

WELCOMETO

GREEN ISLAND!

Proud Home to Immigrants
Since 1858

A city is only as interesting as its history...



WELCOME TO GREEN ISLAND!

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From Canal to Railroads: How Changing



Path of the Canal marker, Kelley Square "Peanut"

Lock 48: "The Canal District"

The Blackstone Canal opened in 1828. It provided an easily accessible route that linked Worcester to nearby Providence and allowed a cheaper and more efficient transportation of goods. Irish-born contractor Tobias Boland purchased swampland along the planned route in 1826. He brought Irish immigrants to build the canal. They became the first residents of what we know today as Green Island.



Covering of the Blackstone Canal, C. 1890 | From The Collection Of Worcester Historical Museum

Infrastructure Shaped Green Island



Looking down Harding St. from Ashmont Ave.

Harding Street Today

The canal helped to put Worcester on the map. Boston investors wanted a connection to Worcester, too, and constructed a railroad linking the cities. By 1848, the success of the Worcester-Providence/Boston railroads had completely shut down the Blackstone Canal. The growing neighborhood was squeezed between the canal, Mill Brook, and new railroad. Many residents characterized it as an "island," giving the neighborhood its first name.



Canal marker at Quinsigamond Ave. & Olde Millbury St. at Brosnihan Sq.

Green Island Legacy

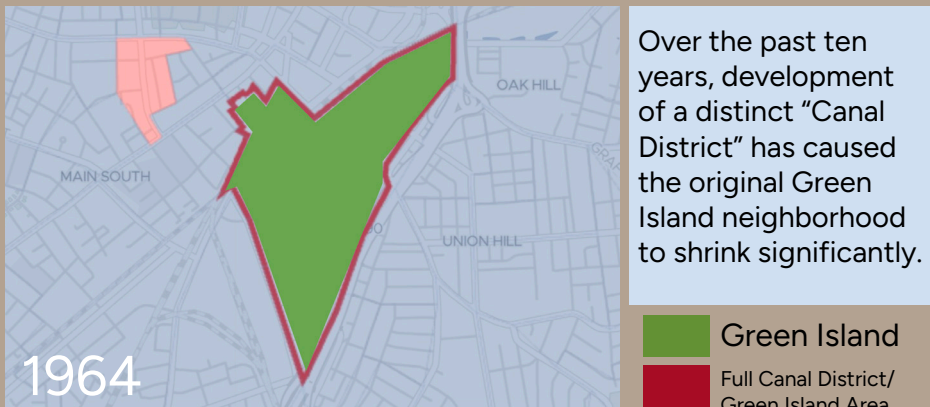
By the 1870s, the Blackstone Canal in Worcester was entirely covered. Today it sits underneath Harding Street. Railroads continue to dominate the neighborhood with their noise and tracks, while the canal exists underground and in the name the "Canal District."

Contrasting Identities

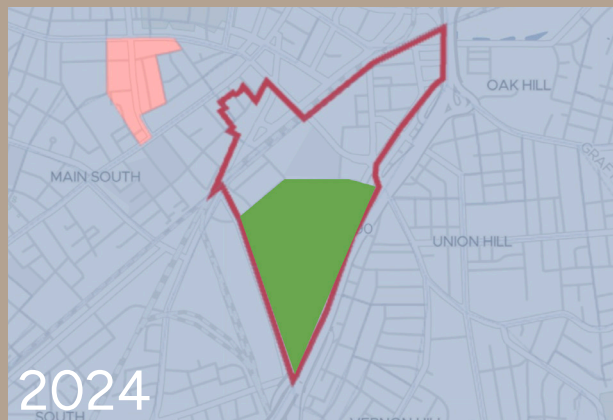
Cultural Reflection Through Naming

Green Island, a neighborhood that once included the area of today's "Canal District," has an industrial working-class history. In contrast, the Canal District, which has formed through recent revitalization efforts including Polar Park, boasts trendy restaurants and shops.

Green Island: A Shrinking Neighborhood



The northern area is now "the Canal District" and includes the Revington Apartments and new developments by Polar Park. The southern area is what remains of "Green Island" and includes historic workers' homes and Crompton Park.



Originally known as "The Island," the neighborhood sat between the Blackstone Canal and the Mill Brook. In the 1960s, the Green Island name came into widespread use due to Green Street's central location.

Green Island is a neighborhood of historic triple-deckers and workers cottages. Part of its cultural identity is a sense of community that has developed around its working-class lifestyle.



Developments in the Canal District, however, tend to be upscale projects generating a fresh environment that does not always cater to the neighborhood's working-class identity. The Canal District's gentrification threatens to push out long-time residents and businesses while attracting wealthier newcomers.

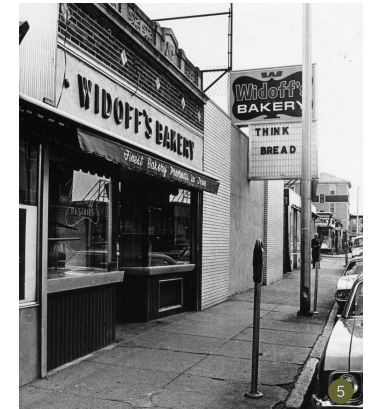
GREEN ISLAND'S EARLY IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES



The Irish were the first immigrants to settle in “the Island” and were soon followed by French Canadians. They began the first Catholic community here, despite local resistance from Worcester’s Protestant community. Masses were held outdoors until Christ Church was built in 1838. It later became St. John’s Church, which still stands today.



More waves of immigrants came to Green Island in the late 1800s and through the 1950s to work in the nearby factories and other trades. These included Poles, Lithuanians, and Eastern European Jews. Like newcomers to Worcester today, these earlier immigrants formed social clubs, shops, and churches to preserve—and share—their cultural traditions. They helped build Worcester and the rich diversity it enjoys today.



“Because they were industrious and valued religion and education their new life was very good—good for themselves and good for the country.”

—Lorraine Laurie
The Island that Became a Neighborhood

- 1 St. John's Church | 44 Temple Street
- 2 St. Casimir Church | 41 Providence St. | BUILT 1903-1916 | Shared by the Polish and Lithuanian communities. Polish service was at 9 am and the Lithuanian at 10:30 am. It is now a Pentecostal Church.

- 3 Brewery on Ellsworth St. | c. 1895 | Photo courtesy of P. Hobbs
- 4 Buyniski Drug Store | Millbury Street | FIRST OPENED 1911 | J. P. Buyniski was from Vilnius Lithuania and opened the first pharmacy in Green Island. Originally called Buyniski's Drug Store, it later moved to 98 Millbury Street and became Vernon Drug Store.
- 5 Widoff's Bakery | In the 1950s–70s, Widoff's Bakery was a favorite stop in the Jewish neighborhood on Water Street. Stores closed for the Jewish Sabbath (Friday evening–Saturday evening), but opened on Sunday mornings when people from all over would come to “nosh” (eat) and stroll.

Worcester's Rich Vietnamese Culture



Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA

The Vietnamese community in Worcester is one of the city's largest and most vibrant ethnic communities. 3% of Worcester's population are Vietnamese. This is the third-highest Vietnamese population of all Massachusetts cities.



Our Lady of Vilna Church. Vietnamese faith cultures exist across Worcester. A vibrant Vietnamese Catholic community is now centered at our Lady of Vilna Church on Sterling St.

Many Vietnamese first arrived in Worcester in the 1970s and 1980s, seeking refuge in the United States after the Vietnam War. They brought with them their rich cultural heritage, including traditions, language, and cuisine, which have since become a large part of Worcester's multicultural tapestry. Worcester is home to the Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA, the Worcester Senior Center, which caters to the Asian community, and Vietnamese restaurants. All help to preserve Vietnamese tradition and identity in the city.

Green Island: Vietnamese Cuisine



Vietnamese Cuisine Restaurant: 10 Milbury St. in Kelley Square

Vietnamese cuisine has made its mark in Worcester, with numerous Vietnamese restaurants and grocery stores scattered throughout the city. Pictured above is a popular Vietnamese restaurant in Green Island. The establishment is known for its Phò, a traditional Vietnamese noodle soup that is an integral part of Vietnamese culture. This restaurant allows for Vietnamese culture to be celebrated in Green Island by informing and attracting Worcester visitors and residents to Vietnamese cuisine.



Vietnamese Phò

The Current Story of The Latino Population in Green Island

The Latino community of Green Island is large and on the rise. With about 40% of the population being Latino, the community has had a great impact on the area. A survey done by Hilda Maldonado at the Green Island Neighborhood Center in 2023 showed that 63% of the people who come to the Center are Latino.



Latino churches on Millbury Street

As a Latina myself, I know how important it can be to find spaces like Latino churches where I can feel integrated into my community. On Millbury Street, I spotted three separate churches with signs in Spanish. These churches existing so close to one another suggests the concentration of Latinos here. The churches provide space for members of the community to gather as one.



138 Millbury Street

Above is a picture of El Dorado which is a Mexican restaurant on Millbury St. Restaurants like this one serve as a place for people of all backgrounds to enjoy aspects of Green Island's Latino culture.



290 Millbury St. Photo: Avanel Chang

The Polish Naturalization Club has existed since 1906 to help with immigration needs and employment, and English learning. Social events were also held there. The Club moved from Lafayette Street to its current location on Millbury Street. The Latino community has used the Polish club for different events including Salsa Worcester, which offers classes in different types of Latin dance styles. This is significant because the Polish community in Green Island has always been large, and now they are welcoming the Latino community into their space.

Green Island's African Community

IN 2021, GREEN ISLAND'S POPULATION WAS LISTED AS

6.31%
(1,645) AFRICAN.

Due to continued immigration, that number has likely increased. Countries represented include Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.



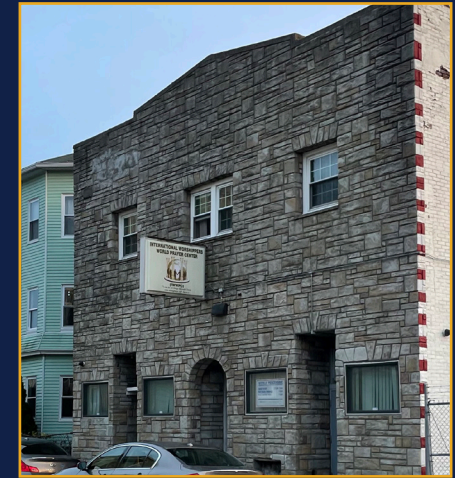
African women on Harding Street coming from the market.

The Green Island African community is well supported. The Massachusetts Organization Of African Descendants (MOAD) and African Community Education (ACE) are two large Worcester organizations that help create a close-knit community. ACE started in 2009 when refugee children fled from Liberia's civil war. ACE has supported children through tutoring and other cultural support.



Green Island is surrounded by African markets and restaurants that offer food familiar to their various cultures.

- Anokye Krom West African Restaurant 687 Millbury Street. Grand Opening
- Image: Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.



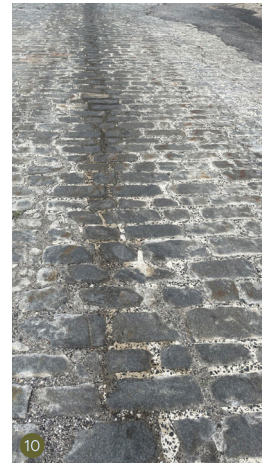
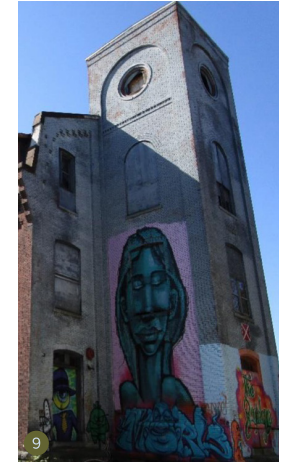
International Worshippers World Prayer Center (IWWPC), 49 Lafayette Street (above right). Previously this was the Polish National Alliance Hall. There was a social club on the first floor. An award-winning Fife, Drum and Bugle corps met on the second floor. Today it is an African Evangelical Church. In Green Island, one wave of immigrants has created space for the next.

Resouces in the African Community:

- International Worshippers World Prayer Center Inc. 49 Lafayette St
- Joyful Way, 47 Blackstone River Rd
- Ankoye Krom, 687 Millbury St
- Monrovia Think African Market, 78 Waverly St
- African Community Education, 51 Gage St
- Massachusetts Organization Of African Descendants, 455 Main St.
- Danco African Market, 785 Main St
- Adom Market, 1073 A Main St

HISTORIC GREEN ISLAND

Workers began to live in this area south of the Blackstone Canal in about 1858. These historic homes and other elements that remain from the Island's first era help us to appreciate our neighborhood's roots.



- 1 28 Ellsworth St. | BUILT 1868
- 2 14 Langdon St. | BUILT 1865
- 3 Formerly Peter Doyle Saloon, 156 Millbury St. | BUILT 1879
- 4 20 Millbury St. | BUILT 1888
- 5 27 Ellsworth | BUILT 1870
- 6 171 Washington St. | BUILT 1860

- 7 86 Lafayette St. | BUILT 1860
- 8 10 Lunelle St. | BUILT 1858
- 9 Former Sargent Card Clothing Factory, Sargent St. (MACRIS) | BUILT 1865
- 10 Cobblestones on Sargent St.
- 11 288 Harding St. | BUILT 1865
- 12 A Surviving Gaslight, Langdon St.



Endicott St. Photo: Avaneil Chang

Triple-Deckers: The Backbone of the Green Island Neighborhood

Triple-decker homes are a defining aspect of the Green Island neighborhood. They helped establish its tightly-knit ethnic communities and served as homes for its hardworking families.

- ▶ Triple-deckers allowed immigrants to purchase a home: owners could live on one floor and rent out the other floors to help pay their mortgage.
- ▶ Triple-deckers allowed immigrant families to live amongst each other and develop support groups that were crucial during their integration into the U.S.

“Neighborhood kids used to yell out their bedroom windows to talk to each other.”

—Triple-decker resident Joseph Volpe



Harding St. Photo: Avaneil Chang

- ▶ Triple-deckers first served as homes for Irish, French-Canadian, and Eastern European immigrants.

- ▶ Today, people from nations in South America, Africa, and Asia also reside in Green Island’s triple-deckers.

“The triple-decker really fits into my lifestyle; it’s a part of the whole community and how I live.”

—Triple-decker resident Stephen DiRado



Triple-deckers on rotary at Olde Millbury St. Photo: Avaneil Chang

“Triple-deckers ‘made the neighborhood a neighborhood.’”

—Lorraine Laurie

Concerns Surrounding Triple-Deckers and Green Island Today:

- ▶ Dwindling sense of community
- ▶ Loss of the neighborhood’s tightly-knit ethnic enclaves
- ▶ Gentrification from the nearby Canal District



Corner of Ashmont Ave. and Harding St. Photo: Avaneil Chang

Will the hardworking and diverse character these triple-decker homes foster be lost?

**Keep Green Island a neighborhood for people of modest means!
Help us create a friendly Green neighborhood!**

CROMPTON PARK

The “Jewel of Green Island”

In the 1870s, immigrants living here demanded a park to have more space to relax and play. In 1888, the City purchased 12.72 acres of land to make Crompton Park. Today’s park is 15 acres.

People have always loved this park. In the early years, a swimming hole doubled as a skating pond in the winter. The baseball fields were so popular people complained you had to spend the night in the park to be sure to have a field for the next day.

In the summer, there were bonfires and fireworks and movies shown outdoors. In winter, children sled down the hill, rumored to be made from the dirt removed to dig basements for three-deckers.

Today, that spirit continues:

- Talented players flock to the basketball courts, named for legend (and Holy Cross graduate) Bob Cousy, who often played there
- Skateboarders ride the bowls, rails, hips, and quarter pipes pivoting like dancers as they zip by
- Children whoosh by on the playground’s swings and slides
- In summer the sparkling pool is filled with happy swimmers



1 Bob Cousy Basketball Courts, Crompton Park

2 The Skate Park replaced Worcside DIY Park, demolished by the City in 2018.

3 Children Wading in Crompton Park Fountain, c. 1900. Former Gas Works (now WRTA building) in background. FROM THE COLLECTION OF WORCESTER HISTORICAL MUSEUM, WORCESTER, MA

4 Kendrick baseball field at Crompton Park, c. 1900
FROM THE COLLECTION OF WORCESTER HISTORICAL MUSEUM, WORCESTER, MA

IN MEMORY OF

LORRAINE LAURIE

1950
—
2024

The “Mayor of Green Island”

In March 2024 Green Island lost its most dedicated neighborhood activist, Lorraine Laurie. Her motto was *“hope in action!”*

Lorraine led the Green Island Neighborhood Residents Group and worked closely with the City’s Crime Watch Program. She grew up in Worcester and worked at the Green Island Community Development Center, and later at the Village of Ascension Heights Home for Seniors.

“Hard work, determination, ethnic pride, and love of God and neighborhood—that’s what made ‘The Island’ a neighborhood. It is the secret of the past. It will be the key to the future.”

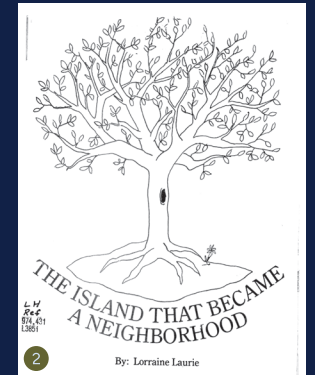
—Lorraine Laurie

1 Lorraine loved the Green Island Neighborhood Center—a “beacon for the community” | D. Vazquez photo
2 Lorraine’s informative history of Green Island. Published 1984



“I’d pick her up for a meeting We would always start with a 20-minute tour of Green Island, and finish with a 20-minute tour. I would drive her up and down the streets. She’d say “Take me to Scott and Lafayette Streets. Let’s see if that stop sign is still there. Everything in this neighborhood, no matter how small, she loved.”

—Officer Sean Lovely, Worcester Police Department and Green Island Community Partner



Lorraine wanted more trees, a safe affordable neighborhood and strong community. She wanted a full bank, pharmacy, and supermarket. May others continue her work!

“Every neighborhood should have a Lorraine Laurie.”

— Dottie Hargrove

Millbury Street: The Center of Green Island

Millbury Street stores represent old and new generations of Green Island. These images represent the older generations of immigrants of the neighborhood: the Irish, Polish, Lithuanian, and French-Canadian communities. As Green Island historian Lorraine Laurie wrote, "Millbury Street was booming with various ethnic shops." That is still true today.

Tom's Deli and Golemo's Market



52 Millbury Street, 2024



43 Millbury Street, 2024

Tom's Deli and Golemo's Market have provided Worcester residents with Polish food for decades. People come from all over to enjoy shopping here for pierogi (meat and cheese dumplings) and specialty items from the shelves. Polish is often spoken here.

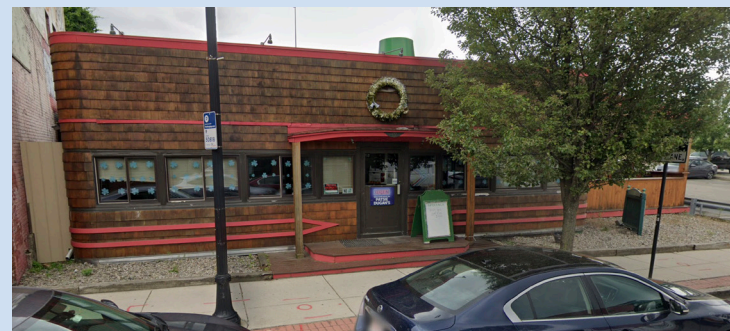
The Evolution of 49 Millbury Street

Shown below is the contrast between the past and the present of 49 Millbury Street. Messier's Diner, established in 1915 by French-Canadian Joe Messier, was one of Worcester's well known diners. Many residents remember it being the most popular diner in Worcester. Today, 49 Millbury Street is occupied by Patsie Dugan's, an Irish pub, which shows the Irish immigrant history in Green Island.



49 Millbury Street, c. 1940

From the Collection of the Worcester Historical Museum



49 Millbury Street, 2024

Wyman-Gordon

A World-Renowned Factory in the Heart of Green Island



Wyman-Gordon Entrance, Gold & Hermon Sts.



Worker at Wyman-Gordon foundry press (from Gabis, Wyman-Gordon in Worcester, 1985)

Wyman-Gordon is a metal manufacturing company established in Worcester in 1883. Over time they have forged metals to manufacture bicycle parts, railroad parts, crankshafts, plane engines during WW2, jet engines, and more. They were pioneers in working with Titanium and gained prominence in the aerospace industry. Worcester's homegrown business became world-renowned.

Wyman-Gordon provided jobs for all of Worcester residents and particularly for those in Green Island, who, living so close, enjoyed walking to work. The factory was surrounded by Green Island's densely settled neighborhood of houses. Residents there remember what it was like to live with the noises from the foundry's heavy vibrations, and the "funny odor" emitted by the plant. "You could stand there on Gold Street and look into the open doors of the foundry and see the huge flames burning 24/7," one neighbor recalls. Another remembers "my mother taught me to place the glasses in the kitchen cabinet so they would not clink together from the vibrations the factory caused."

A Major Landholder in the Heart of Green Island



Wyman-Gordon Vacant Lot, Lunelle St.

During the 1960s, Wyman-Gordon began to purchase houses in the surrounding area with plans to expand. It tore down the homes creating large stretches of empty land surrounded by fences with barbed wire. The company in fact did not expand here and blocks that were bought out, once full of families and homes, have sat vacant for years. Having so many homes gone dampened the strong sense of community in the neighborhood. These vacant lots are gradually being bought up by developers today.

TEARDOWN:

The Heart of Lamartine Street

Residents Remember the Police Station



Green Island has long been a close-knit community. This included the neighborhood police who served at this station. One resident recalls, “I once stepped on glass. My mother took me immediately to the police station and they drove us to the hospital. This was the era of ‘Officer Friendly’—the officers were members of our community!”

In 2023, the police station was demolished. It had been there since 1888. A community member states, “It was with heavy hearts that we saw this well-loved, iconic structure gone. It was a strong landmark, with long-term meaning to our community.”

39 Lamartine Street is now owned by the developer Polar Views LLC.

Save 10 Grosvenor Street!



10 Grosvenor Street, located directly across from the demolished police station, has also been bought by Polar Views LLC. While both properties could be sites for a large development, Green Island Resident Group, Inc. is working to ensure that such sites contribute to and fit into the existing community.

Neighbors see this as a perfect place for a green space that the neighborhood much needs: “Use the yard for an urban garden and the house as a learning center for people/children to explore growing their own food and learning about gardening.” Adding green space here would also help address the problem that the neighborhood is a “heat island” and thus hotter than the rest of the city.

- 1 39 Lamartine Street Police Station (built 1888) with Lamartine Street School (built 1911) in the back and Fire Station on the left. *Worcester Telegram Gazette Photo*, c. 1940
- 2 The site of the demolished 39 Lamartine Street Police Station with Lamartine Street School in background. 2024
- 3 10 Grosvenor Street with yard on the side. 2024

The Change of Housing Prices

In Green Island

In recent years developers have flooded to Green Island to renovate homes in the neighborhood. The combination of an increase in the need for housing and the new renovations has increased prices. Triple-deckers are particularly attractive to real estate developers because three units can be rented within one home. The two houses below show this change and the potential for large scale investments in Green Island. Developers and investors are willing to pay higher than market value for triple-deckers, which means they have to get high rents for each unit to pay their mortgage and make a profit.

Triple-deckers in disrepair, like this one, can attract developers by being more affordable. After putting a lot of money into renovations, developers have to charge high rents to recover their costs. This development usually increases the price of rents in the surrounding area, making these homes unaffordable to vulnerable residents and taking away from the sense of community in the neighborhood.



23 Endicott Street

PURCHASED	In 2003 for \$275,000
IMPROVEMENTS MADE	\$468,300
2024 ESTIMATED VALUE	\$658,900
2024 ESTIMATED RENT	\$3,377 for 3 bedroom apartment
REDFIN WEBSITE DESCRIPTION OF HOUSE	"Great money maker near 290 with 3-4 bedrooms each floor. Many interior updates on 3 rd floor-1 st & 2 nd floors need work."



15 Endicott Street

PURCHASED	In 2023 for \$250,000
IMPROVEMENTS MADE	\$362,100
2024 ESTIMATED VALUE	\$424,600
2024 ESTIMATED RENT	\$2,400 for 3 bedroom apartment

#3

Forbes Magazine listed Worcester as the third "most overpriced housing market in the US" in 2023 with 76.1% of houses selling above the asking price.

Rising Rents in Green Island

“Our community is bracing itself for full blown gentrification, which will eventually occur.”
—Green Island Resident

The residents of Green Island have witnessed a tremendous increase in property values. According to one report, rents in Worcester have increased 80% from 2015 to 2022. The rent prices shown, give examples of how costs have increased in Green Island.



19 Endicott Street

- Sold for \$407,100 in 2020
- Estimated value in 2024: \$675,100
- Rent 3 bedroom apartment in 2024: \$1,990

It is suggested that one should spend no more than 30% of their income on housing. The median income of the average family living in Green Island is \$30,096. This means that a family should spend about \$9,029 a year or \$753 a month on rent or housing payments - far below the rents shown here.

New apartments like The Carlson and The Revington bring new income to the neighborhood but also drive up the rents for the area.

Worcester Business Journal reports that “since 2021 money has flowed into the Canal District, as property values have risen at nearly double the rate of Worcester overall and the number of property sales have spiked” (3/18/24).



The Carlson
135 Millbury Street

- Rent (2024): \$2,200/month for a two bedroom apartment



The Revington
1 Green Island Boulevard

- Rent (2024): \$3,960/month for a three bedroom apartment

Housing costs boosted by Polar Park related developments are impacting Green Island. Former Worcester Councilor Dr. Sarai Rivera, who represented Green Island, states that she has “already seen people start to move out.”

Keeping Green Island Affordable

Green Island residents have the chance to improve their properties and stay

Now is the time for Green Island residents interested in enhancing their homes! Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) have allocated \$3 million of the city's funds to help with home repairs for residents of Green Island. Residents are taking advantage of this opportunity, contributing to the preservation of Green Island's current community. These grants can help people stay in their homes as local real estate prices rise.



4 Meade St. received a CDBG Grant



17 Lodi St. received a CDBG Grant

- The regulations of the grant allow residents to improve their homes (such as lead abatement, new windows, and roofs).
- The house cannot be sold for 5 years after the house is improved (or after 10 years if you own but do not live in the house).
- After the 5 or 10-year wait period, the house can be sold but must be for an affordable (below market rate) price.
- This can help keep the community and its families together.

How to apply:

Contact the Economic Development branch of City Hall (4th Floor) for more information.

These grants became available to help sustain current Green Island homes and neighborhood identity.



Creating a

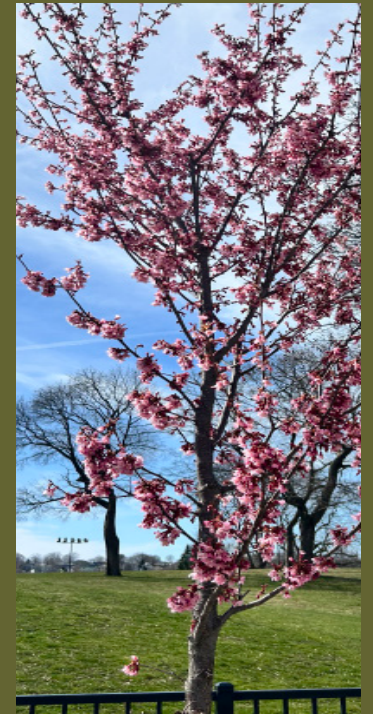
More trees can drastically reduce hot summers in Green Island!



Put the *Green* back in Green Island!

Canopy for the Community

Green Island is an Urban Heat Island that can get up to 17 degrees hotter than the rest of Worcester in the summer. Its problems with heat and flooding designate it, and much of the city, as an "Environmental Justice area." Worcester can help fix these issues with funding toward the planting of trees, which help to lower temperatures by providing shade and decrease flooding by absorbing water. Funds could also go to residents to help them take care of the trees on their properties.



Ward Street near Endicott

However, the city has lots of work to do. Funds must be provided and trees must be planted to grow a large enough canopy to cover Green Island. With enough work, temperatures will decrease as the trees grow.

Why Does Green Island Flood?



Maintenance hole on Harding St. leading to Worcester's combined sewer system

Sitting at the lowest ground in Worcester, and between the buried Mill Brook and the Blackstone Canal (now under Harding Street), Green Island has been prone to flooding for generations. Excess rainfall causes storm drains to overflow and flood the neighborhood.

In the Great Flood of 1955, the water rose five feet higher than ever seen before. Residents found their streets under water and their homes and belongings destroyed. More recently, a neighbor recalls "water up to our thighs in the basement." In 2016, a powerful storm dropped a total of 8.87 inches, devastating the Green Island Neighborhood Center. It was almost three years before this critical center of neighborhood support was able to reopen.



Mill Brook Conduit, a tunnel for water installed in 2007, runs beneath this rotary on Olde Millbury St.



Water flows over Southbridge St. during the Great Flood of 1955, Holy Cross Archives

What is "Combined Sewer Overflow"?

As superstorms become more frequent, concern about the city's sewer system rises. Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) is a serious health concern for residents. When the storm drains cannot keep up with the extreme rainfall, the water from the combined sewer system flows into the streets. The health concern comes from the term "combined." The storm drains are connected to the sewers where the overflow may cause raw sewage to flow into the streets.

Efforts taken to combat flooding

1. \$75 million flood control project in 1985
2. \$15 million extension of the Mill Brook Conduit in 2007
3. \$1.25 million study examining the city's sewer systems in 2017

Join us!

LET'S DO REVITALIZATION RIGHT
DEVELOPMENT
WITHOUT **DISPLACEMENT!**

*Keep Green Island a
Neighborhood for Everyone!*



For more information:
cromptonprk.holycross.edu



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FOR LIBERAL ARTS IN THE WORLD



Scholarship in Action
AT HOLY CROSS

Produced by first-year Montserrat seminar Worcester Stories: Green Island
Spring 2024 in partnership with the Green Island Residents Group, Inc.