



Westfield Redevelopment Authority Meeting  
Wednesday, August 20, 2025  
Municipal Building, 59 Court Street, Westfield, MA Room B-18  
8:00 am

---

Members' Present: Chair Witalisz, Member Morin, Member Woodson, Member Parks via phone.

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Peter J, Miller, Jr. (Executive Director) Christine Fedora (Office Manager)

1. Roll Call

Chair Witalisz called the meeting of the Westfield Redevelopment Authority to order at 8:00 am. The members listed above were in attendance.

Also attending: Jeff Bagg, BSC, Heather Gould. BSC, Ben Murphy Mass Development

---

2. Approve minutes of June 3, 2025

Mr. Miller stated the minutes of June 3, 2025, need to be worked on.

Member Woodson MOTIONED, seconded by Member Morin to approve May 13, 2025 , minutes. All in favor.

3. Reports of Committees

a. WRA Financial Summary

Mr. Miller stated there has been no change in the financials. There is a \$15,000.00 appropriation going to the council for funding agreement for a slum and blight study. Currently the balance remains at \$55,956.52.

---

4. Report of the Executive Director

The Plaza: Mr. Miller updated members on the downtown activity: Concerts are scheduled, dance recitals, social services fair and a welcome back Westfield State Block party.

Businesses:

- Café Zerno is open, they have done a nice job in their location; it is a part of Crave Cafe.
- Santander Bank will be an art consignment shop for art.

- Clemensa’s property remains a challenge, there is a lot of work that needs to be done to bring it up to code.
- Bonte Restaurant on School Street is moving to the old Pancake Sunday’s space.

Members inquired about police presence downtown. Mr. Miller stated the Police Commission met on Monday with some City Councilors and stakeholders from downtown about the lack of community police. The Community police were replaced with a community service unit which did zoning enforcement; there was no bike presence downtown. There is a push to have one person assigned to the Elm Street corridor starting on September 6<sup>th</sup> as there has been an influx of loitering. The mayor has been vocal in getting the officers out and walking.

Chair Witalisz felt if the WRA goes forward with the redevelopment she felt the area must be more accessible and have the issues that are constantly going on resolved.

#### 5. Presentation by BSC Group of Riverfront Area Real Estate Technical Assistance Grant Report.

Mr. Bagg stated he would give a summary of the materials in the draft urban renewal plan and give the group a couple of weeks for review and comment and then finalize, he also noted the contract has been extended to September.

The materials included in the draft urban renewal plan are dated August 20, 2025. Mr. Bagg walked through the sections of the report.

The table of contents was reviewed:

In-depth Analysis of Condition

Demographic and Market Analysis

Project Vision

Conceptual plans which were refined a little for the parking lots, Critical Path Analysis

Page 5 was reviewed as an overview information looking as Urban Renewal as a tool in MA for municipalities to address blighted, decadent, or substandard areas. This was established under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B, a URP empowers a municipality to undertake comprehensive redevelopment efforts that stimulate economic growth, enhance livability, and improve urban infrastructure.

Page 6 The overall project objective is to develop an actionable strategy for the City and WRA to guide the transformation on the underutilized South Riverfront Area into a vibrant, mixed-use district .

#### Page 6 & 7 Urban Renewal in MA

The City of Westfield, through its Redevelopment Authority (WRA), commissioned this plan to explore revitalization strategies for the 7.5-acre South Riverfront Area. The goal is to transform this underutilized zone into a vibrant, mixed-use district that reconnects downtown with the

Westfield River, leveraging historical assets, transportation infrastructure, and environmental features.

## Key Points & Determinations

### Urban Renewal Eligibility

- The area qualifies as “decadent” under M.G.L. Chapter 121B due to:
  - Physical deterioration and vacancy
  - Fragmented ownership and obsolete infrastructure
  - Environmental constraints and brownfield contamination
- Urban Renewal Plan (URP) is recommended to enable land assembly, public investment, and private development and create lasting value for the community.
- Address Blighted and Underutilized Areas
- Flexibility in Land Assembly and Acquisition
- Strategic Comprehensive Planning
- Access to Financial Tools and Resources
- Community Benefits

### Project Objective

- The overall project objective is to develop an actionable strategy for the City and WRA to guide the transformation of the underutilized South Riverfront Area into a vibrant mixed-use district that leverages existing transportation and recreational assets highlights views of the Westfield River, Great River Bridges and the historic Clock. This effort supports the goals for the City of Westfield for the South Riverfront Area.

The Westfield South Riverfront Area Plan incorporated community feedback through a series of targeted outreach efforts designed to shape the vision and priorities of the redevelopment.

### Community Engagement Activities

- Stakeholder Meetings: BSC Group met with the Westfield Redevelopment Authority (WRA) and City officials in March 2025 to introduce the project and review the scope.
- Walking Tours: Guided tours of the study area were conducted with invited stakeholders in May and June 2025, allowing participants to observe existing conditions and discuss opportunities on-site.
- Stakeholder Roundtable: A focused meeting with property owners and community members in the study area took place on March 4, 2025, fostering direct dialogue about local needs and aspirations.
- Concept Plan Presentation: A final conceptual plan was presented to the WRA in June 2025, incorporating feedback from earlier sessions, those plans have been refined a little in regards to the parking lots.

## Key Themes from Community Feedback

1. Reconnect Downtown to the Riverfront Residents and stakeholders emphasized the need to bridge the physical and psychological gap between Elm Street and the Westfield River.
2. Improve Riverfront Access There was strong support for enhancing public access to the river, including trails, green space, and recreational amenities.
3. Expand Housing Options The community expressed interest in increasing housing supply, especially mixed-income and family-friendly units—to support downtown vitality.
4. Revitalize Elm Street Feedback highlighted the importance of improving the streetscape, activating vacant storefronts, and creating a more walkable environment.
5. Boost Economic Development Participants supported attracting small businesses, promoting tourism, and leveraging historic assets like the Whip Building for cultural and commercial uses.

## Page 8 Existing Conditions Analysis

Heather Gould spoke about the urban renewal regulations and what the state looks for in an approved plan.

There is a process the state looks for and looking at area to see if it is an area. A Decadent finding is the basis for the rest of analysis. There is a section about land ownership and properties that are owned by the RA or City. There will be some refinement of initial findings but felt this is a good backbone.

Ms. Gould also noted there are constraints in this area with the wetland's resources, buffer zones, habitat areas which are mostly toward the riverfront area, also there are a couple of Brownfield sites within this area, one parcel the city owns along Emery Street and the gas station that is located on the corner of Orange Street. Also, demographic analysis is also looked at.

There is also an Environmental Justice area in part of this census block where there is both minority and income, with that there are additional steps that are required for MEPA, documentation of this is included in the document.

Mr. Miller noted that has been the subject of his meetings for quite a while.

Mr. Bagg summarized the demographic & market analysis area on page 22 which identifies there is a market for it, the study area is small but may need to be moved out.

Demographic & Market Analysis Page 27 and 29 were reviewed Economic and Market Analysis was reviewed.

- Citywide: Stable population, rising income, aging demographics, and improved education.
- Project Area: High poverty (43.3%), low income, high renter occupancy (≈80%), and increasing diversity.

Page 30.

The WRA has identified a series of goals and objectives for the study area which are intended to provide the foundation for the creation of an Urban Renewal Plan.

Bridge the gap between the “downtown” and the riverfront.

Increase access to the Westfield Riverfront Area.

Create additional housing units downtown.

Revitalize this section of Elm Street.

Increase economic development opportunities.

Conformity with Master Plan and other City Plans.

Housing

Open Space

Historic

Rapid Recovery Plan

Community Development Block Grant

Section 4 Conceptual Plans

Conceptual Development Ideas

Concept A

- 8 new buildings: 3-story residential, townhouses, and commercial spaces.
- Approx. 68 housing units.
- Enhanced pedestrian alleys, public parking, and riverfront access.
- Small riverfront building for events or recreation.

Concept B

- 3 new buildings: larger residential structures.
- Approx. 86 housing units.
- Emphasis on green space and public park near riverfront.
- Improved connectivity via Emery Court.

Environmental Constraints

- Floodplain, wetlands, and rare wildlife habitats limit development.
- Brownfield sites identified at 288 Elm Street (gas station) and former industrial parcels.
- Opportunities exist for green infrastructure, riverwalks, and ecological restoration.

Page 30

### Historic & Cultural Assets

- Includes buildings like the Sanford Whip Company and Westfield Whip Manufacturing Company.
- Twelve parcels lie within the Westfield Center Historic District.
- Adaptive reuse of historic structures is encouraged to preserve “Whip City” identity.

### Shared Features

- Streetscape enhancements, walkability improvements.
- Public parking and trail access.
- Integration with Columbia Greenway Rail Trail and Westfield River Trail.

### Critical Path & Implementation Strategy

Outlined as a 7-step framework:

Step	Focus	Actions
<b>1</b> Vision	Community engagement	Form advisory committee, refine goals
<b>2</b> Eligibility	Legal justification	Slum/blight inventory, infrastructure assessment
<b>3</b> Governance	Land strategy	Acquisition, relocation, partnerships
<b>4</b> Environmental	Compliance	Brownfield remediation, MEPA review
<b>5</b> Market	Economic viability	Business attraction, job creation analysis
<b>6</b> Implementation	Phasing & funding	20-year timeline, financial plan, incentives
<b>7</b> Approvals	Legal process	WRA, Planning Board, City Council, Historical Commission

### Strategic Goals

- Bridge downtown and riverfront
- Increase housing (affordable + market-rate)
- Revitalize Elm Street corridor

- Promote economic development
- Enhance public access and green space
- Preserve historic character
- Align with Master Plan, CDBG, and Local Rapid Recovery Plan

Page 35

The Westfield South Riverfront Area Plan incorporated community feedback through a series of targeted outreach efforts designed to shape the vision and priorities of the redevelopment. Here's a breakdown of how input was gathered and what emerged from those engagements:

Reconnect Downtown to the Riverfront Residents and stakeholders emphasized the need to bridge the physical and psychological gap between Elm Street and the Westfield River.

The community's input was consistent with goals outlined in:

- The 2023 Master Plan
- The Local Rapid Recovery Plan
- The 2025–2029 Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Plan

These documents also emphasized housing affordability, pedestrian safety, and neighborhood revitalization—echoing the feedback collected during this planning process.

The Westfield South Riverfront Area Plan captured several community concerns during its outreach efforts, which helped shape the direction of the redevelopment strategy.

### Main Community Concerns

#### 1. Disconnect Between Downtown and Riverfront

- Residents felt the riverfront was physically and psychologically cut off from Elm Street and downtown.
- Lack of clear pedestrian routes and visual cues made the riverfront feel inaccessible.

#### 2. Limited Public Access to the River

- Despite the proximity of the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail and Westfield River Trail, access points were unclear or underdeveloped.
- Desire for more green space, riverwalks, and recreational amenities.

#### 3. Vacant and Underutilized Properties

- Concerns about deteriorating buildings, empty storefronts, and brownfield sites.
- Community members wanted to see these spaces revitalized and repurposed.

#### 4. Housing Affordability and Diversity

- High renter occupancy and rising poverty in the area led to calls for more affordable, family-friendly housing.
- Residents emphasized the need for mixed-income units and housing types that support both seniors and young families.

#### 5. Economic Disparity and Job Access

- The area was identified as an Environmental Justice zone, with high poverty and low labor force participation.
- Stakeholders wanted job creation, workforce development, and support for small businesses.

#### 6. Historic Preservation vs. Redevelopment

- While many supported adaptive reuses of historic buildings, there were concerns about losing cultural identity.
- The Whip Building and other legacy structures were seen as vital to Westfield's character.

#### 7. Pedestrian Safety and Streetscape Quality

- Elm Street was described as car-centric, with poor walkability and limited pedestrian infrastructure.
- Calls for improved sidewalks, lighting, signage, and traffic calming measures.

These concerns weren't just noted; they were actively woven into the plan's goals, including the push for an Urban Renewal Plan, enhanced connectivity, and inclusive development.

Chair Witalisz asked if there would be enough parking spaces for the units as well as for the spaces the museum was looking at. Chair Witalisz noted parking has always been a top complaint, since the plaza has been created it has seized somewhat. Mr. Miller noted Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays are busy. He further noted the city has a parking pass which is \$20.00 month and there is 3-hour free parking.

#### Spot Clearance and Rehabilitation Eligibility *Table 4-1 & 4-3*

A brief review of the parcels and maps were discussed.

Critical Path Analysis was briefly reviewed pointing out the framework that needs to be included.

- Vision
- Eligibility
- Governance
- Environmental
- Market
- Economic Development and Market Strategy
- Implementation
- Approvals

Throughout the meeting, the WRA emphasized the necessity of substantial collaboration between public officials, private stakeholders, and local residents to ensure the renewal plans success. There was robust discussion about leveraging public forums and digital outreach to keep the community informed and engaged in every state. The consultants underscored the importance of data-driven decision making and the flexibility to adapt design based on evolving needs and feedback. The meeting marked a potential step toward transforming the Riverfront into a vibrant, inclusive corridor.

Mr. Bragg noted some information will be updated once it is decided which way to move forward. Some of the things identified by the initiatives or actions that go into an Urban Renewal Plan is the city would like to see signage downtown to the greenway to try to bolster that, pedestrian signage should be added on both the north and south. The Elm Street alley ways should be made more pedestrian friendly, development should show the waterfront, parking should be added for the Whip buildings, additional mixed housing units should be added.

Mr. Bagg felt the Whip building was most likely to be converted into an active use which would complement the river front, where parking would be most important, the rest of the property is highly suited for housing once more detailed plans are available, and the emphasis is to bring visitors to the river front.

Mr. Miller asked about the Whitewash building, the old print shops, he would like those to stay; he felt there was a possibility of doing something in that space. Mr. Bagg stated they show those buildings should be further investigated.

Page 38 was based on the concept plan, on that it shows as spot clearance, based on conceptual plans, they talk about 6 buildings slated for demolition. Graphic of lower area of Orange and Elm in order to make a concept plan come together there would be 4 that would be demolished. Page 40 shows 2 duplexes being removed to allow access to the city owned properties, adding these are hypothetical.

Page 41

Based on the walk around there are 4 buildings that should be further investigated. Page 42 there should be discussion with Housing Authority to better understand that building. 336 Elm Street, blue with whitewash, long term vacancy like to understand why. The last 2 showing question marks 348 and 350 Elm Street, probably both commercial store fronts. Those 2 provide contest to the neighborhood.

## **Critical Path Analysis**

### **Recommended Actions for the Revitalization of the South Riverfront Project Area**

The critical path framework includes **Vision – Eligibility – Governance – Environmental – Market – Implementation – Approvals**.

Actions flow from one element to the next within the plan.

#### **Vision**

The URP process starts with establishing a shared vision, shaped through public engagement and grounded in community goals for housing, economic vitality, and riverfront access.

- **Vision Refinement Committee** – should include the WRA, the city, and the URP consultant.
- **Community Support** – WRA, City, community members, URP consultant, project-area businesses, residents, and property owners.
- **CAC Formation** – WRA, City, Mayor, Council, CAC, and committee members.

Goals, objectives, and actions within the plan should be decided in one coordinated public forum to avoid confusion.

Mr. Miller noted that in the Elm Street Plan records there was a Citizen Advisory Committee that met at various points; he felt that would be a good model to follow.

Chair Witalisz expressed concerns about how public engagement and media coverage could either enhance or delay the process if information is misunderstood.

Mr. Miller added that balancing the “this is what we’re going to do” perception with true public input is challenging. Creating a URP is one thing; creating it based on tenants’ and public input must be positioned carefully.

#### **Eligibility**

Eligibility determination is based on analysis. Whoever is selected to work with the Authority could build upon the “slum and blight” authority through HUD and CDBG, which would make it easier to justify eligibility.

Ms. Gould stated that if the Authority decides to expand boundaries, other parts of Elm Street could be encompassed through a future amendment.

Member Woodson asked what the next step would be. Mr. Miller replied he would like the WRA to provide their input to him so he could forward to Jeff and Heather so they can complete their report for the September deadline.

#### **Partnerships and Predevelopment**

Ms. Gould noted that in the Critical Path Analysis, partnerships such as acquisition and disposition must be considered. Appraisals and relocation can occur later but must be accounted for when developing the URP.

Other considerations:

- Environmental site preparation and assessment
- Permitting path and time limits
- Phasing approach and duration of predevelopment activities
- Market analysis (jobs created, lost, or maintained; demand assessment; business attraction; coordination with property owners)
- Alignment with zoning and parking; tweaks as needed

### **Implementation Plan**

Develop a 20-year phased implementation plan, identifying funding sources such as TIF or DIF. A sound implementation plan should outline actions, funding, and grant sources moving forward.

### **Approval Process**

Local and state approvals are required.

- The WRA must approve the plan.
- The Planning Board must find it consistent with the Master Plan.
- A public hearing must be held with both the Council and the WRA present.
- Circulation and notification must be completed; the Historical Commission and State Historical Commission must be notified, and photo documentation must confirm no historical significance.

Final plan: legal certification of consistency with Massachusetts General Law and final formatting.

Mr. Miller liked the Critical Path Analysis and felt it should include more site-specific information on each parcel. Chair Witalisz requested completion by August 29 for the regular September 9 meeting.

Chair Witalisz stated the next meeting would be on September 9, and any recommended changes should be submitted by then.

Mr. Miller said this is the time to gauge whether the Council and the Mayor are willing to invest. The public should know it is a 20-year project and show a timeline for the first year. Due diligence is needed to prepare a presentation for them.

Mr. Miller also mentioned that the Critical Path Analysis should be shown to the public and potential funders. It is not inexpensive, and results will take at least two years—this is a long-term endeavor.

Member Morin asked who would be funding this and whether it is still a concept. Mr. Miller replied that the first step is to inform the public and build support for developing an Urban Renewal Plan in that area.

Ms. Gould stated that developing a URP takes one to two years before adoption. Ms. Gould added that a CAC would be created during plan preparation.

Mr. Bagg noted that slum-and-bligh appropriations for the Council may start the process of bringing assessments forward.

Chair Witalisz asked whether the WRA should talk to the Council about the project from the beginning. Mr. Miller felt it might be beneficial to present to the Council and possibly to the Zoning and Development Committee. Chair Witalisz suggested possibly involving the Council from the start. Mr. Miller said he would need to submit something to be placed on the Council's agenda.

Chair Witalisz asked if funding was needed. Mr. Miller responded yes, funding could be requested or WRA funds used. Chair Witalisz suggested getting the Council involved early.

Mr. Bagg thanked everyone for attending.

**New Business:** None.

**Motion to adjourn:** 9:25 p.m.

---

APPROVED