

Meet Indy's next Fountain Square



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A broad coalition of city leaders, nonprofits and power brokers targets three Indy neighborhoods for transformation.



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(Photo: Jenna Watson/IndyStar)

Mass Ave. Broad Ripple. Fountain Square.

How about Englewood Village, River West and Maple Crossing?

The latter three aren't exactly household names — today, you won't even find them on a map of Indianapolis — but a broad coalition of city leaders, nonprofits and power brokers thinks they can make that change over the next four years.

Close to 500 people were in attendance Tuesday at School 43, where project leaders kicked off the Great Places 2020 initiative, unveiling the first three target locations.

The idea is simple: Combining public-sector dollars, the city's wide array of nonprofits, and major financial institutions and employers, Indy has resources that can effect neighborhood-level change. But across Marion County's 403 square miles, these resources are typically spread too thin to make a visible difference.

But if they all were brought to bear on a single intersection in an all-out blitz? Area leaders, from city officials to the Indy Chamber, the United Way of Central Indiana and others, think it could be transformative.

More than 50 partner organizations have already committed \$84 million to the cause, led by LISC, a national community development organization that on Tuesday announced it would pony up \$50 million. Mayor Joe Hogsett, too, pledged to commit city staff and resources to help support those private-sector investments.

"It's essentially the Fountain Square strategy — think of the quarter-mile radius around an intersection and all of the things that can happen there to make it really vibrant, walkable, thriving," Tedd Grain, deputy director of LISC Indianapolis, said in an interview.

'GREAT PLACES' AREAS

On Tuesday, area leaders unveiled the first three of six intersections identified in the Great Places 2020 initiative, a plan to revitalize local neighborhoods using public and private resources. The first three areas are shown below:



SOURCE: LISC Indianapolis

STEPHEN J. BEARD / THE STAR

LISC and its partners have been working for close to three years on the concept, emboldened by the success of places such as Fountain Square and,

more recently, the Super Bowl Legacy project on the east side, which has revitalized the area's housing stock.

Strategically, it dovetails with the city's broader challenge. In an era when the city's fiscal health increasingly depends on income tax revenue and population growth, how do you persuade people to live here and not in the suburbs? Why Indianapolis and not Chicago, Denver or Nashville, Tenn.?

"In 1950 in Center Township, which is where most of these Great Places are located currently, we had 350,000 people living in Center Township," Grain said. "And currently, we have 144,000 people."

The impacts are far-reaching: There's less tax money to pay for city services, and there are higher concentrations of crime and poverty. Nearby schools have suffered a similar decline, making it that much harder for subsequent generations to escape their surroundings.



Indianapolis artist Stefan Eicher tells passers-by about plans to break a world record in Tarkington Park for most sparklers lit at one time. Eicher attended a Great Places 2020 unveiling event Tuesday, May 10, 2016, at James Whitcomb Riley School 43 in Indianapolis. (Photo: Jenna Watson/IndyStar)

Meanwhile, even as Americans are increasingly clamoring for an urban lifestyle, only a handful of places in Indianapolis can offer it affordably. And, sometimes, crime and underachieving schools have to be accepted as a trade-off.

The idea came from the [Project for Public Spaces](http://www.pps.org/) (<http://www.pps.org/>), a national group focused on planning, design and education issues in urban neighborhoods. PPS says a great city needs 10 great places, and each of those needs 10 great things to do, to make them attractive places to live.

"And when we looked around, we saw that, well, we don't really have 10 great places yet in Indianapolis," Grain said. "Maybe Fountain Square, Mass Ave., Broad Ripple, Irvington, maybe Downtown proper. So we maybe have four or five right now."

"A rising tide lifts all boats, and that's what Great Places 2020 is all about," Hogsett said. "It's not enough to have only one great neighborhood in a city. We need to provide every single resident in Indianapolis with close-to-home opportunities."

By 2020 — the city's bicentennial — LISC and its partners hope to bring six new Great Places into the fold. They're still deciding on the final three, but the first neighborhoods were chosen in part because of their potential, and in part on some evidence of market growth already underway.

Here's a quick introduction to the first three "great places" and their new names, as chosen by nearby neighborhoods:

Englewood Village

This east-side Great Place is centered at Washington and Oxford streets, a stone's throw from the vacant, 125,000-square-foot Mallory building.

Today, the area is extremely poor: The median household income is \$21,990, barely half of the \$40,136 of Marion County as a whole.

But there are bright spots: There are a handful of blocks with a stable, growing base of homeowners. New developments such as the Oxford Place senior living center and Oxford Flats apartment building promise even more residents. The city is renovating the East Washington Branch Library and has singled out a number of brownfields for possible redevelopment.

Plus, the Washington Street corridor has long been seen as an area ripe for redevelopment between Irvington and Downtown. Efforts are already well underway in east-side neighborhoods such as St. Clair Place, and homes have been selling at market rates for years in Holy Cross.

Planners envision mixed-use residential as a piece of the puzzle, but success in the area may hinge on employment. They hope food production — think urban farming and groceries — can replace the industrial jobs that once served as the area's lifeblood. The Mallory building could be redeveloped for a number of uses, possibly a major business or academic tenant with a first-floor retail component. Across the street, they want to create a public lawn and pavilion for community events.

River West

Located just west of the White River at Michigan Street and King Avenue, River West has a number of built-in advantages that have long made it attractive to city planners.

It's close to major employers such as Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. The abandoned B&O rail bed is a pitch-perfect rails-to-trails project that could connect the neighborhood to the Cultural Trail and the Monon Trail.

Meanwhile, the White River represents a tantalizing amenity in theory, but in practice it has served as more of a barrier separating Downtown from the

impoverished urban core.

Today, the area is plagued by abandonment. About 30 percent of homes are vacant, more than twice the countywide rate. Household income here is better than in Englewood, but the typical family still makes poverty wages; median income is \$26,719.

Planners envision a pedestrian- and bike-friendly neighborhood connected to Downtown via bridge improvements. And they hope facade improvements and other initiatives can revitalize Michigan Street as a potential retail corridor.

Maple Crossing

There's no doubt this Great Place, at 38th and Illinois streets, faces a troubled present.

One in three homes is vacant. The homicide rate is more than 300 percent higher than the citywide average. The average household income is \$23,789.

But its future could be bright. It's not as if it's located in a wasteland. Within a 2-mile radius, you have the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Butler University, The Children's Museum, Crown Hill Cemetery and the State Fairgrounds.

The city is investing \$5 million in Tarkington Park, providing a major amenity within the quarter-mile focus area. And planners have high hopes for what it could become with the right vision from area partners and arts organizations.

Surrounding the park, planners envision mixed-use commercial development, with office, retail and mixed-income housing. And they see working with Indianapolis Public Schools leaders to improve School 43 as a top priority for the neighborhood.

On the transportation side, the area stands to benefit greatly if city voters approve the mass transit referendum this November. It's located along the Red Line, the first of three bus rapid transit lines to Downtown.

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