

Submission of Written Testimony on Urban Revitalization Plan

I stand before you today as a 25 year: taxpayer, homeowner, business executive and **former member** of the WRA, Chairman of the WRA, Chamber of Commerce, Trustee of Worcester State University, Gubernatorial transition team, Sheriff's transition team, Worcester Fund, Downtown Economic Council, Central Mass Workforce Investment Board, **Cooperator** of the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and Bay State Bank, **founding member** of the Worcester Business Resource Alliance, the Chandler Business Association, the Worcester Minority Council and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Business Empowerment Center. Suffice it to say, I love Worcester and have worked to support the betterment of its existence and inclusion of all citizens. That being said, I personally feel, the powers at be, have always been inviting, but not totally inclusive, to the disenfranchised.

Today, I stand before you as Chief Development Officer of New Americans CDC. A newly created division of Centro, Inc. formerly, known as Centro Las Americas. I would like to make one (1) statement and two (2) requests. The Downtown Urban Revitalization Plan (URP) is a perfect example of the illusion of inclusion. The executive summary of the plan, itself is an oxymoron. In that, it uses many phrases that **"technically"** give the appearance of its consistence and compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 121B, as well as 760 Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 12.00. However, the plan eliminates the 600, 700, 800 and 900 blocks of the city's own Main Street, which **epitomizes** decadence and blight. We fondly call the area "Main Middle". What City develops a 20 year, \$100 million revitalization plan and excludes a major portion of its own Main Street? The revitalization plan uses terminology like: collaboration, synergy, working together, surrounding neighborhoods, bringing those neighborhoods together, chronic problem areas, stakeholders, residents, residential quality of life, developable land areas, severe economic hardships, and key corridors. All of which "Main Middle" is but, literally, it is red lined out of the "Urban" plan. Originated in the 1939 Federal Housing Act's authorities for slum clearance and construction of public housing in the nation's rapidly deteriorating inner cities, urban renewal was introduced to Worcester in the 1950s and 1960s. The urban renewal program invests the WRA, as a designated urban renewal agency, with certain powers to catalyze development within an urban renewal area. Using a combination of public and private funds, urban renewal plans establish local area goals and provide for public infrastructure investment and the public acquisition and disposition of certain properties in order to carry out the plan. Urban renewal powers include the power to determine what areas within its jurisdiction constitute decadent, substandard or blighted open areas, the power to acquire property through eminent domain and access to certain public funding sources.

As one voice of voiceless, I encourage you, as chairman of the WRA, to reconsider its final submission to include the entire designated area of NACDC (see attached) which I am sure will never happen but, at the very least include "Main Middle". Which is Main Street from Chandler/Madison to May/Hammond.

Over the years, the WRA has been involved in six urban renewal projects (soon to be seven) in the City of Worcester, including:

- Area D Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-15
- Elm Park Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-57
- Expressway Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-16
- New Salem Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-5-1
- Medical City Urban Renewal Project (formerly East Central Urban Renewal Plan) - Still Active
- Union Station Urban Renewal Revitalization Plan - Still Active
- Downtown Urban Revitalization Plan - Proposed

None of the seven (7) projects have included full community participation or “Main Middle”. I appeal to your sensitivity to the voiceless, former state representative, WRA chairman, and colleague, to hear the cry of the disenfranchised! The theatrics of the process and parading of the usual suspects in front of the media is great and follows the party line but, not totally inclusive.

My request are: one, please give careful consideration to my statements and include them in the public record. Two, strongly consider, adding another step to the process, where other members of the community can be specifically heard. At which point you will hear the need to connect “Main Middle” to the proposed URP.

Please notify me as soon as possible of the official dates and times of the May-June Planning Board and City Council meetings to review and approve the plan. We would like to share our thoughts and work in harmony with you, at the local level to have this URP go the full distance and not fall short of true Urban Renewal.

Yours for a better Worcester,

Robert L. Thomas