

SWOT Analysis

SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and the analysis describes the current conditions of the Upper Congress Street Corridor. This analysis indicates the area's assets (Strengths), points of limitation (Weaknesses), potentialities for enhancement (Opportunities), and possible perils (Threats). The analysis provides a synopsis of the themes that will need to be addressed, as well as an outline of the probable areas of improvement required to initiate and implement a successful economic development plan for the neighborhood.

This area has a rich and colorful history that grew from the mills and factories powered by the Poesten Kill Creek. The people who lived here formed and nurtured the neighborhood's development through their own culture, beliefs and economic needs. One can still appreciate much of the character of that past in the style and placement of many of the extant buildings, which are the touchstone for future growth and the clearest indication of its former grandeur.

One of the neighborhood's chief strengths is Prospect Park, a beautiful tract of land that is under-utilized and stigmatized as unsafe. As the park originally helped to fuel Mount Ida's shift from an industrial to a service economy in the early 1900s, so it might again serve as an economic and cultural catalyst for the area's renaissance. The campuses of both Emma Willard and RPI, each within walking distance, could be excellent sources of economic increase. Attracting these students into the area could have a significant economic impact to the local businesses. A revitalized Prospect Park and development of an overlook at the Poesten Kill Gorge can significantly increase pedestrian traffic along Congress Street and potentially benefit existing businesses.

The Upper Congress Street DOT project could have a positive effect on the streetscape and its attendant safety issues. There is a heavy volume of traffic on Congress Street (10,000 vehicles a day), which could be tapped as an economic resource to stimulate development of additional shops and restaurants. If better access were provided to the gorge itself, residents and visitors could more easily appreciate its beauty.

Several weaknesses and threats have been identified which will affect the area's potential revitalization. Due to the rock outcroppings and some steep grades that help to give the area its unique natural qualities, there is limited space for parking. Apart from the churches that service the area, there are few gathering places such as restaurants or theaters. Many of the buildings have been altered and/or are in need of renovation and maintenance. It is an inconvenience and a safety hazard that many people need to cross Congress Street in front of the AAA Building, as the barricade on the north side of the street makes the crossing hazardous. The busy intersection where Pawling Avenue meets Congress is potentially dangerous for both pedestrians and motorists. The neighborhood

certainly needs a strong community organization that can work to seize and pursue opportunities and correct and/or lessen the weaknesses and threats.

Below is the SWOT analysis delineated by category referencing the concerns mentioned above as well as other conditions along the Upper Congress Street Corridor.

Strengths:

- Strong historical background
- Good inventory of architecturally appealing buildings
- Opening of the view of the Poestenkill gorge between the Ascension Church and the Cookie Factory and potential access along the south side of the corridor
- Business/retail district at Fourteenth and Congress Streets
- Prospect Park to the east
- High volume of traffic
- RPI and Emma Willard campuses within walking distance of area

Weaknesses:

- Break in the continuity of Upper Congress Street around the AAA Building and the Cookie Factory with large gaps between buildings
- Lack of a warm sense of community and neighborhood connectivity
- Shortage of parking spaces
- Few cultural amenities, restaurants, etc.
- No strong neighborhood organization
- City's zoning code may be detrimental to development as it is not geared toward urban planning
- Some of the building stock needs renovation and maintenance

Opportunities:

- Business district at Fourteenth and Congress is an established retail zone and could provide impetus for future commercial development along the corridor
- Possible parking areas in the empty lots along Walnut Street
- More attractive Gateway entrance to Prospect Park is possible
- Area around AAA property and Cookie Factory is likely a prime area for redevelopment to utilize as a gorge attraction
- Possibility of accessing a view of the gorge easily and safely along the south side of Congress Street
- Attractive Ascension Church (recently closed) could be used for a theater, restaurant, etc. to help revitalize the neighborhood
- Opportunity for leasing parking space from the Community Church when the church is not in use
- RPI and Emma Willard campuses offer the opportunity to attract a large, young population.
- Potential for traffic calming, streetscaping and safe pedestrian crossings with the new DOT project

Threats:

- A high percentage of buildings are absentee owners, less than 25% of the buildings are owner occupied
- Potential gorge viewing area is a possible safety hazard.
- Many traditional buildings have been altered and/or have fallen into disrepair
- Lack of commercial development that serves neighborhood needs
- There are several empty lots and abandon buildings that breakup the continuity of the community