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There are alternatives to eminent domain abuse:

The use of eminent domain for private development is often detrimental to sustainable, long-term community revitalization and economic growth. There are many ways in which cities and developers can encourage stable growth, attract private enterprise and facilitate infrastructure improvements to generate tax revenue and jobs—none of which require forcibly transferring private property from one person to another.

The community members who have united to form Stand with Southern Garfield are incredibly engaged in their community. Despite personal and professional obligations, they have been fighting to protect their homes and businesses for months, raising awareness and appearing at city meetings to voice their concerns, opinions, and emphasize alternative approaches. They see a myriad of opportunities to work together with the city and grow Garfield from the ground up.

When community members know that the city is on their side, working collaboratively with them rather than in opposition, they invest time, resources and energy on their own, in more imaginative, authentic and impactful ways. Conversely, when communities are threatened by condemnation for private development, neighborhoods stagnate and uncertainty paralyzes action and growth.

Unlike condemnation for private development, alternatives require officials to be immersed and invested in their local communities. Below we outline strategies the city could employ in collaboration with residents and business owners. Recognizing long-time community members and historic structures as the city's greatest assets will continue to make Garfield an even better place for everyone.



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Open a Dialogue

Residents, small business owners and property owners must be part of an open, transparent and collaborative process with elected officials, area service providers and other community stakeholders. The city must initiate a neighborhood planning process whereby all residents, city leaders and other community stakeholders have an opportunity to discuss and work to form a shared vision for southern Garfield.

Gather Information

City officials and Stand with Southern Garfield should engage and communicate to better understand the needs and goals of the neighborhood. Residents and small business owners know their neighborhood intimately and can help with efforts such as circulating neighborhood surveys, identifying problem properties and assessing safety concerns and neighborhood assets. Stand with Southern Garfield strives to be a partner with the city, not an adversary.

Partner with Stand with Southern Garfield

Stand with Southern Garfield (SSG) can serve as a liaison between residents and the city to make improvements to Garfield's neighborhoods. SSG can seek out community-minded corporate leaders, and work with innovative business, non-profit organizations, lenders and developers.

Coordinated Beautification

Coordinated beautification efforts would encourage property owners across the city to get together and focus on improvements through facilitating the disposal of trash, painting, siding, mending fences, yard work, etc. SSG could help facilitate implementation through logistical coordination, promotion and by holding fundraisers to raise money for tools and items that could be made available for free to residents. This may be done in collaboration with local drug abuse prevention groups which benefit from community interaction and fundraising efforts.

Funding for Façade Improvements

Small grants and zero or low-interest loans are available for façade improvements from historic preservation trusts and financial institutions to preserve and enhance historic buildings like the former Passaic Street post office and Somerset's Quonset Hut.

Simple Streetscaping

City officials should take ownership of the Passaic Station trestle restoration and examine its integrity despite NJ Transit hurdles. The city can also install more street-side receptacles, add pavers and aesthetic style to sidewalks, planters for lamp posts and landscaping for open spaces. The images used on the River to Rail site highlight the importance of this as the changes in their conceptual imagery are mainly simple streetscaping improvements.



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Engage “Main Street America”

Main Street Programs restore and revitalize neighborhood business districts across America. By focusing on local business and encouraging community accountability, Main Street Programs empower residents. The Main Street Programs approach works toward revitalizing communities while promoting community values and respecting private ownership. Their unique approach encourages economic development within the context of historical preservation. The National Trust Main Street Center offers a comprehensive commercial district revitalization strategy that has been widely successful in towns and cities nationwide. Interested cities can apply for Main Street consideration and potentially receive technical support from the Center.

SSG forms Neighborhood Watch

Stand with Southern Garfield can strengthen its relationship with local police and code enforcement officials to collaborate on addressing legitimate safety and quality of life concerns.

SSG forms Business Improvement Coalition

Commonly used to build an entrepreneur-sponsored effort to long-term growth, business coalitions can drastically empower neighborhoods to come together for community development, set community standards and keep best practices.

Process Streamlining

Cities across the country have achieved enormous success and economic growth by making it easier for property owners to revitalize their communities through strategies like:

- *Relaxed or expedited permitting.* The city may aid private development projects by quickly processing the necessary entitlements and building permits. If a lengthy process can be shortened, the prospect of working ahead of plan can make a development project very attractive.
- *Reduced fees and taxes.* The city can also reduce the cost of development fee applications, processing fees and offer targeted tax abatements for façade renovation. Reducing these costs will ease development financing and free up cash for ground-up beautification.
- *Reduced red tape.* Easing bureaucratic processes encourages development because lengthy and costly business processes deter already-busy property owners.
- *Increased zoning flexibility.* Overlay Zones sometimes called “Opportunity Zones” add additional desirable uses to an area, increasing opportunities and raising property values, while holding future landowners to the standards of the second zoning designation.

Allow Time for Sustainable Growth

There is no quick fix or silver bullet to address the challenges faced by cities across the country, but the urban renewal approaches of the 1950s and 60s destroyed countless communities. Communities need the shared history and character of long-time members and neighborhood structures to continue to thrive. A more incremental and holistic approach has been proven to work time and time again and is needed in Garfield. Success depends on an effective partnership between the city and property owners.