

# A Network-Based Approach to Community Development

Lessons from Lawrence, MA

September 28, 2018

# Lawrence

- Working-class, Gateway city 26 miles north of Boston; 28% households in poverty
- Youngest, most Latino city in New England: median age 31; nearly 80% of residents of Hispanic origin
- Embodiment of larger urban challenges: managing economic change and immigration, reusing historic infrastructure, combating poverty, healing dysfunctional educational and workforce systems
- Embodiment of modern strengths: striving immigrant population, improving educational system, increasing indigenous and outside investment, growing civic capacity and engagement

# THEORY OF CHANGE

**STRONG SYSTEMS**

- Inclusive Economy
- Responsive Institutions
- Collaborative Partnerships
- Effective Public Services
- Practical Policy
- Dynamic Businesses
- Quality Jobs
- Support and Opportunities for Youth



**STRONG PEOPLE**

- Knowledgeable and Skilled
- Financially Stable and Resilient
- Healthy and Well
- Increased Upward Mobility and Choice
- Connected to Each Other
- Connected to Common Life
- Engaged for Collective Impact

**STRONG PLACE**

- High-Quality Affordable Housing
- Open Community & Recreational Spaces
- Vibrant Mixed-Use Neighborhoods
- Good Quality of Life
- Healthy & Green Environment
- Positive City Image



Everything is intertwined!

# The Network Approach: Building a Community

A functional place – a community – is one where residents have the ability to act, plan, and solve problems together, adapt well to change, embrace newcomers, collectively comfort and individually be known. The “network” approach creates the *infrastructure* for community by:

- Focusing on the development of meaningful relationships and *social capital* between and among residents (and other stakeholders too!)
- Magnifying the value that comes from every relationship of trust and mutual support, through shared work on resonant priorities or goals
- Creating a flexible, responsive environment that has many points of entry, pathways for growth, and value propositions for members
- Elevating *reciprocity* and *co-investment* as guiding principles; LCW members are not “clients” or “service recipients” but co-creators of the organization and community

# **IMPACT**

**5,000** members working to revitalize Lawrence

**399** homes built for Lawrence families

**589,592** square feet of abandoned, contaminated, neglected property reclaimed for community use



**\$294,538** into the City tax base annually

**95%** of youth program grads go to college

**850** homeowners educated

**257** People placed in jobs since 2014

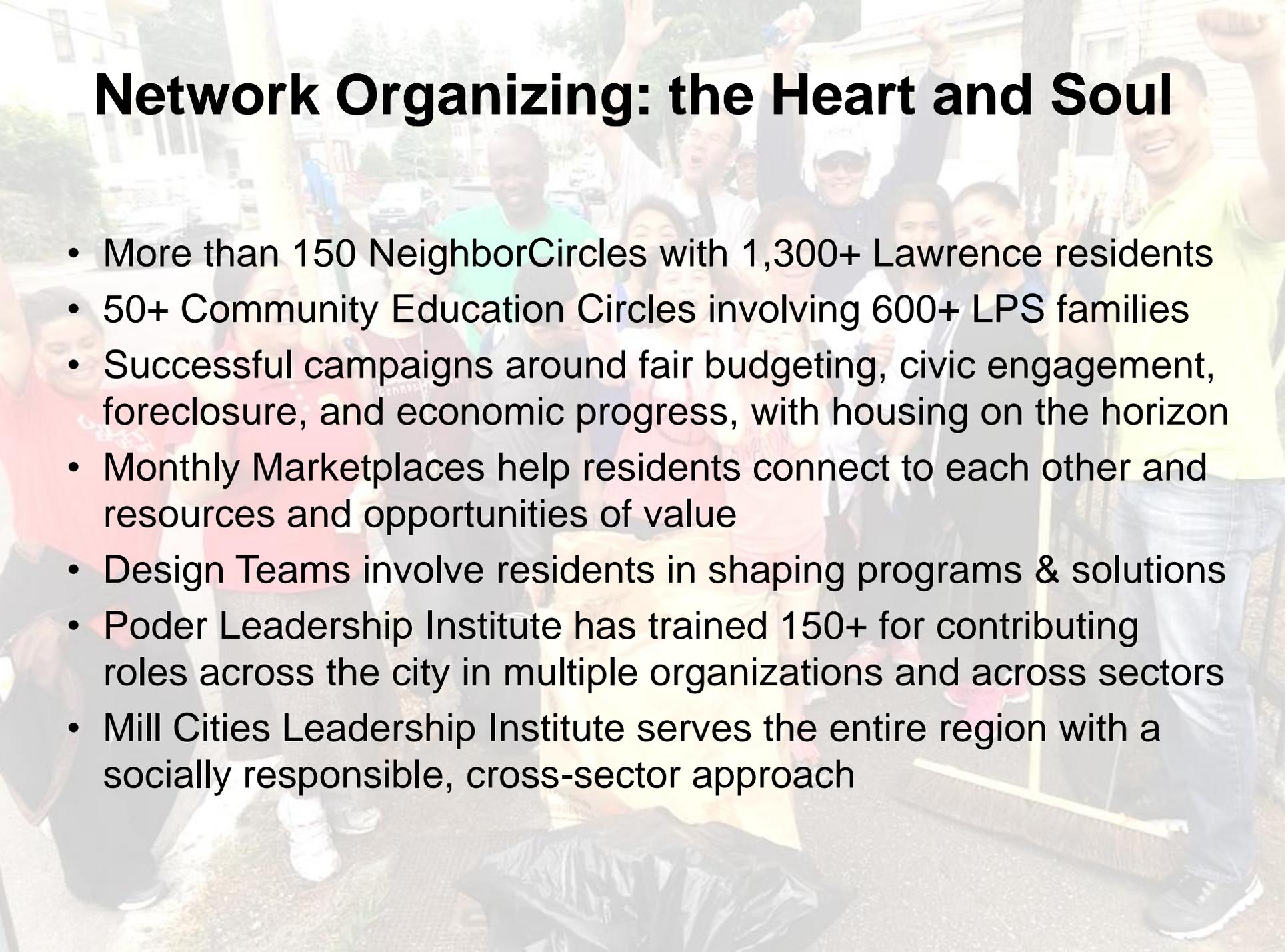
**120** people learning English annually



**\$174,087,832**

invested by LCW and our members in Lawrence homes, neighborhoods, businesses, and education

# Network Organizing: the Heart and Soul

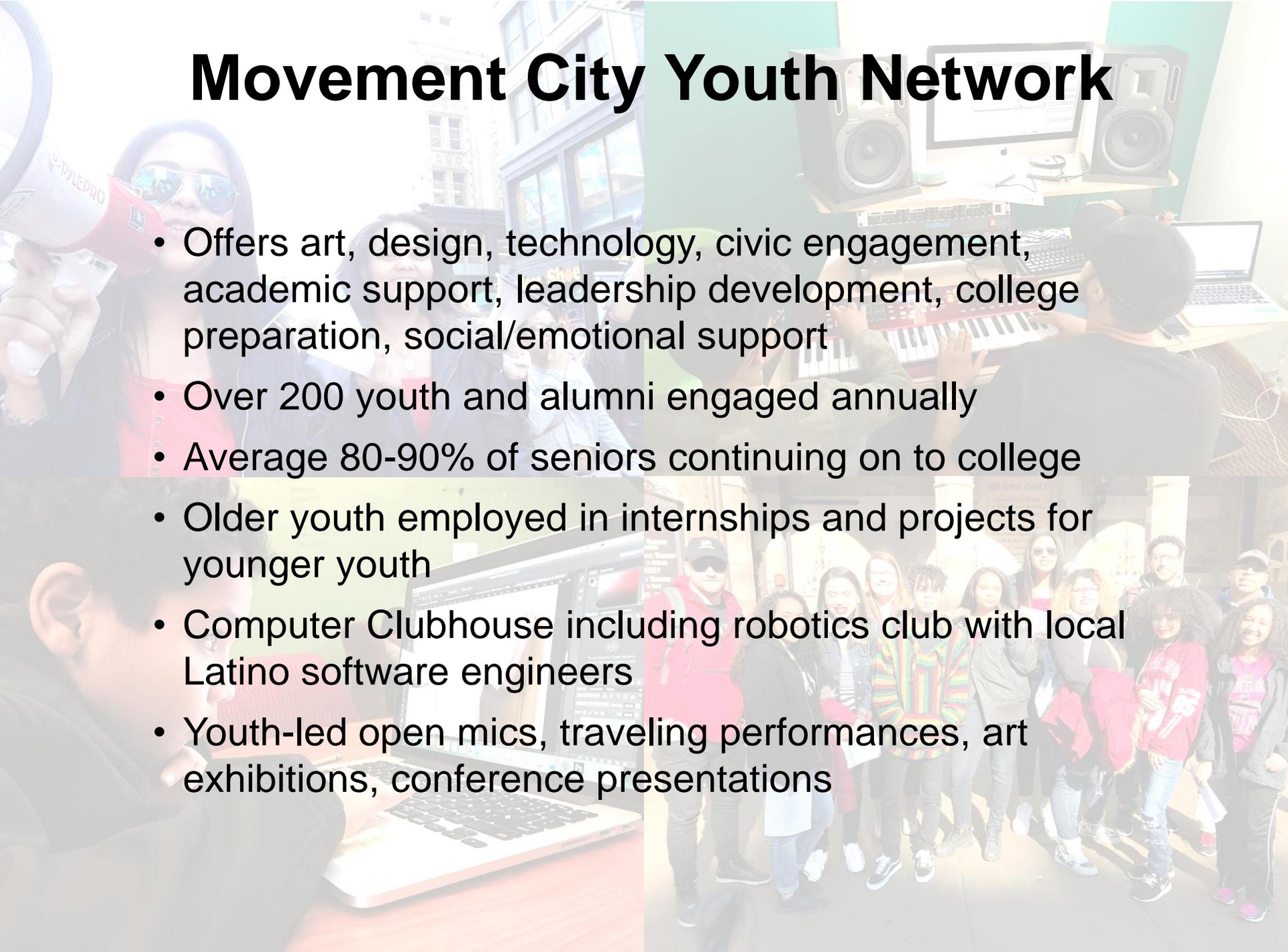


- More than 150 NeighborCircles with 1,300+ Lawrence residents
- 50+ Community Education Circles involving 600+ LPS families
- Successful campaigns around fair budgeting, civic engagement, foreclosure, and economic progress, with housing on the horizon
- Monthly Marketplaces help residents connect to each other and resources and opportunities of value
- Design Teams involve residents in shaping programs & solutions
- Poder Leadership Institute has trained 150+ for contributing roles across the city in multiple organizations and across sectors
- Mill Cities Leadership Institute serves the entire region with a socially responsible, cross-sector approach

# Asset Building: The Largest Network Door

- Financial Coaching and Education
- Workforce Development: Latinos in Finance banking training; Parent to Paraprofessional and early childhood education
- Job Coaching and Placement
- Individual Development Accounts (matched savings towards homeownership, entrepreneurship, higher education)
- Adult Basic Education – ESL and Computer
- First Time Home-Buyer Counseling & Seminars
- Post Purchase & Landlord Education
- Foreclosure Prevention
- Lending Circles and Twin Accounts
- Partnerships with health sector, legal services, schools

# Movement City Youth Network



- Offers art, design, technology, civic engagement, academic support, leadership development, college preparation, social/emotional support
- Over 200 youth and alumni engaged annually
- Average 80-90% of seniors continuing on to college
- Older youth employed in internships and projects for younger youth
- Computer Clubhouse including robotics club with local Latino software engineers
- Youth-led open mics, traveling performances, art exhibitions, conference presentations

LCW:  
Strategic  
Focus on  
**Place**

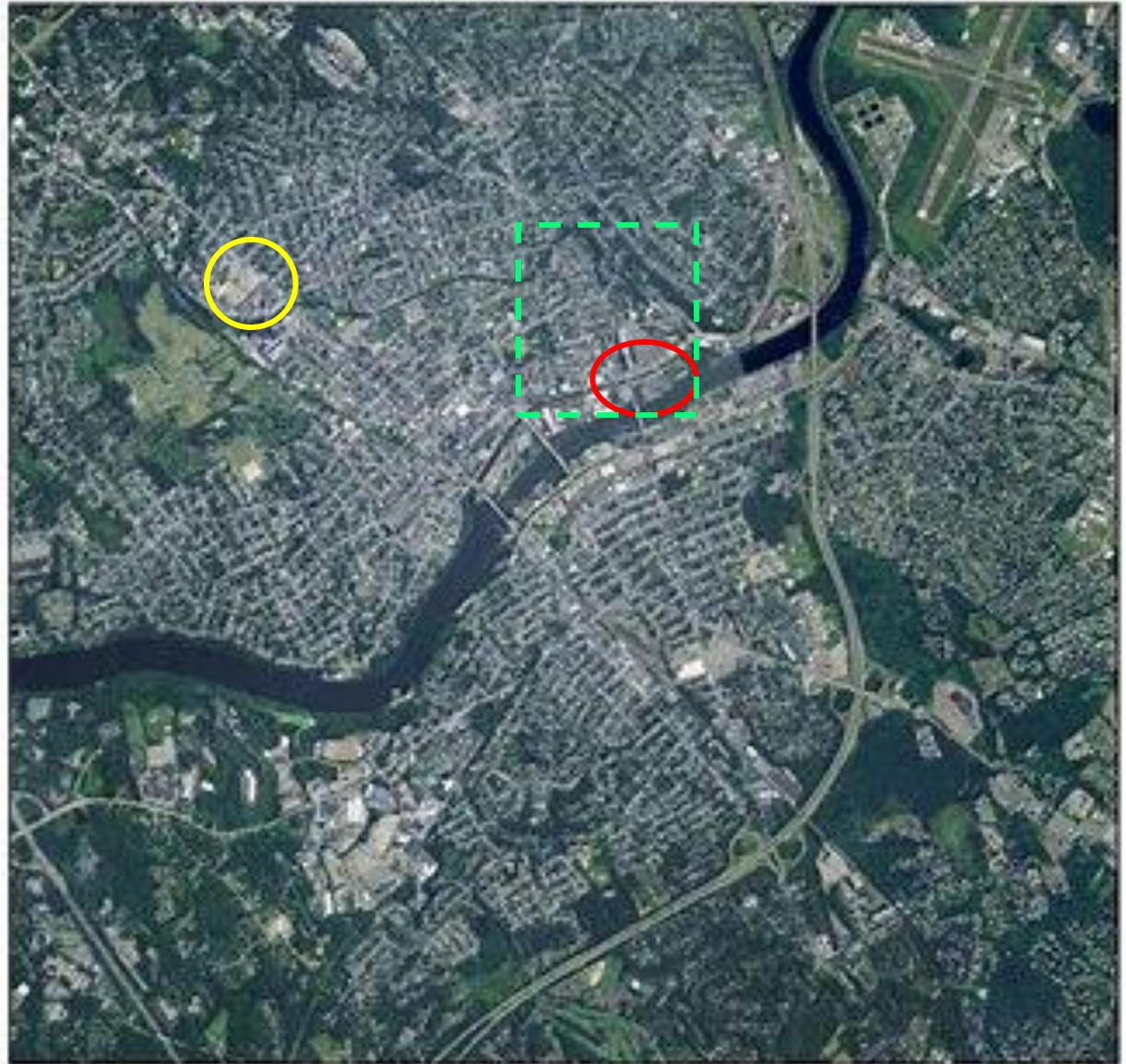
*Areas of Interest*

North Common  
Neighborhood

East Island

Marriner Building  
/ Arlington Mill  
District

Lawrence, MA





# North Canal Mill District: Union Crossing



Total 133  
Residential  
Units  
40,000 sf  
commercial  
space includes  
26 artists'  
studios

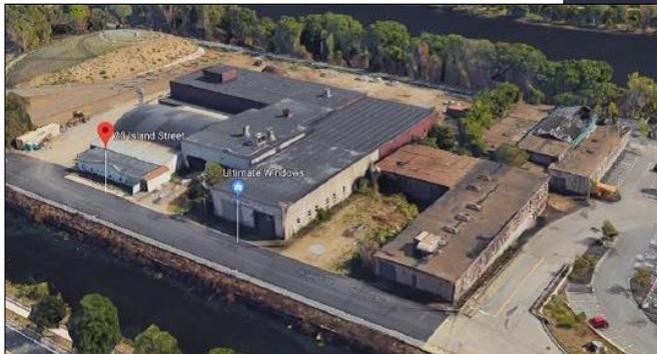


# North Canal Mill District: East Island



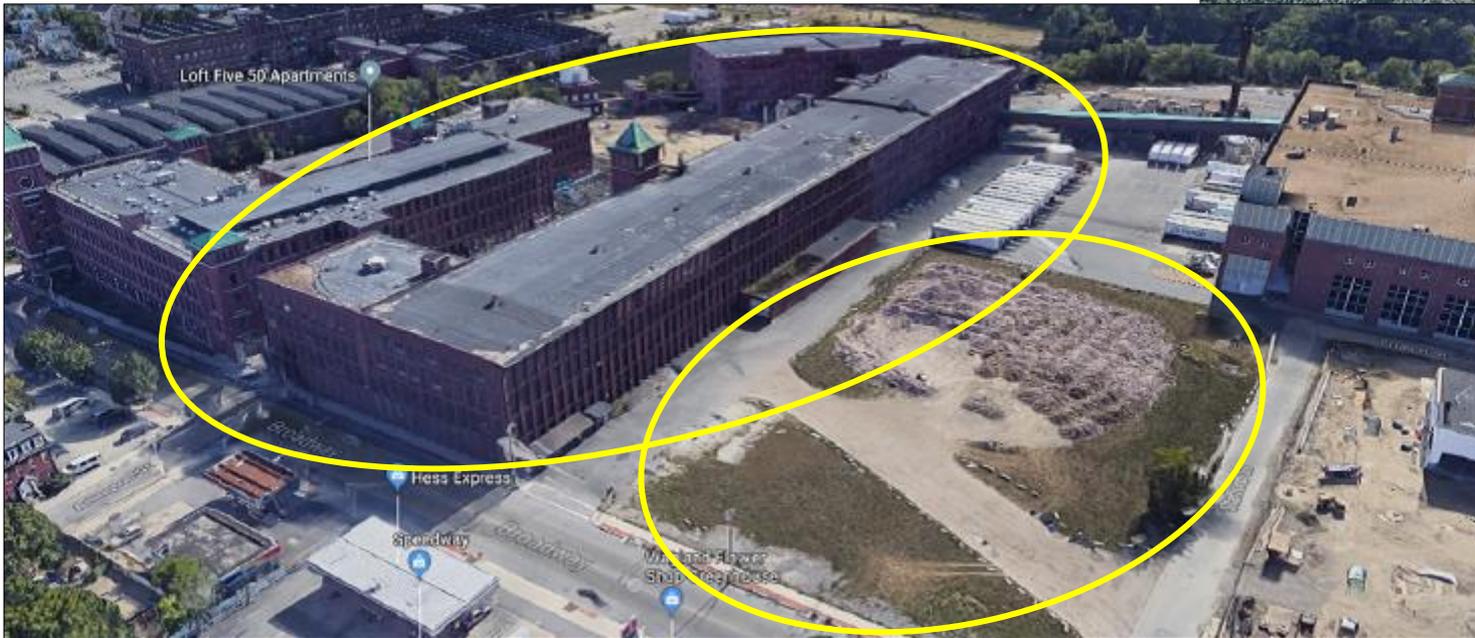
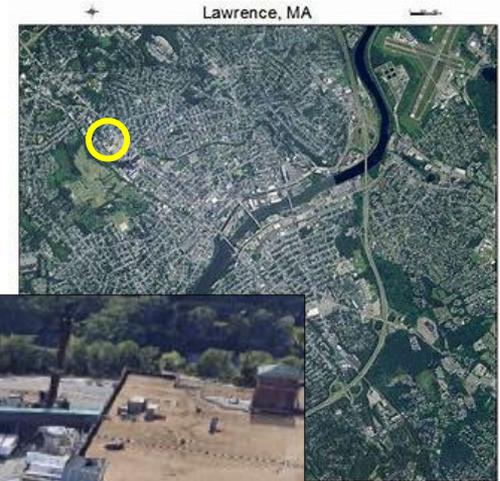
## 20 Island Street

80 residential units  
Parking for DyeWorks



**DyeWorks**  
35,000 square feet, commercial  
Health/recreational/food/art focus

# Arlington Mill District: Marriner Building



450,000 square feet plus adjacent lot for parking/ retail pad site  
3 phases of housing: 180 – 210 units; affordable and workforce units  
60,000 – 120,000 square feet of commercial space  
Careport telemedicine facility for preventive diabetes and general healthcare

# Real Estate Effects

- *Revitalization*: highly visible symbols of renewal that generate significant increased tax revenue, make markets, and catalyze other private investment
- *Affordability*: since 1995, population growth of 20% and housing growth of 2%; more than 40% of Lawrence households spend more than half of their income on rent
- *Impact on People and Systems*: housing stability and quality tightly linked to improved health and educational outcomes for families; real estate fees reinvested in asset-building programs and civic/economic development initiatives

# Challenges

- Contamination, Encumbrances / Entanglements
- Creating the Vision and Path
- Improving the neighborhood while inoculating against gentrification
- Balancing housing development with school enrollment and planning
- Integrating tenants into programming
- Aging infrastructure and lightly built stock
- Improving resident income / ability to pay and to own
- Overcoming political resistance: organizing is key!

# ***Collaborative Leadership: Lawrence Working Families Initiative***

- **Working Cities Challenge:** FedBoston sponsored competition to accelerate cross-sector collaboration and systems change in MA Gateway Cities; Lawrence top prize winner
- **Historic Opportunity:** Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) receivership and Turn-Around
- **Our Problem:** High levels of poverty and unemployment among families of LPS students, coupled with low levels of student graduation and achievement (chicken and egg...)
- **Two-Generation Approach:** Employment and income generation for families of LPS students
- **10 Year Goal:** 15% Increase in real Household Income for LPS families, with related student gains due to increased family stability

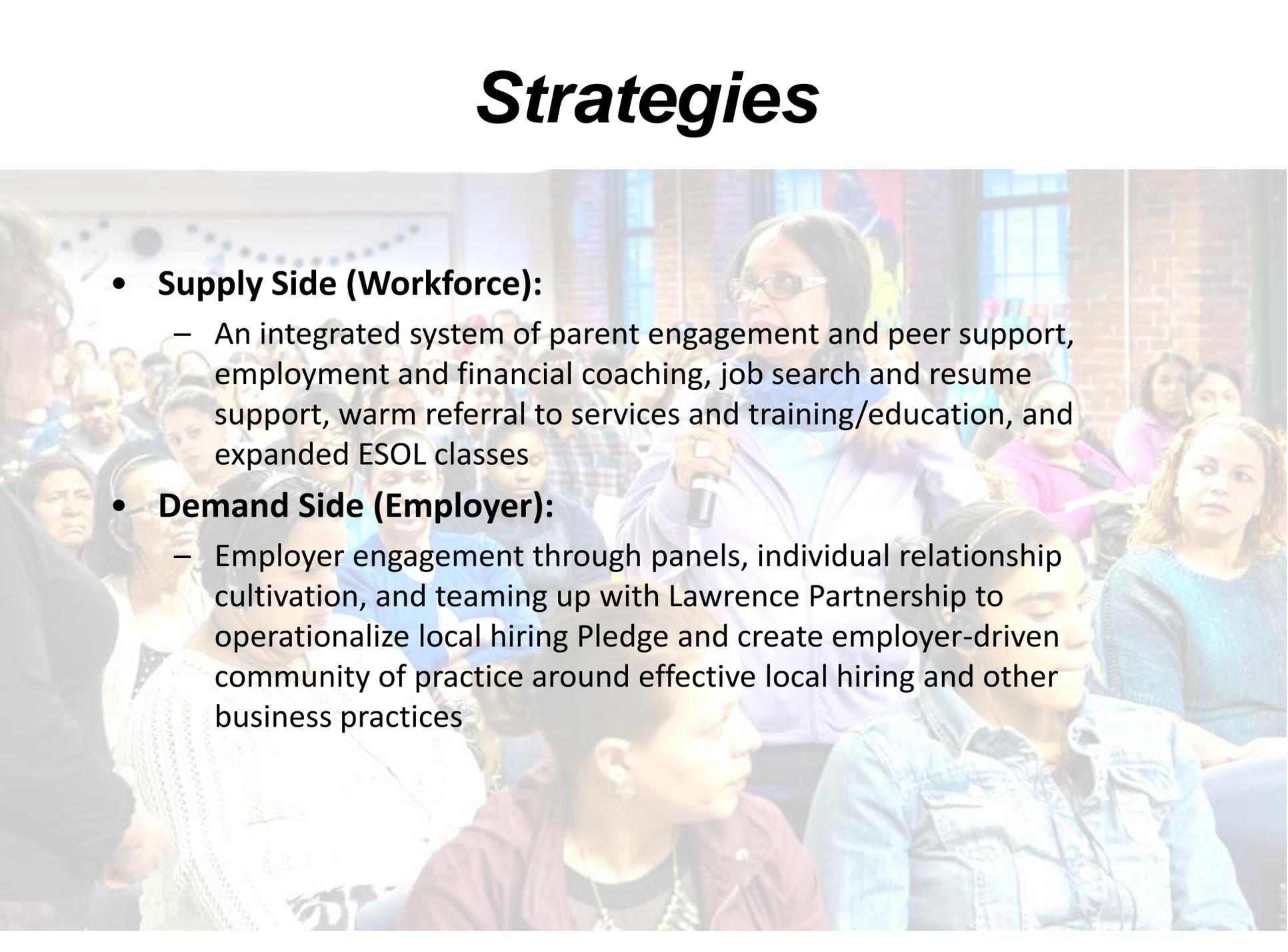
# Partners

- **Public:** Lawrence Public Schools, City of Lawrence, ValleyWorks Career Center, Workforce Investment Board, Greater Lawrence Technical School, Northern Essex Community College
- **Private / For-Profit Employer:** GemLine, 99 Degrees Custom, Associated Home Care, TD Bank, Enterprise Bank, Eastern Bank, Merrimack Valley Federal Credit Union, Metro Credit Union, Citizens Bank, Mary Immaculate Nursing Home, Haffner's, Asahi America, TJ Maxx, Lupoli Companies, Little Sprouts, Imagine That, Everett Mills, Pentucket Medical, New Balance, Belltower Cafe
- **Nonprofit (Service or Employer):** Lawrence CommunityWorks (backbone); Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Lawrence General Hospital, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Adult Learning Center, The Community Group, EforAll, Family Services Inc., Groundwork Lawrence, Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence YMCA, Lawrence YWCA, Lawrence Partnership

# ***Key Drivers***

- **Lack of Connectivity**
  - Lawrence parents lack access to information, resources, and networks for employment opportunities and income generation
- **Skills Gap**
  - Limited English proficiency constrains job options and/or existing skill transfer; soft skills gap; hard skills/training/higher skills gap
- **Employer Culture / Cultural Competency**
  - Many employers lack bilingual/bicultural HR staff, internal training resources, or shop floor supervisors

# ***Strategies***

- 
- A woman in a purple jacket is speaking into a microphone at a community event. She is surrounded by a diverse group of people, including men and women of various ages, who are listening attentively. The setting appears to be an indoor space with large windows and brick walls.
- **Supply Side (Workforce):**
    - An integrated system of parent engagement and peer support, employment and financial coaching, job search and resume support, warm referral to services and training/education, and expanded ESOL classes
  - **Demand Side (Employer):**
    - Employer engagement through panels, individual relationship cultivation, and teaming up with Lawrence Partnership to operationalize local hiring Pledge and create employer-driven community of practice around effective local hiring and other business practices

# Challenges

- Economic opportunities for immigrants are indivisible from language acquisition. This is a central policy concern for communities' long-term social health and economic competitiveness
- Highest impact strategies are potentially on demand side, and changing employer behavior is a long-term, retail, organizing campaign
- Coaching and asset-based, high-touch programs with peer support element are more effective but also more expensive
- Undocumented Families: the whole framework needs to shift from punishment and constraint to integration and opportunity
- Housing (access, affordability) is a top concern for families coming in to LPS through the Family Resource Center and LWFI

A group of people, including men and women, are gathered in a meeting room. They are standing around a table, looking at documents and talking. In the background, there are several whiteboards with handwritten notes and diagrams. The room appears to be a collaborative workspace or a meeting room. The overall atmosphere is professional and focused.

# ***Results and Progress Toward Systems Change***

- Shift in School Culture around both understanding and practice of family engagement (CECs, Design Teams), and focus of family support (from deficit solutions to employment aspirations)
- Employer Engagement in and ownership of demand-side economic development and local hiring strategies (Training Consortium & Employer-Facing Alignment)
- Culture of collaboration growing, spilling over into joint funding applications, shared services, employer cultivation, LP & Venture Fund, disaster response

# ***Learnings***

- Backbone Role: crucial and must be adequately, steadily resourced over time; connecting and weaving are habits to be elevated, practiced
- Change is Iterative, Incremental, & Opportunistic... be tenacious and patient, recognize strategic windows, approach from multiple angles
- Governance and Communication are key for sustained cross-sector buy-in and ownership; structure must be a vehicle, not a proxy, for trust
- Trust and Relationships are central at every level and must be constantly nurtured through shared positive experience and follow-through
- Incentives can be crucial tool for all sectors/constituents
- Know your landscape, invest in and trust and resource your community members; invest in cultural competence
- Take risks, but calculate them: know your landscape and partners
- Look for resonance; seek clarity but tolerate murkiness
- Build on small victories; create opportunities for reflection; be willing to let things go if they fail

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