

## Plainfield Gateway

The western arm of The Campus, much like the Thomas Street Placita eastern arm, must connect residents and workers from the western side of the neighborhood to The Campus and the activity of Thomas Street. This draw can be accomplished by creating a center of activity at the node where Gerena opens onto the Plainfield side of the neighborhood, currently a landscaped yet awkward and non-navigable transitional zone which seems to sever Gerena from the neighborhood. The Chestnut, Gerena, and Brightwood Schools, the Brightwood Health Clinic, Kennefick Park, the future senior center at the old pool house, and the eastern edge of Riverview Apartments are all within a 10-15 minute walk of the western entrance to Gerena. This space can capitalize on the fact that this side of the neighborhood is felt by the residents to lack commercial activity, with the exception of a small convenience store located within the Brightwood Health Clinic.

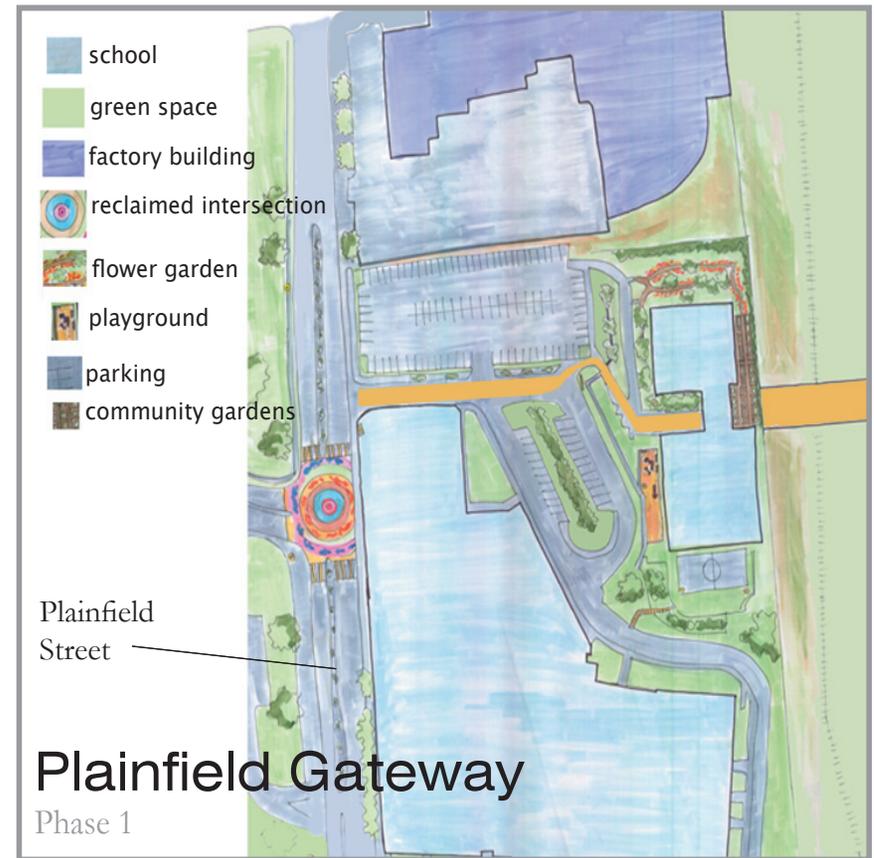
A typical scene . . .

at Plainfield Gateway would have children playing on the playground equipment during school hours and after school. Sitting on the benches, parents and older siblings wait for the elementary school kids to get out of school. The side gardens provide a shady area to sit on a sunny day and meander around the side of the school to garden plots cultivated by the students. The other side the basketball court provides a space for older youth to play hoops. The store and cafe at the opening onto Plainfield Street offer school and office workers an attractive place to enjoy their lunches and after-work time.

The phasing of the transformation of this space addresses these two issues of location and retail. In the short term, the Plainfield Gateway will form a center of activity by linking the above resources and facilities around the western entrance to the Gerena School. In the longer term, activity can be concentrated in the Gateway by introducing commercial activity to Plainfield.

### First Steps (phase one)

Much like the first steps at the Thomas Street Placita, simple signage, streetscaping, and security measures are the beginnings of enhancing the Plainfield Gateway and the key facilities nearby. Coordination of these activities with other areas of The Campus and the greater neighborhood will ensure consistency of design. Signs will be installed along Plainfield Street in front of the entrance to the Chestnut School Parking lot, the Brightwood School, the Brightwood Health Clinic, and Kennefick Park, and in front of the Gerena School entrance. Street trees can be planted, street furniture installed, and sidewalks painted along the routes between these facilities. The intersection at Plainfield Street and at Sanderson Street will be painted to alert drivers to the fact that this is a pedestrian area. The Campus

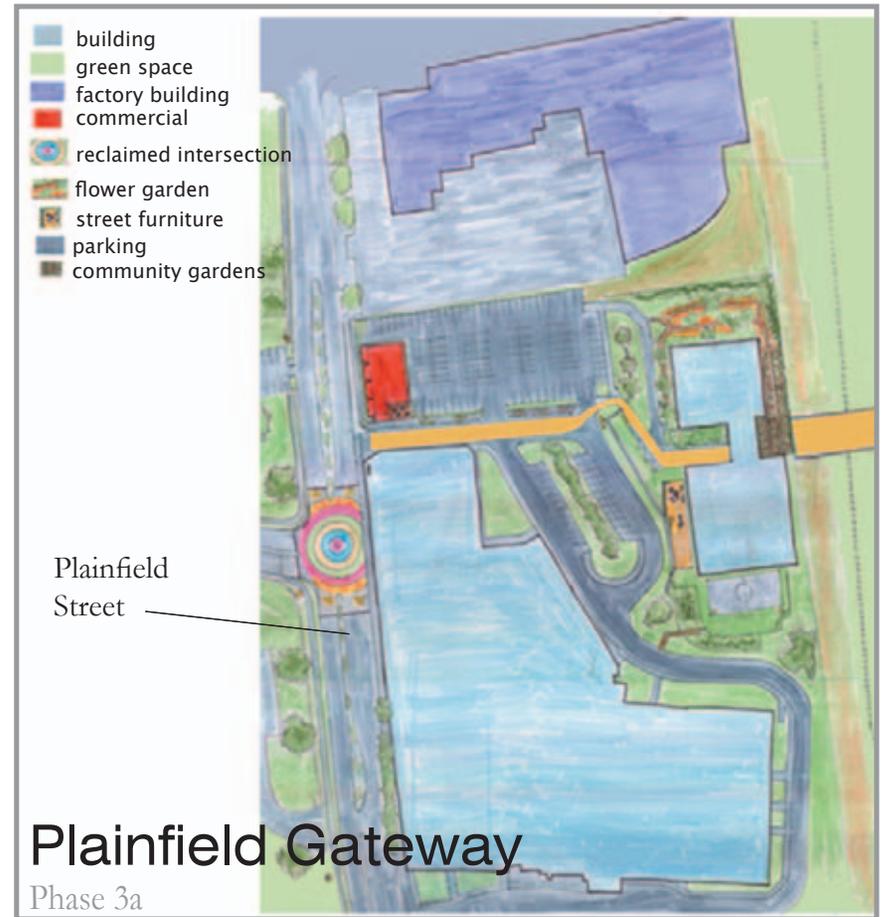


Concept Committee should work in conjunction with the Springfield Department of Public Works and each of the school administrations to carry out these physical improvements.

New activities will be introduced to the Plainfield Gateway alongside the western entrance of the Gerena School. Playground equipment will be installed in the area west of the entrance beside the basketball court. A garden walk will be installed in the area north of the Gerena swimming pool. Finally, the area between the Gerena pool and the railroad track fence will be developed as educational gardens. Further security measures may include security lighting to increase visibility at night, police call boxes to enable pedestrians to report crimes and suspicious activity more easily, or closed circuit television cameras.



*Area to north of Gerena*



## Plainfield Gateway

Phase 3a

### Growth and Experimentation (phase two)

In the second phase of the Plainfield Gateway, more extensive traffic calming along Plainfield Street can include a raised intersection or crosswalk, neckdowns and chicanes, and pedestrian islands between travel lanes. More dramatic streetscape improvements can also be made by using special pavings, more pleasing street lighting, and playful street furniture. This experimentation stage could benefit from a traffic analysis done of Plainfield Street done in partnership with or by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to determine the most effective routing strategy and healthy use of space.



*Pedestrian street with landscaping and playground*

### Expansion and Community Agency (phase three)

Two scenarios to liven the Plainfield Gateway are envisioned. The first introduces commercial activity along the edges of the Gateway. Plainfield residents have repeatedly expressed a desire for retail establishments west of I-91. One of the few places the current zoning ordinance will allow commercial development is within the current parking area for the Chestnut School. This scenario proposes development of a three story mixed-use structure in the western portion of the parking area, fronting on Plainfield Street and facing in towards the Gateway. As envisioned, the building would contain a café and convenience store on the first floor, and elderly apartment housing on the second and third floors. The architectural style of the building would respect the single-family residential aesthetic dominant in the area while acknowledging a need from group living accommodation, particularly within the elderly community. Perhaps the pre-existing convenience store in Brightwood Clinic would relocate to the more spacious quarters on the Gateway.



*Cafe and outdoor seating on Plainfield Street*

The development would displace some parking currently used by teachers at Chestnut Middle School. However, the increased pedestrian activity would provide increased security for people and cars. For the few parking spaces lost, two potential solutions are available. One is to create a 30-40 spot parking lot on the parcel across Plainfield Street from the Chestnut School parking area. The other is to allow on-street parking along both sides of Plainfield Street near the Chestnut School. These spots would be close to the school, and parking along the street would create a buffer between automobile traffic and pedestrian activity. The Campus Concept Committee could support and coordinate this project, but a third-party developer, as suggested in the Implementation section of the report, would be needed to carry it through.

The second scenario involves shifting all Chestnut School parking to the larger northern area of the Chestnut School parking lot. All



*Pedestrian environment with signage and planters*



*Domino players and spectators, San Juan, Puerto Rico*

parking currently located around the round-about between the Gerena and Chestnut Schools can be relocated to the larger parking lot by narrowing the parking spaces and adding another row of parking nearest the Chestnut school. The area between the Gerena and Chestnut Schools could then be developed as a pedestrian-safe, grassy, Campus Quad where children from the two schools could hang out or play, and families and visitors to The Campus could enjoy the outdoor space. Activity in this space would put many residents in contact with The Campus and help make it a true center for the community.

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## Strategies

to hire additional staff to manage the overall project and ensure strong communication between all the stakeholders involved. One of the stakeholders that might pose complex challenges is the Board of Education. The strict restrictions placed on the use of school facilities and property, and the power of the teachers union may impede or delay the implementation of some aspects of the plan. Jurisdiction over the proposed areas might also represent a roadblock between the Campus Committee and the schools.

**A challenge that affects the North End beyond the conceptual is the lack of younger generation representation in leadership positions.**

Although many steps have been taken to meet this challenge including hiring a Campus Coordinator, more work needs to be done. It is essential that the North End builds strong leaders at all ages to ensure that the great work being conducted now can be carried into the future. Lastly, and not unlike most community plans, resident participation presents a challenge. The North End community has to believe in The Campus concept and adopt the plan as their own in order for it to be successful.

Certain strategies need to be created to overcome these hurdles. **The first hurdle is the jurisdiction of space in and around the Gerena School.** As the largest elementary school in Springfield, it is under the jurisdiction of the Springfield Board of Education. Simultaneously, and thanks to the hard work of many leaders within the community, the Gerena School is also a space “owned” by the community. These two distinct jurisdictional zones need to be formalized so the space is neither neglected nor misused, and so this misunderstanding does not create tension between these two bodies. Now that there is an organizational body to represent the community interests in the Gerena space through the Campus Center Coordinator, the distinct responsibilities of the community can be clarified. The phased proposal minimizes the “swing” space which will be shared between the community and the school, reducing the areas which tend to be unclear in terms of responsibility and maintenance. Both the community and the school will benefit from the latter effectively ceding space. For once the community will feel ownership and responsibility over the space, will invest and care for the facility, and will make it a safer and livelier space not only for themselves, but also for the school children.

Employing ample security guards and looking after school areas in the evenings will be the responsibility of the community. A first step toward this understanding of shared space involves extending an invitation to the school board to join the Campus Committee. Equally important, representatives from the Teachers Union or one teacher from each of the neighborhood’s surrounding schools - Gerena, Chestnut, Lincoln and Brightwood - should attend the committee meetings and vocalize their visions and interests in the community space as an educational tool.