

## Section 2.3 Project Description

In Lawrence, Northern Essex Community College (NECC) and Lawrence General Hospital are two of the city's anchors driving economic development by doing what research shows--raising the education levels and health of local residents, which have in turn been shown to raise earnings. These powerful economic engines have helped the City of Lawrence combat deindustrialization and the suburbanization of retail by expanding their presence in downtown Lawrence. A prime example of this investment is the construction of the Ibrahim El Hefni Allied Health and Technology Center which will house the majority of the college's 17 health care associate degrees and certificates, including respiratory care, sleep technology, and nursing programs.

The MassWorks funded infrastructure will provide the important nexus from the new NECC health and technology center to the City's primary downtown street, Essex Street, and support economic development surrounding the growing urban campus in downtown Lawrence, Massachusetts, a city of more than 76,000 residents.

NECC has expanded its campus from its original 68,000 SF building to over 200,000 SF in (5) downtown sites at 45 and 52 Franklin, 414 and 420 Common, and 78 Amesbury Streets. The new Allied Health and Technology Center will open in January 2014 and renovation of 420 Common expands a Follett's bookstore, adds a dining operation and banking facility with new academic program space for Forensic Computer technology and ESL among others. The NECC Foundation, Inc. purchased the former Registry of Deeds building on Common St., demolished it and is preparing it for parking with street front beautification.

The City of Lawrence has supported this development by providing the Intown Mall site for the new Center of the NECC Lawrence campus, assisting with some of the demolition costs with a HUD grant, parking partnerships, and regular strategic planning meetings. The City has just received from Mass Development an area-wide planning grant that the City and NECC are using to refine its planning from the river to Haverhill Street.

The City proposes three related infrastructure sites in the downtown to support the growing campus and encourage economic development. This infrastructure work has been discussed in several studies including the 2008 Lawrence Canal District Revitalization Strategy by Mass Development; and has been identified by Mass Development as a Priority Development Institutional site.

In order of priority they are:

Site 1 - Renovate the Essex Street Connector to integrate the retail amenities to the NECC campus

Site 2 - Transform the Alley between Amesbury and Hampshire Streets into a campus walkway linking parking and the new Center.

Site 3 - Reconstruct the Alley from Hampshire Street to the intersecting parking lot including replacing fencing, delineating parking from the alley, fixing drainage problems; and repaving the parking lot shared by two of the college's new buildings/businesses.

Sites 1 and 2 are a T-shaped parcel adjoining the rear of the Allied Health and Technology Center. Until recently, the site was known as the InTown Mall, a failed 1970s urban renewal project which stood vacant and decayed for over (20) years until NECC made the strategic decision to locate its highly desirable health and technology programs at the site.

With funds from the MassWorks program the City of Lawrence intends to take advantage of this historic opportunity to reclaim a void in the public realm by creating spaces that link the 700 daily visitors to the Center to current and new retail amenities on Essex Street. The alleyway renovation will integrate student and faculty parking with campus facilities and adjoining businesses; provide safe, accessible walkways and gathering areas for students and residents; and include wall screening, lighting, landscaping, benches, and resurfacing.

To assure the readiness of this project upon approval of a MassWorks application we have expended Community Development Block Grant funds to have the surveys of the alleys completed and to hire an engineering firm to provide 25% plans.

The Allied Health and Technology Center will generate new jobs; address the need for health care professionals in the region; and create both temporary construction employment and permanent faculty and staff positions in Lawrence.

NECC and the City will support the improvements described in this application with a signage system integrating the college and the city, providing clear pathways, curb cuts/ADA compliance for safe public access, traffic calming and streetscape repair to sidewalks and trees.

While housing is not supported by this application, the City has supported and continues to support the development of housing in our community. Currently 2 important housing projects, Union Crossing Phase II (Duck Mill) -- 73 units, and Loft 550 Phase II (Arlington Mills) -- 62 units, have received City commitments of HOME funds and are under review with DHCD for LIHTC allocations. Loft 550 is located in a 40R District, and Union Crossing is located in the Reviviendo Smart Growth Overlay District. In the past 16 months we celebrated the openings of Union Crossing Phase I, 60 units, and Loft 550 Phase I, 75 units. Also, 46 units of housing in the Blakely Building, sold by the City for a dollar and one block from our infrastructure funding request, were developed in 2007.