

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

Lincoln Square

Worcester, MA



September 30, 2014



Urban Land
Institute

Boston/New England



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Executive Summary

Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council, the Lincoln Square Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Worcester, Massachusetts on September 30, 2014, bringing together stakeholders, community leaders, and a panel of planning, design, engineering, and development professionals for a day-long session focused on identifying the issues, constraints, and opportunities presented by Worcester's Lincoln Square. The report that follows, which summarizes the TAP recommendations, is composed of five chapters.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process gives an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) and provides a detailed list of participants in the Lincoln Square TAP, including City officials, stakeholders, and the panel of land use professionals.

Chapter 2: Background and Assignment gives background information about Lincoln Square and the City-owned parcels in the area, briefly reviews a number of redevelopment studies that have been conducted over the past several years, and describes recent development activity in the area. This chapter also reviews the City of Worcester's objectives for the TAP, as stated in its initial application, which were to identify appropriate uses for the City-owned parcels, ways to create connectivity between the sites and the

surrounding neighborhood, and how the City can encourage unique and sustainable development of the parcels.

Chapter 3: Observations and Findings presents the panel's insights about Lincoln Square's positive attributes (including City control of three signature buildings, the availability of remediation funds for one of the sites, vibrant local institutions, a high level of recent local investment, and political will for redevelopment) and the chief challenges of redevelopment (including the age, layout, and condition of the buildings, challenging tax credit requirements, a depressed market for commercial office, limited potential for standard retail uses in the neighborhood, a market for in-town living of untested depth, the need for public subsidy in competition with other City and public agency priorities, and a lack of connectivity between the buildings).

Chapter 4: Recommendations begins with the panel's general recommendations about master planning, streetscape and transportation improvements, and financing. This chapter also gives recommendations for each of the four City-owned parcels at Lincoln Square, first listing considerations for each site and then proposing several potential use options.

Finally, **Chapter 5: Implementation** outlines action steps that the City can take as it seeks to redevelop these properties.



Aerial photograph of Lincoln Square and surrounding area.



Aerial photograph Showing Old Courthouse (bottom center), the former Boys Club site (top right), Worcester Memorial Auditorium (top center), and the Highland Street Parking Lot (top left).

1. ULI and the TAP Process

a. Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals, among others.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. The Boston/New England District Council serves the six New England states and has over 1,000 members.

b. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) at the request of public officials, local stakeholders, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who could benefit from the pro bono recommendations of planning

and development professionals. At the TAP, an expert group of real estate professionals typically spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way that is consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

c. MassDevelopment Support

MassDevelopment is the state's finance and development authority. Both a lender and developer, the agency works with businesses, nonprofits, and local, state, and federal officials and agencies to strengthen the Massachusetts economy. Through these collaborations, MassDevelopment helps create jobs, increase the number of housing units, eliminate blight, and address factors limiting economic growth, including transportation, energy, and infrastructure deficiencies.

Recognizing the alignment between ULI Boston's Technical Assistance Panels and MassDevelopment's mission to support sustainable redevelopment across the Commonwealth, in 2011 the two organizations partnered to support TAPs in four Gateway Cities throughout the Commonwealth. The success of that initial year's collaboration led to continued support.

MassDevelopment partnered with ULI Boston/New England to sponsor the Lincoln Square TAP.

d. Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of the disciplines associated with the planning and development challenges presented by Worcester's Lincoln Square.

Disciplines represented include architecture, urban planning and design, and development. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the City's objectives for this TAP. The following is the list of panelists:

- Barry Abramson, Abramson & Associates (TAP Co-Chair)
- Ryan Pace, Anderson & Kreiger (TAP Co-Chair)
- Ted Carman, Concord Square Planning & Development
- Lawrence Cheng, Bruner Cott
- Eliza Datta, The Community Builders
- Tony Hsiao, Finegold Alexander
- Noah Luskin, Suffolk Construction
- Claire O'Neill, MassDevelopment
- Tania Hartford, MassDevelopment
- Shyla Matthews, MassDevelopment
- John Schmid, Nitsch Engineering
- Peter Smith, Oxbow Partners

Senior Project Manager George Saliba and Project Manager Amanda Gregoire, both of the City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development, served as the primary City contacts for ULI Boston/New England.

Calvin Hennick served as the consulting technical writer, while Michelle Landers and Ileana Tauscher of ULI Boston/New England provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP event.



d. Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders — policy makers, City staff, business owners, property owners, and representatives of area institutions — who met with the panel and shared information, ideas, and opinions on a range of issues affecting Lincoln Square. Stakeholders at the session included:

- Edward M. Augustus, Jr., City Manager
- Paul M. Morano, Jr., Director of Business Assistance
- Stephen Rolle, Director of Planning & Regulatory Services
- Michael E. Traynor, Acting Chief Development Officer
- Erin Williams, Director of Cultural Development
- Donald Birch, Leggat McCall Properties
- Craig L. Blais, Worcester Business Development Corporation
- Ramón Borges-Méndez, Ph.D., Clark University
- Sandra Dunn, SMG/DCU Center
- Dr. David Ellis, Becker College
- Mark Fuller, The George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation/Benefit Development Group/MCPHS
- Trip Anderson, Worcester Art Museum
- Timothy J. McGourthy, Worcester Regional Research Bureau
- Timothy P. Murray, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Michael O'Brien, Winn Development
- Stephen O'Neil, Worcester Regional Transit Authority
- Kevin O'Sullivan, Mass Biomedical Initiatives

- Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester
- Troy Siebels, The Hanover Theatre
- Jeffrey S. Solomon, Worcester Polytechnic Institute



e. TAP Process

The Lincoln Square TAP was held on September 30, 2014 at Worcester City Hall. In the morning, City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. welcomed the panelists, and then Director of Business Assistance Paul M. Morano, Jr. led a tour of Lincoln Square and the surrounding area.

The tour began by bus at City Hall, proceeding north one mile to the site of the Old Worcester County Courthouse. After touring the courthouse, the group walked northwest across the intersection of Main Street and Highland Street to the site of the former Boys Club, then west across Grove Street to Worcester Memorial Auditorium. The group then re-boarded the bus and drove through the Gateway Park research and commerce complex, before returning to City Hall.

After the tour, the ULI panel interviewed stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues, dynamics, and opportunities surrounding Lincoln Square. The panelists then engaged in an intensive charrette to develop recommendations addressing some of the critical issues associated with redeveloping the area. The TAP concluded with a presentation to the City Council and members of the community at a public meeting that evening at City Hall.

The presentation is available electronically at the ULI Boston/New England website <http://boston.uli.org>.

2. Background and Assignment

a. Lincoln Square

At the intersection of Highland Street and Main Street, one mile north of Worcester City Hall, three historic buildings with more than 400,000 square feet of total space sit vacant. Together, they once created a hub of civic and cultural activity in Lincoln Square, but the buildings' users have all left for newer facilities, leaving behind structures for which City officials have struggled to find practical and appropriate uses. The City of Worcester controls all three buildings, and also owns a nearby parking lot, and officials hope that the area can be redeveloped in a way that preserves the buildings' historic features while also serving the City's current needs.

The Old Worcester County Courthouse was built in 1843, with several additions since that time, including a large annex built in 1954. The 246,000 square-foot building features a mix of office space, courtrooms of various sizes, and a law library. The site was abandoned in 2007, when all court activities were moved to a new facility in downtown Worcester.

Sitting just across Highland Street to the north, the 110,000 square-foot Worcester Memorial Auditorium is frequently cited as "Worcester's grandest building." Stone steps lead up to a stately columned façade, and the auditorium (which can seat up to 3,500 people, depending on configuration) once hosted events ranging from Bob Dylan concerts to Holy Cross basketball

games. The building also houses the approximately 600-seat Little Theatre, as well as Memorial Hall, which contains a large mural depicting a buried soldier ascending to heaven. As the one-time site of high-school and college graduation ceremonies in the City, the "Aud" is the source of special memories for many in Worcester. It was built between 1931 and 1932, and recently housed some court activities, but has sat vacant since 2007.

To the east, across Grove Street, the former Worcester Boys Club was built in 1930. The 40,000 square-foot building, which contains two gymnasiums, an elevated track, and a swimming pool, was used as school space starting in 1988 but has sat vacant since 2006. Much like the Memorial Auditorium, this facility has extra emotional weight for many citizens who spent much of their youth at the Boys Club.

The Highland Street parking lot, just west of Worcester Memorial Auditorium, has space for between 85 and 100 cars, and is currently used for free parking by area residents and visitors.

b. History

The City has extensively studied possible reuses for the Lincoln Square buildings over the past several years. The 2007 North Main Market Analysis report concluded that historic buildings in the area offered the potential to be reused as creative office or laboratory

space. In the 2008 Worcester Memorial Auditorium Adaptive Re-Use Study, the authors suggested that the highest and best uses for that building would preserve Memorial Hall, minimize subdivision of the main auditorium space, and reuse the Little Theatre in its current form. A museum, they wrote, would be an “ideal” tenant for the main auditorium. Also in 2008, the authors of the North Main Economic Development Strategy report suggested that the Auditorium could be converted into office, flex, or research and development space, or else be reused as a Faneuil Hall-style marketplace or as a consortium space for the City’s colleges. They also suggested that the Old Courthouse could be converted into high-quality office space, and that the Boys Club building could be converted into 24 units of housing and a health club. Finally, a 2011 study looking at reuse options for the Courthouse included sketches of several multi-use layouts, including different mixes of retail, institutional, educational, and parking space uses, as well as space for a potential family health center.

City officials have also engaged with developers to try to gauge interest in the abandoned buildings and push forward with their redevelopment, a process that has further illuminated the opportunities and challenges presented by the properties. For example, City officials expressed a willingness to demolish the 1954 annex at the Old Courthouse site, but several developers advised against this, citing potential reuse options. In the case of the Boys Club, one developer was seriously interested in redeveloping the building as housing, but the developer found that restrictions attached to historic tax credits made the

project infeasible (a consideration that could also limit options at the other two historic buildings).



Worcester Memorial Auditorium.



Front steps of Worcester Memorial Auditorium.



Former Boys Club building.



Old Courthouse, original building.



Old Courthouse, 1954 annex.

c. Recent Activity

Worcester, New England’s second largest City, is the site of billions of dollars of recent investment, including the 12-acre Gateway Park life sciences complex, which sits just a couple of blocks north of Lincoln Square. The complex, owned by Worcester Polytechnic Institute, is designed to accommodate five buildings totaling 500,000 square feet of flexible space, including WPI’s 125,000 square-foot Life Sciences and Bioengineering Center, as well as a Courtyard by Marriott hotel and an 89,000 square-foot WPI residence hall. The site also contains a 660-space parking garage and more than 200 surface parking spaces. A 100-room Hampton Inn has also been approved at the complex.

This year, WinnDevelopment cut the ribbon on its Voke Lofts project, an 84-unit apartment complex (half market rate, half affordable) at the site of a former technical high school, nearly adjacent to the former Boys Club building. The units in the building are fully leased.

Additionally, the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy has purchased two parcels in the area for use as classroom, student activity, and student housing space.

d. City of Worcester’s Objectives for the TAP

The Technical Assistance Panel was asked to make recommendations for redevelopment or reuse of the three historic buildings and parking lot at Lincoln Square, considering three

essential questions. First, the panel was asked what types of uses would be a good fit for the identified parcels, taking into account the buildings' layouts and location, other nearby uses, area demographics, and traffic and pedestrian flow. The next question asked how the City can create connectivity between the parcels and the surrounding neighborhood, what types of infrastructure improvements could help facilitate this connectivity, and whether any current features serve as impediments to connectivity. Lastly, the panel was asked to address how the City can encourage unique and sustainable development for the parcels and what types of funding opportunities are available for the parcels.

3. Observations and Findings

a. Assets and Opportunities

Lincoln Square may be the only location in all of Massachusetts with three large, vacant buildings in close proximity that have so much historical, emotional, and architectural significance to their community. In addition to this unique situation, the panel found a number of factors working in the City's favor as it seeks to revitalize the area:

Signature Buildings: The Worcester Memorial Auditorium, the Old Worcester County Courthouse, and the former Boys Club building are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, the structures serve as landmarks in the City.

Site Control: The City of Worcester owns all three buildings and the Highland Street parking lot, giving officials the ability to tailor and execute the property disposition process. City officials can have significant input into the uses that are appropriate for each parcel, as well as the building features that might be preserved or altered.

Courthouse Remediation Funding: \$4 million (\$3 million from the state and another \$1 million from the City) is available for site remediation, including hazardous waste removal, roof repairs, and the possible demolition of the 1954 annex.

Gateway Potential: Together, the three buildings create an impressive sense of place. If redeveloped properly, they



The Auditorium's Memorial Hall.



The Auditorium's Little Theatre.

could create an active and cohesive “gateway” into Worcester’s downtown.

Vibrant Local Institutions: Worcester is home to a number of educational, cultural, and medical institutions – including 10 colleges and universities – that might act as participants and supporters during the effort to revitalize Lincoln Square. The Worcester Art Museum is located immediately north of the Auditorium.

Active Development Market: Worcester is the site of substantial recent residential, commercial, and institutional development, including the Gateway Park complex and the Voke Lofts residential development, both of which sit near Lincoln Square.

Political Will and Capacity for Redevelopment: Although consensus has yet to emerge on a practical and appropriate use for each site, there is broad agreement among stakeholders that the properties should be redeveloped in the near future. The City has demonstrated considerable capacity to foster and secure public funding for redevelopment, and local nonprofit and philanthropic foundations also appear to be invested in redevelopment of the buildings.

b. Challenges and Constraints

As evidenced by the fact that stakeholders have spent years studying how to reuse or redevelop these buildings without finding a workable solution, the structures at Lincoln Square present a number of challenges:

Age of the Buildings: All three of the buildings (with exception of portions of the Old Courthouse) were built in 1932 or earlier, meaning that systems are out-of-date.

Layout and Condition of Buildings: The buildings have all fallen into various states of disrepair, especially the former Boys Club. Because each of the facilities was built for a very specific use, the layouts of the buildings present challenges for other re-uses. In the case of the Auditorium, much of the square footage is currently devoted to voluminous performing arts and events space (of which there is an ample supply in up-to-date buildings in Worcester), and the square footage is a challenging fit for other reuses. The Old Courthouse, of course, contains several large and many smaller courtrooms that do not naturally lend themselves to an alternate use. At the former Boys Club site, a swimming pool and two gymnasiums (one with an elevated track) contribute to a challenging layout.

In each of the buildings, especially the Old Courthouse, large amounts of space are dedicated to common areas, resulting in an inefficient usable-to-gross building area ratio. While rehab costs can vary considerably depending on size, structural condition, use, and other factors, it is likely that the development cost will be considerable. In the panel’s experience, hard and soft costs for gut-rehab adaptive reuse developments (largely for residential use) at similar historic properties range between \$250 and \$350 per square foot or more – even assuming private non-union/prevaling wage construction. Therefore, the cost of redeveloping all of the approximately 500,000 square feet



Worcester Memorial Auditorium interior.



The elevated track at the former Boys Club.



A courtroom inside the Old Courthouse.

in the three historic buildings could cost as much as \$150 million or more.

Historic Tax Credit Requirements: All three buildings are eligible for historic tax credits, and financial realities will likely motivate developers to try to take advantage of this tool. However, these credits often require that developers retain building features that are not economically productive. A developer seeking to turn the former Boys Club into housing was told that a new design would have to incorporate the elevated track located in the interior of the top floor of the building, for example. It is not clear exactly which features regulating agencies would require a developer to retain at the other two buildings, but it seems likely that protection would extend to features that have more historical significance than the running track (such as the balcony in the Auditorium and the courtrooms in the Old Courthouse).

Limited Office Market: There is not currently a large demand for commercial office space in Worcester, and market rents are relatively low (reportedly in the mid-teens for basic office space), limiting the feasibility of redeveloping the buildings for this use. For any significant amount of office development to occur, a pre-lease commitment would likely be required.

Limited Retail Potential: Currently, Lincoln Square lacks the parking volume and pedestrian traffic that would support significant standard retail use.

Residential Market of Unproven Depth and Capacity to Support Development: The City has expressed an interest in the development of

market-rate housing at Lincoln Square. While the recent success of such residential development at Voke Lofts and ongoing investment in downtown is encouraging, the depth of the market for urban multi-family housing in the City generally, and the Lincoln Square area in particular, is unknown. Market rents, reported to be in the low-\$2.00 per square foot, per month range, do not appear to be high enough to support the considerable development costs without significant tax credits and/or other assistance.

Need for Public Assistance: Because of the high cost of redeveloping these buildings and the limited ability of market rents to support that cost, redevelopment may require financial assistance from the City and/or Commonwealth (in addition to the anticipated tax credits and the \$4 million in Courthouse remediation funds). Public funding is limited, and these projects would have to compete with other public priorities for it.

Limited Institutional Demand and Locational Preferences: While the City has a wealth of educational and medical institutions, some of which have spurred redevelopment close to Lincoln Square (e.g. WPI's Gateway Park and Mass College of Pharmacy's reuse of buildings on Main Street to the south of Lincoln Square), the institutions may feel they have already achieved their off-campus development goals, and Lincoln Square may be considered a bit too far a reach for any additional off-campus facilities. Also, development for special use facilities to be used collaboratively by multiple institutions would require conceptualizing, "selling", and orchestrating a meaningful use and

participation that such institutions would consider worthy of buying into.

Lack of Connectivity: While the three buildings all sit near one another, the sites are divided by wide and busy streets, creating pedestrian and vehicular isolation from downtown and the WPI campus.

Lack of Parking: The properties may not contain enough space to accommodate the parking that will be required to support the full redevelopment of the buildings, and alteration of the buildings to add all of the parking that will be required may not be feasible.

4. Recommendations

The panel outlined several general recommendations for the City to consider as it seeks to revitalize the area, and also made preliminary suggestions for what sorts of uses might be appropriate for each property.

a. General Recommendations

Because of the lack of parking and the immense redevelopment challenges presented by the existing buildings, the panel recommended that the City deliberately plan its approach to revitalizing the area. For instance, it would likely be a mistake for the City to proceed with the redevelopment of one of the buildings without considering how that redevelopment might include parking for the other buildings in the area. A coordinated master planning process would address these types of issues, although such a process might need to be abbreviated in the interest of time and efficiency.

In addition to making recommendations about a master planning process, the panel made suggestions about streetscape and transportation improvements, and also highlighted financing issues.

Master Planning

The three buildings present different levels of challenges for redevelopment, meaning it is likely that one or two of the buildings could be redeveloped more

quickly than the others. (The panel predicted that the Auditorium would be the most difficult of the three buildings to put back into use, largely due to its layout, while the Courthouse may attract a developer in the near term.) For this reason, the panel recommended that the implementation of redevelopment of the properties not be bundled together.

Still, the City must consider interrelationships between the parcels. While the sites need not be developed in concert, a holistic approach must be taken to ensure that the development of one of the properties does not hinder the success of the others. Therefore, the panel recommended that the City create a flexible master plan for Lincoln Square.

Parking capacity is of particular concern. Ideally, each property would be able to fully satisfy its parking needs on-site, but, if this is not feasible, planning and development should explore shared parking on neighboring sites.

The panel also recommended continued engagement of local stakeholders and suggested that a dedicated person from the City's staff, a local nonprofit, or an outside group be put in charge of exploring potential reuses for the Auditorium.

Streetscape and Transportation Improvements

In the near term, the panel recommended that the City make infrastructure improvements that would help accommodate development. Potential improvements include the addition of bike lanes and car-sharing lanes, as well as dedicated bus lanes between Lincoln Square and Union Station.

The panel also raised the possibility of an underpass underneath Route 9 that could create pedestrian access between the Auditorium and Old Courthouse if shared parking were to be a viable option.

Finally, the panel recommended streetscape improvements, such as landscaping and signage, to help connect the sites.

Financing

Market rents for reuse of the three City-owned buildings at Lincoln Square are unlikely to support the high cost of redevelopment. Therefore, the panel recommended that the City and private developers aggressively explore public financing options. In addition to historic tax credits, options may include New Markets tax credits, property tax abatement (TIF), affordable housing programs which may help cross-subsidize market-rate residential development, special state funding, and the possibility of local philanthropic foundations playing a role in financing.



Street view of the intersection at Lincoln Square.

b. Old Worcester County Courthouse Site

Considerations:

- Panel members found the original courthouse building attractive, calling it “a wonderful presence.” However, panelists also found the building to be problematic vis-à-vis historic tax credits.
- At more than 246,000 square feet, the building has ample space, as well as a good deal of on-site parking.
- If surface parking proves inadequate, parking in the basement or first floor of the annex or demolition of all or some of the annex could be explored.

Potential Uses:

- Residential – It is possible that the original portion of the Old Courthouse could be redeveloped as residential space, with large, loft-style units that would utilize the high ceilings and perhaps feature mezzanine bedrooms. The 1954 annex is conducive to a residential

use because of its layout and large windows.

- Office – The original courthouse building and annex may also lend themselves to institutional or office uses, although finding a pre-lease tenant would be necessary, and the ability to secure such a tenant is not assured. An office use would also require significantly more parking than a residential use, although some of it could be located off-site.
- Hotel – Several panel members thought that the original section of the Old Courthouse could be redeveloped into a “spectacular” high-end boutique hotel, perhaps rationalized by a major institutional reuse of the Auditorium, such as a collaborative college facility. However, the viability of such a hotel at this location would be seriously challenged by a number of factors: the high development cost and challenging physical requirements of the structure; generally low room rates in the City (quoted rates at the Courtyard by Marriott were in the low-\$100’s); existing and planned nearby cost-sensitive flagged hotel properties at Gateway Park and downtown; and the distance of Lincoln Square from other popular attractions and market support generators in Worcester.
- Institutional Use – The Old Courthouse might support an institutional use, such as a law school, with courtrooms being used as lecture halls.

c. Worcester Memorial Auditorium Site

Considerations:

- Panel members called the Auditorium iconic, said it was the “lynchpin” of Lincoln Square, and noted both its historic and emotional significance to Worcester residents.
- Stakeholders, including those in Worcester’s arts community, said the City already has plenty of similar large-scale performing arts and events spaces, making it infeasible to restore the building for its former use.
- Panel members said that, while the Auditorium was a “wonderful venue” in the past, the time may have come to reimagine the property as a place where people come together in new ways.
- City officials should explore each of the options detailed below in a more focused way, determining which use best matches up with the City’s priorities while also considering the price tag for each option.



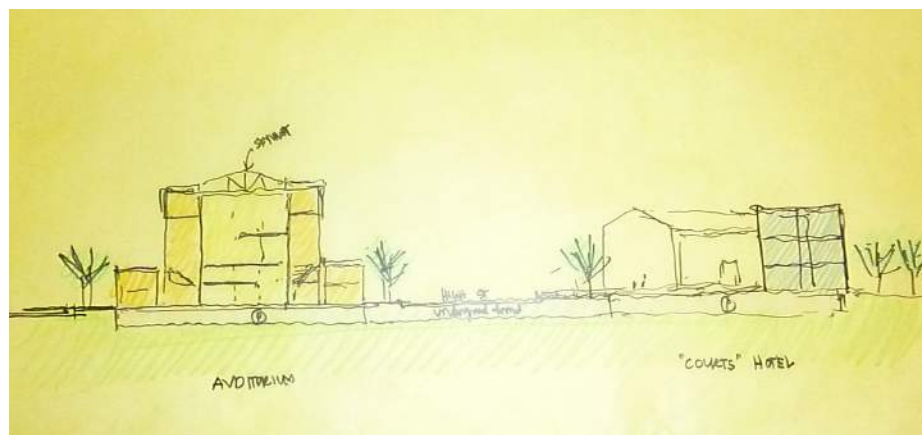
Rendering of an “activated” plaza in front of Worcester Memorial Auditorium.

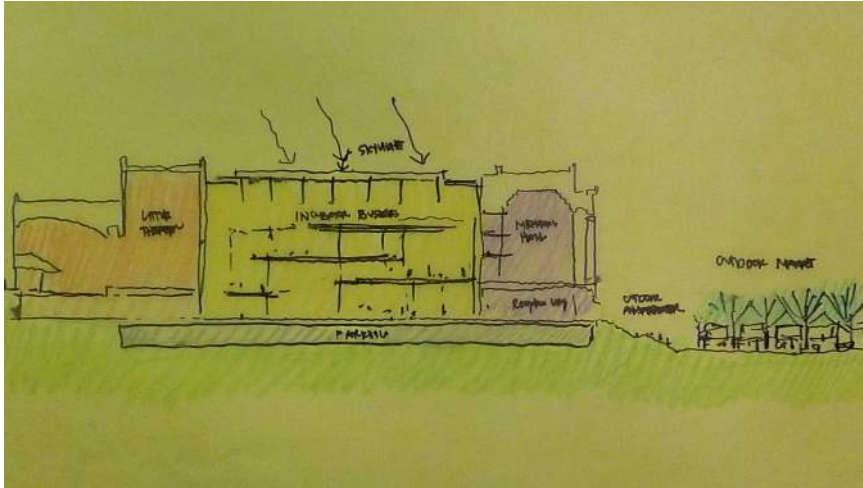
- The site includes a large underground level that may be suitable for reuse as parking.
- Because the Auditorium is likely to take longer to redevelop than the other two buildings, its ultimate use may depend to some extent on what development occurs at the Old Courthouse site across the street. For example, if the Old Courthouse were to be used as a hotel, the City might want to redevelop the Auditorium in a way that best supports that use.
- If historic tax credits are sought, a developer will likely be required to retain the wrap-around balcony in the Main Auditorium – a significant constraint on potential uses.
- In its current form, the Auditorium is not suitable for housing.
- None of the uses that the panel considered would be feasible without large subsidies.

Design Strategies:

- Panel members considered several different design strategies for the Auditorium.
- One approach would keep the building's footprint unchanged while inserting a glass "building within a building" (or multiple structures) into the main Auditorium space. The balcony space could potentially be subdivided into a series of seminar rooms or meeting spaces (which would take advantage of the existing slope). This option would be extremely expensive in terms of cost per usable square foot created.
- A second design strategy would be a moderate rehab approach in which the main Auditorium space is kept largely as is.
- In any of the above design options, a skylight might be installed in the roof in order to bring more daylight into the building.

This sketch shows the Old Courthouse converted into a Luxury hotel, with a pedestrian underpass connecting it to the Auditorium site.





This cross-section view shows the Grand Auditorium space redeveloped to house several “trays” of activity. The sketch also shows the addition of a skylight, as well as underground parking.



The panel discussed the possibility of retaining the Little Theatre and Memorial Hall at the Auditorium, while demolishing the Grand Auditorium and replacing it with new development.

- An alternate design option considered by the panel would retain only the building’s Memorial Hall and Little Theatre, while the Main Auditorium space in the center of the parcel would be demolished. This option would give a developer the opportunity to create a new space with a layout specifically designed for a desired use.
- In the near term, the panel recommended that the City “activate” the outdoor space in front of the Auditorium, perhaps utilizing it as an outdoor performance venue or a farmers market.

Potential Uses:

Potential uses considered by the panel were:

- Collaborative Institutional Use – The stakeholders from the City’s colleges did not express a pressing need for a collaborative facility nor an inclination to locate facilities in Lincoln Square. However, the panel felt that it would be worth exploring whether some such collaborative use could be identified that would tie the colleges together and reinforce their connection with the City center, as well as providing a viable reuse for the Auditorium. Such a reuse was the only one identified by the panel that might rationalize a substantial redevelopment of the existing structure as envisioned in the first design strategy.
- Indoor Farmers/Artisan Market – This use, which would likely require only a moderate rehab, might include a combination of art galleries and studios in perimeter spaces, with business incubator/maker space in the basement. Such uses were also seen as a possible way to connect entrepreneurs from immigrant communities in the neighborhoods with broader customer markets.
- Performance Use – The Little Theatre may retain its original use.

- Residential – A housing development, perhaps with some live-work artist space and very limited support retail/restaurant, was considered a reasonable use program for new development of the middle portion of the site in the partial-demo design option.

d. Former Boys Club Site

Considerations:

- This building holds a particular emotional connection for many former Boys Club members. However, the degraded condition of the building will likely require a total gut rehabilitation, and could lead to the building’s “demolition by neglect” if a project does not move forward soon.
- The building currently has limited parking. The panel recommended that the City explore negotiating the acquisition of rights in an adjacent church-owned parking lot, a move that could help facilitate marketing of the development opportunity.
- The rents for commercial or housing space at the site will likely not support the cost of redevelopment, so other sources of revenue such as historic tax credits will be necessary. As mentioned above, the historic tax credits carry onerous requirements, including the preservation of the elevated track in the building’s main gymnasium.



e. Highland Street Parking Lot

The panel recommended leaving the lot as parking for now. Eventually, the site might be developed with a building that connects Lincoln Square to the rest of Highland Street – most likely a mixed-use building with residential units above ground-floor retail or restaurant space. However, such a development would likely have to include replacement parking (or require the City to find an alternate location for it), in addition to new parking to serve whatever is built on the site of the current lot, challenging feasibility.

Design Strategies:

- The panel discussed two main design options for incorporating the elevated track into the new building. The first option would create two floors inside the gymnasium, with the top floor opening out onto the track for a use that incorporates an open layout (such as business incubator space).
- The second design option would reuse the gymnasium and track for their original purposes as part of a health club.

Potential Uses:

- Residential and/or Office Incubator – Panel members felt that the most appropriate uses are likely residential and/or office/incubator space for commercial office or institutional users.

5. Implementation

Key panel recommendations for implementation are as follows:

- Create a flexible master plan for the Lincoln Square area, with particular focus on parking capacity and the demand implications of alternate uses (including the potential need or opportunities for shared parking).
- Complete streetscape and transportation improvements.
- Explore public funding options.
- Hire or designate a person or firm to seriously engage with the local colleges to identify potential collaborative uses for the Auditorium, explore interest and parameters for their participation, orchestrate their interests, and investigate funding sources.
- Dedicate appropriate staff or advisor to flesh out alternate reuse options for the Auditorium, including farmers/artisan market, arts, and incubator/maker space.
- Prior to offering the Boys Club property, the City should attempt to negotiate a deal with the Church to secure the Church's parking lot to enhance the attractiveness of the opportunity.
- Explore interest in the Old Courthouse and Boys Club properties by means of RFP processes. The City has started this process with an RFI for the Old Courthouse. To the extent allowed under Chapter 30B, structure solicitations as two-stage processes to limit the cost of entry for these challenging redevelopment opportunities.