to promote an integrated and coordinated approach to ensuring housing quality, comfort, health and energy efficiency. It also assists residents in applying to these programs. Each year, the Coalition partners coordinate a healthy homes bus tour of poorly maintained properties for tenant, concerned citizens, community leaders and elected officials to raise awareness about housing quality issues.¹ They also attracted the attention of local media to substandard housing issues, which led to the publication of a front-page story in the local newspaper.² As part of the bus tour, the collaborative gives awards to landlords who made progress in remedying problems in the rental units.³ The annual bus tour helped the organization build a positive partnership with local housing agencies and work towards regular housing code enforcement, as opposed to the piecemeal complaint-based approach exercised before. On top of all these measures, the Coalition is engaged in public education programs, works with medical providers on the link between health and housing, and offers repair programs to help low-income owners fix their rental properties.⁴

1 Greensboro Housing Coalition. "Healthy Homes Matter" <http://greensborohousingcoalition.com/healthy-homes/healthy-homes-greensboro/http://policylink.info/EDTK/airqualityinhomes/ToolInAction.html>

2 ibid

3 ibid

4 ibid

Code Enforcement Mechanism in Boston.

Owners of rental units must request property inspection within 45 days of new occupancy. Properties should also be inspected once a year regardless of property transactions. Tenants should report violations to the housing division of Boston. Property owners found in violation will be given 24 hours to 30 days to fix the problem, depending on its severity and will be issued a fine of \$300 for each month of incompliance. Building code enforcement takes place at renovation and construction.¹

¹ Indira Alvarez. Assistant Director, Inspectional Services Department, Housing Division, City of Boston, personal communication, April 18, 2012.

Existing Housing Quality Programs in Boston.

In the short term, Fields Corner should also tap into existing housing quality improvement programs run by the City. Such programs include:

1. *Breathe Easy*, is a program in which health professionals refer patients with asthma for housing inspections if they suspect substandard housing conditions being the reason for the disease. The program makes sure that housing inspections and needed follow-up improvement measures are implemented promptly. The initiative connects Boston Inspectional Services Department's Housing Inspection Division, Boston Medical Center, Boston Public Health Commission, Boston

Urban Asthma Coalition, Bowdoin St Neighborhood Health Center, and Asthma Regional Council of New England.³

2. *Healthy-Pest Free Housing Initiative* is a collaboration between the Boston Public Health Commission and various partners, including Boston Housing Authority, Committee for Boston Public Housing, West Broadway Task Force, Asthma Regional Council of New England, Boston Urban Asthma Coalition, Massachusetts Public Health Association and the Boston University School of Public Health. The project's goal is to reduce environmental and public health risks, such as asthma, associated with pest-infested public housing. The program implements pest management measures in an integrated and comprehensive manner, involving residents, building managers and owners. The program's tools include education, outreach and systems change.⁴

With regards to both these programs, Viet-Aid can play a role in:

- Raising awareness and disseminating information among residents whose families are affected by asthma and substandard housing quality issues about the problem and the possibilities of the programs;

³ Boston Housing Division. "Breathe Easy Program". <http://www.cityofboston.gov/isd/housing/bmc/>

⁴ More information can be found at: <http://www.bphc.org/hpfhi/Pages/home.aspx>

- Working with the program partners to draw their attention to the high incidence of asthma in Dorchester with the view to ultimately foster housing improvements and fight asthma in Fields Corner.
3. Boston Triple-decker Campaign (The 3D Program), is a City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development program providing owners of Boston triple-deckers with various services and assistance to improve their properties. 3D assistance include HELP (Home Equity Loan Program) offering zero percent interest and deferred payment on home renovation loans of up to \$30,000 as well as additional funding to replace outdated heating systems. Homeowners can also get discounts at hardware stores, participate in home renovation and energy efficiency classes and workshops, get access to guidelines on-line, etc.⁵

With regard to this program, Viet-Aid can help by raising awareness among Fields Corner landlords about the available financial resources. At the same time, housing renovations need to be carried out in such a way as to guarantee that existing tenants keep the right to return to rehabilitated housing. Also, given that whole envelope retrofits of triple-deckers is the City's priority, Viet-Aid could communicate to property owners the importance of applying to energy efficiency and

⁵ More information about the program can be found at <http://www.cityofboston.gov/3D/default.asp>



Figure 2.4. “Bridge”: Outreach. Diagram revised from: Amy Stitely, MIT CoLab.

weatherization programs simultaneously with the 3D program resources.

Other Measures. Viet-AID can make a difference raising awareness among shop owners about the health risks associated with certain pesticides and engage them in information dissemination campaigns that educate buyers, as well as through Pesticide Paybucks.

Furthermore, it is important to coordinate any housing improvement initiatives in Fields Corner with ABDC (Action for Boston Community Development), which delivers low-income weatherization programs in Boston (WAP). Through its Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), WAP can provide eligible residents with up to \$5,500 for energy efficiency and weatheriza-

tion measures, of which \$1,000 to \$2,500 can be spent on basic housing improvements.¹

Energy Efficiency

“Bridge”: Raise awareness among residents and offer assistance in program application. Viet-AID can fully utilize its expertise in reaching out to local residents to fill in the gap and construct a bridge between community residents and energy efficiency programs. In addition to its current work, which largely focuses on energy efficiency information delivery and language support, Viet-AID can strengthen the effectiveness of its work by further improving publicity channels to residents and reaching out to landlords with more targeted information.

To further solidify and extend its network on energy efficiency assistance, Viet-AID could diversify its outreach channels to reach a larger part of the community. The capacity and effectiveness of Viet-AID’s current practices, including hosting regular information sessions on energy efficiency programs to local residents and distributing promotional materials, can be further improved if information on energy efficiency is also delivered on a variety of other occasions. For example, Viet-AID currently runs a number of educational and social activities, including childcare,

language classes, sporting games, group dancing, and so on. It does not require a great deal of additional effort to give a brief introduction or distribute accompanying materials on available energy efficiency improvement opportunities during these events. Since Viet-AID attracts a diverse group of residents, it could serve as a good platform to increase the publicity of energy efficiency programs. In particular, Viet-AID is already hosting classes for first-time home buyers in the Fields Corner neighborhood. This could be a good opportunity to incorporate educational information on energy efficiency and raise awareness about sustainability among new property owners.

Viet-AID can also deepen its involvement in outreach to landlords with more targeted information. Landlord outreach poses a great challenge in energy efficiency programs. Many landlords prioritize short-term financial returns from their properties; therefore, they may not have enough incentive to participate in energy efficiency programs without foreseeing direct financial benefits as a result. In addition, unlike low-income weatherization programs that are specifically designed and funded for low-income households, market-rate energy efficiency programs expect property owners to contribute financially to the costs of retrofits. It thus becomes more difficult to motivate landlords to join market-rate programs if they do not qualify for subsidized retrofits.

¹ David MacLellan. Action for Boston Community Development, personal communication, April 27, 2012.

Viet-AID can illustrate the economic benefits to landlords clearly and directly. According to Action for Boston Community Development, many landlords do not sign up for energy efficiency assessment and retrofits because they are not aware of the availability of such programs. When they understand the potential economic benefits from these improvements, many landlords will become active participants. To trigger attention and interest from landlords, Viet-AID can showcase the improvements in housing quality and the increase in property values brought by retrofits with convincing precedents in the Fields Corner neighborhoods. Viet-AID can emphasize the availability of Renew Boston's cost-free home energy assessment, and introduce the Mass Save HEAT Loan for which qualified home owners can apply for interest-free loans of up to \$25,000 for up to seven years that can be used for installing energy efficient improvements.

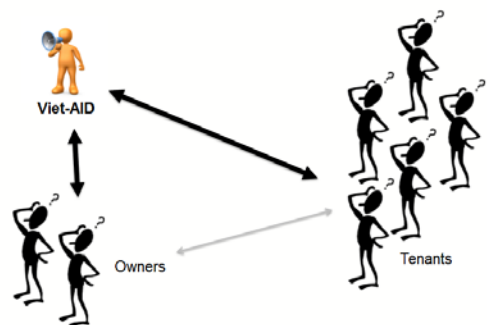


Figure 2.5. "Ambassador": Organizing

"Ambassador": Eliminate misconceptions and organize residents. In addition to the lack of information, a large number of residents are reluctant to participate in energy efficiency programs because they have misconceptions about effectiveness and security of such programs.

"The low-income Weatherization Assistance Program and the Renew Boston Energy Efficiency Program do not require qualified residents to make substantial financial contribution to the retrofits.² The Mass Save HEAT Loan also provides zero-interest rate loans for qualified home energy efficiency improvements. However, many eligible tenants and landlords are skeptical of whether these "free" retrofits are truly effective. Moreover, most energy efficiency retrofits include some portion of indoor repair and construction, including upgrading heating systems, installing energy efficient lighting equipment, and weather-stripping windows, doors, attic access and air leaks. The presence of contractor

2 Renew Boston. "Energy Efficiency Rebate Program." 2012. <http://www.renewboston.org/residents/energyefficiency/>. Accessed May 1, 2012

US DOE Weatherization Assistance Program.<http://www1.eere.energy.gov/wip/wap.html>. Accessed April 29, 2012. Renew Boston. "Zero Interest Financing-HEAT Loan." 2012. <http://www.renewboston.org/residents/heatloan/>. Accessed May 1, 2012.

workers inside homes may cause security concerns among residents as well.

To satisfy doubts and provide incentives for local residents, Viet-AID can play an active role to serve as the local ambassador for energy efficiency programs in Fields Corner. Viet-AID can motivate households who have already benefitted from energy retrofits to share their stories with other residents in the neighborhood on formal or informal occasions.

One possibility is for Viet-AID to sponsor neighborhood "house parties" in newly retrofitted homes with the property owners or tenants to share persuasive evidence and experiences with local residents. Through negotiation with service providers, Viet-AID may also launch a "referral" mechanism for local property owners, where households that introduce and bring in other nearby participants receive discounts on the retrofitting costs of market-rate energy efficiency programs.

There have been great potential opportunities that Viet-AID can promote such intervention in targeted resident population. For example, Renew Boston has revealed that it hopes to extend focus on partially owner-occupied triple-deckers, where the owner's household occupies one floor and rents the other two floors to tenants. If the owner and tenants that occupy a building are all convinced to participate in the energy retrofit program, the

program deliverer and contractor can realize economies of scale by optimizing labor and material utilization, and reducing transportation costs.

“Partner”: Enhance collaboration with program deliverers. Viet-AID could also establish closer and more comprehensive ties with deliverers

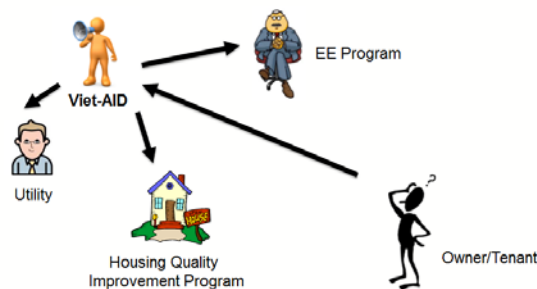


Figure 2.6. “Partner”: Feedback

of existing energy efficiency programs, and become an active partner of those organizations in the Fields Corner neighborhood.

Viet-AID is currently collaborating with a number of organizations on several energy efficiency programs, including:

- Renew Boston and Next Step Living on helping qualified residents and landlords apply for energy efficiency assessment and retrofits;

- Action for Boston Community Development on the low-income Weatherization Assistance Program;

- New Ecology on energy efficiency consulting and Energy Star qualified affordable housing development;

- Dorchester-based community organizations, including GreenDorchester, on campaigns and activities to raise awareness of local environmental health issues.

In addition to its traditional roles such as outreach to local households, Viet-AID can take on more strategic roles, especially in collecting and providing partners with feedback from residents. Viet-AID can ask residents for their experiences and evaluations of their participation in energy efficiency programs, as well as offer suggestions on potential improvements to sponsoring organizations.

Meanwhile it is also helpful to establish farther and wider connections with locally based organizations to promote energy efficiency in Fields Corner. In particular, Viet-AID can establish and strengthen connections with The Green Justice Coalition, which has recently partnered with Chinese Progressive Association to successfully achieve weatherization goals through its Community Mobilization Initiative.

It is important to note that, as provisions by the American Recovery and Reinvestment

Case Study 3: New Bedford Community Mobilization Initiative.

The New Bedford Community Mobilization Initiative (CMI) is a community-based effort to provide energy efficiency improvements to 50 residential homes, 25 small businesses, and 4 multifamily apartment buildings in New Bedford, Massachusetts between July 2010 and April 2011. This pilot program is initiated and sponsored by NSTAR, with participation of local partners including the City of New Bedford, the Marion Institute’s Green Jobs, Green Economy Initiative, the ESHU+ Collective, and PACE YouthBuild.

Through the New Bedford CMI, local partners reached out to households with incomes between 60 percent and 120 percent of state median income, and provided them with information on energy efficiency services that NSTAR was already offering. All participating residents contributed to Mass Save through a systems benefits charge on monthly utility bills. Out-of-pocket expenses depended on specific retrofits and pre-weatherization costs. At the end, the New Bedford CMI exceeded its small business goal by weatherizing 33 small businesses, and approached its residential goal by weatherizing 16 homes and 3 apartment buildings.

The New Bedford CMI is characterized by its community-based efforts of outreach to local residents. The outreach strategy included door-to-door and telephone advocacy, advertising on local media, participating in community events and meetings, and spreading information on social network websites.



Act will expire soon, the local partnership networks of some energy efficiency programs are expected to be restructured. For example, Renew Boston is scheduled to change its local partners by June 30, 2012. Viet-AID needs to keep in close contact with Renew Boston, and seek to continue its partnership by taking on a more active role.

LONG-TERM PROPOSALS

Housing Quality

In the long run, Viet-AID could advocate, either on its own or in coalition with other

organizations, for changes in regulation related to housing code enforcement. For example, the Greensboro Housing Coalition (Greensboro, NC), which has long advocated for stricter rental housing inspection rules in the city, has recently lobbied for legislation allowing inspections of properties whose owners have a history of code violations in the past 12 months. In response, the City of Greensboro adopted a policy to track this data and inspect all the properties with violations. The City of Moorhead, MN, works proactively with landlords by raising awareness about what to expect from inspections. The City sends them a detailed pre-inspection

checklist and a list of fees for non-compliance. It has also hired a staff to track down unregistered and absentee landlords. These measures have significantly improved code compliance.

Viet-AID can also assist the City in addressing the problem of non-existent or very poor information on outstanding housing quality issues and cases of code violation, as well as the absence of monitoring mechanisms. For example, community organizations in St. Paul, MN, collected data and maintained a database of problem properties and worked with the City to match resources with needs at the neighborhood level.

Finally, in the long run, an experienced CDC, such as Viet-AID, can help transfer renovated properties to tenants' ownership through finance and operations mechanisms, such as community land trusts, limited equity housing cooperatives, retention of subsidized housing, and housing trust funds. Viet-AID, in association with other community advocates and organizations, can lobby for priority grants and loans from the government to support of tenant ownership. For example, the Springfield Project (Springfield, Illinois), a not-for-profit agency which collaborates with public agencies and private partners to facilitate community development and revitalization, is providing tenants with housing and home ownership through TSP-HOPE (Home Ownership Program for Equity).

Develop Strategic Roles in Community Energy Efficiency

“Platform”: Provide one-stop community services. Energy efficiency services are initiated and operated at multiple stages by different agencies. On the one hand, federal, state, city and community organizations may not own effective channels to exchange information, share resources, and establish cooperation. On the other hand, local community residents are often puzzled by the complexity of available programs and do not know which one best suits them.

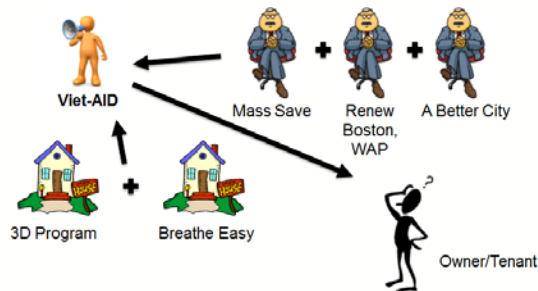


Figure 2.7. “Platform”: one-stop services

As both program deliverers and residents are often scattered and uncoordinated, there is a huge potential to further improve the operational efficiency and effectiveness of energy efficiency programs. In the long run, Viet-AID can aim to serve as a strategic and crucial one-stop platform of energy efficiency services. Instead of the short-run strategy that is on

separately implementing individual programs, Viet-AID’s energy efficiency platform could serve the following functions:

- Incorporate information of all available energy efficiency programs, compare and recommend suitable programs for specific households, and integrate a uniform information publicity channel of various opportunities for Fields Corner residents;
- Initiate meetings and panels of representatives from different energy efficiency programs and provide a venue for information sharing across multiple agencies;
- Break the boundary of residential and commercial energy efficiency, and actively participate in commercial energy efficiency programs such as A Better City;
- Establish a database of households that are current and past participants in energy efficiency programs, pay return visits or phone calls to solicit feedback, and pass their suggestions and concerns back to deliverers.

“Leader”: Advocate for more financial resources and institutional support. Viet-AID could further extend its strength and commitment to energy efficiency in the neighborhood by taking a more proactive role, directly or indirectly, to participate in the design and development of energy efficiency programs, as well as advocate for more funding and

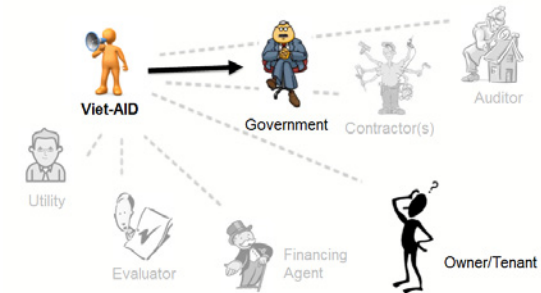


Figure 2.8. “Leader”: Program design and advocacy.

institutional resources on municipal and state levels.

For most energy efficiency services, the current mode of design and implementation is still top-down, and community organizations often serve as the receiving end of the programs. The program structure is commonly designed with one or a small number of core operational agencies partnering with an extensive network of local organizations; however, the role of most local partners is more focused on program outreach and implementation rather than initiation and design. In addition, due to constraints of capacity and political connectivity, most community organizations are more likely to passively apply and compete for funding resources than to actively advocate for greater financial pools for these programs.

With the implementation of the short-term strategies, Viet-AID can further demonstrate

its capability as a successful and important community organization delivering energy efficiency programs in Dorchester. There have been successful examples in Salem, MA¹ where non-profit organizations have played strategic roles in forming municipal-level sustainability initiatives. To establish a more ambitious model for community organizations' participation and leadership in energy efficiency programs, Viet-AID can consider forming an alliance with other interested program partners and community organizations to approach Boston or Massachusetts government agencies, advocating for greater financial and institutional support. It is also a good opportunity for Viet-AID to promote its visibility, and leverage more attention and recognition from the government.

SUMMARY

Our proposals regarding existing housing quality improvement and residential energy efficiency could potentially help Viet-AID overcome the challenges of gentrification and displacement, decay of residential housing stock and deteriorating health and quality of life of Fields Corner residents, rising housing costs, and wasted energy. Our proposals seek to help Viet-AID engage the community stakeholders in innovative ways, while still fully tapping into existing programs and partnerships.

In order to improve residential housing quality in Fields Corner, Viet-AID needs to educate and raise awareness among renters, landlords and hardware shop owners, engage public health and housing code enforcement authorities, and take greater advantage of existing housing quality programs to build momentum for addressing the most urgent housing quality issues in the neighborhood. In the long run, Viet-AID could support the transfer of renovated properties to tenants' ownership, advocate for stricter housing code regulations, collect information on housing quality issues in Fields Corner and promptly communicate it to the housing code enforcement authorities.

On the side of improving residential energy efficiency, Viet-AID could take on multiple roles to further strengthen its current involvement. In the short term, Viet-AID can serve as a "bridge" to better reach out to local residents, as an "ambassador" to further organize property owners and tenants, and as a "partner" to provide more feedback to program deliverers. In the long run, Viet-AID can be prepared to become a "platform" to provide one-stop energy efficiency services to the Fields Corner community, and a "leader" to fully engage in energy efficiency program design and policy and funding advocacy.

¹ Salem Goes Green. <http://www.salem.com/pages/salemgoesgreen>

[3] New Housing



Fields Corner already boasts many features of a sustainable neighborhood. As noted in the Introduction, it is well connected to transit, residential density is high, it has an active commercial core, it is located close to job centers, and it is home to a number of committed social and civic institutions. Fields Corner has also traditionally been accessible and affordable to a variety of ethnic and racial groups, as well as to households earning a range of incomes.

Its sustainable and affordable assets make Fields Corner an attractive place to live for immigrants, white-collar professionals, and low-wage earners alike. However, increasing demand for rental housing in the neighborhood, falling wages, and a variety of other factors threaten Fields Corner's affordability to low- and moderate-income earners.

Demand for rental housing has steadily risen across the metropolitan region over the past few decades – since 2000 in particular – and a tightening market for rental housing has had three major impacts on low-income renters: 1) there is a significant and increasing shortage of rental units that are affordable to them; 2) they dedicate increasingly unsustainable percentages of incomes to housing; and 3) they face increasing risk of displacement from centrally located, transit-accessible neighborhoods. This dynamic is clear in Fields Corner, as rapidly rising rents in recent years have made affording housing in the neighborhood difficult for many renting households, creating a high risk of displacement.

The trends show a neighborhood in a period of transition and have created a pressing need for high quality housing that is affordable to low-income families and individuals. We believe a sustainable Fields Corner would offer affordable, healthy, energy-efficient housing options to people of all income levels. Energy efficiency programs in Fields Corner’s existing rental stock will generate meaningful savings for many households, but alone will not be enough to meet demand for affordably priced rental housing in the neighborhood. As such, we believe developing new affordable multifamily rental housing in Fields Corner is a crucial strategy for keeping Fields Corner accessible to people from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, and that it would support our vision of sustainability in the following ways:

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK: NEW HOUSING

Economic Opportunity

- Increase economic opportunity, savings, and health by reducing housing and transportation costs and improving housing quality for low-income renters

Social Equity and Inclusiveness

- Protect low-income Fields Corner renters from rapidly rising rents and displacement
- Increase civic engagement among low-income Fields Corner renters by providing stable homes free from displacement pressures and other strains that can lead to involuntary moves

Environmental Health and Livability

- Preserve access for low-income renters to environmentally friendly and affordable modes of transportation
- Strengthen the commercial core and residential areas by activating vacant and underutilized lots

Viet-AID and other nonprofit organizations have already taken steps to address the need for high quality, reasonably priced rental housing in Fields Corner by developing new multifamily housing on infill sites. For example, Viet-AID has already developed 72

affordable units, and will have 27 more in operation by the summer of 2012. Viet-AID’s efforts have certainly helped, but demand for affordable rental housing in the neighborhood remains high and continues to rise. What is more, several sites exist in Fields Corner that are well suited to be developed as multifamily housing in the short term.

A distinct challenge to developing multifamily housing in Fields Corner is that market rents in the neighborhood are not high enough to support the exorbitant cost of developing housing in Boston. As a result, using competitively awarded public funds represents the only financially feasible way to build new rental housing – even units priced to serve some of the higher earning households in the neighborhood. On the other hand, publicly assisted housing offers clear benefits: the programs protect low-income tenants from rising rents, set rents at affordable levels, and provide on-site services and overall housing quality typically better than in market rate developments with comparable rents.

In today’s fiscal environment, securing public funds for multifamily housing is an increasingly challenging task. We believe, however, that maintaining and expanding housing choices for a variety of income levels, family sizes, ages, and special needs populations in Fields Corner is a worthy use of public funds.

Our analysis in this chapter is divided into two parts:

1. An assessment of housing market trends in Fields Corner, with a particular focus on rental affordability; and
2. An analysis of site-specific opportunities to develop new multifamily rental housing in Fields Corner.

HOUSING MARKET AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As noted in the Introduction, we define Fields Corner as comprising five census tracts that together approximate the area within a ½-mile of the T Station for the purpose of data collection and analysis.¹

¹ Data for the market conditions and needs analysis comes from the 2010 and 2000 U.S. Censuses, the 2010 and 2000 American Community Surveys (ACS), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the rental listings websites Craigslist and Zillow. In many cases, 5-year 2006-2010 ACS stands in as 2010 data because it is generally more precise than 1-year 2010 ACS data, although it does represent a multi-year period and is not strictly 2010 data in this sense. Overall, using the 2006-2010 ACS data in this way likely results in underestimating neighborhood-level changes in rents, poverty, income, and rent burden between 1999 and 2010. In addition, ACS data are based on surveys, and include margins of error that are often substantial at the census tract level. As such, ACS data are estimates, and are not completely accurate.

EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

Housing tenure in Fields Corner mirrors housing tenure citywide: two thirds of households rent and one third own their homes. Fields Corner, however, features older residential building stock than does Boston as a whole. Seventy-five percent of residential units in the neighborhood were constructed before 1939, as compared to 57 percent for the city and 37 percent for the metropolitan region.² As shown in Figure 3.1, approximately two thirds of renting households in Fields Corner live in the neighborhood's historic and distinct "triple-decker" homes.

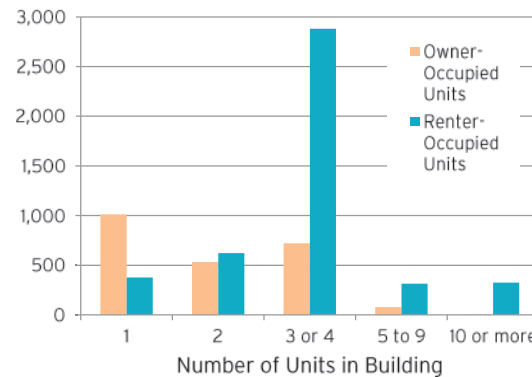


Figure 3.1. Tenure by Number of Units in Building (Fields Corner, 2010)
Source: 2010 US Census

The average household size for both renting and owning households in Fields Corner is approximately three persons. Although the Census reported a 50 percent drop in overcrowding between 2000 and 2010 in Fields Corner, from 15 percent to 7 percent of occupied units, the rate is still more than twice the citywide rate.³ Viet-AID has also informed us that instances of overcrowding among immigrant families are probably undercounted in the Census. Finally, despite Viet-AID's efforts to provide new housing in the neighborhood, Fields Corner lost 197 rental units between 2000 and 2010.⁴

TRENDS IMPACTING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Rental affordability is a function of a household's income and the rent it pays for a home. A common rule of thumb (reflected in most local, State, and federal housing programs) is that a household should not spend more than 30 percent of its income on rent. If this percentage rises above 30 percent, a household is considered to be rent-burdened and paying an unaffordable rent. If the level grows to 50 percent or higher, the household is considered to be severely rent-burdened. Severe rent burden is most prevalent in tight markets such as Boston where demand for affordable units outpaces supply by a wide margin. In

³ American Community Survey (2000 and 2010).

⁴ U.S. Census (2000 and 2010).

² American Community Survey (2010).

addition, severe rent burden is most common among the lowest-income renting households in Fields Corner; in 2010, households making less than \$50,000 per year represented 69 percent of all renting households, but accounted for 90 percent of rent-burdened households in the neighborhood.¹

Rent and Income. Recent trends in rent and income in Fields Corner have dire implications for rental housing affordability. While poverty rose and incomes fell between 1999 and 2010, rents rose dramatically. Table 3.1 shows the divergent relationship between incomes and rents in each of the five census tracts that compose the neighborhood; Figure 3.2 shows poverty trends. While the exact origin of these trends remains difficult to deter-

Table 3.1. Fields Corner incomes fell as rents spiked between 1999 and 2010

	Fields Corner Census Tracts				
	916	917	920	921	922
Median Contract Rent					
1999*	\$809	\$829	\$837	\$823	\$843
2010	\$971	\$1,076	\$877	\$1,008	\$1,057
Percent Increase	20%	30%	5%	22%	25%
Median Household Income (Renting Households)					
1999*	\$33,822	\$43,326	\$42,374	\$43,469	\$42,407
2010	\$25,411	\$40,682	\$34,205	\$27,215	\$31,782
Percent Change	-25%	-6%	-19%	-37%	-25%

* all \$ in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars

Sources: American Community Survey, 2000, 2010

mine, they clearly predict a negative potential

1 American Community Survey (2010).

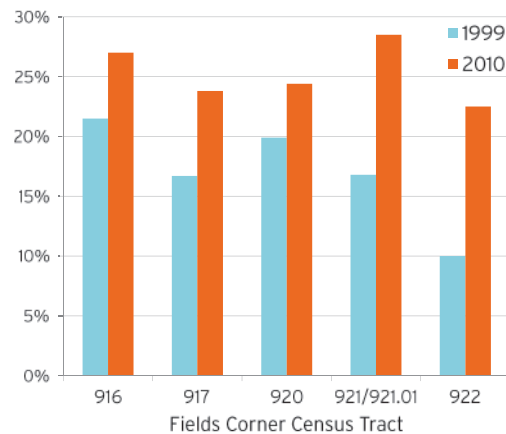


Figure 3.2. Poverty rate in Fields Corner (individuals)
Sources: American Community Survey, 2000, 2010

impact on rental affordability, particularly for lower-income Fields Corner residents.

One explanation for such a dramatic rise in rents is that rental market pressures are flowing from downtown Boston into Dorchester along the Red Line. The census tract immediately bordering the Savin Hill Station – the next closest stop to downtown from Fields Corner – saw rents increase by 52 percent between 1999 and 2010.² In addition, it is possible that market pressures are displacing lower-income renters from other neighborhoods into Fields Corner. As shown in Figure 3.3, households who moved

2 American Community Survey (2000 and 2010). Census tract is Suffolk County tract 907.

to Fields Corner between 2009 and 2010 were slightly poorer when compared to existing residents, despite the overall increases in rent. Although the forces behind demographic changes and housing demand in the neighborhood are complex, Fields Corner is clearly a neighborhood in transition that faces increasing challenges to housing affordability.

Rent Burden. Fields Corner faces a level of rent burden even higher than the already high overall rate in the city of Boston. Between 1999 and 2010, rent burden increased in both Fields Corner and Boston.

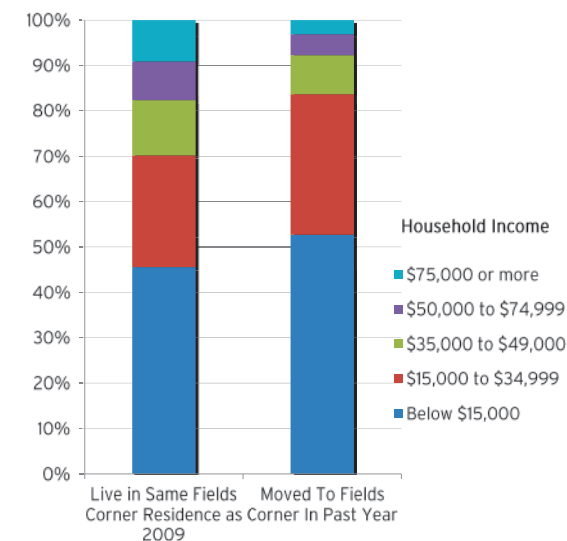


Figure 3.3. New vs. existing households in Fields Corner (2010).
Sources: American Community Survey, 2000, 2010 (Fields Corner, 2010)]

However, as shown in Figure 3.4 below, severe rent burden spiked in Fields Corner during this period and rental housing affordability is demonstrably worse in Fields Corner than in Boston as a whole. In addition, low-income renters in Fields Corner are much more likely to be rent-burdened than are moderate- and upper-income renters; in 2010, 85 percent of renting households with annual incomes under \$50,000 (the 2012 cut-off for to qualify as a “low-income” 3-person household in affordable housing programs) were rent-burdened.³

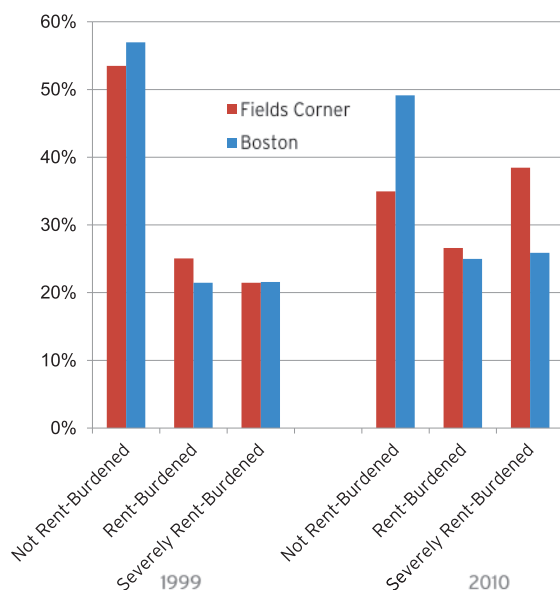


Figure 3.4. Severe rent burden in Fields Corner rose dramatically between 1999 and 2010.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2000, 2010

3 American Community Survey (2000 and 2010).

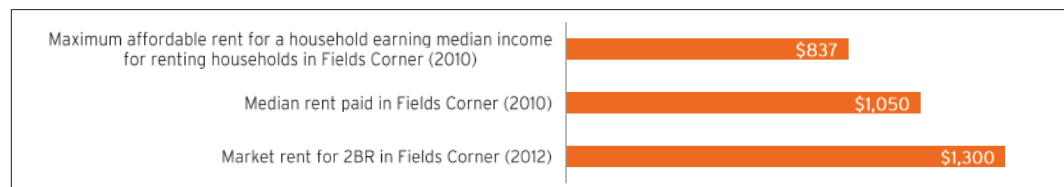


Figure 3.5. Fields Corner renters can't afford to move within the neighborhood.
Note: all \$ in 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars. Sources: 2010 American Community Survey, Craigslist, Zillow

In 2010, the median annual household income among renting households in Fields Corner was approximately \$33,500.⁴ The maximum affordable rent for a household making \$33,500 – where the percentage of household income does not exceed 30 percent, thus avoiding rent-burden – is \$837 per month. However, as shown in Figure 3.5 below, renters in Fields Corner in 2010 paid a median rent of \$1,050. In addition, we found that the average two-bedroom apartment (appropriate for a three-person household, which is the approximate average household size for a renting household in the neighborhood) on the market in Fields Corner today is renting for \$1,300 per month. Figure 3.5 demonstrates the current vulnerability of many renting households in Fields Corner. Most are already rent-burdened, but they also cannot afford the market rent for a new apartment. If they need to move for any number of reasons -- if their landlord raises the rent, if their building is being converted to condos, if they want a more affordable apartment, or if they need to find a higher quality unit for their

4 American Community Survey (2010).

asthmatic children because their landlord will not take care of a mold problem – they in all likelihood will need to move to a different, cheaper neighborhood.

Existing renters are thus vulnerable to a number of forces that could push them out of the neighborhood and in many cases will not have the choice to stay in Fields Corner even if they want to. Their new home will likely not be as conveniently located near a T station or major bus lines as is their current unit in Fields Corner, thus increasing the likelihood that they will commute by car; a shift to commuting by car has negative impacts on both the household's income and the environment. Providing more affordable housing options can help mitigate the undesirable tradeoffs that low-income renters often face between living in a desirable neighborhood, affordable and efficient transportation options, and proximity to social supports.

Senior Housing Needs. Sixty-five percent of seniors (over age 65) in Fields Corner are rent-burdened, compared to 55 percent of seniors citywide. In addition, Fields Corner

grandparents living in poverty were almost twice as likely in 2010 to be responsible for their own grandchildren under 18 years old (57 percent) as grandparents at or above the poverty line (32 percent).¹ Fields Corner therefore faces a pressing need for new affordable rental housing options for low-income seniors with a variety of family circumstances. Finally, demographic trends suggest a long-term need to develop new housing solutions for a growing population of seniors. In 2010, 19 percent of the total population in the Boston metro area was above 60 years old; however, MAPC projects that this percentage will grow to 23 percent in 2020, 27 percent in 2030, and 29 percent in 2035.² Although it is not possible to know exactly how this broad trend will impact Fields Corner, it is likely that finding affordable, safe, and well-suited options to age in the neighborhood will remain a challenge for local seniors.

EXISTING ASSISTED HOUSING IN FIELDS CORNER.

Despite challenges to housing affordability in

Fields Corner, 2,934 renting individuals (23 percent of renters) living in 1,022 apartments did receive some type of federal rental assis-

tance in 2009 (the most recent year for which data is available).³ Housing Choice Voucher (HCV, formerly known as a Section 8 voucher) holders account for the vast majority of the federally assisted population. HCV holders are allowed to rent units on the market up to between 90 and 110 percent of the HUD-designated Fair Market Rate for a given city; since HCVs are tied to the tenant and not to any particular housing unit, however, it is possible for HCV holders to be priced out of a neighborhood if the market rents are too high for the voucher payment to support. The 2012 Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Boston is \$1,369 and the market rate for a two-bedroom in Fields Corner is around \$1,300. For the moment, many HCV holders can afford to rent apartments in the neighborhood. But if rents continue to rise at anywhere close to the rate they did the previous decade, within a few years HCV holders will not likely be able to find an apartment in Fields Corner and existing residents with HCVs may see their rents rise to a level beyond what they can support with the voucher. Between 2008 and 2009 alone, HUD data showed a decrease of 730 subsidized renting

individuals in Fields Corner;⁴ most, if not all, of these renters were likely HCV holders and the number of voucher holders in the neighborhood has likely decreased even more since 2009. For this sizable population of low-income renters who call Fields Corner home, displacement can come as a result of market rents in the neighborhood approaching and ultimately surpassing the HUD-designated Fair Market Rent for Boston.

In gentrifying neighborhoods, project-based rental subsidies – where physical housing units are affordable and restricted to households with target income levels – offer the best protection against displacement, and provide stability for low-income renters that mobile rental vouchers cannot. As shown in Map 3.1, Fields Corner features several affordable housing developments that serve a range of low-income families, individuals, seniors, and special needs populations. However, federal subsidies at several of these properties are set to expire within the next few years and these vital neighborhood assets may not remain as affordable housing. In addition, the existing properties cannot sufficiently counteract overwhelming economic and housing market forces in the neighborhood. The dual strategy of preserving the existing stock and developing new rent-restricted housing is

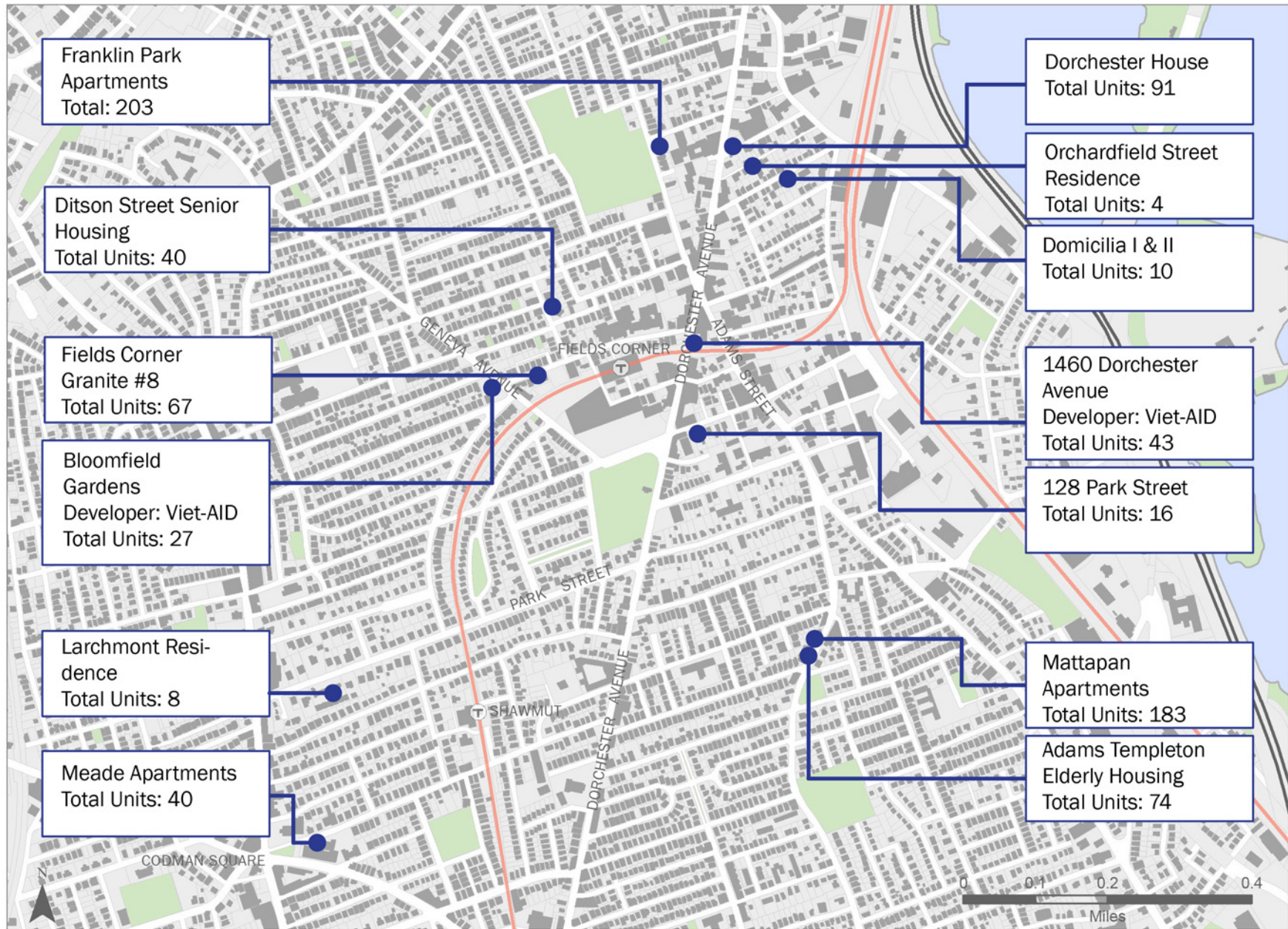
1 American Community Survey (2010).

2 “Metrofuture 2035 Update (March 2011),” Metropolitan Area Planning Council, accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.mapc.org/data-services/available-data/projections#Mf35>.

3 “Picture of Subsidized Households for 2009,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed May 18, 2012, <http://www.huduser.org/portal/picture/picture2009.html>.

4 “Picture of Subsidized Households - 2008,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.huduser.org/portal/picture2008/index.html>.

Map 3.1. Existing affordable housing in Fields Corner



crucial to helping as many low-income Fields Corner residents as possible at least to have the option of a stable, healthy home in the neighborhood.

WHO WOULD LIVE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN FIELDS CORNER?

As shown in Figure 3.6, the maximum allowable rents in publicly assisted “low-income housing” match, and in some cases exceed, what current Fields Corner residents already pay in rent. In addition, as shown in Figure 3.7, a family earning median income among renting households in Fields Corner would qualify for a “very low-income” unit restricted to households with incomes at or below 50 percent area median income (AMI).

The tables illustrate that new publicly assisted low-income housing in Fields Corner would serve income groups that already represent a large proportion of the Fields Corner community. As of 2010, 69 percent of renting households in Fields Corner had annual incomes under \$50,000.¹ Many families and individuals who would qualify as low-income according to local, State, and federal metrics and regulations actually earn some of the higher incomes among households in Fields Corner and are not “low income” in the local context. For this reason, most low-income housing is better defined as workforce housing in this particular neighborhood.

¹ American Community Survey (2010).

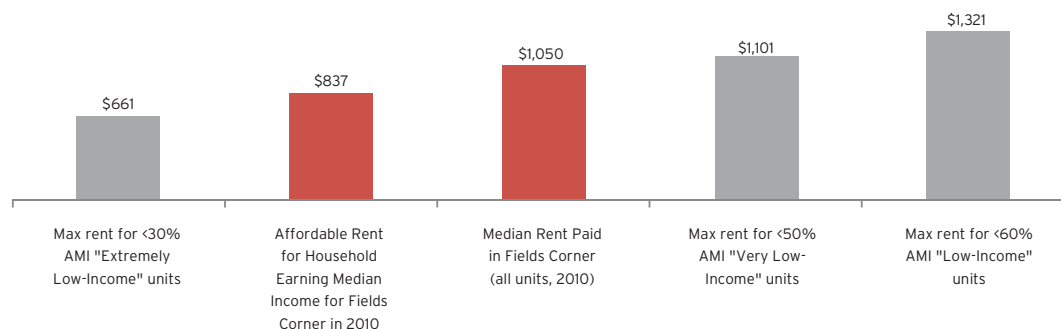


Figure 3.6. 2012 maximum allowable rents for affordable units in Boston vs. Rents in Fields Corner

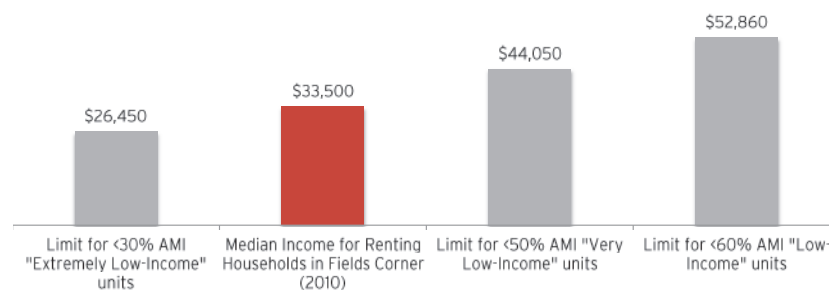


Figure 3.7. 2012 income limits to qualify for 2-bedroom/3-person affordable units in Boston vs. Income in Fields Corner.

Notes: all \$ in 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars; the average household size for renting households in Fields Corner in 2010 was approximately 3 people.

Sources: HUD, 2010 American Community Survey

Illustrative case: two-parent household with one school-age child. If one parent works full time and earns \$33,000 per year and the other parent earns \$15,000 per year working part-time and stays home part-time to take care of the child, the family would qualify for a low-income unit restricted to households earning at or below 60 percent of AMI – the most common income cut-off for low-income rental units in publicly assisted low-income housing. In the private market, the family would need to find a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,125 per month or lower in order to pay less than 30 percent of household income on rent. The current asking price for a two-bedroom apartment in Fields Corner, however, is \$1,300. Despite earning significantly higher wages than the median household income in Fields Corner, this family would likely not find a high quality apartment on the open market in Fields Corner within their price range. They will likely move to a poorer neighborhood with inferior access to public transportation, and thus face an undesirable tradeoff between housing costs and higher transportation costs. This case is a simple illustration demonstrating why there is an urgent need to continue developing new, quality housing in Fields Corner.

ANALYSIS OF MULTIFAMILY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Given the need for additional affordable housing in Fields Corner, we conducted a broad analysis of potential sites suitable for multifamily housing development. For the first stage of the analysis, we used Geographic Information System mapping software and

2010 parcel data from the City of Boston Assessing Department to analyze sites within a one-half mile radius of the Fields Corner T Station, which would best capture the benefits of transit access and transit-oriented development for Fields Corner residents.

ANALYSIS METHOD

Based on similar studies of other TOD areas and in consultation with Viet-AID's Real Estate Director, Aspasia Xypolia, we determined several criteria for site suitability that we could screen for using GIS. A primary factor we considered is a measure termed the "Improvement/Land Ratio," a measure that compares the value of any buildings on a property to the value of the underlying land. Screening for properties – or multiple abutting properties that can be assembled – that have an Improvement/Land Ratio of less than one is a common way to identify parcels that are likely to be attractive to developers, and to be developed in the near term; a vacant lot, for example, would have a ratio of zero. Once we determined which parcels have Improvement/Land Ratios of less than one, we selected parcels and groups of adjacent parcels with a minimum area of 13,200 square feet, which would allow a four story building with 24 units, the minimum number that would make a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit-financed LIHTC- project feasible

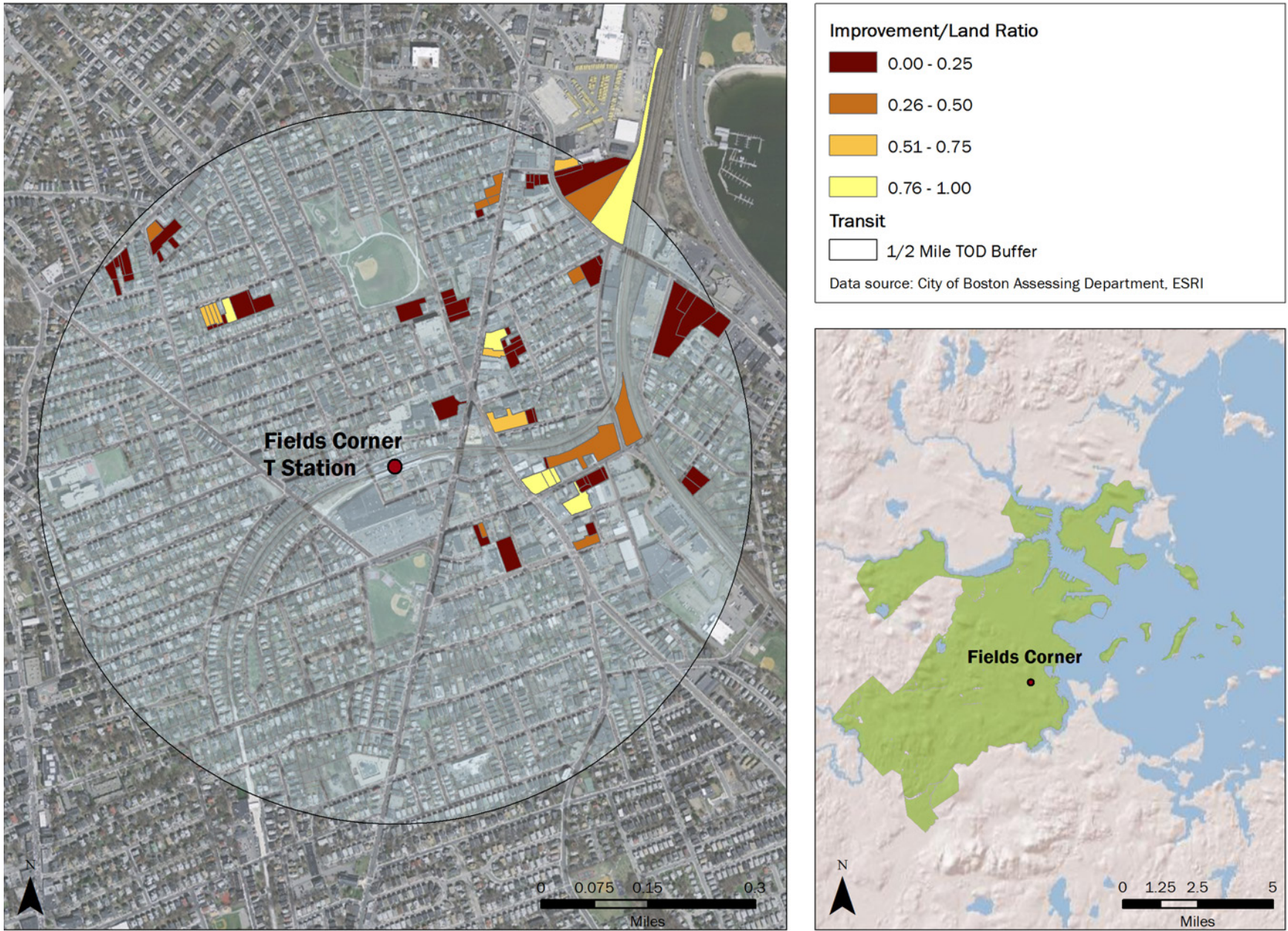
and competitive.² We then screened out sites that were obviously unsuitable for housing development – parks, transportation rights-of-way, newly developed or remodeled parcels, and sites with difficult footprints or access problems. Map 3.2 shows the set of potential sites our analysis revealed.

Following our mapping analysis, we visited the sites we had identified as having development potential to see their current conditions and uses. Based on our observations, we selected five sites, seen in Map 3.3, that we believe would be most suitable for short-term development as multifamily workforce housing. All five sites feature considerable amounts of unbuilt land, either as vacant lots or underutilized surface parking.

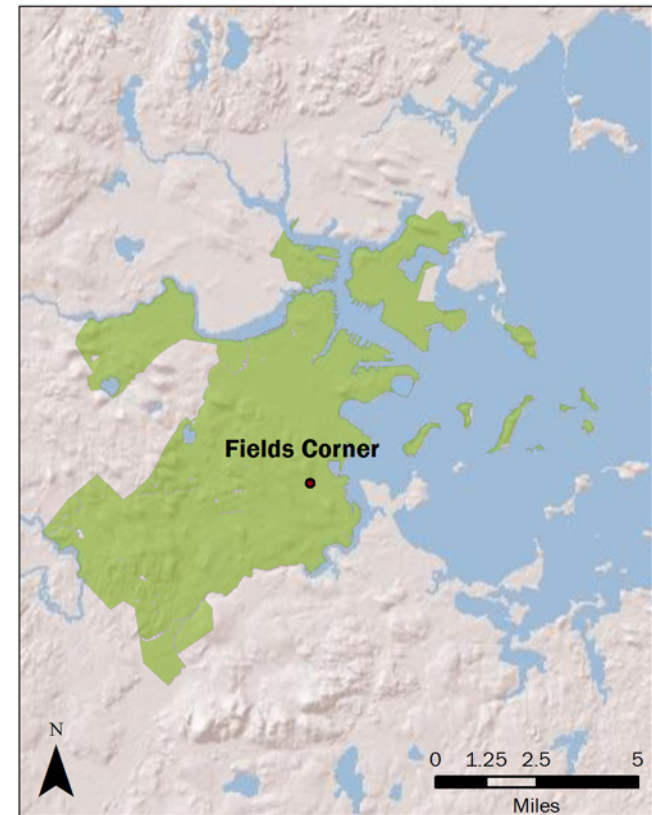
The site analysis in this report is meant to provide Viet-AID with a framework for thinking about the types and locations of parcels that may be most suitable for affordable housing development that secures walkable access to transit and the commercial core and activates underused lots in Fields Corner. While we believe the sites detailed below potentially offer very promising opportunities for short-term housing development, further research and due diligence into title, environmental history, applicable zoning, and other

² The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the largest federal subsidy program that supports development of new affordable housing. Almost all new projects use LIHTC funding.

Map 3.2. Potential sites for new multifamily housing.



Map 3.3. Highly suitable sites for new multifamily housing.

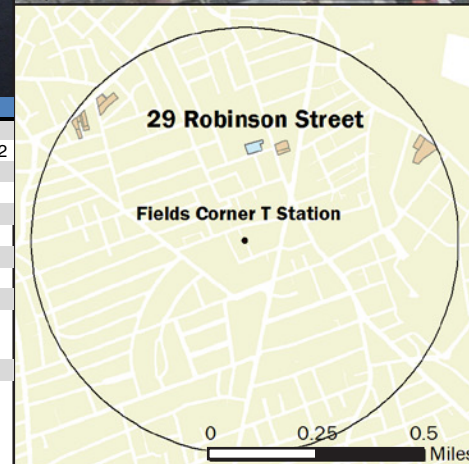


29 Robinson Street



29 Robinson Street

Ownership	Owner	Mailing Address	City	State	ZIP
	One Arcadia Place LPS	1 Arcadia Place	Dorchester	MA	02122
Valuation	Land	Building	Improvement/Land Ratio		
Fiscal Year 2012	\$198,100	\$0	0		
Distance to T	Miles	Minutes Walk			
	0.3	6			
Land Use	Parcel	Adjacent			
	Commercial Land	Residential, Park, Industrial			
Zoning	Current	Multi-Family Housing	Neighboring		
Capacity	Two-Family Residential	Variance Needed	Three-Family, Triple-Decker, Open Space		
	Square Footage	Housing (Approximate)	Housing (With First Floor Retail)		
	25,032 Sq. Ft.	45 Units	33 Units		

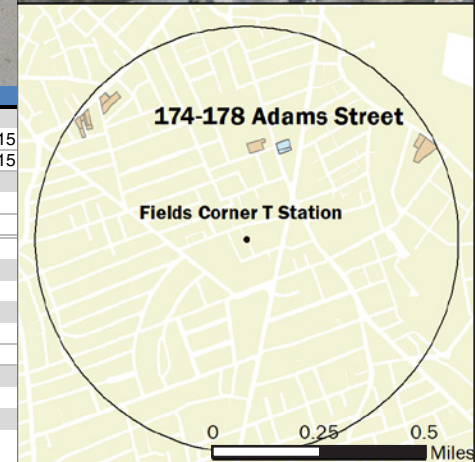


174 - 178 Adams Street



174-178 Adams Street

Ownership	Owner	Mailing Address	City	State	ZIP
	New England Tel & Tel Co	PO Box 152206	Irving	TX	75015
	New England Tel & Tel Co	PO Box 152206	Irving	TX	75015
Valuation	Land	Building	Improvement/Land Ratio		
Fiscal Year 2012	\$160,427	\$0	0		
	\$92,373	\$0	0		
Total	\$252,800	\$0	0		
Distance to T	Miles	Minutes Walk			
	0.3	5			
Land Use	Parcel	Adjacent			
	Commercial Land	Residential, Industrial, Surface Parking			
	Commercial Land				
Zoning	Current	Multi-Family Housing	Neighboring		
	Multi-Family/Local Services	By-Right	Multi-Family/Local Services		
Capacity	Square Footage	Housing (Approximate)	Housing (With First Floor Retail)		
	23,972 Sq. Ft.	43 Units	32 Units		

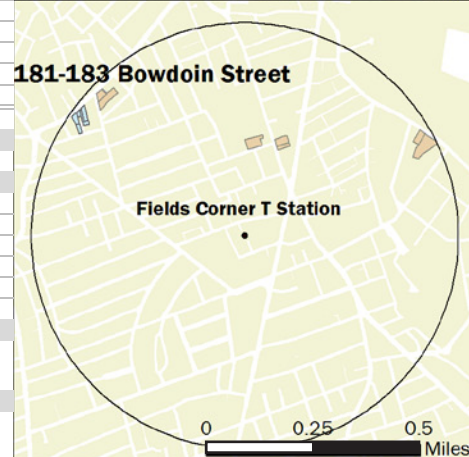


181 - 183 Bowdoin Street



181-183 Bowdoin Street

Ownership	Owner	Mailing Address	City	State	ZIP
	John Casserly	PO Box 51777	Boston	MA	02205
	John Casserly	PO Box 51777	Boston	MA	02205
	John Casserly	PO Box 51777	Boston	MA	02205
	John Casserly	PO Box 51777	Boston	MA	02205
	John Casserly	PO Box 51777	Boston	MA	02205
	Phillip Liem Truong	20 Levant Street	Boston	MA	02122
Valuation	Land	Building	Improvement/Land Ratio		
Fiscal Year 2012	\$74,693	\$9,710	0.13		
	\$21,226	\$2,759	0.13		
	\$63,133	\$8,207	0.13		
	\$27,430	\$3,818	0.14		
	\$31,240	\$4,061	0.13		
	\$30,500	\$0	0.00		
	\$248,222	\$28,555	0.12		
Total					
Distance to T	Miles	Minutes Walk			
	0.6	11			
Land Use	Parcel	Adjacent			
	Storage Warehouse/Garage	Residential			
	Commercial Land (Unusable)				
	Commercial Land				
	Commercial Land (Secondary)				
	Commercial Land (Secondary)				
Zoning	Residential Land (Unusable)				
	Current	Multi-Family Housing	Neighboring		
Capacity	Triple-Decker	Variance Needed	Three-Family, Two-Family, Local Convenience		
	Square Footage	Housing (Approximate)	Housing (With First Floor Retail)		
	34,665 Sq. Ft.	62 Units	46 Units		

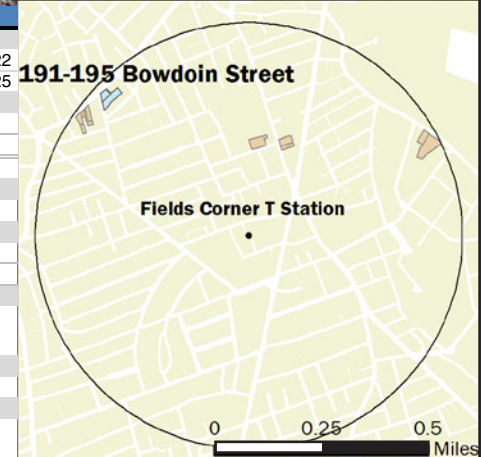


191 - 195 Bowdoin Street

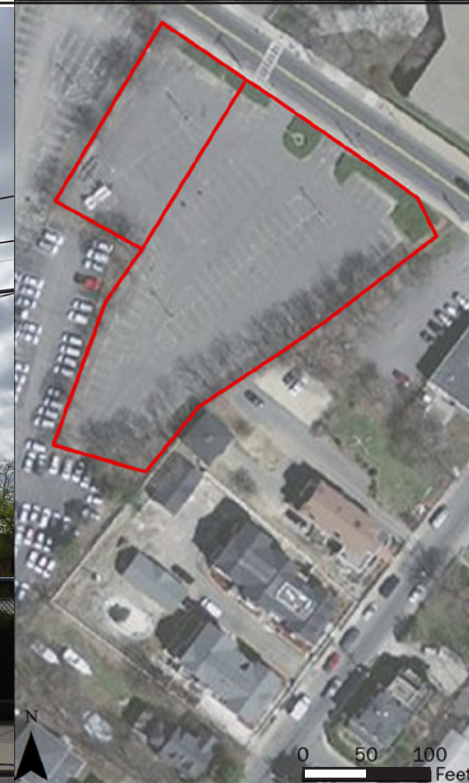


191-195 Bowdoin Street

Ownership	Owner	Mailing Address	City	State	ZIP
	City Of Boston By Fcl	191 Bowdoin St	Dorchester	MA	02122
	DB Housing Inc	594 Columbia Rd	Dorchester	MA	02125
Valuation	Land	Building	Improvement/Land Ratio		
Fiscal Year 2012	\$155,200	\$45,600	0.29		
	\$233,200	\$0	0.00		
Total	\$388,400	\$45,600	0.12		
Distance to T	Miles	Minutes Walk			
	0.6	12			
Land Use	Parcel	Adjacent			
	City of Boston - Exempt	Commercial, Residential, Mixed Residential/Commercial			
	Commercial Land				
Zoning	Current	Multi-Family Housing		Neighboring	
				Local Convenience, Three-Family, Triple-Decker, Community Garden	
Environmental	Local Convenience	Conditional			
	DEP				
	Open Site at 195 Bowdoin St. (as of 2008)				
Capacity	Square Footage	Housing (Approximate)		Housing (With First Floor Retail)	
	32,568 Sq. Ft.	59 Units		44 Units	

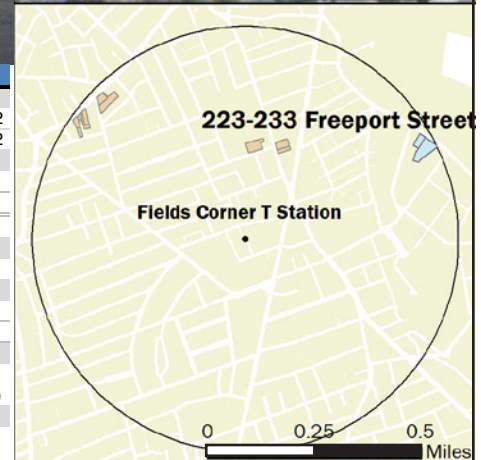


223 - 233 Freeport Street



223-233 Freeport Street

Ownership	Owner	Mailing Address	City	State	ZIP
	Local 103 I B E W	256 Freeport St	Dorchester	MA	02122
Valuation	Land	Building	Improvement/Land Ratio		
	Fiscal Year 2012				
	\$281,600	\$0	0.00		
	\$664,800	\$0	0.00		
Total	\$946,400	\$0	0.00		
Distance to T	Miles	Minutes Walk			
	0.6	13			
Land Use	Parcel	Adjacent			
	Other Public Land	Commercial, Surface Parking, Residential			
Zoning	Current	Multi-Family Housing	Neighboring		
	Neighborhood Shopping	Conditional on First Floor; By-Right Second and Above	One-Family, Two-Family, Open Space (Recreation)		
Capacity	Square Footage	Housing (Approximate)	Housing (With First Floor Retail)		
	53,466 Sq. Ft.	96 Units	72 Units		



site information will of course be necessary before pursuing acquisition for any of these parcels.

In total, the five sites we have profiled in this report would allow for the creation of up to approximately 300 total units of new affordable housing in Fields Corner. Current trends in neighborhood income levels, rising rents, and increasing shares of household earnings being devoted to basic housing needs suggest an immediate need for more of the type of housing Viet-AID has been effectively developing in the area for many years. Whether the particular sites we have profiled become housing or not, our analysis clearly shows that there are parcels in the area that are currently vacant or severely underused and could be acquired and developed in the near term. While developing housing is a lengthy, complex process, Viet-AID's existing capacity in development and the availability of suitable sites suggests that the process of planning new development could begin immediately.

Housing of the type Viet-AID has developed at 1460 Dorchester Avenue and Bloomfield Gardens represents an important contribution to neighborhood sustainability. Energy-efficient units both reduce fossil fuel consumption in the region and free residents' incomes to be used toward achieving greater comfort and prosperity. Living in close proximity to the T and several major bus lines allows families to reduce automobile use and

walk more, benefiting their health as well as reducing costs. Including ground floor retail where appropriate contributes to economic development goals and public safety, introducing a diversity of uses and taking advantage of the Red Line, a major asset in Fields Corner's economy. The 1460 Dorchester Avenue project is a particularly visionary example of transit-oriented affordable housing because it was developed without providing any new parking. The current rezoning process along Dorchester Avenue could ease parking requirements for other, similar infill redevelopment projects in Fields Corner's commercial core.

In the long term, Viet-AID will need to consider innovative strategies for acquiring and financing properties if it seeks to implement a neighborhood-scale affordable housing development program. While the development process and public subsidies have allowed CDCs to build new housing in a financially stable way, recent years have shown that economic downturns can make traditional sources of financing unpredictable and increasingly competitive. Given Fields Corner's significant potential for sustainable, transit-oriented development and Viet-AID's excellent reputation as a developer of affordable housing, we recommend sharing the results of this analysis with MAPC's Sustainable Communities program and other government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and foundations in an effort to secure grants and funding that can help to preserve opportuni-

ties to acquire sites for sustainable, affordable housing. Where appropriate, partnerships with other neighborhood organizations, including other Dorchester-based CDCs, could allow for undertaking development with less risk, while also building lasting organizational connections that build long-term capacity. New models for development, such as land banking and community land trusts for multifamily rental housing, may also offer Viet-AID greater development opportunities. Fields Corner is a neighborhood in transition, and it is important for Viet-AID to monitor affordability indicators such as rents, incomes, rent burden, and concentration of Housing Choice Voucher holders in order to target its housing programs to current and projected needs. It should also track properties that represent the best opportunities to develop new affordable housing. As a CDC, Viet-AID is well situated to help address long-term affordability by developing new housing within a sustainability framework that takes advantage of the neighborhood's excellent transit access and commercial center.

SUMMARY

In order to be a truly sustainable neighborhood, Fields Corner must provide affordable, healthy, energy-efficient housing options to people of all income levels, household sizes, ages, ethnic backgrounds, and national origins. Recent housing market pressures and other demographic trends such as dropping incomes jeopardize this ideal. Although some house-

holds might choose to stay in Fields Corner under the duress of increasingly unaffordable rents and poor housing quality, we do not believe this is a long-lasting solution, nor do we believe they should. Low-income renters suffer undue economic and health burdens in their efforts to make gains and get ahead, let alone tread water and get by. In addition, Fields Corner should remain accessible to new low-income people drawn to its many assets, and not just to current residents hanging on to their homes as the neighborhood changes around them. As such, we strongly recommend new housing as a strategy to increase neighborhood sustainability.

[4] Economic Development

We encourage Viet-AID to remain committed to commercial and economic development in Fields Corner. Our proposals for commercial and economic development would benefit Fields Corner residents by increas-

ing economic activity in the neighborhood's commercial district and increasing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Our proposals build on Fields Corner's strengths. Proximity to the T station and multiple

bus lines can draw in residents and visitors without the use of a car, while the diversity of residents and community groups can lead to a unique and vibrant neighborhood character that facilitates social interactions and cultural exchange.

This chapter describes the existing conditions of the Fields Corner commercial district and local workforce, including the key findings that led to our proposals. It goes on to discuss two short-term and two long-term proposals that Viet-AID and other partners can pursue to enhance commercial and economic development in Fields Corner.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The center of commercial activity in Fields Corner lies along Dorchester Avenue, starting a few blocks North of Adams Street and continuing past the T station to the shopping center on Park Street. The area is a natural

neighborhood retail center, positioned close to transit and neighborhood homes. It is home to between 150-200 businesses totaling more than 500,000 SF, in small storefronts and a shopping center.¹

1 "Business Directory," Fields Corner Main Streets, accessed 4/28/12. <http://www.fieldscorner.org/directory.html>

With the exception of the shopping center, the businesses typically occupy spaces smaller than 3,000 square feet and employ fewer than 10 employees. Conversations with stakeholders suggest that these businesses are primarily owned by and employ neighborhood residents. The area features a cluster of multi-ethnic businesses, including restaurants and

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

We envision a vibrant Fields Corner commercial district and complementary economic development programming that meets the goals of sustainability in the following ways:

- **Economic Opportunity:** Provide entrepreneurial and employment opportunities that build up residents' skills and provide sustainable sources of income.
- **Social Equity & Inclusiveness:** Help local businesses and residents, who are primarily lower-income and minority, take part in regional growth and prosperity.
- **Environmental Health & Livability:** Provide residents with nearly all of their daily goods and services needs right within their neighborhood, thus reducing car travel and increasing pedestrian activity.



Table 4.2. Composition of retail and service businesses in Fields Corner Main Street Business District

Business Type	Count	Sq. ft.	Percent of sq. ft.
Retail	48	167,463	43%
<i>Convenience</i>	19	65,515	17%
Food, Liquor	15	61,615	16%
Drugs, Health, Beauty	4	3,900	1%
Florist	0		0%
<i>Shoppers Goods</i>	29	101,948	26%
Apparel, Footwear, Jewelry	12	50,145	13%
Furniture, Home Furnishings	1	2,000	1%
Hobby/ Special Interest	1	1,880	0%
Sporting Goods	0		0%
Gifts, Party Supply, Luggage	2	3,700	1%
Hardware, Building Materials, Paint	0		0%
Home Appliances, Computers, Music	3	6,400	2%
General Merchandise, Department Stores	2	16,400	4%
Other (eyeglasses, fabric, office supply, pets)	5	9,396	2%
Used Goods	0		0%
Auto Related Retail	3	12,027	3%
Services (Food, personal and professional)	82	221,302	57%
<i>Food Service and Personal Services</i>	36	74,815	19%
Restaurants and bars	19	52,808	14%
Beauty, barber, nails, skin	9	11,330	3%
Laundry, dry cleaning	3	6,000	2%
Tailoring, shoe repair	1	2,277	1%
Printing, copying, packaging, delivery	0		0%
Video rental	1	600	0%
Travel	3	1,800	0%
Other personal services	0		0%
<i>Professional Services</i>	46	146,487	38%
Health Care	14	100,561	26%
Finance, Insurance, RE, Legal, Accounting	28	42,236	11%
Other Professional Services	4	3,690	1%
Total Retail and Services	130	388,765	100%

Source: Fine Point Associates LLC, 2010. "Commercial District Profile and Business Mix Analysis." Fields Corner Main Street: MA.

bakeries, jewelry and clothing boutiques, and specialty item stores that contribute to the neighborhood's unique character. While a Vietnamese ethnic niche exists, especially in restaurants, about half of the businesses fit into the category of being non-Vietnamese.²

Several recent studies have revealed a less than ideal overall mix of businesses in the neighborhood, with some business types over-represented and others under-represented. Fields Corner enjoys a lower share of retail and higher share of professional businesses compared to other retail neighborhoods in Boston. Over-represented businesses include auto-oriented uses, beauty, convenience, stores and offices (such as medical, insurance, and taxes).

At the same time, the commercial area likely fails to meet demand for food-related businesses (restaurants, grocery, bakery, deli, etc), general merchandise (clothing, shoes, home furnishings, electronics), and recreation (dance or martial arts studios, gyms).³ Conversations with stakeholders, such as Viet-Aid and Fields Corner Main Streets, and the experience of businesses that recently

2 Cheigh, Brian, et al., 2004. "Recommendations for Sustainable Development in Fields Corner." Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

3 Fine Point Associates, LLC, 2008. "Fields Corner Market Assessment including Customer Spotting and Trade Area Analysis.

opened indicate sufficient demand to support new businesses in these areas.

However, businesses in Fields Corner face several physical, financial and technical challenges. First, the neighborhood has a poor street image. Many façades are in poor condition and blank walls and gaps between active businesses break up the urban fabric and sense of activity. In addition, 12.5 percent of the space, or about 30 empty ground floor retail and second floor office spaces, is vacant.¹ Despite demand and vacant spaces, landlord activity within the core presents barriers to finding suitable spaces. Of the 20 vacant retail spaces, 12 are not currently in rentable condition and landlords are seeking unrealistic rents in several. In addition, minimum off-street parking ratios for commercial uses have been a barrier for attracting new business investment, but the Boston Redevelopment Authority is in the process of eliminating this parking requirement through the Dorchester Avenue Zoning Update.

Many business owners in Fields Corner also face the challenge of limited technical training, such as relatively limited business experience, computer skills, and access to outside financing. Fields Corner Main Street recently conducted a survey of existing businesses and found that only 16 percent of businesses are at the level of “dedicated business,” in

which they use a computer to readily update financials, and have good credit and access to capital.² Nineteen percent of businesses are at the level of “paper business,” where financials are tracked in paper notebooks and they have little to no credit history. In fact, 94 percent of businesses surveyed have not attempted to secure outside financing. This challenge is not limited to existing businesses, but also includes prospective businesses. Some prospective businesses that have been interested in opening in Fields Corner were unable to get financing because they lacked strong enough businesses plans and bookkeeping skills. Both prospective and existing businesses could use more technical assistance, such as accounting, business planning, marketing, legal services, and permitting.

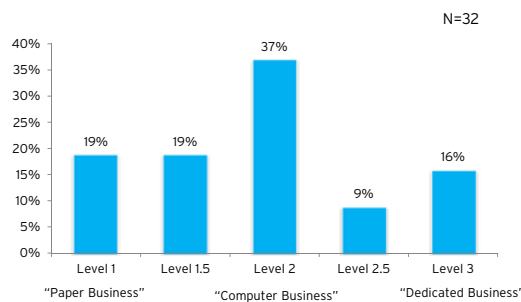


Figure 4.2. Business operations levels in Fields Corner
Source: Fields Corner Main Street Business Operation Survey, March 2012

1 Darling, E. “All Vacancies,” Fields Corner Main Streets. February 2012.

2 Fields Corner Main Street Operations Survey Results, March 2012

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL WORKFORCE

As discussed in the Introduction, median household incomes in Fields Corner have fallen by over 14 percent, from approximately \$51,914 in 2000 to \$43,386 in 2010.³ In addition, the unemployment rate in Fields Corner census tracts is significantly higher than the unemployment rate in the City of Boston.⁴ While the recession certainly has impacted the entire Boston region, it has disproportionately affected Fields Corner, making employment needs in the community a great concern.

The concentration of employment in manufacturing, transportation, and services puts Fields Corner residents at risk given the current industry changes in the region. Between 2001 and 2006, over 6,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the region⁵ and MetroFuture, the master plan developed by MAPC for 2030, predicts an additional loss of 46,000 manufacturing jobs over the next two decades.⁶ The plan focuses on growing highly skilled sectors, such as medicine, technology,

3 2000 U.S. Census, 2010 American Community Survey

4 2010 American Community Survey

5 “Key Trends”. The Boston Indicators Project, accessed 5/1/12 <http://www.bostonindicators.org/indicators2006/economy/>

6 Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2008. “MetroFuture Regional Plan”.

professional services, and clean energy. The manufacturing jobs that remain will be in specialized industries such as pharmaceuticals and solar paneling. There is a need for leaders who can identify industry demands and promote skills training for under-skilled workers in Fields Corner.

VIET-AID'S CAPACITY FOR COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Viet-AID is already providing assistance to business in the Vietnamese community, including nail salon owners, hardwood floor contractors, and weatherization crews. Viet-AID has been instrumental in helping nail salon owners comply with new health regulations and enter the growing market for environmentally friendly products and services. Viet-AID conducts referrals for weatherization training, accreditation for local contractors, and helps connect people to energy efficiency programs provided by NSTAR and Renew Boston. In essence, Viet-AID has helped many Vietnamese small businesses navigate the complexities of local regulation and enhance market demand for their services. In addition, Viet-AID's core activities, including housing and childcare, help address two of the major barriers to securing and maintaining stable employment.

Viet-AID has also recently developed several ground floor commercial spaces as part of its mixed-use development at 1460 Dorchester Avenue. It sold these spaces as commercial



Figure 4.3. Viet-AID's mixed-use development at 1460 Dorchester Ave: Before (left) and after (right).

condos to local businesses to help enhance local ownership and wealth generation in the community. Although Viet-AID has faced challenges in these transactions, this development plays an important role in fostering a healthy business climate in the Fields Corner commercial district.

PROPOSALS

We propose that Viet-AID pursue two short-term actions:

1. Develop partnerships to enhance economic development service delivery, and
2. Use the community center to organize and engage the Fields Corner business community.

Viet-AID could build on these initial steps and pursue our two longer-terms proposals:

1. Directly invest in commercial spaces, and

2. Develop programs for small business assistance.

SHORT TERM PROPOSALS

Develop Partnerships to Enhance Economic Development Service Delivery

Although there is no business assistance program specific to Fields Corner, many programs exist around Boston. Viet-AID should be the connective tissue between busy local business owners and existing programs and resources. Viet-AID can help connect businesses with resources for physical improvements and technical assistance by forging partnerships with service providers to help make the services more readily available and understandable for Fields Corner businesses. For example, Viet-AID could potentially partner with Fields Corner Main Street and Boston University Urban Businesses Accelerator to recruit Vietnamese-speaking

business owners to participate in a 10-week technical assistance program. For physical improvements, Viet-AID could help connect businesses with existing storefront improvement or energy efficiency upgrades by having a staff person go door-to-door with a representative from Historic Boston Inc. or Renew Boston.

Case Study: Sustainable Chinatown



Community organizations are proving to be important outreach partners for citywide programs. The Barr Foundation funded the Asian American Civic Association to work with the BRA to help promote Renew Boston in Chinatown. The Asian American Civic Association is seen as a trusted partner by the community. They were therefore able to effectively cross language and cultural barriers to engage businesses, resulting in energy efficiency upgrade projects in 60 businesses.¹

¹ <http://www.greentechboston.org/tag/sustainable-chinatown/>

For workforce development, Viet-AID should focus on connecting residents to existing services by hosting skills training workshops in its community center and referring clients to existing programs. Viet-AID is best positioned to facilitate existing programs by hosting basic skill building workshops sponsored by other organizations. Basic skill development includes: GED preparation, computer literacy, resume writing, and interviewing techniques. Organizations such as JobNet, a one-stop career center, have the experience and expertise to conduct effective job training programs, but often lack the space required to host these events. Thus, Viet-AID could partner with JobNet and use the community center to host a workshop or career fair. JobNet has established similar partnerships with Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation and Southwest Boston Community Development Corporation.

Viet-AID could also provide job-readiness training as a stepping-stone for clients going on to more specialized job training programs. For these programs, Viet-AID would partner with a workforce development organization, such as ProjectHope. Viet-AID would provide the soft-skill development courses for clients as preparation for them to enter the longer-term training program with the partner organization. Viet-AID and the partner organization could seek funding from organization such as SkillWorks.

Viet-AID could host financial education programs to assist clients in budgeting and saving. For example, Viet-AID could augment their first-time homebuyer program through Individual Development Account (IDA) programs, which match an individual's savings with funding to be used towards a designated goal. For example, the IDA Program at DotWell matches two dollars for every one dollar that a participant saves towards financing their education. Viet-AID could explore the opportunity to use such a savings program to investments in energy efficiency home improvements.

Table 4.3. Composition of retail and service businesses in Fields Corner Main Street Business District

Organization	Area of Expertise	Key Resources for Fields Corner	Potential Areas for Collaboration
A Better City: Challenge for Sustainability Program	Physical Improvements, Technical Assistance	Free energy audits, assistance applying for EE programs, sustainability tools, workshops, networking events, recognition.	Encourage businesses to participate in the program. Go door-to-door with a representative.
Accion USA	Technical Assistance	Microloans for small businesses	Help businesses apply for loans; Hold a workshop with an Accion USA representative
Boston University Businesses Accelerator	Technical Assistance	Pilot project providing on-site business assistance for 10 weeks. Focused on financial management.	Recruit Vietnamese-owned businesses to participate. Provide translation services.
Center for Women & Enterprise	Technical Assistance	Workshops, courses, networking opportunities	Encourage businesses to take advantage of their services. Invite a representative to host a workshop.
City of Boston Neighborhood Response Team	Physical Improvements	Code enforcement for some neighborhoods, but there is no team for Fields Corner.	Advocate for team devoted to Fields Corner and communicate with them about problem properties.
City of Boston Restore Program	Physical Improvements	Matching grants for storefront improvements and signage	Help businesses apply for grants
Dorchester Bay EDC	Technical Assistance	Small Business Loan Fund, Technical Assistance, Small Business Incubator	Technical assistance for FC businesses. Direct investments in commercial space
Fields Corner Main Street	Physical Improvements	Marketing materials, connecting businesses resources and programs, relationships with landlords and businesses	Engagement with Vietnamese-speaking businesses; Host business community meetings and workshops; Develop marketing materials and events.
Historic Boston Inc. Historic Neighborhood Centers Program	Physical Improvements	Helps businesses apply for local, State, and Federal historic preservation program funds. Technical assistance for renovations.	Go door to door with a representative to explain their services to businesses
JobJet	Workforce Development	Skill training workshops, career fairs	Host events at the Community Center
MA Small Business Development Center	Technical Assistance	Free business advisory services and workshops	Encourage businesses to take advantage of their free services
Renew Boston	Physical Improvements	Free audit and direct install programs that can cover up to 70% of the cost of energy efficiency measures	Go door to door with a representative to explain their services to businesses
SkillWorks	Workforce Development	Specialized job training	Provide soft skills training as a feeder for specialized job training programs

Use the Community Center to Organize and Engage the Fields Corner Business Community

As Viet-AID gains a greater presence in the Fields Corner business community through strategic partnerships with other economic development organization and by building relationships with business owners, we propose that it use the community center as a gathering space for regular meetings of the business community. Local stakeholders tell us that workshops for the Fields Corner Business Community have not been well attended, but Viet-AID's community outreach efforts could help generate more interest and attendance. Viet-AID and local partners, such as Fields Corner Main Street, could invite businesses to the community center for quarterly meetings to discuss challenges and opportunities that would benefit from more collaboration. Increasing dialogue among businesses owners helps ensure that they are working together to develop creative solutions to problems as they arise. Some potential areas that the business community could address through enhanced dialogue and collaboration include:

- A vision for the Fields Corner commercial district, including images and design guidelines
- Developing marketing materials and planning special events
- Cleanliness and beautification
- Improving city services

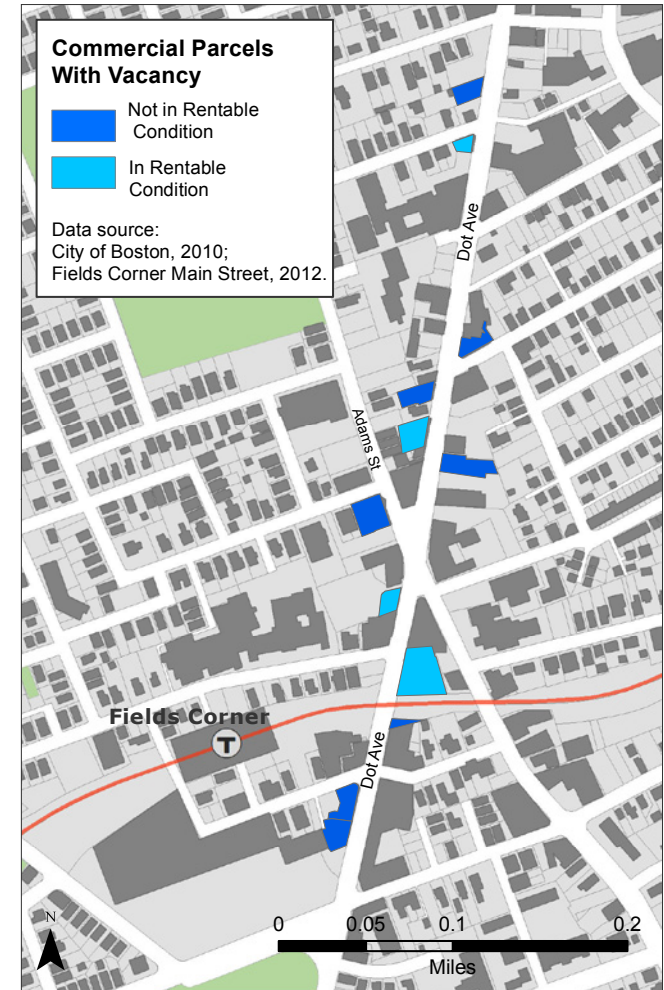
LONGER-TERM PROPOSALS

Direct Investment in Commercial Space: Making Spaces Business-Ready

Many retail spaces in the Fields Corner commercial district need direct investment in interior renovations to make them ready for use. Market research indicates that new businesses could pay enough rent to provide a reasonable return on an investment in improved spaces, including some interior renovation. Viet-AID should consider helping renovate store interiors either by providing a financial subsidy to owners or directly investing in the spaces themselves.

Market research and recent rental agreements demonstrate that there is sufficient demand to support new retail businesses, particularly food-related businesses and general merchandise, such as clothing and home goods. The biggest barrier to new businesses is not retail demand, but rather finding space at reasonable rents and in decent condition. One or both of these barriers must be addressed for many of the vacant spaces in Fields Corner. Viet-AID should consider taking a more direct role in rehabilitating key commercial spaces.¹ As illustrated in the map below, more than half of the commercial vacancies are not in rentable condition.

¹ Boston's parking requirements have also been a barrier to new retail businesses in Fields Corner, however this will likely change in the upcoming Dorchester Avenue rezoning.



Many of the vacant spaces are in rentable condition, but asking rents range widely, from \$12 per square foot to more than \$35 per square foot. Rents over about \$20 are too high to attract tenants and will make it difficult for businesses to survive. The spaces are much more likely to be occupied if the rents are between \$15-20 per square foot depending on the condition and location of the space. The chart below shows retail rents for Boston neighborhoods at the end of 2011.² Compared to Fields Corner, the neighborhoods shown in the chart are much more central, with a larger target market and more “destination” shoppers from outside of the neighborhood, as well as lower vacancy rates. This suggests that rents below \$20 per square foot are appropriate for Fields Corner.

Table 4.4. Boston retail rents 2011

Neighborhood	Vacancy	Average Rent
South End	0.5%	\$29.19
Newton/ Brookline	6.9%	\$28.10
Brighton/Allston/Fenway	1.4%	\$27.35
Financial District	6.8%	\$24.45
Somerville/ Everett	4.9%	\$19.86
South Boston	1.7%	\$17.49

2 “2011 Year End Boston Retail Market Report,” Cabot & Company, accessed 4/26/12. <http://www.cabotandcompany.com/blog/2012/02/13/2011-year-end-boston-retail-market-report/>

About ten retail spaces are currently not in rentable condition. Needed improvements may range from code compliance activities, such as installing sprinkler systems, to improvements that make the space ready for a business. It is best practice for owners to provide a “vanilla box” for new businesses, meaning that the space has a minimal finish on the interior, including drop ceilings, lighting, heating and cooling, interior walls (typically painted white), electrical outlets, rest rooms and plumbing, and a concrete or other basic floor. This arrangement increases the quality of tenants attracted and reduces the start-up costs for new businesses.

Several building owners are allowing their spaces to remain vacant because they do not have sufficient funds to bring the spaces to code and “vanilla box” condition. In addition, there is a dearth of existing resources in the Boston area to address this need. Therefore, commercial renovation represents a prime area for Viet-AID, another CDC, or a developer to intervene.

A basic investment analysis shows that an investment in improving retail spaces would be quite profitable. For a recently renovated store in Fields Corner, an owner invested about \$25 per square foot to achieve \$14 per square foot per year in rent. This investment is equivalent to \$28 per square foot profit over five years, which is a very high profit margin. The owner could have spent double that level of investment and the project

would still have been profitable at a relatively low rent for Fields Corner. The chart below shows that investments in building interior renovations can be profitable within a very wide range of reasonable investment costs and rental incomes.³

Table 4.5. Projected returns on retail investments: 5-year net present value per SF

		Rent / SF / Year					
Investment Cost /SF	\$38	\$14	\$16	\$18	\$20	\$22	\$24
	\$15	\$37	\$45	\$52	\$60	\$67	\$74
	\$20	\$33	\$40	\$47	\$55	\$62	\$70
	\$25	\$28	\$35	\$43	\$50	\$57	\$65
	\$30	\$23	\$30	\$38	\$45	\$53	\$60
	\$35	\$18	\$26	\$33	\$40	\$48	\$55
	\$40	\$13	\$21	\$28	\$36	\$43	\$50

*Assumptions used

The value proposition for upgrading retail spaces is clear, but many of the owners of vacant retail spaces do not have sufficient funds to cover the upfront costs or are not actively engaged in taking care of their properties. Therefore, it may be warranted for a third party, such as Viet-AID or Fields Corner CDC, to directly invest in the spaces.

3 This analysis assumes that the owner takes out a five-year loan for 80 percent of the upfront cost, and pays 7 percent interest. Future income is discounted at 9 percent to reflect the riskiness of the investment.

Redevelopment entities can either provide a subsidy to the owners of the building, or purchase and renovate the buildings themselves.

Direct subsidies can be a very successful strategy. Fields Corner Main Street could pursue funding sources to provide this type of financial assistance for properties that need some “fixing up.” However, this level of intervention may not be enough to help severely capital-constrained or absentee landlords.

Direct investment in retail space renovations could help properties that need a lot of work but also have a lot of potential. Direct investment is appealing because it would generate a revenue stream for the CDC. In addition, the CDC would have more direct control over what type of business moved in, ensuring that it provides goods or services needed in the community, and ensuring that the business participates in technical assistance programs and has a viable business plan.

Conversations with local stakeholders, however, indicate that many owners in Fields Corner are reluctant to sell their properties. If this is the case, a long-term lease structure could be considered. Under a leasing model, a developer effectively takes control of a property for a long enough time period to make sufficient returns on their investment. The owner receives a lease payment and can retake control of the property at the end of the agreement.

Case Study: The Austin Main St. Project



Figure 4.4. Hastings Shoes, Austin Texas: before (left) and after (right).

The Austin Main Street Project provides matching funds up to \$2,500 for retail space improvements and reimburses 20 percent of new businesses’ rent for the first year they are open. The program has helped renovate 36 properties and assisted 17 businesses to date, catalyzing more than \$3 million in private investment.¹

1 “About Us,” the Austin Main St Project, accessed 4/28/12. <http://www.austinmainstreetproject.com/index.html>

In the case of Fields Corner retail spaces, the CDC would lease the space from the building owner for a nominal amount (less than \$5 per square foot), pay for the improvements, and then rent out the space to a retail business. At the end of ten years, the owner would get back a renovated space with an active retail business in it. From the CDC’s perspective, any rent paid to the owner is effectively a reduction in the rent they receive.

Consider the earlier example in which a building owner invested \$25 per square foot to achieve \$14 per square foot in annual rents. If a CDC undertook this investment and leased the space from the owner for \$3 per square foot, they would effectively be receiving \$11 per square foot in rents. This rent results in a \$17 per square foot net present value of returns (instead of \$28), which is still quite a profitable investment. Moreover, \$14 per square foot is at the low end of the rent range for Fields Corner and it is likely that

newly renovated spaces would get rents closer to \$20. Higher rents create a larger cushion of returns that could be split between the CDC and owner.

We propose that several properties be prioritized for renovation based on their location and ability to connect the existing uses in the neighborhood by providing continuity and activity in key locations. These buildings are in good enough condition that it probably makes more sense to renovate them than to tear them down and build new developments. Priority properties include, but may not be limited to:

A 1493-1503 Dorchester Ave (formerly Emerald Isle bar)

B 1476 Dorchester Ave (formerly Fields Corner Bakery)

C 197-205 Adams St (currently has Domino's, liquor store and two empty storefronts)

1396-1400 Dorchester Avenue is also a priority site, but is already owned by Fields Corner CDC, who intends to redevelop the property.



A



B



C

Small Business Assistance Program Development

Viet-AND offers very useful services for businesses in Vietnamese community, including

Case Study: East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC)¹



The EBALDC invests in commercial buildings as part of their broader community development objectives. It has developed or provided asset management services for nearly 250,000 square feet of retail and office space. The Asian Resource Center is a historic warehouse building that now houses non-profits, retail businesses, medical offices and an art gallery. The EBALDC also renovated the historic Oakland Market Hall into a food marketplace and created ground floor retail spaces in several of its housing developments.

¹ "Commercial Properties," East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, accessed 4/28/12. <http://www.ebaldc.org/pg/19/properties/commercial-properties>

nail salons, hardwood flooring, and most recently, weatherization crews. However, Viet-AID has not generally had a strong presence in the broader Fields Corner business community. Furthermore, Fields Corner lacks a robust business assistance program targeted at the issues that local businesses face. In the long-term, Viet-AID could consider developing a business assistance program that serves the Fields Corner business community as well as their traditional Vietnamese business constituency. Here are the steps that Viet-AID would need to follow to develop a program.

- Step 1: Business Community Needs Assessment: Use surveys and focus groups to find out what services are most needed in the Fields Corner business community. The business assistance service model needs to be supported by the needs in the community in order to be successful.
- Step 2: Use the needs assessment to raise funds from banks, local foundations, and state and local agencies. Both the needs assessment and partnerships that Viet-AID has developed will be important to document for the fund-raising effort. Interviews with other business assistance programs in Boston have indicated that fees from the business assistance cover only a small share of the costs, so grants are an important source of revenue.
- Step 3: Hire the right staff person who has the necessary expertise and connections to serve the needs identified in the assessment.

- Step 4: Ongoing strategic planning every 4-5 years to make sure the program is adapting to meets the needs of the community.

SYNERGIES BETWEEN INVESTING IN COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE AND BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

If Viet-AID directly invests in improving the physical condition of commercial real estate in Fields Corner, it will be able to take advantage of the synergies between com-

Case Study: Neighborhood Development Center, Minneapolis, MN¹

This organization partners with community-based organizations to offer a 12-week entrepreneur training program, where the main focus is creating a viable business plan. Each program includes 12 classroom sessions with a culturally sensitive business trainer and one-on-one consultation with the trainer. Program fees are on a sliding scale based on household income. Graduates of this program are then eligible for Small Business Consulting services, which provides support from professionals with expertise in management, accounting, and marketing, to strengthen their businesses.

¹ "Entrepreneur Training Program," Neighborhood Development Center, accessed 5/19/12: <http://www.ndc-mn.org/training>

mercial real estate development and business assistance programming. First, Viet-AID will be in a position to choose and/or help develop a tenant that serves the needs of the community and adds to the economic vibrancy of the neighborhood. For example, in a typical commercial space, the owner might be open to renting to a liquor store or check cashing business because that tenant is willing to pay the highest rent. Viet-AID, however, could use different criteria for choosing businesses for their space and can help ensure their stability. Once Viet-AID has tenants in their building, they are more easily able to reach them with technical assistance services. In fact, they could even require that their tenants receive certain training courses to help ensure the stability of the business.

Case Study: Neighborhood Development Center, Minneapolis, MN¹



In addition to small business assistance, Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) also develops key real estate projects to transform commercial buildings in strategic locations into small business incubators. These spaces provide tenants with stable and affordable places to do business. NDC makes its small business assistance services available to all tenants of these commercial properties.

NDC helped a group of Latino immigrants develop a public market called Cooperative Mercado Central. NDC provided entrepreneurial training and the development of the commercial space through a partnership between Project for Pride in Living (PPL) and Whittier CDC. The Mercado Central, opened in 1999, has helped transform the formerly blighted intersection into a hub of commerce that has catalyzed further investment on the Lake Street corridor. Today, the business owners at Mercado Central generate more than \$1.2 million in annual sales and have created nearly 90 jobs. There are 43 entrepreneurs in business at the Mercado, including 10 of the founding owners from 1999.

¹ "Cooperative Mercado Central," Neighborhood Development Center, Accessed 5/19/12: <http://www.ndc-mn.org/mercadocentral>

One could envision Viet-AID playing a similar role as NDC, providing commercial space and business assistance for Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Fields Corner, especially given the niche of Vietnamese restaurants. These efforts could help to catalyze economic development in the Fields Corner commercial district.

SUMMARY

The Fields Corner commercial district has many strengths, including proximity to transit and mix of unique minority-owned businesses. At the same time, it faces challenges such as storefronts in poor physical condition and business owners in need of technical assistance. Viet-AID is in a unique position to help address both of these challenges. Viet-AID can develop strategic partnerships to enhance the delivery of existing programs and services to Fields Corner businesses. In the long-term, we propose that Viet-AID directly invest in commercial spaces and rent them to businesses that provide goods and services that the neighborhood needs. If implemented, our proposals will support neighborhood sustainability by creating a vibrant commercial district that residents can use for their daily shopping needs, and which provides employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for low-income and minority residents.

[5] Public Realm



Housing and economic development strategies have the potential to make Fields Corner a healthier and more prosperous neighborhood. Another important aspect of how Fields Corner residents relate to their neighborhood is the public realm – the public spaces and streets community members experience as they move between their homes and their jobs and as they spend time in the neighborhood.

The vision and interventions we propose are meant to:

- *Encourage use of Fields Corner's commercial core.* Pedestrian and bicycle improvements can help make downtown Fields Corner a more lively place by connecting residents to the core and creating spaces where people want to walk, bike, and spend time. A shift in use and perception will help local businesses

by increasing foot traffic and encouraging people to linger.

- *Create clear pedestrian and bicycle connections within Fields Corner.* Making pathways clearer and more inviting will help people travel through the neighborhood and provide better connections between neighborhood homes and businesses.
- *Improve Fields Corner's connection to other Boston neighborhoods.* Better physical connections between Fields Corner and the T Station will make it easier for residents to use transit, rather than automobiles, for their trips and will make the neighborhood more accessible for visitors from the rest of Boston.
- *Create a walkable neighborhood* that enhances the pedestrian experience.

- *Create visual continuity* to make Fields Corner feel more cohesive and safe.
- *Promote the safety and comfort* of residents and visitors in Fields Corner.

The streets and public spaces in Fields Corner are important defining features of the neighborhood's identity and the experiences of residents and visitors. Therefore, public realm changes should be appropriate to the specific context of Fields Corner. They should reflect residents' needs while expressing the neighborhood's unique identity and diverse cultures. The proposals in this section are not meant to be finalized solutions, but ideas to start a conversation in the community about what Fields Corner's streets and public spaces could be. In this section, we will: analyze existing conditions; propose short-term interventions to improve pedestrian connectivity and activate vacant walls and lots; and explore long-term strategies to improve safety and convenience for pedestrian and bicycle travel. Our goal is to inspire Viet-ATD and other community groups to approach the public realm creatively to improve neighborhood quality of life.

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

Economic Opportunity:

- Increase access to a vibrant commercial core

Equity and Social Inclusiveness:

- Promote community engagement to develop a shared vision for streetscapes and the public realm
- Increase accessibility and mobility for neighborhood residents and visitors
- Enhance public spaces

Environmental Health and Livability:

- Promote sustainable modes of transportation
- Enable transit-oriented development by integrating the Fields Corner T Station into the neighborhood's commercial core and residential areas.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

Situated along one of Boston's primary arterial streets and served by multiple bus routes and a T station, Fields Corner is well connected to the rest of the city. Vehicle traffic is relatively high in Fields Corner, with approximately 1,600 vehicles passing through Hero Square (Dorchester Avenue and Adams Street) during the weekday morning peak hour of 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.¹ The intersection was recently redesigned in response to the 2007 Dorchester Avenue Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan, which, in addition to several streetscape improvements, led to the prohibition of right turns from both directions of Dorchester to Adams, the prohibition of left turns from both directions of Adams to Dorchester, and to the adjustment of the intersection's signal timing.

¹ Boston Redevelopment Authority. 2007. Dorchester Avenue Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan. <<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/planning/PlanningInitsIndividual.asp?InitID=112&action=ViewInit>>

Figure 5.1. Existing conditions in Fields Corner for streetscapes and the public realm, highlighting available green space, pedestrian connections, and street art, as well as parking space, vacant lots, and barriers to connectivity.



Free on-street parking is provided on Dorchester and Adams, as well as on most of the connecting residential streets. The shopping center on Dorchester and Park Street has approximately 250 spaces of free parking, while a network of privately owned and regulated parking lots supports many of Fields Corner's businesses (Figure 5.2). Despite its ample supply, parking is often a key concern among Fields Corner residents and businesses, as it is in many other communities.

Fields Corner is served by an eponymous MBTA Red Line station, which connects to Ashmont to the south and to downtown Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville to the north. Fields Corner station was rebuilt in 2008 as part of the \$67-million Dorchester Red Line Rehabilitation Project, approved by the Massachusetts legislature in 1999. The station was fitted with elevators, escalators, and accessible ramps, making it fully ADA compliant. The station also features a dedicated busway, which enables direct transfers to eight MBTA bus routes.

Despite these investments, Fields Corner was one of the least used Red Line stations in 2009, (4,152 boardings per weekday), ahead of only the adjacent Shawmut (2,241) and Savin Hill (1,863) stations (Figure 5.4). Transit use at these stations has greatly fluctuated over the years, making current ridership difficult to predict in the absence of newer data. For example, Fields Corner averaged a 20-year high of 5,203 station entries per day between

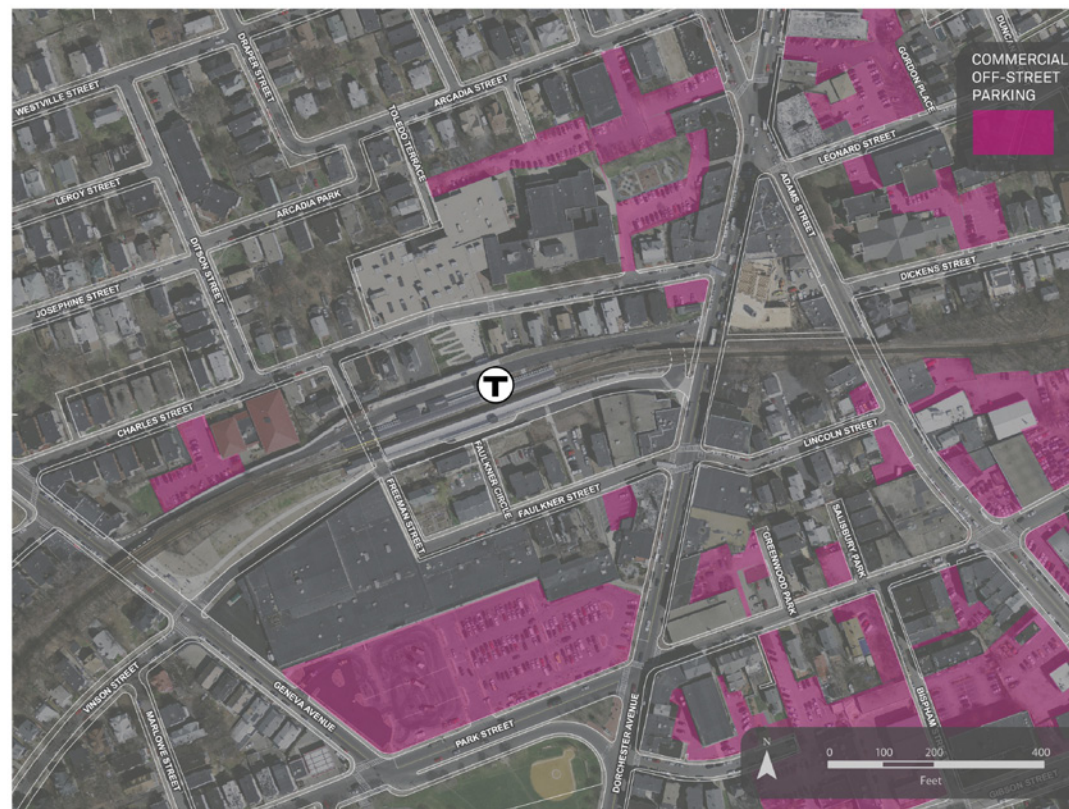


Figure 5.2. Commercial off-street parking in a portion of Fields Corner



Figure 5.3. The large commercial parking lot at the shopping center at Dorchester Avenue and Park Street.

2001 and 2006 before dropping to a 20-year low of 3,480 in 2007 and then rising to 4,152 in 2009.

The largest concentration of fare activity at Fields Corner station takes place during the morning rush hour, suggesting that residents use the station as an origin more than commuters or visitors use it as a destination (Figure 5.5). The primary destinations for these morning trips are the employment centers of downtown Boston, followed by regional medical centers and colleges (Figure 5.6).

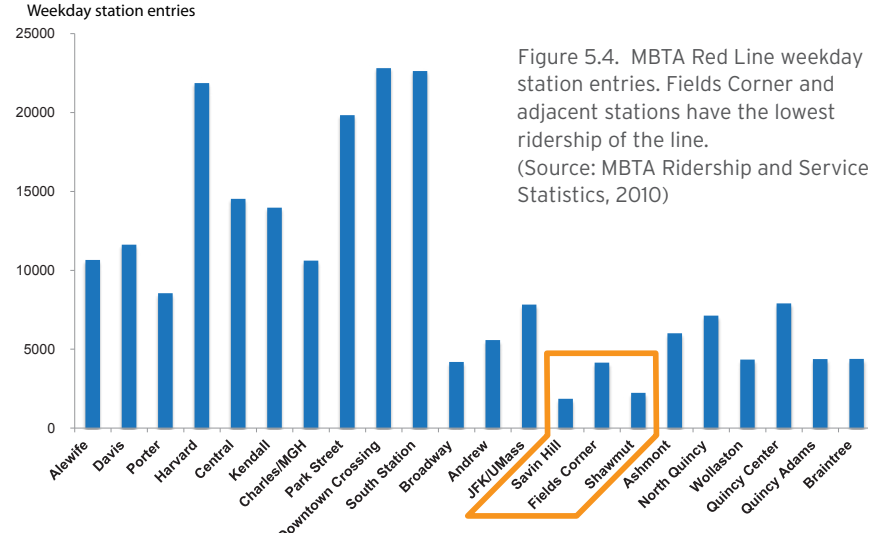


Figure 5.4. MBTA Red Line weekday station entries. Fields Corner and adjacent stations have the lowest ridership of the line. (Source: MBTA Ridership and Service Statistics, 2010)

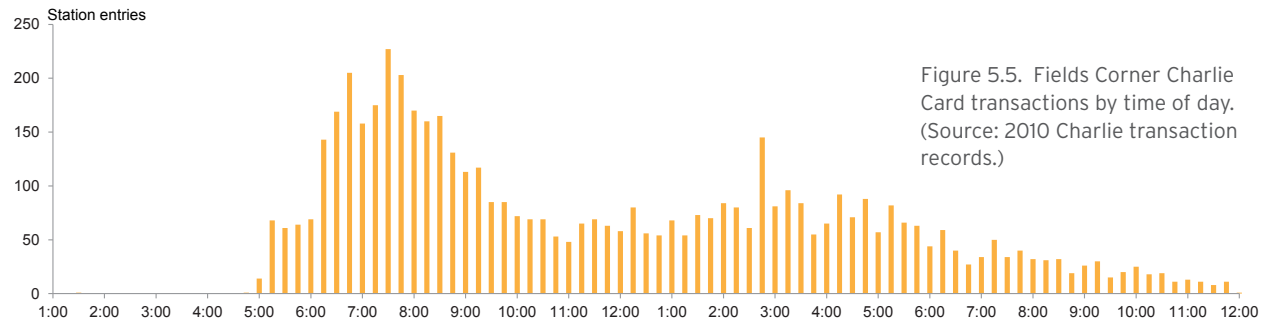


Figure 5.5. Fields Corner Charlie Card transactions by time of day. (Source: 2010 Charlie transaction records.)

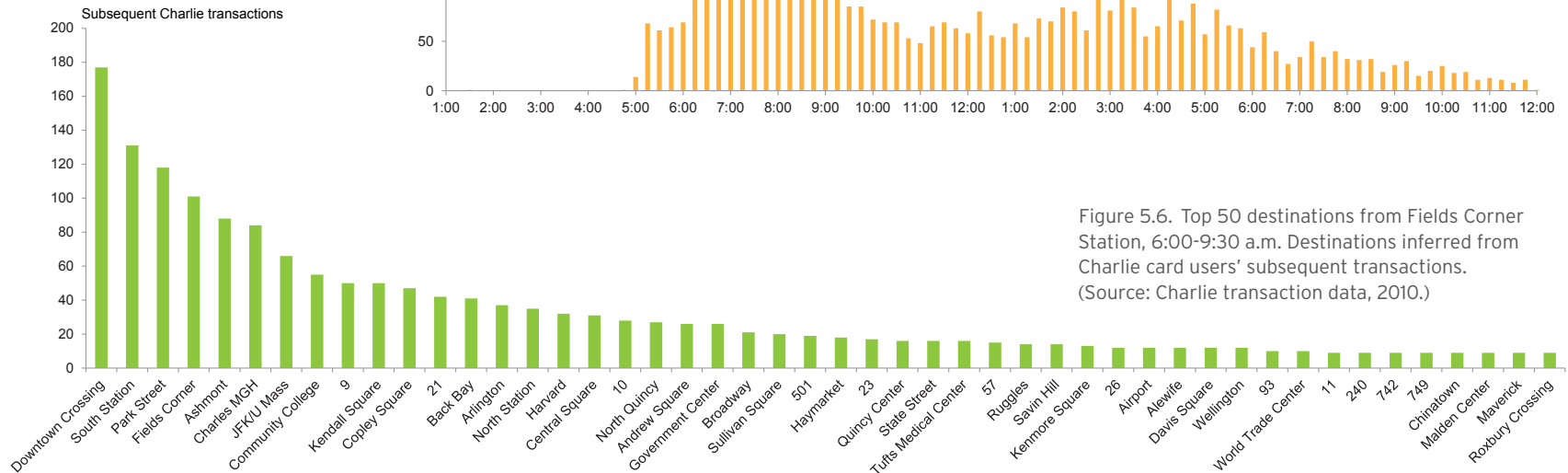


Figure 5.6. Top 50 destinations from Fields Corner Station, 6:00-9:30 a.m. Destinations inferred from Charlie card users' subsequent transactions. (Source: Charlie transaction data, 2010.)

Eight bus routes serve Fields Corner, seven of which terminate at the T station and stop in the dedicated busway adjacent to the station's doors (Figure 5.7). The remaining route, number 18, stops on Dorchester Avenue, adjacent to the Red Line overpass. By observing the previous transactions of Charlie Card users who entered Fields Corner station during a typical morning rush hour, we can infer bus-to-rail transfers. Figure 5.8 shows the frequency of prior routes, suggesting that most riders who transfer to the Red Line at Fields Corner in the morning arrive from the southeast (on routes 201, 202, and 210), and that a significant number of passengers also transfer from the north and northwest on routes 17 and 19.

In addition to transit and auto connectivity, Fields Corner is becoming more accessible by bicycle. Bike lanes were striped on Dorchester Avenue in late 2011, although they terminate several blocks north of Adams Street. The City of Boston has installed parking for 26 bicycles within a quarter mile of Fields Corner, mostly in the form of single-post bike racks but with larger racks located at Doherty/Gibson Playground and the adjacent shopping center, both near the intersection of Dorchester Avenue and Park Street. Additionally, bike racks at Fields Corner Station can accommodate more than twenty bikes. As of April 2012, the Boston Transportation Department has been painting bike boxes—road markings designating space for cyclists to wait at signals in front of cars,



Figure 5.7. MBTA system map, showing transit services near Fields Corner

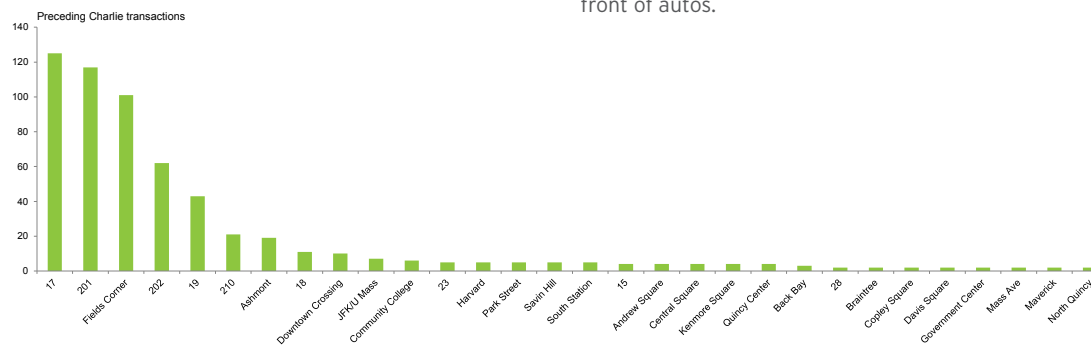


Figure 5.8. Top routes and stations prior to Fields Corner, 6:00-9:30 a.m. Prior origins inferred from Charlie users' previous transactions. (Source: Charlie transaction data, 2010.)



Figure 5.9. A freshly painted "bike box" at the intersection of Park Street and Dorchester Avenue provides a space for cyclists to make left turns in front of autos.

in order to make left turns—at key intersections in Fields Corner (Figure 5.7). Markings for shared bike and auto lanes (“sharrows”) have been installed on portions of Dorchester Avenue as well, but as of this writing are not yet present in Fields Corner.

STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC SPACE

Regardless of transport mode, every trip starts and ends on foot, making pedestrian access a key component of neighborhood planning. Figure 5.10 shows the primary pedestrian flows in the commercial core of Fields Corner, as well as the pedestrian connections between the core and the MBTA station. The primary pedestrian routes in the commercial core flow along Dorchester Avenue and on Adams Street where the two intersect. With the exception of a recently built pedestrian path between Dorchester and Adams adjacent to the Red Line right of way, most pedestrian pathways are situated along roadways. The four pedestrian connections between the station and Dorchester Avenue, for example, occur along two residential streets, a busway, and through a parking lot and alley. The connection between the T station and shopping center is indirect, as one must walk east to Dorchester Avenue or west to Geneva Avenue in order to then move north or south between the two.

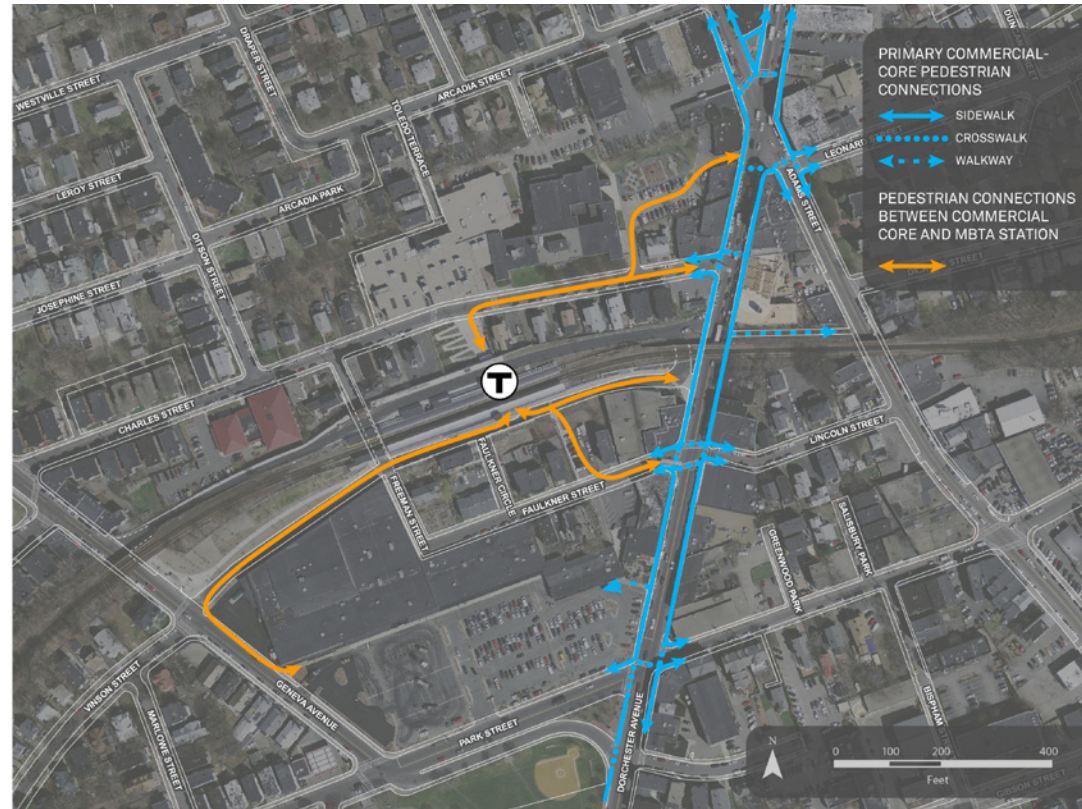


Figure 5.10. Pedestrian connectivity in the core of Fields Corner.

The intersection of Dorchester and Adams was recently reconstructed by the Boston Transportation Department, as recommended in the 2007 Dorchester Avenue plan.¹ Right turns were prohibited, allowing the island

at Hero Square at the north of the intersection to be reconnected to the rest of the block (Figure 5.11) and enabling the retiming of the traffic signal, which now allots more time to pedestrian crossings. The brick sidewalks were replaced with concrete, and the entire intersection was treated with patterned Duratherm (Figure 5.13).

¹ Boston Redevelopment Authority. 2007. Dorchester Avenue Streetscape and Transportation Action Plan.

Although Fields Corner is well served by public transit and its transit connections are physically close to the neighborhood core, they are visually disconnected and are isolated by the configuration of adjacent land uses. Figure 5.10 shows the pedestrian connections between Fields Corner station and the neighborhood core, which includes Dorchester Avenue and the shopping center on the northwest corner of Dorchester and Park. The station has two entrances, one to the north along Charles Street and another at its south along the dedicated busway. When the MBTA rebuilt the station in 2010, it added sidewalks, plantings, and lighting improvements along the busway and painted a mural along the wall opposite the station (Figure



Figure 5.11. Hero Square, recently reconnected to the block to the north by eliminating the right turn lane from southbound Dorchester Ave.



Figure 5.12. Renovated busway and pedestrian improvements at Fields Corner Station



Figure 5.13. Duratherm-treated intersection at Dorchester and Adams

5.12). The façades of the busway, however, are occupied by the station viaduct on the north and the backs of commercial spaces to the south, presenting an attractive but inactive face to pedestrians.

PROPOSALS

What are the attributes of streets and public spaces that help sustainable, transit-oriented neighborhoods succeed? They should be closely integrated with transit, support multiple modes of travel (walking, biking, driving, transit), and include street trees and other green elements. But a vibrant, livable neighborhood should also provide public spaces where residents want to spend time; the streets should not just be multi-modal, but multi-use.

In 2009, the City of Boston's Transportation Department developed a set of Complete Streets Guidelines to specify how to build streets that meet these goals, accommodating people traveling different ways as well as those spending time in the public realm.¹ Boston envisions complete streets as multi-modal (accommodating cars, bike, buses, and walkers), green (including street trees and permeable surfaces), and smart (including innovative technology). Boston's Complete Streets Guidelines also recognize how the

character of building façades and open lots affect pedestrian experiences and include recommendations to incorporate façades into the streetscape. The Complete Streets program is still new, but the BTB has recently employed these guidelines in the redesign of Peabody Square south of Fields Corner.

What does this mean for Fields Corner? The concept of complete streets and the strategies they entail can be a helpful way to think about the many roles that streets play, and the many different ways that people use and experience them. Viet-AID could work with other neighborhood community groups, such as GreenDorchester and Dorchester Main Streets, to design a community visioning process to identify the points where pedestrian connections are confusing or dangerous, or where vacant lots or storefronts diminish the commercial core's sense of place, and pursue creative solutions to these problems.

In addressing the public realm, Viet-AID could focus on several different scales. Some projects, such as activating walls through art or vacant lots through gardens, could be implemented in the short term by reaching out to local businesses, building owners, the City, and local artists. Other potential projects would be much longer term, such as building bike lanes on Dorchester Avenue or Charles Street. These projects are politically and logistically complicated and would require action and funding from the City. Therefore, they are not likely to be implemented in the short

term, but Viet-AID and other community groups should consider advocating for them in the long term.

We hope that the illustrations below can spark some ideas on how Viet-AID and local residents can take ownership of their public spaces, working to create a public realm to serve a diverse, vibrant, and sustainable Fields Corner.

¹ Boston Transportation Department, "Boston Complete Streets Guidelines," <http://bostoncompletestreets.org/>, 2010.

SHORT-TERM PROPOSALS

Pedestrian Connections from MBTA Station to the Commercial Core

The connection between Dorchester Avenue and the MBTA station is key to the sustainability of Fields Corner. A safe, visible, and legible connection between the two can promote transit use while creating a more desirable setting for retail and services. Since all four existing pedestrian connections to the station pass through residential or inactive areas, it is important to provide cues that signal the presence of the station or commercial strip, depending on the direction of travel. Care should also be taken to protect pedestrians from vehicle traffic, and to provide a well lit, safe, and attractive setting that validates and promotes walking rather than making pedestrians feel as though they are trespassing in a space for cars.

While pedestrian connections are an important part of a long-term sustainability strategy, there are simple short-term projects that can improve the quality of the pedestrian environment in Fields Corner while providing a catalyst for community engagement. One example of a potential short-term improvement would be rethinking the alleyway and parking lot between Dorchester Avenue and the Adult Learning Center (Figure 5.14).

The alley is presently well used as a pedestrian connection between the MBTA station and Hero Square. But this space—essentially a driveway—is clearly intended as a space for cars, as evidenced by Driveway on west side of Dorchester Avenue, immediately south of Adams Street. (Figure 5.15) The Boston Transportation Department, however, recommended in the Dorchester Avenue plan that this path be closed to vehicle traffic because the driveway is dangerously close to a complicated intersection. If closed to vehicle traffic, this pathway could be converted to a pedestrian space and could be visually integrated with the park behind it, signaling that it is a public space and dignifying the simple act of walking through the space, which might otherwise feel like trespassing. One potential pedestrian improvement to the alleyway entails closing it to auto traffic and using lighting, plants, and street furniture to signal that it is a public space while drawing people to the park within, and ultimately to the T station. (Figure 5.16).

Although the City has already deemed the driveway unsafe, the businesses on either side of the alley strongly opposed its closure. By engaging the rest of the community on this issue, a compromise might be reached that is optimal for all parties. For example, the driveway might be retained, either as a one-way or two-way passage, but could still be treated with plantings, permeable pavers and improved lighting, to signal that it is a shared space. These visual cues would encourage

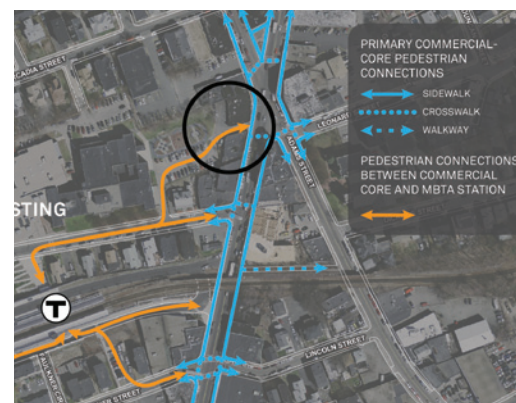


Figure 5.14. Location of one potential pedestrian improvement: an alleyway that is currently well used as a connection between Hero Square and the MBTA station.

pedestrian use of the space while instilling a greater sense of caution in drivers, who might otherwise not expect foot traffic through the space.



Figure 5.15. Driveway on west side of Dorchester Avenue, immediately south of Adams Street.



Figure 5.16. One potential pedestrian improvement to the alleyway entails closing it to auto traffic and using lighting, plants, and street furniture to signal that it is a public space while drawing people to the park within, and ultimately to the T station.

Another possible way to improve pedestrian connections between Dorchester Avenue and the MBTA station in the short term would be to rethink the eastern edge of the station's parcel, where it intersects the street (Potential improvement to the pedestrian interface between the MBTA station and Dorchester Avenue.). The existing crosswalk trends southeast from the busway's sidewalk, which is useful for connecting the shopping center and other businesses to the south but is less visible from the north of Dorchester Avenue (Signs indicate the presence of Fields Corner station, but the barrier of the hedge and the lack of a clear pedestrian path (the crosswalk is behind the camera) downplay the connection.). Signs indicate the presence of the station, but the barrier of the hedge and the offset crosswalk downplay the connection. Reconfiguring the crosswalk to be parallel to the T overpass would clarify the connection from both the north and south approaches of Dorchester Avenue while taking full advantage of the station's signage.

Perhaps more importantly, such a configuration would lend itself to the creation of a crosswalk to the other side of the avenue, which could help to activate the commercial spaces opposite the station and could in turn mitigate the negative effect that the rail overpass has on the apparent continuity of the commercial strip. The crosswalk could be signalized and timed to the intersection immediately to the south, which would minimize any impedance to the flow of traffic.



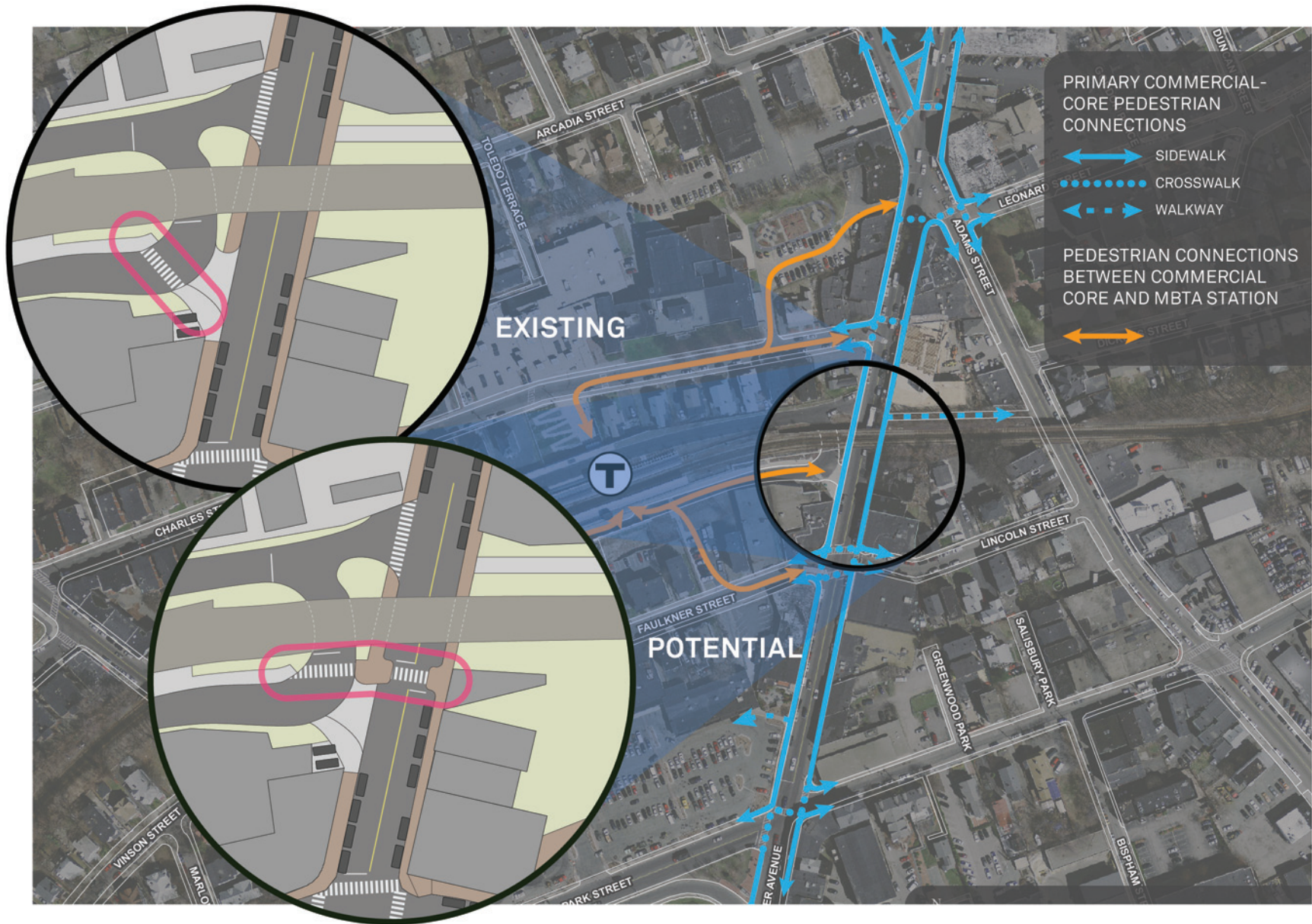
Figure 5.17. Signs indicate the presence of Fields Corner station, but the barrier of the hedge and the lack of a clear pedestrian path (the crosswalk is behind the camera) downplay the connection.

Widening the sidewalk on both sides of the crosswalk (creating “bus bulbs”) would enable safe crossing by making pedestrians visible to motorists, since people on foot might otherwise be hidden behind the supports of the overpass. The bulbs could also be widened in the north direction to accommodate the existing bus stop for Route 18, which would

improve its speed by obviating the need for it to merge back into traffic.

While CDCs do not often practice traffic engineering in public rights-of-way, a city can often implement such projects rather quickly, typically funding such projects as well. By reaching out to the community and building consensus about safe, small-scale pedestrian

Figure 5.18. Potential improvement to the pedestrian interface between the MBTA station and Dorchester Avenue.



Overpasses

The Red Line connects Fields Corner to the rest of Boston and is a defining feature of the neighborhood. However, the raised tracks running through Fields Corner act as a visual barrier, breaking the connectivity of the pedestrian experience and threatening walkers' perceptions of safety. Public art projects and lighting installations are a few ways to transform these spaces making them feel safer and inviting and integrating them into the neighborhood's expression of its unique identity. The mural on the overpass at Geneva Avenue, painted by Artists for Humanity, is an example of how the community has already successfully used these strategies in Fields Corner.



Figure 5.19. Street art by Artists for Humanity on the Red Line Overpass at Geneva Avenue.

Commercial Façades

Commercial façades are the faces businesses turn towards the public street. As such, they affect the way people experience a street and perceive a neighborhood's identity. To

improve this neighborhood "face," Viet-Aid and other community groups could reach out to businesses, building owners, and local artists to activate façades through public art and maintenance. Improving building façades would enhance the pedestrian experience,



Figure 5.20. Existing conditions of eastern façades on Dorchester Avenue.

making the neighborhood feel safer and more inviting. It can also encourage foot traffic to operating businesses, increasing the vitality of the commercial core. Engaging community members in this endeavor can also increase neighborhood pride.



Figure 5.21. Visualization of potential street art to activate the street during non-business hours.



Figure 5.22. A successful example of lively façade treatments in Fields Corner on Geneva Avenue.

Walls and Lots

Vacant lots and long, blank walls also affect the pedestrian experience. Fields Corner already has a number of successful community gardens, which transform vacant lots into community assets. Viet-AID can continue to build on this success by encouraging more efforts to use underutilized spaces. In addition, green façades, art, and street trees can enhance the impact of community gardens by reflecting neighborhood green spaces on its streets and buildings.



Figure 5.23. Top: existing community garden on Freeman Street, facing the rear facade of the shopping center; bottom: visualization exploring improvements to the rear façade and streetscape to draw awareness to the urban garden.

LONG-TERM PROPOSALS

Complete Streets: Dorchester Avenue and Charles Street

Short-term projects to enliven façades and increase access to pedestrian paths and green spaces have the potential to make Fields Corner a more vibrant and sustainable community, but more comprehensive changes to neighborhood streets will require a longer-term focus on visioning and advocacy. Dedicated bike lanes on Dorchester Avenue, for example, would help bicyclists feel safer traveling on this busy arterial street. Bike and pedestrian improvements on residential streets can help bicyclists, pedestrians, and residents with limited mobility travel safely and easily through the neighborhood. Wider sidewalks and street trees would make the streets more comfortable. Street trees would also contribute to greater air quality and less storm water runoff. Major streetscape changes can be controversial, however, especially if they require removing parking. Because of the particular controversy surrounding parking issues, we recommend studying existing parking supply and ways that off-street parking can be used more efficiently, through programs like negotiated shared lots among businesses. The neighbor-

hood could potentially meet commercial and residential parking needs without dedicating a disproportionate amount of valuable neighborhood space to parking.

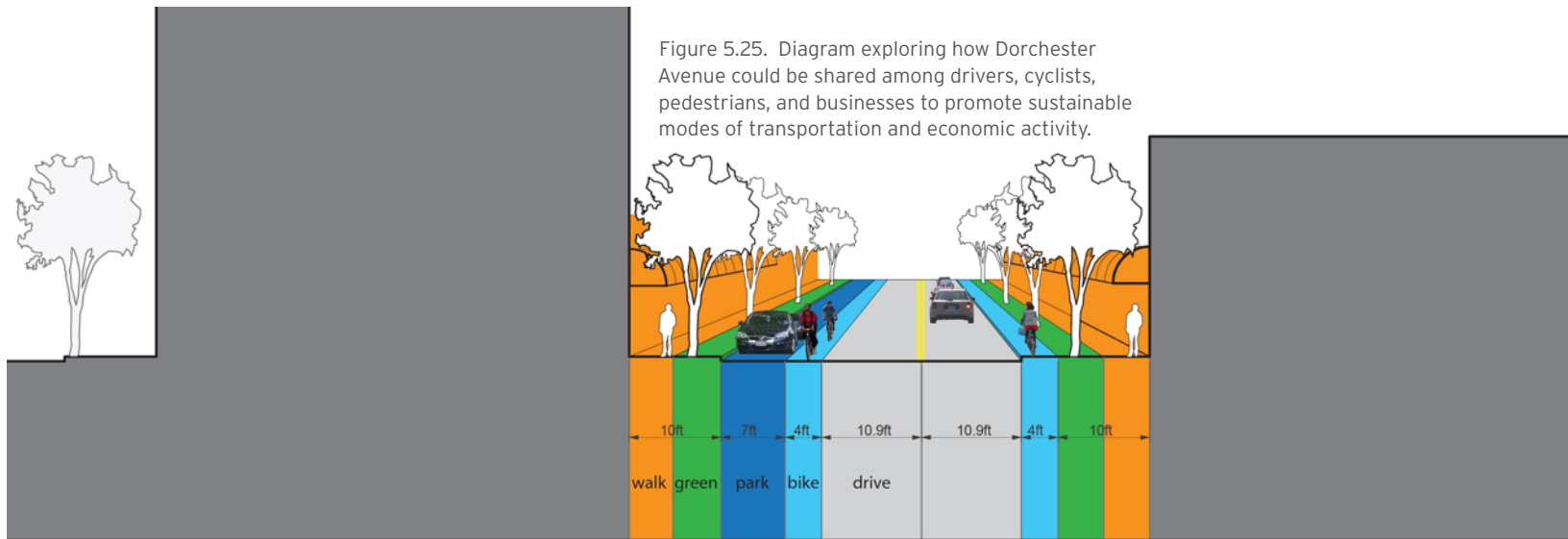
The following diagrams show what Dorchester Avenue and Charles Street could look like with added bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and street trees. The lane dimensions adhere to Boston's Complete Streets Guidelines:

Figure 5.24. Existing dimensions of Dorchester Avenue.



DORCHESTER AVENUE EXISTING

Figure 5.25. Diagram exploring how Dorchester Avenue could be shared among drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, and businesses to promote sustainable modes of transportation and economic activity.



DORCHESTER AVENUE COMPLETE STREETS

Figure 5.26. Existing dimensions of Charles Street at the Fields Corner MBTA Station.

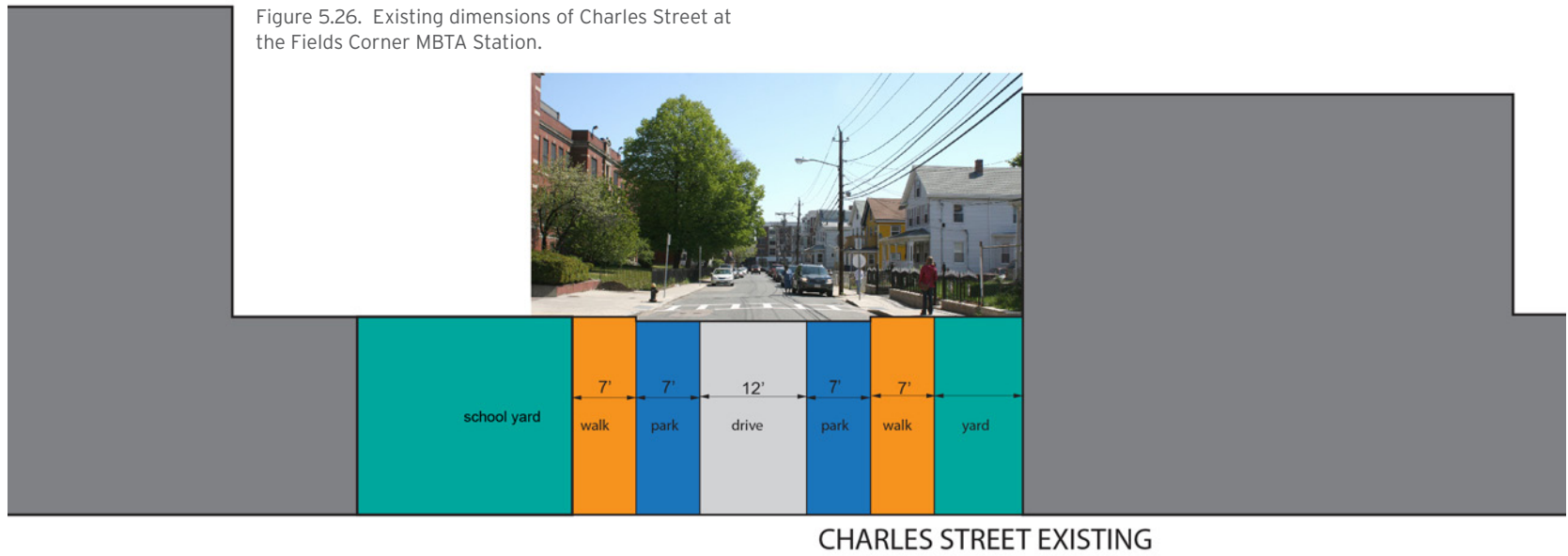
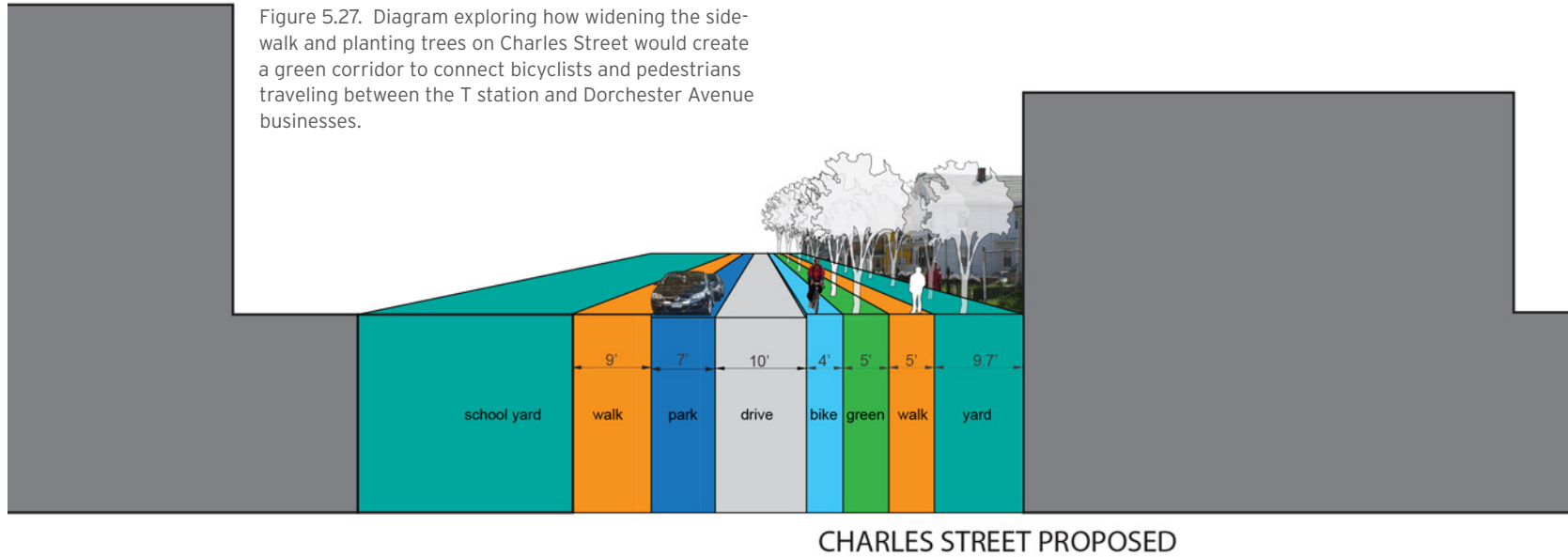


Figure 5.27. Diagram exploring how widening the sidewalk and planting trees on Charles Street would create a green corridor to connect bicyclists and pedestrians traveling between the T station and Dorchester Avenue businesses.



SUMMARY

The streetscapes and public spaces of Fields Corner are an important part of sustainability that can help create a vibrant commercial core, contribute to an improved quality of life, and mitigate many of the externalities often associated with dense urban areas. By using the public realm as a way to start a discussion with the community about the future of their neighborhood, Viet-AID can engage with the city to improve its public spaces while building a common vision for a more sustainable Fields Corner in the long term.

The concepts of Complete Streets and sustainability presented in this section can contribute to a long-term vision for the neighborhood. Although many streetscape changes will require a long-term planning effort and are beyond the capacity of Viet-AID alone to implement, it is valuable to start discussions around these topics now to envision what sustainable streets in Fields Corner could look like. Building this vision can be a catalyst to future change.

[6] Conclusion: A Plan for a Sustainable Fields Corner



In preparing this report, we have focused on areas in which Viet-AID can take leadership in helping develop a neighborhood sustainability plan for Fields Corner that promotes economic opportunity, social equity and inclusiveness, and environmental health and livability. Projects focusing on improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing housing, constructing new housing to serve the existing income levels of Fields Corner residents, fostering new economic opportunity in the commercial core, and enhancing the public realm all have the potential to make Fields Corner more sustainable, equitable, and vibrant.

This report contains many suggestions for how to achieve this goal. Rather than pursuing them all at once—an impossible task—we recommend that Viet-AID choose a few catalytic projects to implement in the short term. Other proposals will take longer-term

planning and capacity building; some of these can be implemented by Viet-AID alone, but many of them are intended for collaborative efforts (see Table 6.1).

A neighborhood plan for sustainability must be shaped by those who live and work in the neighborhood. As an established institution with a commitment to Fields Corner, Viet-AID can take a leadership role in shaping a neighborhood vision, by drawing in the many other organizations working to effect positive change in Fields Corner (Table 6.2). It is through such collaborations that Viet-AID and other community groups can spark change and meet the needs of Fields Corner's diverse residents. Our hope is that this report can serve as a catalyst for conversations and partnerships around sustainable neighborhood development in Fields Corner, both immediately and in the years to come.

Table 6.1. Summary of proposals

EXISTING HOUSING	Short term	• Work with tenants, landlords and Housing Code Enforcement Division to address pressing housing quality issues. • Increase involvement in existing housing quality improvement and energy efficiency programs.
	Long term	• Develop and maintain neighborhood housing quality database. • Take on leadership roles in housing quality and energy efficiency policy advocacy. • Integrate various programs and provide one-stop services for community energy efficiency.
NEW HOUSING	Short term	• Continue leadership in affordable housing development. • Investigate suitable sites for multifamily housing and explore purchase options.
	Long term	• Develop new affordable housing. • Explore alternative acquisition and financing strategies. • Monitor neighborhood affordability indicators and other housing needs.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Short term	• Develop strategic partnerships to enhance economic development service delivery. • Use the community center to organize and engage local businesses.
	Long term	• Invest directly in commercial spaces. • Develop programs for small business assistance.
PUBLIC REALM	Short term	• Engage community and community groups about public realm vision, using current BTB, MBTA, or BRA planning projects as catalysts for small but symbolic changes. • Work with local businesses and artists to create public art. • Promote “pop-up” gardening and other uses of vacant space.
	Long term	• Work with the city to improve bike and pedestrian circulation, green spaces and public art.

Table 6.2. Opportunities for partnership.



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