



3. The Campus Concept

This chapter presents an overview of the Campus Concept from the formulations of its guiding principals through general recommendations to facilitate the triple urban design plan presented in the chapter that follows.

To create this Concept, the Springfield Studio at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT spent three months researching the North End and interacting with its residents. With the help of staff from the North End Outreach Network (NEON), the North End Campus Coordinator Ben Torres, and members of the North End Campus Concept Committee, the students developed an understanding of the community that included its strengths as well as the challenges it faces. The class then used this image to create a conceptual vision for the Campus. The multiple community organizations represented on the Campus Concept Committee gave valuable feedback at student presentations of the Campus concept development on March 19th and April 15th. Together, the students and community representatives came up with the guiding principles from which The Campus was born.

| Guiding Principles | |
|--------------------|---|
| People | <i>The Campus is a place for anyone to “celebrate, to dance, and to share culture”</i> |
| | Promotes Diversity |
| | Contextually Appropriate |
| | Health and Safety |
| Place | <i>The Campus is a single cohesive place with visual consistency and internal connections</i> |
| | Walkable |
| | Accessible |
| | Leverages Neighborhood Assets |
| Management | <i>The Campus is an asset and resource to the community for years to come</i> |
| | Sustains Activity |
| | Adapts |
| | Meets needs |

This is a major endeavor, which this plan breaks up into three implementation phases.

Defining The Campus

The Campus will connect the North End by celebrating its history and culture while inviting newcomers and long-time residents to participate in the life of the community. It will accommodate services and opportunities that will allow North End residents to improve their lives. In addition, the new Campus will enhance the link between the Memorial Square and Plainfield halves of the North End. This plan achieves these goals by reclaiming Thomas Street. Until the construction of I-91, Thomas Street ran from Main Street to Bernie Avenue, through what is now the German Gerena Elementary School.

This plan proposes the recreation of Thomas Street; a public promenade along which the community can meet, socialize, play, learn and activate change. The main hallway and atrium of the Gerena School, currently underutilized, will be revitalized and opened through the evening with a mixture of fun and more serious public uses made possible through additional security measures. Public art and history exhibitions will educate North End residents about past community victories, increasing their pride in the North End. The new Thomas Street, anchored by the Thomas Street Placita to the east and the Plainfield Gateway to the west, will bring back an historic link through the highway and recreate the Gerena School as a center of community life.

Phasing

1. **Short Term:** Projects that can be completed by the Campus Committee with available resources in 6 months.
2. **Medium Term:** Projects that can be completed by the Campus Committee with additional resources in 18 months.
3. **Long Term:** Projects that can be completed with third party participation in 5 years.

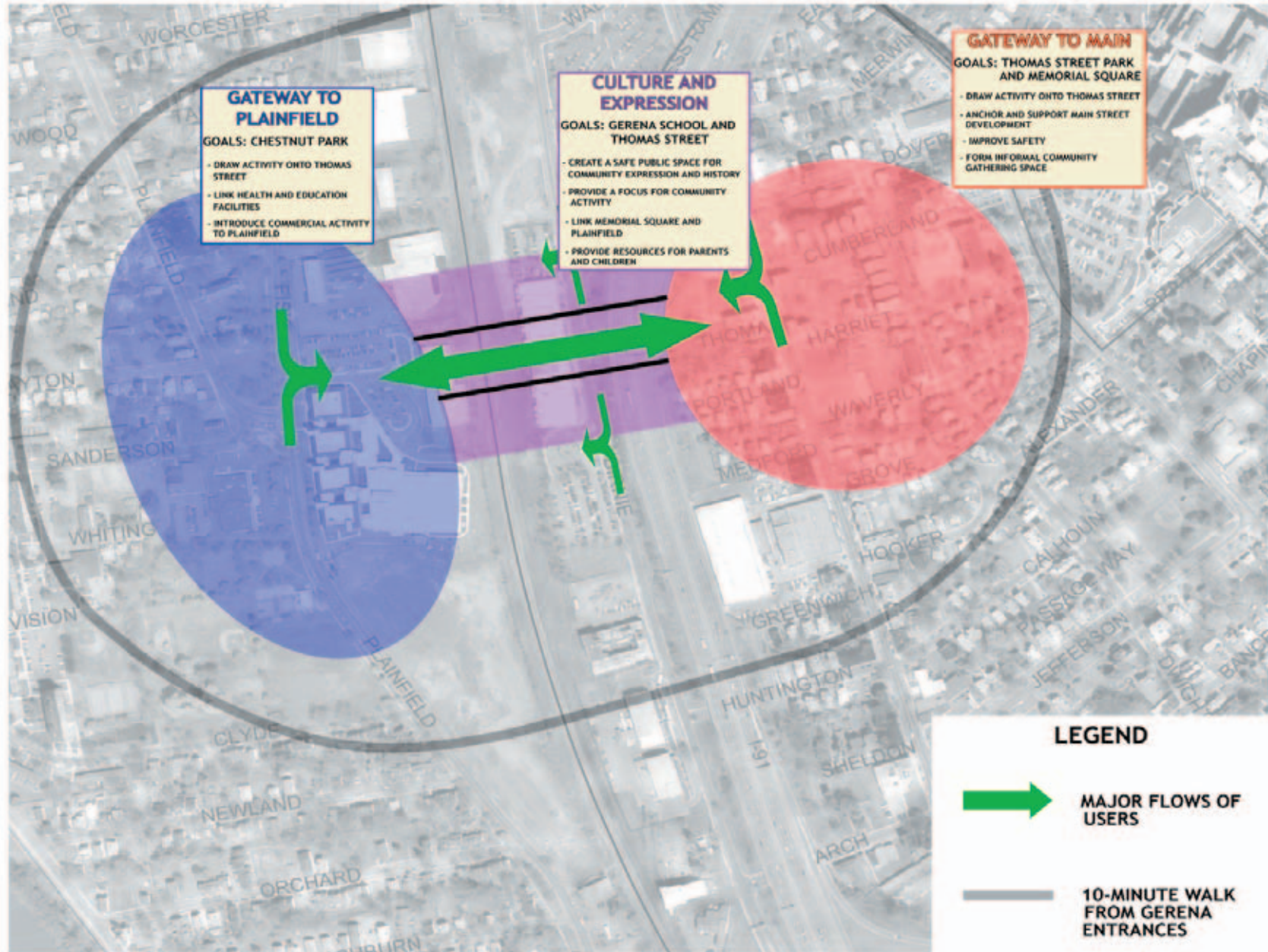
The plan also divides the campus project into three physical areas: Plainfield Gateway and the Plainfield neighborhood; Thomas Street Passage through the Gerena School; and Thomas Street Placita and the Memorial Square neighborhood. These three physical areas together establish an important link buttressed by two vital gateway spaces which draw activity onto Thomas Street. These two gateways link the rest of the North End to the Campus, connecting the neighborhood to its assets and resources, while also linking the two halves of the North End.



0 250 500 750 1,000 Feet

CONCEPT PLAN

THE NORTH END SPRINGFIELD, MA



MIT SPRINGFIELD STUDIO - SPRING 2004

General Recommendations

Several imperative connecting elements of The Campus should be introduced throughout the three spaces and phases, particularly at its edges where it interacts with the rest of the neighborhood. These connecting elements can be clustered into the following three overarching recommendations.

General Recommendations

- The Campus should present an **inviting image** of itself as a single cohesive place to residents and non-residents that draws activity into the campus.
- The Campus should be **safe and secure** and make people feel comfortable being there at all times of the day or night.
- The Campus should make **pedestrian movement** easier and safer within the campus itself, and between the campus and the surrounding areas.

Image

The Campus should present an inviting image of itself as a single cohesive place to residents and non-residents that draws activity into the campus. Essentially, presenting an image of the campus involves marketing. Successful marketing will make The Campus the first place residents think of when they want to interact with the community. There are many ways to create this image and the North End should bring its creativity to this task to make the image distinctly its own. Some suggestions to begin image-making include:

- Name and Logo – The Campus should have a name that evokes the qualities of the space and of the North End. It should have a logo for use on materials and signs that is immediately recognizable within the North End and throughout the region.
- Signage and appearance – Signs indicating where The Campus is and where the user is within it are essential to making The Campus welcoming and easy to use. Decoration and design should be vibrant and consistent throughout the campus to make spaces pleasant, and to help users associate each part of The Campus with the others as a single place.

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- Gateways – The Plainfield Gateway and Thomas Street Placita should function as gateways from the community into The Campus and on to Thomas Street. The Gateway design should make the entrances to Gerena School on each side as visible as possible. While their design does not have to include a physical gateway or arch, they should draw people into The Campus spaces with their own activities. Thomas Street, within Gerena School should allow visibility along the main hall and should encourage movement into and through the central atrium.

This marketing approach can support the North End’s economic development goals if applied to the neighborhood as a whole. The North End already has a reputation as a center of Latin culture in Western Massachusetts. The community can capitalize on this with signage on I-91, gateway improvements at the northern and southern ends of Main Street, and assistance to local businesses for regional advertising.

Safety

Personal safety is a top concern of North End residents. The safety of public property, especially within the Gerena School, is also very important to the success of The Campus. Specific design elements that increase visibility and use can make The Campus safer. The most effective way to keep the campus safe is to use it, and to provide amenities, activities, and programming that will ensure it is used throughout the day and into the night. New commercial and residential development near campus areas can help maintain a vigilant presence in The Campus as well.

The design of The Campus should facilitate visibility of all parts of the campus and should expose currently hidden areas. Infrastructure such as bright security lighting, closed circuit television cameras, and police call boxes can also increase safety in public spaces. Human resources, such as security patrols will be especially effective in making the campus safe. Private security guards can accomplish this but residents should also make clear to the Springfield Police

Department that safety within The Campus is a priority that warrants additional policing effort.

These strategies would be effective for other areas in the North End. Increased police patrols, security lighting, and police call boxes would reduce the vulnerability of pedestrians on Main Street and Birnie Avenue and other areas within the community. Birnie Avenue, a particularly isolated road in the North End sandwiched between I-95 and the railroad, could also benefit from inserting signs indicating the abutting Gerena School.

Movement

The Campus is a cohesive pedestrian place where a visitor can walk from any part to another along the Thomas Street spine. All spaces within The Campus are within a 10- to 15-minute walk from all other spaces. People should feel that getting around The Campus is easy and pleasant. This can be accomplished through streetscape and traffic calming improvements along key vehicular and pedestrian routes within The Campus. These improvements should have a consistent appearance to make navigation between different places easier, including a simulation of a streetscape within the Gerena



*Plaza in San Juan,
Puerto Rico*



*Raised median
with greenery*

School. Signage should direct users to The Campus resources they are looking for. Street trees and other greenery will help make the trip pleasant. Street furniture will offer welcome respites to the elderly and disabled and create gathering spaces throughout The Campus. Regularly placed trash receptacles will help keep The Campus clean.

Traffic calming measures such as those shown above will help make key street crossings safer for pedestrians. Traffic calming creates visual or physical obstacles that slow automobile traffic and make drivers more aware of pedestrians. Traffic calming is not meant to stop traffic or aggravate drivers. It simply produces irregular road conditions such as rises in the road surface or shifting lanes that require drivers to slow down and take note of their surroundings. Visual cues, such as distinctive paving or even a coat of brightly colored paint can let drivers know that a certain stretch of road is a space for pedestrians as well as for cars.

Traffic calming and reclaimed intersections can improve circulation and pedestrian accessibility at several key locations throughout the North End. In particular, Birnie Avenue, considered a particularly dangerous road, could benefit from raised intersections near the

*Street
furniture and
landscaping*



entrance to the Gerena School parking lot, narrowed traffic lanes, and the opening of Birnie to two-way traffic between Arch Street and the Gerena School would help slow traffic particularly during school hours. With such safety and movement improvements, including finding alternative parking spaces, The Campus may someday be able to expand onto Birnie Avenue, where footbridges from Plainfield could lead to expanded Campus facilities such as an independent Teen Center and overflow community gardens.