

CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE SMALL BUSINESS INCUBATOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

FINAL REPORT
JULY 2025



The following report includes the comprehensive findings of the feasibility study conducted by New Venture Advisors (NVA) between April 2024 and July 2025. The study was conducted in partnership with the City of East Providence's Planning and Economic Development Department and was supported by grant funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).



New Venture Advisors is a consulting firm that specializes in food system planning and infrastructure development. Since 2009, NVA has helped more than one hundred communities across North America identify strategies to develop food systems, food enterprises, and food policies that are good for farmers, food entrepreneurs, consumers, and the intermediaries that connect them.



The City of East Providence's Department of Planning and Economic Development oversees land use planning, development project review, community development activities, economic development, administration of federal and state grant programs, housing, and other planning related activities.

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Oldham School Incubator Facility Feasibility Study - Executive Summary

Project Background

In December 2023, after receiving funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the City of East Providence sought a consultant to conduct a feasibility study on converting the former municipal school, Oldham Elementary School, into a small business incubator.

The decision to fund and conduct a feasibility study was based on preliminary recommendations from a 2022–23 revitalization assessment by Roger Williams University and GrowSmart RI (in partnership with the City of East Providence), which recognized the need to find alternative uses for the Oldham school site as part of a Riverside redevelopment plan. The team suggested repurposing the facility as a specialized food and/or arts-focused business incubation space.

The City, after completing a preliminary needs assessment, issued an RFP in the fall of 2023 for development proposals to purchase, lease, or redevelop the Oldham school parcel and site into mixed-use housing and a small business incubator. During the RFP process, the City was advised that a feasibility study might help confirm the proposed uses, and the City identified EDA funding to support the study work.

The project team engaged New Venture Advisors (NVA) in April 2024 to conduct the study and identify the ideal components, programs, and services, as well as assess the feasibility of redeveloping the school building into a facility that meets the defined objectives. In defining the study objectives, the facility's potential reuse was expanded to include support for the incubation of small businesses involved in the food, arts, and blue economy industries.

Project Goal

The goal of the study was to create a feasible plan for a multi-use business incubator in the former Oldham Elementary School building that would generate jobs through startups and offer a supportive network and resources to promote long-term success for small businesses, with a focus on helping the most disadvantaged residents in East Providence.

The feasibility study sought to address the following key questions:

- What are the best use cases for Oldham?
- Among potential users of the space, what is their level of interest? What are their goals and objectives? Needs and requirements?
- What are the needs of potential users regarding incubator, acceleration, and growth spaces to support small business development in the area?
- What is the best way to incorporate these into the facility's design, operations, and business plan?
- What key space uses or components will a viable facility at Oldham consist of?
- What will it cost to develop, build, finance, and operate the incubator?
- What are the realistic funding options for a redevelopment project of this scale?
- In what ways can cooperative partnerships with community and civic groups contribute to the long-term success of entrepreneurs?

The project aimed to answer these questions through two study phases:

- (1) a facility evaluation and market analysis
- (2) the development of an operations and financial model.

Project Team and Advisory Committee

A core project team consisting of city representatives supported the feasibility study (table 1).

Table 1: Project team

Team member	Title	Role
Keith Brynes	Director of Planning and Economic Development	Project lead
Tristan Jimerson¹	Business Development and Economic Opportunity Coordinator	Project representative (phase 2)
Jim Moran	Chief Economic Planner	Project representative
Melissa Spurr²	ARPA Project Manager	Project representative (phase 1)

Timeline and Methodology

NVA has created a multi-stage planning process. The initial phase assesses the regional landscape to identify gaps and opportunities for growth. When enterprise ideas are identified, NVA develops and refines the business case in stages, testing its feasibility before moving forward. Table 2 below outlines this project's timeline, details, and methodological approach.

Table 2: Project timeline and details

Project timeline details	Timeline (month/year)
Phase 1A: Project design and initiation	
Initiate project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kickoff with project team • create and maintain project plan and timeline • review prior studies and reports • conduct preliminary interviews to inform the research plan and facility assessment • develop a research plan for market analysis 	April – June 2024
Phase 1B: Facility evaluation	
Evaluate the Oldham school building and site to inform its potential use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct research on local zoning, permitting, traffic patterns, and surrounding community environment • in-person tour of site • review floor plans • interview stakeholders regarding sites use, history, and challenges • evaluate site and propose recommendations for site improvements 	June – July 2024
Phase 1C: Market analysis	
Conduct a market analysis to assess community needs and inform the spaces, programs, and services that the facility could provide to local businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a survey for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the food, arts, and blue economy sectors • develop an interview guide for conversations with organizations and business associations in the three target sectors, local government stakeholders, and community groups • collect stakeholder contacts • support survey distribution 	July – November 2024

¹ Tristan Jimerson joined the project team mid-project and supported the second phase of work.

² Melissa Spurr participated as a member of the project team during the initial phase before leaving to pursue a personal opportunity in October 2024.

Project timeline details	Timeline (month/year)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conduct interviews conduct secondary research to understand the local landscape, existing infrastructure, and existing programs serving these sectors develop a map of local infrastructure analyze findings and present a market analysis report, with operating implications for the next phase 	
Phase 3A: Operating model development	
Develop one or more concept models for the facility, a preliminary layout, and a supporting financial model and validate with project stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> using market analysis findings, develop a concept for the spaces and programs in the facility identify case studies of similar models gather input on concept models from client team gather input on concept models from the community and stakeholders develop preliminary layouts for the space build a preliminary financial model and breakeven analysis refine the model for stakeholder input 	December 2024 – May 2025
Phase 3B: Stakeholder input	
Gather stakeholder input on space requirements and building design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conduct one to two stakeholder meetings synthesize input and implications for model 	June 2025
Phase 3C: Model refinement	
Refine the operating and financial model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> refine the operating model based on stakeholder input refine site layouts conduct additional conversations with anchor tenants (if identified) develop a detailed financial model 	May – June 2025
Phase 4: Finalization	
Provide a final feasibility study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> finalize the facility design and financial analysis engage project team in a go/no-go/pivot decision identify potential risks and economic impact of the project share a final report of feasibility findings 	July 2025

Summary of Findings

Phase 1: Facility Evaluation

The Oldham school site has strong potential for redevelopment, supporting community and city goals to improve public and community spaces. However, a significant investment will be needed to fix building hazards, structural problems, and accessibility issues. Involving the local community early in the planning process will help build support and ensure the project aligns with neighborhood priorities.

NVA provided the following recommendations for the next steps before moving forward with a development plan:

- Community engagement:** Reaching out early to community members will help gain local support and ensure the project meets community needs.

- **Environmental and structural abatement:** Lead, asbestos, and mold removal are essential; structural examination of water damage should inform future repairs.
- **Accessibility compliance:** Creating ADA-compliant pathways, entrances, and facility modifications will be essential to meet inclusivity standards.
- **Zoning adjustments:** The team will need to collaborate with city officials to ensure any necessary zoning changes (if required) can support planned uses.

Phase 1: Market Analysis

The market analysis was created to evaluate the first level of feasibility, which involves examining community needs and objectives and checking if they align with the proposed project. The analysis confirmed community interest in and support for redeveloping the site, specifically for a multi-use maker space and community space that could benefit businesses and residents with features such as the following:

- shared or flexible kitchen space for food and non-food businesses
- flexible (private or shared) studios that can be used for creative arts, music practice, gallery or exhibition space, or retail
- specialized (shared) workshop areas for activities like welding, ceramics, or woodworking
- a multipurpose event space and/or areas to support a community theater, a co-operative bicycle shop, a community garden, or recreational facilities
- a classroom area to support various business and community programs
- larger (private) spaces for small groups of anchor tenants

There is interest in offering programming in the facility to support business growth and workforce development across industries. Several interested partner organizations were identified for further engagement.

Phase 1: Community Support of Concept

Community members and stakeholders contributed input during the market analysis, helping shape a concept aligned with the project's goals. As part of that market analysis, it was decided that the City of East Providence would hold a community meeting in January 2025. This meeting aimed to give local residents, potential users, and engaged stakeholders a chance to hear about the study's current findings and share their feedback on the developing concept. The City hosted the meeting at a local community center, and it was well attended. NVA's representative gave a short presentation, and various activities were offered to gather residents' input on the research, findings, and concept being developed.

As part of that community effort, the City also updated the community on abatement work underway at the facility, including roof repairs, asbestos removal, and security upgrades to ensure the building asset is protected for future use.

Phase 2: Model and Financial Feasibility

The second phase of the feasibility study aimed to verify whether the second and third levers of feasibility—operational and financial viability—are achievable. This phase included developing concept, operational, management, and economic models that outlined potential management structures, assessments of operations for each proposed space function, a total development cost, and an evaluation of financial viability based on sustainable fiscal operations during the first five years.

The concept stage of this work included developing design renderings that incorporated housing, as originally proposed in the Riverside redevelopment assessment and 2023 RFP. Housing was added to the concept and design renderings as an option that could support funding opportunities and increase the chances of attracting development partners who are incentivized to support a larger-scale re-development project. Feedback from the community, city officials, and

stakeholders was gathered during a community meeting held in June of 2025, which included discussions on the housing addition and inclusions.

The operating and financial models were created to project potential accessible rents and leases for all spaces, considering that a development partner might act as the operator for one or more areas. It was identified during the modeling process that the City would continue supporting community-focused programs within the gymnasium. Other partners, such as workforce, acceleration, and skills-training organizations, were approached about collaborating on the operation of the facility and expressed interest. Potential revenue from sub-leases of maker spaces, kitchen spaces, workspaces, classrooms, and related functions across the building was explored with partners to demonstrate the viability of these models for other secondary operators.

The primary financial model was focused and finalized following the June 2025 site work, during which designs and model projections were shared with key local stakeholders like Hope & Main (kitchen incubator operators), who provided feedback on the pricing projections and space functions. The final model offers a per-square-foot, triple-net lease structure for all functional spaces in the facility, which could be overseen by a single main facility operator and specialized function sub-operators or partners.

Conclusions and Findings of Feasibility

The study found a viable model and rationale for redeveloping the Oldham school site to promote acceleration and incubation of small businesses, workforce programs (skills training and upskilling across all projected industries), and community initiatives. The proposed model includes a multi-industry approach to programming the building, ensuring the operator does not depend on any single industry or entity for revenue. This diversification of revenue sources creates a stable operating model and simplifies management, with local partners identified to support the specialization of spaces, offer needed skills to assist users and functions, and provide specialized programs and opportunities for visitors and the community.

The study highlights the risks of the proposed redevelopment structure but concludes that there is a pathway to redevelopment that meets the three key criteria: community and stakeholder support, a practical operational and management model, and a sustainable long-term revenue plan.

NVA recommended moving forward with the development plan to preserve the Oldham school site and emphasized the importance of finding the right development and operational partners who can effectively support the mission objectives outlined in this report.

Oldham School Incubator Facility Feasibility Study — Phase 1: Facility Evaluation

Facility Evaluation Methodology

The facility evaluation started with a site visit to the Oldham school building in May 2024. Project team members and representatives from school facilities, the mayor's office, the planning department, and city facilities attended. Led by the facilities director, this walkthrough offered a detailed look at the building's current condition and its redevelopment potential. The visit involved both interior and exterior assessments, focusing on structural integrity, environmental issues, accessibility, and neighborhood context.

NVA created a site analysis workbook to thoroughly evaluate the building's condition and structure, as well as site and environmental factors, along with development and accessibility considerations. This assessment was based on both the site visit and supporting research, ending with recommendations for the next steps.

Site Findings

Building Condition and Structure

The Oldham school building was constructed in at least two phases. The original section, built with CMU (concrete masonry unit) walls and a brick veneer, has a pitched roof that is in poor condition with extensive water damage, leading to mold in certain areas. The rear additions are in better shape but will also need roof repairs. Both sections seem to contain asbestos in tiles, ceiling panels, and insulation, posing a health risk that requires immediate removal. All mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems and HVAC systems have been removed, requiring new installations to ensure modern functionality and energy efficiency.

- **Exterior:** The building's masonry is mostly intact, though minor vandalism (e.g., broken windows, graffiti) has occurred.
- **Interior layout:** The original section has ceiling heights from twelve to fourteen feet, while the cafeteria area features higher ceilings of about twenty-four feet, ideal for open-format uses. The additions, with slightly lower ceilings, could be adapted for similar purposes, though they require environmental testing for potential toxins.

Overall, the building's original structure and interior layout are adaptable for various uses but will require a comprehensive overhaul to address the removal of hazardous materials, water damage, and outdated infrastructure.

Site and Environmental Considerations

The site is well situated within a community-focused neighborhood, surrounded by residential areas, a park, and a few commercial establishments. Zoning may need to be modified or addressed, as the property is currently designated as open space under the Riverside Square Overlay District. However, since the City owns the land and leads any redevelopment, this should not be a barrier if a use that benefits the community is identified.

The site's position on a main route with access to public transit provides strong connectivity for future users. However, further assessment of potential traffic flow and parking needs is needed, especially if the renovated space is meant for high-capacity or high-traffic uses. While the neighborhood shows no major environmental risks, such as wetlands or pollution issues, the site's proximity to residential areas will require careful planning to manage noise, traffic, and visual impacts.

Development and Accessibility

The Oldham school site is accessible through multiple entrances. Existing surface parking areas are generally in good condition and could be expanded if necessary. However, any redevelopment plan must prioritize accessibility by adding ADA-compliant pathways, ramps, elevators, and other features to ensure all spaces are accessible to users of different

abilities. The current parking and access routes support the existing layout; however, future development may require additional studies to address increased traffic and accessibility needs.

Considering the building's size and location, redevelopment options align with local development goals for community-focused uses. The building's structural features permit potential modifications into various spaces, such as open gathering areas, offices or incubation spaces, and recreational facilities. However, further environmental testing (for asbestos, lead, and mold) is necessary before any renovations commence.

Site Budget Considerations

Significant budget allocations will be required to address the following:³

- **Hazardous material abatement:** To ensure safety, removal of lead paint, asbestos, and mold is essential.
- **Roof and structural repairs:** The roof needs to be replaced, especially in the original section where water damage is extensive.
- **Mechanical and utility systems:** Complete MEP and HVAC installations are required since previous outdated systems have been removed.
- **Accessibility upgrades:** Ensuring ADA compliance across the entire site—including accessible paths, elevators, and updated entrances—is essential.

Additional costs are expected for professional services related to rezoning and design, as well as for potential traffic control measures if needed to manage increased site activity.

Site Evaluation Tool

To support the evaluation process, NVA utilized a site analysis workbook (table 3).⁴ This tool addressed the following:

- **Structural evaluation:** site, buildings, and surroundings; transit/circulation; utilities; natural physical features/environmental considerations
- **Facility research:** zoning/regulatory; ownership/legal; neighborhood/neighbors

Table 3: Site analysis workbook (summary)

Category of Focus: Structural Evaluation - Site, Building(s), and Physical Surroundings	
Address	
Road names (two major)	
Existing buildings/condition (construction type)	
Defunct or functioning? (Reusable for needs?)	
Existing businesses in buildings?	
Is demolition an option if required?	

³ The City began some remediation and abatement work during the course of this study. The roof was addressed with asbestos removal, closure of gaps and holes, and related repairs to control water damage and environmental impacts. The City also completed an environmental and hazards assessment with a qualified firm to confirm the presence of hazards such as mold, lead, and asbestos and propose solutions for their removal. The City also removed an old oil tank from the lower basement levels that was non-functional and a potential hazard for any reuse developer. Finally, the City provided additional security to the site by repairing/sealing off broken windows, doors, and related access points to prevent theft, vandalism, or further environmental encroachment. All of these steps were part of NVA's recommendations for site security and hazard removal and are excellent first steps in supporting future development.

⁴ The full workbook is included as part of the appendix resources with this report.

Category of Focus: Structural Evaluation - Site, Building(s), and Physical Surroundings (Continued)
Is size of existing building(s) adequate to support use?
Existing allocated parking
Is size of lot adequate to support use?
Are there existing architectural drawings or will they need to be built?
Any existing site resources: photos, maps, building eval?
Category of Focus: Structural Evaluation – Transit & Circulation Considerations
Distance/travel times to other locations of importance (per scope)
What are the uses and conditions of/in neighboring lots/buildings?
Is there any adjacent major development in progress? (Nearby?)
How do trucks currently access the site? Space to support turn-arounds?
Existing traffic patterns (people, trucks, cars, transit)
Proximity to highway? Proximity to major roadways? Proximity to mass transit and type?
Walkability, cross walks? Walking distance to nearest mass transit connection?
Is there existing viable parking infrastructure?
Are there existing viable docking options?
Category of Focus: Structural Evaluation – Utility Considerations
Is lot currently adjacent to or already connected to city water? Sewer? Electric Utility? Gas?
Category of Focus: Structural Evaluation – Natural/Physical Features and Environmental Considerations
Any concern that topography of site may be a challenge (sloping, grading, clearing)?
Does land need to be extensively cleared and graded?
Any wetland areas? Streams? Natural ponds?
Is site generally compatible with projected project needs?
Are there contamination concerns? Remediation needed?
Are there impactful noise, odor, pollution or other sensory concerns?
Category of Focus: Facility Background/Research – Zoning and Regulatory
Current zoning designation (compatible/not compatible?). If not compliant, is special use permit/variance an option?
Any areas requiring setback or no-build zones?
Any other recorded restrictions or functional use barriers?
Does initial review of building seem compatible with proposed project size?
Category of Focus: Facility Background/Research – Ownership and Legal
Ownership?
Any holds or restrictions that would cause delay
For purchase or lease (Any known terms)? Cost or price if known?
History of delays or difficulty with ownership?
Is timeline of potential sale viable within project timeline?
Category of Focus: Facility Background/Research – Neighborhood and Community
Abutting land use and streets
Proximity to other areas of community connection

Category of Focus: Facility Background/Research – Neighborhood and Community (Continued)
Proximity to other commercial/retail/food zones
Proximity to residential or key housing corridors
Potential for partnerships related to development?
What are the patterns around neighborhood crime or vandalism?
Are there specific community attitudes toward the site/neighborhood?
Existing patterns of ethnic groups in area as related to project?

Site Conclusions

The Oldham school site has promising redevelopment potential, aligning with community and city goals for improved public and community spaces. However, significant investment is needed to fix building hazards, structural problems, and accessibility issues. Engaging the local community early in planning will help build support and ensure plans match neighborhood priorities.

Recommended Next Steps

- **Community engagement:** Starting outreach early will help gain local support and ensure the project meets community needs.
- **Environmental and structural abatement:** Removal of lead, asbestos, and mold is essential; structural examination of water damage should inform future repairs.
- **Accessibility compliance:** ADA-compliant pathways, entrances, and facility modifications are vital to meet inclusivity standards.
- **Zoning adjustments:** Collaborate with city officials to obtain zoning changes if required to support planned uses.

Following these recommendations, the project team can advance with a well-informed development plan that balances regulatory and budgetary needs to create a safe, accessible, and community-oriented space.

Oldham School Incubation Facility Feasibility Study — Phase 1: Market Analysis

Market Analysis Goals

The City of East Providence initiated this feasibility study to identify the best use for redeveloping the former Oldham Elementary School. As the initial phase, the market analysis aimed to evaluate community needs and identify the optimal spaces, programs, and services the site could offer to local businesses. These insights helped shape the project strategy, including its components, programs, and partners.

Research Hypothesis

Before beginning the analysis, it was hypothesized that the space could be transformed into a multipurpose business incubator and community center aimed at supporting the food, arts, trades, and/or blue economy sectors. Potential site features for validation included the following:

- a food business incubator with shared or private kitchen spaces, particularly one focused on baking or gluten-free production
- an arts, trades, or makers space with workshop, studio, or gallery spaces
- a blue economy incubator with spaces for product development or testing
- coworking or private office spaces
- small business support programming, such as training or workforce development
- community access spaces, such as event spaces or recreational facilities

Research Methodology and Outreach

The research tools and methodology for this project were selected to gather feedback from diverse stakeholders on a wide range of potential site components. Using public and syndicated data, secondary research provided an overview of the local food system and existing infrastructure. Surveys and interviews were identified as the primary research methods for this project scope.

Through surveys and interviews, NVA collected input from regional small businesses, business associations, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and educational institutions. The project team also recognized the importance of gathering feedback from local residents and decided that the City of East Providence would host a community meeting once the initial market analysis was finished.

NVA engaged the project team throughout the market analysis phase to provide feedback on research tools, identify contacts, facilitate introductions, and distribute the surveys to their intended audiences.

Landscape Analysis

Landscape Analysis Overview

A landscape analysis was carried out through secondary research of public and syndicated data to provide regional context for the project. Five specific research priorities were identified:

1. **Demographics**—to provide context on the population that the facility would serve
2. **Workforce and employment** to identify gaps and opportunities that align with programming within the facility
3. **Existing infrastructure**—to identify and assess the breadth of existing facilities that support business development, specifically related to the food, arts, and blue economy industries
4. **Seafood industry**—to assess if and how this industry may be relevant for the site
5. **Blue economy industry**—to provide context on this industry's focus and presence in Rhode Island

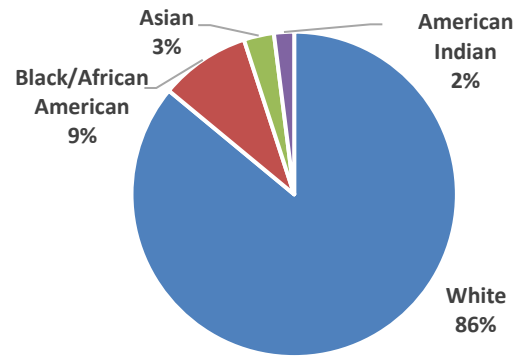
Figure 1: East Providence demographics

Demographic Landscape

East Providence is home to 47,012 residents, with 86 percent of the population identifying as White; 9 percent as Black/African American; 2 percent as American Indian/Native American; 3 percent as Asian; and 8 percent as Latinx. East Providence has a higher proportion of both foreign-born residents (21.8%) and residents aged sixty-five or older (17.5%) compared to the average for the entire state.⁵

The median income in East Providence (\$71,736) is 13 percent below the Rhode Island state median income of \$81,854. East

Providence faces a slightly higher poverty rate, with 7.4 percent experiencing poverty compared to the Rhode Island state average of 6.7 percent.⁶ In 2023, the unemployment rate in East Providence was the same as the state rate of 5.4 percent.⁷



Workforce and Employment Landscape

Rhode Island's employment outlook is robust, with projections indicating 6.2 percent job growth (32,943 new jobs) by 2032, reaching total employment of 564,230. This growth rate is more than double the national projection of 2.8 percent for the same period, according to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training. These forecasts are derived from historical and current employment trends, along with baseline assumptions about future conditions.⁸

Over the next ten years, Rhode Island projects 16.5 percent growth in food manufacturing and the addition of over 2,000 new food service jobs. Fishing, performing arts, and related industries are expected to see expansion, but the anticipated increase in employment opportunities within these fields remains modest as indicated by table 4.

Table 4: Rhode Island industry job projections

Rhode Island industry projections	2022 average employment	2032 projected employment	% change
Fishing, hunting, and trapping	70	80	14.3
Food manufacturing	4,076	4,750	16.5
Food and beverage retailers	12,221	12,750	4.3
General merchandise retailers	7,255	7,600	4.8
Support activities for transportation	1,246	1,500	20.4
Performing arts, spectator sports, etc.	1,345	1,410	4.8
Food services and drinking places	44,025	46,100	4.7

⁵ United States Census Bureau, QuickFacts East Providence, RI, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/eastprovidencacityrhodeisland/PST045223>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ RI Department of Labor and Training, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, 2024, <https://dlt.ri.gov/labor-market-information/data-center/unemployment-ratelabor-force-statistics-la.us>.

⁸ RI Department of Labor and Training, *2022–2032 Industry and Occupational Projections*, 2022, <https://dlt.ri.gov/labor-market-information/data-center/2032-industry-occupational-projections>.

The fastest growing occupations in Rhode Island that are also considered high-demand jobs include restaurant cooks, stockers, and light truck drivers, as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Fastest growing occupations in Rhode Island

Fastest growing occupations in Rhode Island	% change 2022–32	High-demand job
Data scientists	32.1	
Industrial machinery mechanics	27.5	
Cooks, restaurant	23.3	x
Welders, cutters, solderers, and brazers	18.0	
Exercise trainers and group fitness instructors	16.8	x
Stockers and order fillers	15.1	x
Light truck drivers	12.9	x
Bakers	12.5	
Driver/sales workers	12.0	x
Laborers and freight, stock and material movers	8.7	x
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	8.6	x
General and operations managers	8.2	x
First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	6.2	x
Food preparation workers	-	x

In East Providence, retail trade employs 13.7 percent of the population. Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services employ 5.8 percent of the population. From 2020 to 2021, nonemployer establishments⁹ in the Providence-Warwick metropolitan area grew from 117,000 to 125,771.¹⁰ Of these,

- 5,053 are independent artists, writers, and performers
- 1,488 are in fishing
- 1,090 are in special food service (including caterers, food trucks)
- 195 are in food manufacturing (like jams, canning, and other packaged goods)

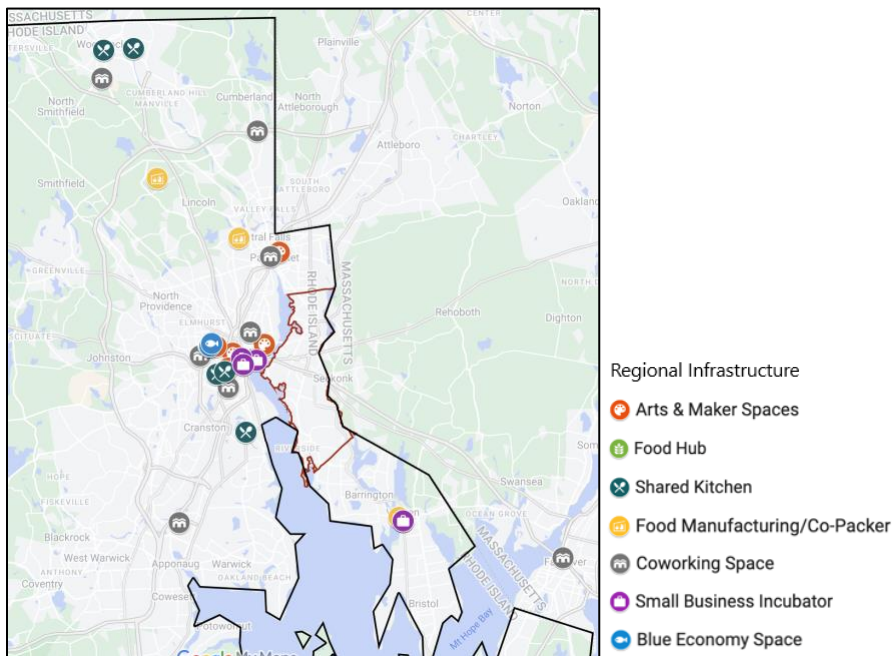
Existing Infrastructure

Several existing spaces to support entrepreneurs and small businesses were identified in the region. While none of this infrastructure is located in East Providence, there are several key businesses and supports in neighboring Providence.

⁹ "Nonemployer establishments" are a designation under the U.S. Census and Department of Labor and refer to businesses that are "self-employed individuals operating unincorporated businesses (known as sole proprietorships)" with a sole employee/owner. They are used as a proxy to identify the number of very small, independent businesses in the region.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Economic Survey, Nonemployee Establishments Providence-Warwick MSA, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/abs/data/nesd.html>.

Figure 2: Map of existing infrastructure



Existing infrastructure in and around East Providence include the following:

- **six arts and maker spaces:** AS220 Community Studios (Providence), Brown Design Workshop (Providence), The Steel Yard (Providence), The Wurks (Providence), The Avenue Concept (Providence), Rhode Island Maker Mill (Pawtucket)
- **thirteen coworking spaces:** CIC Providence (Providence), Social Enterprise Greenhouse (Providence), Sprout Coworking (Providence), The Multicultural Innovation Center (Providence), UpRiseHer (Providence), Cowork Cumberland (Cumberland), Coworking Station (Walpole), Good Coworking (North Smithfield), Groundwork (Fall River), Innovate Newport (Newport), Social Co-Working & Collaboration (Warwick), The Hive RI (North Kingstown), The Rail (Pawtucket)
- **four food hubs:** Farm Fresh RI (Providence), Red Tomato (Providence), South Side Community Land Trust Healthy Food Hub (Providence), Hillandale Food Hub/Farmers' Community Food Hub (Westerly)
- **four food manufacturing and co-packer facilities:** Blount Seafood Corporation (Warren), Hope & Main (Warren), Palate Pack (Lincoln), Plants to Food (Lincoln)
- **seven shared kitchens:** Sankofa Community Kitchen (Providence), South Side Community Land Trust Healthy Food Hub (Providence), Gastros Commisary Kitchen (Woonsocket), Millrace Kitchen (Woonsocket), Hope & Main (Lincoln), Ocean State Commissary Kitchen (Cranston), Town Made (South Kingston)
- **five small business incubators:** Center for Women and Enterprise (Providence), RI Hub (Providence), Social Enterprise Greenhouse (Providence), Hope & Main (Lincoln), Innovation Studio (Boston MA)¹¹
- **three blue economy spaces:** 401 Tech Bridge (Middletown and Providence), Ocean Tech Hub (Providence)

¹¹ Innovation Studio is no longer operating at the time of this report however it is being included as it was counted as part of initial infrastructure that was assessed during the market analysis.

Seafood and Fishing Landscape

Fisheries have been hit hard by fish catch quotas and restrictions, impacts of climate change, and offshore wind farm development. Commercial seafood landings in Rhode Island decreased 19 percent from 2022 to 2023. The top three commercial seafood species caught in Rhode Island are sea scallops, squid, and quahog.¹²

Table 6: Top commercial, wild harvest species landed in Rhode Island

Common name	Pounds	2023 dollars (million)	Decrease from 2022
Sea scallop	26,258,836	\$25.7	30%
Longfin squid	1,015,260	\$12.7	33%
Illex (squid)	4,433,219	\$3.2	30%
American lobster	1,093,229	\$7.7	10%
Summer flounder	2,249,978	\$5.86	2%
Quahog	15,394,303	\$4.0	9%
Jonah crab	2,480,386	\$3.6	10%

Point Judith is the largest port in Rhode Island, landing 44.7 million pounds of fish annually. Ports Warwick and Bristol, which are closest to East Providence, landed less than 1 million pounds of fish in 2023. There are eleven seafood processors operating in Rhode Island, employing approximately 215 people. Seven of the processors specialize in finfish and squid; the other four specialize in shellfish.¹³

Blue Economy Landscape

The blue economy is defined as the **sustainable use of ocean resources** for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem. About 6 to 9 percent of Rhode Islanders work within the state's ocean economy, a sector with a direct impact of more than \$5 billion. At present, federally funded defense activities and industries are the largest blue economy sector, valued at \$3.16 billion. It is yet to be seen the value offshore wind will bring.¹⁴

Table 7: Sectors of the blue economy

Sectors	Value	Jobs	Notes
Defense	\$3.16 billion	16,011	87% of contracts are federally funded defense activities and industries
Marine trades	\$1.45 billion	13,337	Boat building, repair, and retail; diving and marine construction
Ports and shipping	\$727 million	2,000	Largest employer is Port of Davisville at the Quonset Business Park, a top ten North American auto import location
Tourism and recreation	\$4.3 billion	83,913	Largest constituents are eating, drinking, hotels, and lodging industries, which employ 32,078 workers
Fisheries	\$151.5 million	2,965	Harvesting and processing capacity of the fishing industry
Aquaculture	\$5.77 million	194	Most aquaculture in Rhode Island takes place in the Salt Ponds
Offshore wind	TBD	300+	Orsted - own and operate Block Island Wind Farm and the Revolution Wind project

¹² Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management - Division of Marine Fisheries, Rhode Island Annual Fisheries Report, 2023, https://dem.ecms.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/2024-06/Annual_Fisheries_Report_2023.pdf.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The University of RI Graduate School of Oceanography, *The Value of Rhode Island's Blue Economy*, 2020, https://web.uri.edu/gso/wp-content/uploads/sites/916/BE-Report_2020_FINAL_edited-3-14-24-1-compressed.pdf.

A 2020 report published by the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography recommends that the state develop additional workforce training programs, “to develop the required skills and talent to meet growing industry demand, and to enhance the diversity and agility of the state’s blue economy.”¹⁵

Although few blue economy companies are currently located in East Providence, ProvPort’s exclusive port operator and manager, Waterson Terminal Services, announced in 2023 they have executed a lease to develop and operate the undeveloped port project located at East Providence’s South Quay.¹⁶ To support businesses in this sector with manufacturing, office, lab, and warehouse space, 401 Tech Bridge currently operates three pilot incubators.

Primary Research Overview

NVA utilizes multiple tools to build a comprehensive understanding of the regional landscape. Primary research was conducted through interviews and surveys for targeted stakeholder groups. Key research questions were designed to validate potential components of the incubator space. NVA worked with the project team to define the key research questions to guide the development of surveys and interview guides (see research plan in the attached appendix materials) and to ensure project goals were met.

Primary research focused on several key objectives:

- assess stakeholder interest in the redevelopment of Oldham school
- identify small business needs and requirements
- identify existing infrastructure and programs that support small businesses in the food, arts, and blue economy industries
- prioritize the potential spaces, programs, and services of the facility
- identify resources to support the project and anticipated challenges or barriers

In addition, the research team considered adding community meetings to the primary research scope to gather input from local residents in the Riverside neighborhood. It was determined that the City would hold community meetings as a next phase, after the initial market analysis was completed.

The following sections analyze survey and interview results and highlight key insights and findings impacting the facility’s spaces and programs. The original survey questions, full survey results, and interview guide are included in the appendix materials.

Methodology: Surveys

NVA designed a survey to reach small businesses and entrepreneurs in the food, arts, trades, and blue economy sectors. The survey launched in mid-August 2024 and remained open for six weeks, through late September 2024. The survey was offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Cape Verdean Creole. It aimed to assess business interest in various potential spaces or programs that the facility could offer. In total, thirty-six responses were received, all in English.

Methodology: Interviews

Interviews were primarily conducted by telephone or video call between May 2024 and October 2024 by the NVA team. One interviewee provided input via email, and another provided input through an on-site visit. The project team worked with NVA to generate a list of stakeholders including organizations and business associations in the foods, arts/creative, and blue economy sectors; local government stakeholders; community groups; and organizations offering workforce

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ City of East Providence, *ProvPort Executes Lease to Develop and Operate East Providence Port Project*, November 29, 2023.

development, coworking space, and/or small business development programming. Additional contacts were identified during interviews using the snowball sampling approach.

In total, forty-eight interviews were conducted (table 8), reaching fifty-three people representing forty-four unique organizations.

NVA designed an interview guide (found in the appendix materials) that was approved by the project team. Preliminary interviews were used to confirm the project hypothesis and inform the research approach. Subsequent stakeholder interviews gathered feedback on existing programs and resources for regional businesses, the unmet local need for various spaces and programs, potential partnerships, anticipated challenges, and potential resources to support the project.

Table 8: Interviewees by industry focus/category

Category	Interviewee	Organization	Organization type
Food sector	Alison Macbeth , Food Strategy Project Manager Julianne Stelmaszyk , Director of Food Strategy	Rhode Island Commerce Corporation	Small business support, government
	Lisa Raiola , Founder and President	Hope & Main	Small food business/incubator
	Josh Daly , Associate Director Rozie Schleinig , Food Business and Economic Development Program Director	Rhode Island Food Policy Council	Government, nonprofit
	Jesse Rye , Executive Director	Farm Fresh RI	Nonprofit
	Traci Dufresne , Director, Education Foundation Farouk Rajab , President/CEO	RI Hospitality Association	Nonprofit
	Tammy Kim , Office and Administrative Manager	South Side Community Land Trust	Nonprofit
	Lauren Abda , Founder/CEO	Branchfood	Small food business/incubator
	Angel Mendez , Executive Director	Red Tomato	Nonprofit
	Thomas J Delle Donne , Assistant Dean	Johnson & Wales University	Academia
	David Dadekian , President	EatDrinkRI	Small food business
	Alba Curti , Board Secretary/Treasurer	East Providence Heritage Arts Inc.	Nonprofit
Arts/maker sector	David O'Connell , Chairman	East Providence Arts Council	Nonprofit
	Todd Trebour , Executive Director	Rhode Island State Council on the Arts	Government
	Rue Sakayama , Executive Director	DESIGNxRI	Small arts business
	Jillian Gesualdi , Co-Founder and Executive Director	East End Theater	Nonprofit
	Dr. Tobias Stapleton , Chair	Blue Venture Forum	Nonprofit
Blue economy	Will Cox , VP Business Development	Rhode Island Commerce Corporation / Ocean Tech Hub	Blue economy business/incubator
	David Hirschman , Host	Blue Economy Podcast	Media
	Natalie Ciardi , Partner Relationship Manager	SeaAhead	Blue economy business/incubator

Category	Interviewee	Organization	Organization type
	Erik Brine , Director	401 Tech Bridge	Nonprofit
	Christian Cowan , Executive Director	URI Research Foundation	Nonprofit
	Dustin Varnell , CEO	Spirit Advisory/V2Subsea	Blue economy business
	John O’Keefe , VP of Business Development Chris Waterson , President and CEO	Waterson Terminals	Blue economy business
	Shayne Rooney , Assistant Director	Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island	Nonprofit
Government stakeholders	Lisa Carnevale , Vice President of Innovation Initiatives	Rhode Island Commerce Corporation	Government
	Kayleigh Hill , SupplyRI Program Manager	Rhode Island Commerce Corporation	Small business support, government
	Roberto DaSilva , Mayor	City of East Providence	Government
	Rick Lawson , Ward 4 Councilman	City of East Providence	Government
	Robert P. Rodericks , Council President, At-Large City Councilman	City of East Providence	Government
	Robert Hanlon , Director	East Providence High School Career and Technical Center	Government, education
Community groups	Kannyka Pouk , Director of Programs	Center for Southeast Asians	Nonprofit
	Erin Gilliatt , Executive Director Damian Ramos , Community Outreach Director	Boys and Girls Club of East Providence	Nonprofit
	Jason Rafferty , Director	Riverside Renaissance Movement	Nonprofit
	Alyssa Gleason , HEZ Project Director	East Providence Health Equity Zone (HEZ)	Nonprofit
Facility stakeholders	Chris Murphy , Director of Facilities	East Providence School Department	Government, education
	Antonio Vieira , Superintendent	East Providence Public Works Department	Government
Workforce, coworking, and business incubation	Jason Colonies , Executive Director	Education Exchange, Inc.	Nonprofit
	Amy Erickson , Director of RI Programs	Innovation Studio	Nonprofit
	Reilly Kons , Director	Venture Cafe	Nonprofit
	Erin Donovan-Boyle , President and CEO	Newport Chamber of Commerce / Innovate Newport	Nonprofit
	Constance Ferber , CEO	Social Enterprise Greenhouse	Nonprofit
	Nina Pande , Executive Director	RI Skills for RI Future	Nonprofit
	Julia Krasnow , Program Manager	Entrepreneurship for All	Nonprofit
	Annette Tonti , Managing Director	RIHub	Nonprofit
	Maggie Longo , Restaurant and Hospitality Consultant	Rhode Island Small Business Development Center	Education, incubator

Category	Interviewee	Organization	Organization type
	Anthony DeCrescenzo , Executive Director	East Providence Area Chamber of Commerce	Nonprofit
	Colleen Kwedor , Assistant Director of Sales	CIC (Cambridge Innovation Center)	Coworking, incubator
	Sarah McBain , Program Coordinator, Real Jobs RI	RI Department of Labor and Training	Government

Survey Respondents

Business Types and Demographics

The survey primarily reached businesses and entrepreneurs located in the Riverside neighborhood of East Providence, although a few responses were received from other areas of the state.

Table 9: What is your ZIP code? (Q2)

ZIP code	City	Count	%
02915	East Providence (Riverside)	22	65%
02914	East Providence	8	24%
02822	Exeter	1	3%
02840	Newport	1	3%
02916	East Providence	1	3%
02925	Providence	1	3%
Total respondents		34	

Responses were received from existing and aspiring business owners across all three industries, with the majority of responses (64%) from the arts sector. Respondents were primarily English-speaking (96%), White (82%), and female (57%).

Table 10: What is your business type? (Q3)

Business type	Existing	Aspiring	Total	%
Food business	4	5	9	25%
Arts, crafts, trades, or maker	14	9	23	64%
Blue economy	2	2	4	11%
Total respondents	20	16	36	

Food Sector Businesses

Existing food business respondents included two restaurants/foodservice operations, one of which specified that they offer a full-service restaurant and caterer; a major grocery store; and a fishing/shellfish operation (Q5, Q8).

Aspiring food business respondents included a caterer, a soup business aiming to sell to local small business retailers, a food truck/mobile food business, a cold-pressed juice and wellness food company, and a barista bar (Q14, Q17).

Table 11: Select the option that best describes your food business or the business you will be launching. (Q5, Q14)

Type of food business	Existing	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Restaurant, café, or coffee shop (or other food-service operation)	2	50%	1	20%	3	33%
Fishing or shellfish operation	1	25%	0	0%	1	11%
Grocery or other food retail/market	1	25%	0	0%	1	11%
Caterer	0	0%	2	40%	2	22%
Food truck/mobile food business	0	0%	1	20%	1	11%
Prepared meals or meal kits	0	0%	1	20%	1	11%
Total respondents	4		5		9	

Arts and Trades Businesses

Arts and trades respondents work in a variety of modalities, and many of these businesses produce multiple types of products. The four categories with the largest share of respondents (22% each) are vocal or performance art, painting or illustration, digital or multi-media arts, and music.

Table 12: Select the option that best describes your business or the type of business you will be launching (Q6, Q15)

Type of arts/maker business	Existing	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Vocal or performance art	4	29%	1	11%	5	22%
Painting or illustration	3	21%	2	22%	5	22%
Digital or multi-media arts	3	21%	2	22%	5	22%
Clothing, fiber, or textile art	2	14%	0	0%	2	9%
Woodworking or furniture-making	2	14%	1	11%	3	13%
Other craft items	2	14%	0	0%	2	9%
Audio or visual production	2	14%	1	11%	3	13%
Music	2	14%	3	33%	5	22%
Writing	1	7%	1	11%	2	9%
Sculpture	1	7%	0	0%	1	4%
Industrial design	1	7%	0	0%	1	4%
Ceramics or glass	1	7%	1	11%	2	9%
Photography	1	7%	0	0%	1	4%
Metalworking or welding	1	7%	0	0%	1	4%
Construction or carpentry	1	7%	0	0%	1	4%
Jewelry	0	0%	1	11%	1	4%
Electrician	0	0%	1	11%	1	4%
Mechanic	0	0%	2	22%	2	9%
Other	4	7%	1	0%	5	4%
Total respondents	14		9		23	

Respondents included (Q8, Q17)

- an art and artisan studio that highlights the work of artists and artisans of Luso descent, a working art studio, and a classroom space for collaborative writing and artisan textile workshops
- an architectural design service
- a community theater organization that provides inclusive, accessible, and professional-quality theater opportunities and arts education to youth and young adults, producing five full-scale musicals per year and annual recitals
- a fiber and mixed media artist and teacher, specializing in needle and wet felted wool art
- a visual arts center offering classes for children and adults, which is also home to a gallery space
- an entrepreneur providing dance, henna, art, and empowerment coaching to women
- a business making sublimation tumblers, badge reels, beaded pens, and keychains
- a local theater
- a poker school
- a soap and lotion business that also teaches others how to make these items
- a business aiming to build a multi-surface ice rink with other amenities, including pickleball courts, a fitness center, and restaurant
- a creative coworking space for a wide spectrum of uses by the arts community
- a business producing wreaths, door signs, and other wall décor
- an aspiring cooperative bicycle repair and education space, providing access to bicycle tools, spare parts, and expert help for users to tune up and maintain their own bikes
- an aspiring art lessons and gallery business
- an aspiring custom ceramics and glaze business
- an aspiring wood crafts business that would sell their products online
- an aspiring music lessons business
- an aspiring small electronics and basic automotive repair and maintenance business

Blue Economy Sector Businesses

Blue economy respondents included (Q7, Q17, Q17)

- an existing business offering coworking, office space, and networking for blue economy companies
- an existing business offering an accelerator, matchmaking services, and programming for blue tech firms
- an aspiring organic mosquito control business
- an aspiring business aimed at saving wildlife in East Providence through education and treatment

Existing Businesses (All Sectors)

Existing business respondents included businesses at varying levels of maturity. Of the seventeen businesses that shared their annual revenue range, fifteen of them (88%) earn less than \$1 million of revenue per year. The businesses in the arts and trades sector are largely small businesses, the majority of which (62%) earn less than \$25,000 per year.

Table 13: How long have you been generating revenue? (Q9)

Time	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
<1 year	0	0%	3	21%	0	0%	3	16%
1–3 years	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	5%
3–5 years	0	0%	4	29%	1	50%	5	26%
5–10 years	1	33%	2	14%	0	0%	3	16%
10+ years	2	67%	4	29%	1	50%	7	37%
Total respondents	3		14		2		19	

Table 14: What is your approximate yearly revenue? (Q10)

Annual revenue	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Less than \$10,000	0	0%	4	31%	0	0%	4	24%
\$10,000–24,999	0	0%	4	31%	0	0%	4	24%
\$50,000–99,999	0	0%	2	15%	0	0%	2	12%
\$100,000–249,999	0	0%	2	15%	0	0%	2	12%
\$250,000–499,999	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%
\$500,000–999,999	0	0%	1	8%	1	50%	2	12%
\$2,500,000–4,999,999	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	1	6%
\$5,000,000 or more	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%
Total respondents	2		13		2		17	

All existing businesses sell their products year-round (Q11).

When asked about the top challenges their businesses face, the top responses were the high cost of business (44%), access to the general public (38%), finding or affording general production space (31%), and finding skilled workers (25%).

Table 15: Below are some challenges that can hinder the growth of small businesses. Please select the top 3 barriers that apply to you. Select all that apply. (Q12)

Challenges	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Costs	2	50%	5	36%	0	0%	7	44%
Customer access (general public)	0	0%	6	43%	0	0%	6	38%
Production space (general)	0	0%	5	36%	0	0%	5	31%
Labor (skilled)	2	50%	2	14%	0	0%	4	25%
Supply	1	25%	0	0%	1	50%	2	13%
Labor (general)	1	25%	0	0%	1	50%	2	13%
Production space (specialty)	0	0%	2	14%	0	0%	2	13%
Collaboration	0	0%	2	14%	0	0%	2	13%
Market maturity	0	0%	2	14%	0	0%	2	13%
Innovation resources	0	0%	2	14%	0	0%	2	13%
Volume	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	6%
Production equipment	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	6%
Product demand	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	6%
Other	1	25%	1	7%	0	0%	2	13%
Not applicable	1	25%	0	0%	1	50%	2	13%
Total respondents	4		14		2		16	

Aspiring Businesses (All Sectors)

Half of the aspiring entrepreneurs are not yet sure when their business will launch, and 31 percent anticipate launching their business in the next one or two years.

Table 16: When do you anticipate launching your business? (Q13)

Timeframe	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Within the next 6–12 months	1	20%	1	11%	0	0%	2	13%
Within the next 1–2 years	1	20%	3	33%	1	50%	5	31%
Within 3–5 years	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%
Not sure	2	40%	5	56%	1	50%	8	50%
Total respondents	5		9		2		16	

Survey: Space Interest and Priorities

Food Production and Kitchen Spaces

In total, ten respondents expressed interest in accessing kitchen space in the Oldham facility, including six food industry respondents and four arts industry respondents. Two businesses—a local restaurant/catering company and an aspiring wellness food/juice company—expressed interest in operating a café or retail space to sell food to the public. These businesses plan on using a variety of processing techniques, including cooking with a hotline, assembly of dry ingredients, light processing of produce, and packaging.

Table 17: What type of space(s) are you interested in? (Q20)

Desired spaces — food businesses	Existing	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Kitchen space	1	50%	3	75%	4	67%
Food processing space	1	50%	2	50%	3	50%
Event space	2	100%	1	25%	3	50%
Allergen-specific processing or kitchen space (e.g., gluten free, allergen free)	0	0%	2	50%	2	33%
Café or restaurant for selling food and beverages	1	50%	1	25%	2	33%
Retail space for selling packaged products	1	50%	1	25%	2	33%
Storage space (dry, cold, frozen)	1	50%	1	25%	2	33%
Demonstration kitchen for interacting with the public/audiences	1	50%	0	0%	1	17%
Outdoor space for a food truck or other use	0	0%	1	25%	1	17%
Total respondents	2		4		6	

Table 18: Which of the following processing techniques do you employ or plan to employ? (Q35)

Processing techniques	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Total	%
Cooking with access to a hotline	4	100%	1	33%	5	71%
Assembly of dry ingredients	2	50%	2	67%	4	57%
Cutting, slicing, shredding of fresh produce	3	75%	1	33%	4	57%
Packaging (batch or at scale)	2	50%	2	67%	4	57%
Bottling	2	50%	1	33%	3	43%
Canning or preserving in jars	1	25%	2	67%	3	43%
Non-food production (i.e., tinctures, balms)	0	0%	3	100%	3	43%

Processing techniques	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Total	%
Drying or dehydration	0	0%	2	67%	2	29%
Freezing (with blast chiller)	1	25%	1	33%	2	29%
Juicing	1	25%	1	33%	2	29%
Baking	2	50%	0	0%	2	29%
Breadmaking	1	25%	1	33%	2	29%
Milling, grinding, or seed collection from staple crops	0	0%	1	33%	1	14%
Specialty beverage (brewing, distilling)	0	0%	1	33%	1	14%
Butchery or meat handling	1	25%	0	0%	1	14%
Smoking, curing, or sausage making	1	25%	0	0%	1	14%
Total respondents	4		3		7	

One arts business specified that they plan to make soap in the kitchen and may need separation from other businesses (Q36). The businesses will also require sinks for washing both kitchen supplies and produce, and half of the businesses anticipate needing access to a loading dock.

Table 19: Which of the following spaces will you need to access? (Q37)

Space requirements	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Total	%
Scullery or washing station	2	50%	3	75%	5	63%
Produce washing station (crops or eggs)	4	100%	1	25%	5	63%
Loading dock	2	50%	2	50%	4	50%
Animal product wash/sort station (shellfish, fish, animal meats)	1	25%	0	0%	1	13%
None of the above	0	0%	1	25%	1	13%
Total respondents	4		4		8	

Table 20: Rather than having you and your staff prepare your product, would you be interested in having kitchen staff produce your product for a fee (i.e., copacker)? (Q38)

Interest in kitchen staff producing product	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Total	%
Maybe	3	75%	2	50%	5	63%
No	1	25%	2	50%	3	38%
Total respondents	4		4		8	

Arts and Maker Space

In total, nineteen respondents expressed interest in a new maker space to create or showcase their work. Most of the artists and makers are currently working out of their homes or still searching for a space to produce or showcase their work. Respondents are most interested in having spaces dedicated to hands-on production activities (56%), educational classes (50%), and events (44%).

Table 21: Are you interested in utilizing a new maker space to create or showcase your work? (Q22)

Interested maker space — arts/maker	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Maybe	5	36%	5	56%	10	43%
Yes	6	43%	3	33%	9	39%

Interested maker space — arts/maker	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
No	3	21%	1	11%	4	17%
Total respondents	14		9		23	

Table 22: Where do you currently create or showcase your work? Select all that apply. (Q23)

Current location	Count	%
At home	5	50%
I do not yet have any space to produce or show my work	3	30%
I own or lease private studio space	2	20%
At a shared maker space or studio	1	10%
At an art gallery	1	10%
Other shared space	1	10%
Other: At a church in East Providence and high school in Pawtucket, which is at risk for getting torn down	1	10%
Total respondents	10	

Table 23: What type of space(s) do you need? (Q24)

Space needed for arts/maker businesses	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Workshop space — for hands-on trades or maker activities	4	36%	6	86%	10	56%
Classroom or instructional space	6	55%	3	43%	9	50%
Event space	8	73%	0	0%	8	44%
Art gallery — for exhibiting work	3	27%	3	43%	6	33%
Retail space — for selling finished products	5	45%	1	14%	6	33%
Studio space — for individual or collaborative creative work	3	27%	2	29%	5	28%
Sound-controlled practice space — for music, performance, or related	4	36%	1	14%	5	28%
Performance space — for music, performance art, or related	4	36%	1	14%	5	28%
Kitchen space — for preparing beauty or household items	2	18%	2	29%	4	22%
Storage space	3	27%	1	14%	4	22%
Computer lab	0	0%	2	29%	2	11%
Office or coworking space	1	9%	1	14%	2	11%
Other (please specify)	2	18%	0	0%	2	11%
Photography darkroom — for photo production	0	0%	1	14%	1	6%
Outdoor space — for large-scale or outdoor projects	0	0%	1	14%	1	6%
Total respondents	11		7		18	

Other (write-in) responses:

- A large theater (not a black box) would be transformational for our organization.
- I currently have what I need, but might consider some collaborative projects.

The majority of artists and makers are seeking basic tools and supplies (56%). There was some interest in audio/visual equipment (31%) and specialized equipment for various uses.

Table 24: What type of equipment do you need access to? Select all that apply. (Q26)

Equipment needed for arts/maker businesses	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Basic tools and supplies (brushes, easels, etc.)	6	60%	3	50%	9	56%
Audio/visual equipment (cameras, projectors)	4	40%	1	17%	5	31%
Heavy machinery (woodworking, metalworking)	2	20%	2	33%	4	25%
Digital fabrication equipment (3D printers, laser cutters)	2	20%	2	33%	4	25%
Digital design equipment (computers, scanners)	3	30%	1	17%	4	25%
Ceramics equipment (kilns, pottery wheels)	2	20%	2	33%	4	25%
Music production equipment (soundboards, recording space)	2	20%	2	33%	4	25%
Cooking or kitchen equipment (stove, steam kettle, sinks)	3	30%	1	17%	4	25%
Textile equipment (sewing machines, looms)	2	20%	1	17%	3	19%
Specialized equipment (please specify)	0	0%	2	33%	2	13%
Total respondents	10		6		16	

Specialized equipment (write-ins):

- Basic electronic testing equipment (e.g., soldering equipment and multi meter)
- Bicycle repair stands and tools

Several respondents also provided responses on specific needs or requests for an arts or maker space, including detailed requirements for a theater, a small air compressor, a projector and screen, fabric drying racks, a washer and dryer, soundproofing, an indoor or outdoor area with a drain for washing bicycles, and waste disposal and recycling.

Blue Economy Spaces

In total, three blue economy respondents expressed potential interest in a new space. They are primarily seeking outdoor space and office space with workshop tools.

Table 25: Are you interested in accessing new space to develop or grow/scale your business or projects? (Q28)

Interest in space to grow blue economy business	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Maybe	0	0%	2	100%	2	50%
Yes	1	50%	0	0%	1	25%
No	1	50%	0	0%	1	25%
Total respondents	2		2		4	

Table 26: What type of space(s) do you need? (Q30)

Space needed for blue economy operations	Current	%	Aspiring	%	Total	%
Outdoor space — for fieldwork or testing	1	100%	1	50%	2	67%
Office space — for administrative tasks (shared or private)	0	0%	2	100%	2	67%
Indoor lab space — for research and development	1	100%	0	0%	1	33%
Workshop space — for hands-on projects or prototyping	1	100%	0	0%	1	33%
Classroom or instructional space	0	0%	1	50%	1	33%
Training space — to train others in job skills or upskilling	0	0%	1	50%	1	33%
Storage space	1	100%	0	0%	1	33%
Total respondents	1		2		3	

Table 27: What type of equipment do you need access to? Select all that apply. (Q32)

Blue economy equipment needed	Total	%
Workshop tools (saws, drills, welding equipment)	2	67%
Basic lab equipment (microscopes, lab benches, etc.)	1	33%
Marine research equipment (sampling devices, etc.)	1	33%
Not sure	1	33%
Total respondents	3	

Business Space Preferences and Parameters

Respondents were split in their preferences for private or shared spaces. Most businesses are seeking between 101 and 500 square feet for their businesses.

Table 28: What types of space would you prefer? (Q31)

Preferred spaces by business	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
A private space	2	33%	7	39%	1	33%	10	37%
A private area in a shared space	1	17%	7	39%	1	33%	9	33%
A shared space with other businesses	3	50%	4	22%	1	33%	8	30%
Total respondents	6		18		3		27	

Table 29: Approximately what square footage of space would you need for your business? (Q39)

Square footage needed	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Less than 100 square feet	1	17%	2	12%	0	0%	3	12%
101–500 square feet	2	33%	7	41%	1	33%	10	38%
501–1,000 square feet	1	17%	3	18%	1	33%	5	19%
1,001–5,000 square feet	1	17%	2	12%	0	0%	3	12%
More than 5,000 square feet	0	0%	1	6%	1	33%	2	8%
Other (not sure, it depends)	1	17%	2	12%	0	0%	3	12%
Total respondents	6		17		3		26	

Most respondents prefer a monthly fee (58%) or hourly usage fee (42%) for the spaces. They are price sensitive, preferring an hourly rate of \$20 or below. Write-in responses also identified interest in the option for a seasonal lease and the opportunity to provide space management or scheduling support in exchange for affordable reduced rental rates.

Table 30: What pricing structure or lease terms would you consider? Select all that apply. (Q40)

Preferred pricing structure	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Hourly usage fee	3	50%	8	47%	0	0%	11	42%
Monthly fee	4	67%	9	53%	2	67%	15	58%
6-month lease	2	33%	4	24%	1	33%	7	27%
1-year lease	2	33%	4	24%	0	0%	6	23%
2- to 3-year lease	1	17%	3	18%	0	0%	4	15%
Other	0	0%	2	12%	1	33%	3	12%
Total respondents	6		17		3		26	

Table 31: If the facility charged for each hour you utilized it, at what hourly rate (in dollars) would you consider it: very affordable, inexpensive, a good value, expensive, or too expensive to consider? (Q43)

Preferred pricing value	Very affordable	%	Inexpensive	%	A good value	%	Expensive	%	Too expensive to consider	%
<\$15	12	46%	1	4%	5	19%	1	4%	2	8%
15	10	38%	4	15%	5	19%	3	12%	0	0%
20	6	23%	2	8%	9	35%	2	8%	1	4%
25	5	19%	1	4%	4	15%	7	27%	2	8%
30	0	0%	3	12%	3	12%	8	31%	4	15%
35	0	0%	3	12%	1	4%	7	27%	7	27%
40	0	0%	1	4%	2	8%	5	19%	10	38%
45	0	0%	1	4%	2	8%	5	19%	10	38%
>\$45	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	3	12%	13	50%
Total respondents	26									

The largest share of respondents (38%) anticipate having eight or more people use the space at a time. When asked about how many hours per week they would use the space, they were split between twenty hours per week and five or fewer.

Table 32: On average, how many people do you anticipate having in the space (including yourself)? (Q42)

Number of people using space	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Just me	0	0%	2	12%	0	0%	2	8%
2	3	50%	3	18%	1	33%	7	27%
3	1	17%	2	12%	0	0%	3	12%
4	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
5	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%

Number of people using space	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
6	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
7	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
Over 8	1	17%	7	41%	2	67%	10	38%
Total respondents	6		17		3		26	

Table 33: On average, during the months you are active, how many hours per week do you expect to use the space? (Q41)

Space use (hours per week)	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
1–5	3	50%	4	24%	0	0%	7	27%
10	0	0%	3	18%	1	33%	4	15%
15	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
20	1	17%	6	35%	0	0%	7	27%
25	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
30	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
35	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
40	0	0%	2	12%	0	0%	2	8%
Over 40	1	17%	0	0%	2	67%	3	12%
Total respondents	6		17		3		26	

There is limited interest in storage space, and storage needs vary across businesses and across industries.

Table 34: You expressed interest in storage space. What type of storage would you need for your business? Select all that apply. (Q44)

Type of storage space needed	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Dry/warehouse storage	1	50%	2	50%	1	100%	4	57%
Cold storage (refrigeration)	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	29%
Climate-controlled storage (mixed media, papers, ceramics)	0	0%	2	50%	0	0%	2	29%
Well-ventilated storage (encaustic work, sculpture, oil paints and additives)	0	0%	1	25%	1	100%	2	29%
Cold storage (special temperature — i.e., roots, seafood, or other)	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	1	14%
Freezer storage	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	14%
Vertical or horizontal storage cabinet (paper, paintings)	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	1	14%
Total respondents	2		4		1		7	

Community and Shared Spaces

Survey respondents were also asked about their preferences for other spaces that could provide community access to the building. Many respondents are interested in having an arts demonstration or teaching space (63%), event space (63%), gallery or exhibit space (50%) and performance space (50%).

Table 35: What other spaces would you like to see included in the redevelopment of Oldham School? Select all that apply. (Q49)

Other spaces	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Arts demonstration space or “teaching” space	3	60%	12	75%	0	0%	15	63%
Event space	4	80%	11	69%	0	0%	15	63%
Gallery or exhibit space	1	20%	11	69%	0	0%	12	50%
Performance space (music, vocal, performance art, dance)	2	40%	9	56%	1	33%	12	50%
Outdoor space for community gardens	2	40%	8	50%	1	33%	11	46%
Gym or recreation center (basketball, yoga, dance)	2	40%	7	44%	1	33%	10	42%
Digital media studio (video/audio/podcast recording and editing; graphic design)	2	40%	7	44%	0	0%	9	38%
Outdoor green spaces/sports areas (pickleball, bocce)	2	40%	5	31%	2	67%	9	38%
Meeting space or conference room	2	40%	6	38%	0	0%	8	33%
Demonstration kitchen or “teaching kitchen”	3	60%	5	31%	0	0%	8	33%
Cafe	3	60%	4	25%	0	0%	7	29%
Viewing space (movies, films)	0	0%	6	38%	0	0%	6	25%
Community gathering space	1	20%	4	25%	1	33%	6	25%
Innovation lab or shared space (science-based activities)	0	0%	5	31%	0	0%	5	21%
Shared officing or coworking space	1	20%	3	19%	1	33%	5	21%
Computer lab	0	0%	3	19%	0	0%	3	13%
Other: Outdoor ice skating behind gym	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
Total respondents	5		16		3		24	

Additional spaces that were requested through write-in responses include

- outdoor ice skating
- a movie viewing space
- a recreation area for kids
- a farmers market for workshops (live arts and crafts) and vending
- a safe zone for children up to age thirteen
- walking paths around the facility
- a new bus stop and bus shelter outside the facility

Most respondents did not anticipate any conflicts with serving multiple industries in the same space or providing public access to the space. A few respondents raised the following concerns and suggestions:

- any chemical or environmental hazards must be kept separate from any food businesses
- some occupants may need quiet spaces
- there is the potential to combine food and arts businesses to develop “dinner and a show”
- business supplies should be secured and not accessible by the public
- public access could be a potential distraction for businesses

Table 36: Do you anticipate any challenges or incompatibilities with hosting food, arts, and blue economy businesses in the same building? (Q51)

Challenges hosting various businesses	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
No	5	100%	11	69%	1	50%	17	74%
Yes	0	0%	5	31%	1	50%	6	26%
Total respondents	5		16		2		23	

Table 37: Do you anticipate any challenges with operating active business production spaces in a building with public access points (community-facing spaces)? (Q52)

Challenges operating with public access	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
No	5	100%	13	81%	1	50%	19	83%
Yes	0	0%	3	19%	1	50%	4	17%
Total respondents	5		16		2		23	

There was not a clear preference on the age of businesses that would benefit most from the site.

Table 38: Based on your local experience, what types of businesses could benefit most from this facility and its business development programs? (Q53)

Target business type	Food business	%	Arts/maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Pre-launch entrepreneurs	2	50%	5	31%	0	0%	7	32%
Early-stage businesses (1–3 years in business)	1	25%	5	31%	1	50%	7	32%
Second-stage/mid-stage businesses (3–5 years in business)	0	0%	1	6%	1	50%	2	9%
I’m not sure	1	25%	5	31%	0	0%	6	27%
Total respondents	4		16		2		22	

Survey: Programming and Workforce Development

Respondents are interested in participating in a number of business support programs. Eleven respondents are interested in hosting programs at the site, including educational classes, arts events, and community gatherings.

Table 39: Business incubators and accelerators typically offer a range of training and support programs. Which of the following would you be interested in? Select all that apply. (Q46)

Training and support programs	Food business	%	Arts/ maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Business start-up (registration, licensing)	4	67%	8	44%	0	0%	12	44%
Business growth, scale, or expansion	1	17%	8	44%	1	33%	10	37%
Grant writing, funding development, financing (for start-up or growth)	1	17%	8	44%	1	33%	10	37%
Business planning	1	17%	8	44%	0	0%	9	33%
Accounting and financial management	1	17%	8	44%	0	0%	9	33%
Marketing and branding	3	50%	6	33%	0	0%	9	33%
Small business networking	3	50%	6	33%	0	0%	9	33%
Audience/customer development or differentiation	2	33%	7	39%	0	0%	9	33%
Pricing	3	50%	5	28%	0	0%	8	30%
Specialized regulatory needs, labeling, licensing, or patents	1	17%	5	28%	1	33%	7	26%
Legal access or expertise	1	17%	6	33%	0	0%	7	26%
Labor development (specialized skill training, upskilling)	2	33%	4	22%	0	0%	6	22%
Food safety	4	67%	2	11%	0	0%	6	22%
Working with investors, private equity, venture capital, or related funding strategy	1	17%	5	28%	0	0%	6	22%
Labor management (hiring, scheduling)	2	33%	3	17%	0	0%	5	19%
Not interested	1	17%	2	11%	1	33%	4	15%
Quality control	1	17%	1	6%	1	33%	3	11%
Selling your business (future planning)	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
Technical assistance	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
Other	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%
Total respondents	6		18		3		27	

Table 40: Would you be interested in hosting any of the following types of events? Select all that apply. (Q50)

Interest in hosting events	Food business	%	Arts/ maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Classes or trainings	2	40%	10	71%	1	50%	13	62%
Art-related events and/or openings	1	20%	8	57%	0	0%	9	43%
Public events or community gatherings	2	40%	6	43%	1	50%	9	43%
Musical or performance events	1	20%	7	50%	0	0%	8	38%
Cultural event or offering	1	20%	6	43%	0	0%	7	33%

Interest in hosting events	Food business	%	Arts/ maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Private events or parties (family reunions, birthdays, holiday parties, etc.)	1	20%	3	21%	1	50%	5	24%
Conferences	1	20%	2	14%	1	50%	4	19%
Lectures or presentations	1	20%	3	21%	0	0%	4	19%
I do not host events/not interested	2	40%	1	7%	1	50%	4	19%
Food demonstrations or cooking events	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%
Total respondents	5		14		2		21	

Two-thirds of respondents are interested in supporting workforce development in some capacity, primarily through mentorship (50%), upskilling or advanced skills training (29%), creating hands-on job training opportunities (29%), or hiring graduates of a workforce program (29%).

Table 41: Another goal of this project is to enhance the regional workforce. How would your business be interested in supporting workforce development? Select all that apply. (Q47)

Supporting workforce development	Food business	%	Arts/ maker	%	Blue economy	%	Total	%
Offering mentorship	1	17%	11	73%	0	0%	12	50%
None of the above	4	67%	3	20%	1	33%	8	33%
Supporting upskilling or advanced skills trainings	1	17%	6	40%	0	0%	7	29%
Creating an apprenticeship or hands-on job training opportunity	1	17%	6	40%	0	0%	7	29%
Hiring employees who are graduates of a workforce training program (externship)	1	17%	5	33%	1	33%	7	29%
Leading a workforce development or skills training program	1	17%	5	33%	0	0%	6	25%
Hiring interns during their enrollment in a workforce training program	2	33%	4	27%	0	0%	6	25%
Helping skilled workers understand how to launch a private business	0	0%	4	27%	0	0%	4	17%
Teaching GED or high-school equivalency courses or programs	0	0%	4	27%	0	0%	4	17%
Offering language support or related services	0	0%	4	27%	0	0%	4	17%
Helping skilled workers understand how to compete for government/specialty contracts	0	0%	3	20%	0	0%	3	13%
Other	0	0%	2	13%	0	0%	2	8%
Total respondents	6		15		3		24	

A few businesses provided input on the specific types of workforce development programs they would like to see (Q48, Q55):

- hands-on training (2)

- soap-making
- a direct link between the high school's vocational programs and paths toward entrepreneurship
- bicycle and bike mechanics training, which would include customer service and communications that can be transferred to either a career path in the bicycle industry or other settings
- visual arts training, including painting
- repair trades training
- a teen center with vocational education and IT training

A few businesses also expressed interest in supporting the operations of the site related to food incubation or acceleration, arts or trades incubation or acceleration, or general operations (Q54).

Interview Results

Interviews: General Input

Overall, interviewees were very supportive of the adaptive reuse of the Oldham school, provided that it was planned for appropriately. They believe that it would be beneficial to host multiple programs in the space to support collaboration and networking across businesses or industries. They also anticipate that it would provide easy opportunities for visitors or site users to engage in a variety of aspects of the space.

Interviewees emphasized the need for strong community buy-in, which is essential but can be challenging. They mentioned that some older residents of East Providence may be resistant to change. Interviewees would like to see the building façade preserved. A few interviewees expressed a concern that the project could lead to gentrification in the neighborhood.

Although interviewees cautioned that the site's programs should not compete with existing efforts, many anticipate that it would primarily serve those within a fifteen-minute drive of the site. Others believe that the Washington Bridge closure, which overlapped with the time period of the interviews, could limit visitation in the short term.

Interviewees feel strongly that the site must be accessible to a variety of audiences. The programs and services should be affordable, accessible to those speaking different languages, and physically accessible. They emphasized the need for parking and public transportation (bus access), which was identified as a key barrier for some residents of East Providence. Childcare was mentioned in approximately half of the interviews conducted; participants believe that providing childcare access for space users and local community members could be a key factor in its success.

Interviewees emphasized the need for a strong financial and management model, which would include a designated manager to oversee the operation, a sustainable revenue plan, and perhaps an anchor tenant. Rather than catering exclusively to early-stage businesses, which can be risky, it was suggested that the site should also work with established businesses that could commit to stay engaged for a longer time period.

Funding was mentioned frequently as a potential challenge for both the site itself and its tenant businesses. There can be high competition for funding in a small city, and there is generally a lack of state incentives for business and infrastructure development. Funding can be particularly limited for second-stage businesses compared to start-up entrepreneurs, and business that receive investments need greater support in understanding how to best use this funding. Often, small businesses outgrow Rhode Island's startup spaces and leave the state in order to grow their businesses.

Interviewees recognized that development costs could be a barrier; the Boys and Girls Club of East Providence tried to develop a building with multiple family and children-focused services in one space but did not move forward with the project due to high renovation costs.

Interviews: Food Sector

Interviewees support the development of a space that would support small- to medium-sized businesses, especially food businesses, with manufacturing. Although state cottage food laws support some small business incubation, there is a cap on the sales volume to be considered a cottage business. Many food businesses graduate from Hope & Main with no infrastructure in place to grow their business, and although there are a number of local programs to support start-up businesses, programs for second-stage food businesses are lacking.

Specific needs mentioned include

- co-packing services, particularly for beverages, frozen foods, and consumer packaged goods (CPG)
- lab testing for packaged food
- licensing and certification support
- manufacturing equipment for second stage food businesses
- mentoring, financial planning support, and other programs to support second-stage food businesses
- food safety training for entrepreneurs transitioning from home cooking to a licensed business
- labeling and packaging services
- a processing space for farmer produce
- allergen-free processing space for CPG companies
- a community space for collaboration, innovation, and brainstorming
- a cooking demonstration space

A clear need for seafood processing was not identified during the interviews, but it was mentioned that a seafood processing space would need ice and wastewater processing. There is also interest in developing introductory trainings to raise public awareness on local fish species and how to cook them, as well as industry trainings and certifications related to boat mechanics and boat captain training.

A few interviewees also expressed a desire for Oldham to support food access by providing a food pantry or a location to support registration for food benefits (SNAP/EBT).

Interviews: Arts/Creative Sector

Interviewees identified a strong need for additional space to support arts organizations as well as artists and makers seeking affordable workspace. Specific needs mentioned include

- gallery space
- musician practice rooms
- rentable studio spaces
- work/live spaces, including temporary residents
- theater space, including a 300-seat auditorium, greenrooms, and storage
- shared equipment, cost-sharing, and tool/equipment rental

Currently, there is no local space for theater performances in East Providence.

Interviewees clarified the distinction between an arts space and a maker space: a maker space is typically dedicated to innovation, collaboration, and experimentation; it is often equipped with the tools to support these efforts across industries and provide industry-transferable skills. A maker space could serve not only the creative sector but also food and tech companies. Suggested uses of the space include welding, metal fabrication, food innovation, podcasting, 3D printing, and development of “med tech” or “blue tech.”

Interviewees emphasized the need for the space to be affordable to users. They also mentioned that some of these functions must be kept separate for safety reasons, including spaces that support welding, automotive work, and kilns.

Interviews: Blue Economy Sector

Interviewees emphasized that the blue economy is new and emerging industry; there is a lot of potential for growth in the state, but many people do not have a clear understanding of the industry or know how to engage with it.

Blue economy organizations largely did not see a risk of competition; rather, the industry is focused on “clustering,” building a large concentration of businesses locally that can work together to support the entire supply chain. However, they mentioned some competition between offshore wind companies that are and are not associated with the defense sector. The offshore wind industry is growing, but there has been some backlash from the fishing and ocean harvesting industries that are concerned about wind turbine impacts on their work.

Many blue economy businesses require access to a marina; since Oldham is not directly on the water, it may not be an ideal location for some businesses. However, interviewees mentioned a ten-year coastline development plan and a recent announcement that Waterson Terminal Services would be developing and operating a new port in East Providence.

Interviewees ideated that Oldham could provide wet labs, a biotech incubator, warehouse space, or flexible innovation space for emerging blue economy businesses. These companies often are sensitive about proprietary information and may require some separation from other businesses if located in a shared space. Although there are several efforts to support emerging blue economy companies underway in the state, interviewees mentioned a lack of sufficient funding, resources, and start-ups.

Interviews: Coworking and Community Spaces

Interviewees mentioned that there are many existing coworking spaces in Providence and were skeptical about the interest or need for an additional coworking space in East Providence. In order to be successful, they emphasized that the space must be affordable and offer robust programming to attract users into the space.

Interviewees mentioned a variety of community spaces and programs that would support both Riverside residents and potential users of the space:

- affordable housing and worker housing, which is seen as a local need
- a gymnasium for basketball, gym equipment, and exercise classes
- a community garden
- indoor and/or outdoor community gathering spaces
- a rentable event space for up to 100–150 people
- a flexible classroom space
- a cultural or historical library
- a retail space or café to attract visitors
- a food pantry space, school lunch program, or food benefits registration to support families
- adult activities, classes, and clubs
- drop-in services/classes for teens, such as workforce development and workforce readiness workshops

Interviews: Workforce Development

Interviewees provided information on existing workforce training programs in the region as well as unmet needs.

Although not a key focus area of this study, several interviewees mentioned a gap in the healthcare industry. There is also an interest in general small business development and growth, workforce readiness for both youth and adults, skilled trades, blue economy training, and general production training that can be applied across industries.

Table 42: Existing and desired training programs

Training area	Existing programs identified	Programs desired by interviewees
Business development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polaris MEP: business mentorship, financing, pitching - Social Enterprise Greenhouse: business incubation and acceleration - SBDC: business training, office hours, Spanish language programming - Rhode Island Black Business Association: business start-up assistance - Center for Women and Enterprise: business workshops, webinars, and online courses - Skills for the Future: skills training, small business resource hub - Venture Café: small business support - EforAll: business accelerator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business growth and development
General technical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polaris MEP: manufacturing, manual production lines, supply chain design — aimed to support small to medium manufacturers - East Providence High School CTC: automotive technology, construction technology, electrical technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skilled trades: contractor, landscaping, construction, plumbing, electrical, welding - Manual production line
Workforce readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boys and Girls Club: resume writing, job readiness - American Job Center: resume assistance, career counseling - Woonsocket Education Center: entry-level workforce readiness program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Office skills - Workforce readiness (general) - Taxes (for teens)
Food industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - East Providence High School CTC: culinary arts - Polaris MEP: manufacturing - Education Exchange: oyster farming, ServSafe, hospitality programming - Southside Community Land Trust: farmer training, landscaping, ServSafe, value-added processing - Center for Southeast Asians and RI Hospitality Association: ServSafe - SBDC: hospitality training - Amos House: culinary education, ServSafe - Branch Food: second-stage food business innovation, mentorship, strategic advising, and angel investing - Genesis Center: culinary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grocery, retail, and supply chain management - Mentorship - Financial planning support
Blue economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polaris MEP: manufacturing - Rhode Island Department of Labor: offshore wind training, blue/green economy workforce training - Education Exchange: oyster farming, sea captain training - V2 Subsea: GIS training, computer training, yacht restoration - Community College of Rhode Island: offshore wind training - Waterson Terminal Services: workplace safety, OSHA, forklift training - 401 Tech Bridge: business acceleration, entrepreneurship support in blue economy - Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island: commercial fishing training, apprenticeships - SeaAhead: blue economy start-up incubation - Westerly Education Center: maritime electrical, sheet metal, pipefitting, and paint - Rhode Island Marine Trades Association: marine trades workforce development programs - IRYS School of Technology and Trades: trade programs including boatbuilding, marine woodworking, and marine systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offshore wind - Mechanics and engineering - Captains: barges, ferries, fishing boats, CPR - Boat-building
Arts and makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - East End Theater: performing arts training for kids and adults - HeARTspot Art Center and Gallery: arts classes for kids and adults - AS220: arts and maker workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sewing (for teens) - Skilled trades (woodworking, welding, etc.)

Training area	Existing programs identified	Programs desired by interviewees
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brown Design Workshop: workshops on woodworking, metalworking, sewing, laser cutting, 3D printing, and electronics - The Steel Yard: courses and educational programs in blacksmithing, welding, jewelry, foundry, and ceramics - Fab Newport and PVD Young Makers: experiential STEAM learning primarily for 11–19-year-olds 	

Interviews: Partnerships and Funding

Several organizations expressed a potential interest in being involved in programming or utilizing space in the building. This included

- five organizations interested in supporting general business incubation or educational programming
- seven organizations interested in providing specializing technical assistance or education
- two organizations interested in supporting coworking
- six organizations interested in using the space
- four organizations interested in supporting the project in other ways, such as advising on the project, providing connections to residents or businesses, or developing a connection between their spaces and this facility

Interviewees also provided input on potential funding sources to support the project, including local foundations (Rhode Island Foundation, Van Beuren Charitable Foundation, New Bedford Ocean Cluster Fund, Chaplain Foundation) and federal grants (USDA, EDA, Community Development Block Program).

Research Analysis – Interest and Needs by Sector

The market analysis provided valuable insights into the community's demand for the facility's spaces, services, and programs.

Interest and Needs by Sector: Food Industry

The expected growth in the food industry, especially in food manufacturing, shows a need for more infrastructure and programs in the state. However, interest from food businesses involved in the market analysis was modest; six food businesses and entrepreneurs showed interest in using kitchen space at the facility. The main needs identified include

- food manufacturing and co-packing space and associated services, including lab testing and labeling for “second-stage” food business
- limited need for shared kitchen space for entrepreneurs for cooking and light processing
- limited need for private kitchen space
- event space
- a loading dock

Research also identified two potential businesses to operate a food retail space or café/restaurant for sales to the public.

Interest and Needs by Sector: Arts and Maker Industry

Interest from the arts and maker sector was high, with most survey responses coming from local businesses and entrepreneurs in this area. The top needs identified include

- private or semi-private arts studios
- art gallery space

- musician practice rooms
- a community theater
- a multi-functional maker space
- limited shared kitchen space
- shared equipment and tools

Interest and Needs by Sector: Blue Economy Industry

Interest from the blue economy sector was modest. Rhode Islanders are eager to support this industry's growth, especially in workforce development, but few potential business tenants for the space were identified, and there was no interest in the seafood or fish processing sectors. The needs expressed include

- outdoor space
- office space
- potential demand for wet labs, biotech incubation, warehouse space, or shared innovation space

Interest and Needs by Sector: Shared and Community Spaces

Market analysis also showed moderate interest in offices or coworking spaces and high demand for community spaces. The coworking sector is well-established regionally, but only a few potential office users were identified. Interviewees and survey respondents were eager about including spaces to support community activities and local nonprofits. The top needs expressed included

- public-access arts spaces, including an arts demonstration space, a gallery, and/or a performance space (theater)
- a multi-functional event space
- a community garden
- recreational spaces, such as a gym, basketball court, and/or ice-skating rink
- a café and demonstration kitchen
- limited office space for businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies
- affordable housing
- childcare facilities
- a bicycle shop

Interest and Needs by Sector: Programming (Multi-Sector)

The market analysis also identified a strong interest in business programming, community programming, and workforce development efforts. Top programming identified include

- business start-up and growth
- workforce readiness
- hands-on training for arts, trades, and technical skills that can be used across industries
- community education workshops and events

Market Analysis Findings and Implications

Operating Implications: Spaces

The market analysis revealed a strong local interest in creating a collaborative space. The highest demand came from small artists and makers, although there was also some interest from food businesses and limited interest from the blue economy sector.

By transforming the site into a **versatile maker and community space**, Oldham could support a variety of entrepreneurs, businesses, and nonprofits in a location that could provide

- shared kitchen space for food and non-food businesses
- flexible (private or shared) studios that could be used for creative arts, music practice, gallery/exhibition, or retail
- specialized (shared) workshop spaces for activities such as welding, ceramics, or woodworking
- a multipurpose event space and/or spaces to support a community theater, a co-operative bicycle shop, a community garden, and/or recreational facilities
- a classroom space to support a variety of business and community programming
- larger (private) spaces for a small group of anchor tenants

Further involving local residents to identify their priorities and preferences for the space will be a key next step to refine the concept.

Operating Implications: Programming

There is strong interest in providing **business programming, community programming, and workforce development**, along with the potential to collaborate with various existing organizations to deliver these programs.

All sectors—especially the blue economy and food industries—need labor. Using the facility to **provide workforce development, hands-on skills training, and upskilling** could significantly engage these industries and support community members. Tenant businesses are interested in promoting workforce development and **community education** through **mentorships, hands-on skills training, workshops, and demonstrations**. A workforce development program that focuses **on building general skills applicable across multiple industries** may be the best addition to a community maker space.

For the facility to succeed, it must be **affordable** and gain **strong community buy-in**. Re-engaging interested organizations will be essential to align their programming with the facility's design, and further involving local residents will be key to prioritizing the types of hands-on skills training to offer. Identifying a few anchor tenants may help offset subsidized pricing for small businesses and nonprofits, supporting the sustainability of the model.

Research Feasibility Conclusions

This market analysis aimed to evaluate the first level of feasibility, which involves assessing community needs and objectives and determining if they align with the proposed project. The analysis highlighted community interest and support, along with specific priorities and requirements to guide the space design and programs.

The market analysis makes a strong case for redeveloping the Oldham school into a multipurpose maker and community space that can provide programs to support business growth and workforce development. Several interested partner organizations were identified.

The next phase of the project will focus on the remaining two feasibility levers—operational viability and financial viability—through modeling. Further engagement with local residents during this phase will be used to gauge support for the proposed model.

Oldham School Incubator Facility Feasibility Study — Phase 2: Model Feasibility

Modeling and Design Scope Outline and Objectives

The modeling scope within a feasibility study is designed to evaluate the second and third levers of feasibility. The second lever of feasibility questions whether a facility has a viable operational and management model and if there are parties capable (or with enough capacity) to support that operational context. The third lever of feasibility assesses whether the proposed concept can functionally sustain itself through revenue generation or other funding mechanisms within the first five to seven years of operation.

To support these assessments, NVA develops the following resources during the second phase of the study:

- concept models that show how potential spaces, programs, and services could be organized within the desired facility area, including case studies illustrating similar multi-functional facilities operating across the country
- concept designs that help visualize the potential space plan and program for the space, building, and parcel
- operating and management models that examine daily operating needs, including staffing, costs, and pricing structures based on comparisons to local pricing options
- potential revenue models that the facility could support, based on comparable examples in the local marketplace
- profit and loss statements that compile all financial data to analyze utilization and breakeven potential within the first five years of operation

Facility Attributes and Concept Model

The first step in developing an infrastructure model is to create a concept model that identifies

- each of the component spaces that are needed to service the identified functions
- the potential services to be offered by the facility operator
- opportunities to overlay desired programs to be provided by the facility operator or partners

A concept model generally includes the following:

- a table identifying all primary operating components
- samples (layouts, bubble diagrams, or graphics) to illustrate how those elements may work together in potential sizing
- case studies to identify comparable projects

A site fit or site evaluation, as a concept model, is ideally linked to site considerations.

Facility Attributes

The East Providence Oldham School Feasibility Study identified the following key attributes of the facility that were most desired by stakeholders, potential user groups, and community partners:

- **Commercial kitchen** — a central flexible facility with cold production, scullery space, and secure, food-safe access, including rentable or leasable kitchen(s) and/or production stations and leasable cold and dry storage. Assumed structure is as an acceleration focused block of four or fewer leasable kitchens.
- **Demonstration kitchen and event space** — flexible-use kitchen and adjacent event space that can be rented in one- to three-hour blocks, allowing for cooking classes, community gatherings, or multi-cultural events
- **Production, maker, or studio spaces** — leasable space for food, arts, and other small to medium-scale producers. These spaces could be adapted to accommodate private or collaborative maker studios; sound- or ventilation-controlled spaces for food, production, or arts fabrication; or adaptable space for small manufacturing or trades development.

- **Training and classroom spaces** — spaces designed for workforce development, trade, and skills programming in multiple industries, including indoor/outdoor flexible training space and co-working or conference room capabilities
- **Community and gathering spaces** — multi-functional public areas that support community events, performances, markets, and recreation. Notable desired elements or programs included retaining the gymnasium as a community multi-use asset, potential indoor/outdoor market areas and performance/gallery space, and event/gathering corridors for large-scale use.
- **Retail and open market space** — opportunity for pop-up or permanent market space to support food access, small businesses, or community commerce
- **Office and support space** — space for nonprofit partners, operational staff, or shared office uses that could support co-working areas or shared desk officing, meeting rooms or small consultation spaces, and staff and storage areas

This concept envisions approximately 30,000 square feet of redeveloped space within the Oldham school facility, along with an additional 6,600 square feet of exterior usable space.

Site Attributes

The components should ideally be integrated into the current Oldham school building and the surrounding campus in East Providence. The recommended site attributes are intended to support the facility's programs and operations:

- 30,000+ square feet of interior renovation space within the Oldham school building
- extra 6,600 square feet of usable outdoor space for programming, markets, gatherings, and housing development
- capacity to support three separate use zones: training/production, community/gathering, and maker/studio space
- access to secure, food-safe areas with scullery, cold storage, and kitchen ventilation requirements
- opportunities to reuse and repurpose existing spaces like the gymnasium, corridors, and main entrance
- opportunities to maintain and repair the existing historic façade and/or elements of the original front-facing school building¹⁷
- flexible floorplan to accommodate leasable tenant spaces, kitchen facilities, and multipurpose event or classroom areas
- indoor and outdoor connectivity to support market activities, training programs, and seasonal events
- adequate infrastructure to support ventilation, soundproofing, and utility upgrades for food, arts, and small-scale production
- ability to combine private and collaborative workspaces, nonprofit operations, and public gathering areas

Site challenges include necessary remediation (mold, asbestos, water damage) and heavy demolition required for renovation of the historic schoolhouse building.

Housing Inclusion on Site

The original project RFP issued before the feasibility study included an assessment of affordable housing options along with the redevelopment of the Oldham school facility. NVA was hired to focus on re-developing the school building as

¹⁷ The Oldham school is two buildings built during separate time periods — the front-facing structure is the historic “school building” that local community members have attachment to. The full building make-up is discussed in the evaluation documents included in the appendix resources.

the main part of this feasibility study. However, housing was included in the design aspects proposed for redeveloping the campus for two reasons:

- 1) Community sentiment gathered in the market analysis supported including the project in broader redevelopment efforts across the Riverside community. A preference was expressed for the Oldham school redevelopment to be part of a walkable campus environment that connects the new activity spaces proposed by the concept models, such as kids' playgrounds, parks, and commercial developments in the area.
- 2) It was identified that housing should be considered and evaluated as part of an approach to funding development for the project site, as the State of Rhode Island (via the governor's office) has placed priorities on providing funding in support of low-income or affordable housing development.¹⁸

For these reasons, NVA included housing in two elements of this study:

- 1) The concept designs included potential opportunities to integrate housing into the parcel and explored what capacity might exist (i.e., how much housing the parcel could support) to accommodate housing without removing or reducing the proposed program and functions identified for the Oldham school building. NVA developed a site plan design (an overhead view of the campus buildings) to illustrate the possible number of units and necessary support functions (parking, garbage collection, walkways, etc.). This design was shared in June 2025 as part of the second community meeting and was adjusted in final versions to incorporate feedback and discussions shared with the project team during that meeting.
- 2) The funding development plan for the project includes integrated approaches where funding opportunities may exist due to the inclusion of housing and/or affordable housing as a project outcome.

As stated earlier, NVA is a food-systems specialty firm, and the specific focus of this project was the re-development of the Oldham school building and site to support the community and stakeholder objectives discussed in this report. The housing elements were not studied or tested during this feasibility work (i.e., traffic impact studies, garbage or waste allocations, energy availability, total build massing code and regulatory implications, community feedback, etc.). Those elements will need to be incorporated into any future plans or proposals developed to support housing at the site.

NVA concluded that it is feasible to build housing in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Oldham school site without having to remove any building section or eliminate any proposed functionality from the final design or development. The site can support a mixed range of housing options and fulfill the needs of potential tenants, users, and partners in the Oldham school incubator/accelerator facility.

Concept Model Case Studies

To support the development of a successful incubator and community facility at the Oldham school, NVA conducted a national case study analysis of similar adaptive reuse projects. These case studies showcase best practices in building reuse, business incubation, arts and maker space programming, and community engagement. Each case represents different models for economic development, cultural programming, and public access, with a focus on spaces that have fostered entrepreneurship, local workforce growth, and the revitalization of underused community assets.

Across the case studies, several shared principles and operational strategies emerged:

- **Segmented spaces offer versatility** by combining private areas with public spaces, allowing for both production and engagement within a single location.

¹⁸ NVA did not study or evaluate the various housing types that may be included in a "low income" or "affordable" housing project, and these will need to be evaluated in any future work or proposals. These may include income-specific housing, senior housing, veteran or military affiliated housing, affordable purchase opportunities, or other housing opportunities designated to make housing (either rental or owned) more available to all income levels within a community.

- **Collaboration and mentorship propel success.** Access to shared tools, learning environments, and one-on-one mentorship speeds up career growth and promotes a culture of innovation.
- **Adaptive reuse builds cultural value.** Converting heritage or municipal buildings into multi-use hubs strengthens community identity and sustainability while safeguarding historic assets.
- **Diverse and flexible programming attracts users.** Providing training, exhibitions, events, and incubator services builds a comprehensive support ecosystem for a wide range of users.
- **Community access anchors the facility.** Open studios, markets, and shared event spaces foster public support and help keep spaces relevant to local residents and neighborhoods.

The following case studies were developed for the project to explore potential programming and space function combinations.

BOK (Philadelphia, PA)

- **Size:** 348,000 square feet
Building type: former vocational high school
- The BOK building in south Philadelphia showcases large-scale adaptive reuse. Formerly a public vocational school, it now accommodates over 200 businesses, artists, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs across nine floors. Tenants include ceramicists, woodworkers, small food producers, a glassblowing studio, a bike shop, a daycare, and a rooftop bar. The old auditorium and gym have been transformed into event spaces.
- Programming at BOK is very community-focused. Open studios happen twice a year, attracting thousands of visitors to tour the building and meet tenants. In 2023, BOK hosted fifteen small business markets and drew over 160,000 visitors. Tenants also host classes, workshops, and events that add to a lively ecosystem.
- **Relevance to East Providence:** BOK demonstrates how diverse users, including food entrepreneurs, artists, tradespeople, and nonprofits, can successfully share a large, segmented space. Its publicly accessible design encourages engagement while keeping workspaces secure. Its success also highlights the importance of strong community partnerships and curated programming to activate the building.

Make Santa Fe (Santa Fe, NM)

- **Size:** approximately 7,000 square feet
Building type: former school building
- Make Santa Fe is a nonprofit maker space that provides access to shared tools, training, and professional development. It features woodshops, metal shops, digital fabrication tools (such as 3D printers and laser cutters), and studios for fiber arts and blacksmithing. The space supports both hobbyists and small business entrepreneurs.
- The facility runs a student mentorship program that introduces high school students to industrial arts and creative trades. It also helps aspiring entrepreneurs by offering affordable memberships, one-on-one mentorship, and structured workshops. Courses cover thirteen disciplines and focus on hands-on learning, community building, and accessible innovation.
- **Relevance to East Providence:** Make Santa Fe shows how even a small facility can inspire local creatives and entrepreneurs. Its focus on youth mentorship, tool access, and affordability highlights potential priorities for the Oldham site, especially in trades, industrial arts, and small-scale production.

Artscape Wychwood Barns (Toronto, ON)

- **Size:** approximately 60,000 square feet (five streetcar barns)
Building type: former streetcar maintenance barns

- Wychwood Barns, operated by Artscape, is a converted streetcar barn complex that now functions as a mixed-use community cultural center. It features live/work studios for artists, galleries, a community garden, a large public courtyard, and offices for nonprofit arts and cultural organizations.
- The site hosts regular farmers markets, public events, and festivals. Its versatile venue spaces are used for exhibitions, performances, and community meetings. Artscape also supports artist residencies through structured professional development and peer learning opportunities.
- **Relevance to East Providence:** Wychwood Barns provides a model for combining private creative spaces with public programs in a way that revives a historic building. Its blending of cultural, civic, and commercial uses mirrors the vision for the Oldham school, particularly in terms of year-round community access and economic growth through the arts.

NXTHVN (New Haven, CT)

- **Size:** approximately 40,000 square feet (two buildings)
Building type: former factory buildings
- NXTHVN is a nationally recognized arts incubator located in the Dixwell neighborhood of New Haven. The facility features private studios, galleries, administrative offices, and community spaces. The organization is deeply committed to artist development and workforce training.
- Its ten-month fellowship program provides emerging artists and curators with stipends, studio space, and mentorship, while connecting them to national networks and markets. A concurrent apprenticeship program pairs local high school students with fellows for paid creative work, collaborative projects, and professional skills training.
- **Relevance to East Providence:** NXTHVN is a prime example of how arts-focused facilities can provide workforce development, mentorship, and economic opportunities. Its combination of studio infrastructure, fellowships, and youth programs offers an inspiring model for how Oldham might serve both professional creatives and aspiring young residents.

Concept Model

The East Providence Oldham School Feasibility Study helped develop a concept model that will guide the next stages of planning. The model combines all recommended facility features, ideal site qualities, and a framework for programs that local partners and organizations could lead. The concept highlights creating a multi-use, inclusive campus that promotes economic growth, community involvement, and access to community-centered programs and events. Program suggestions integrated into the concept include

- **workforce, trade, and skills training programs** provided through designated training classrooms, production areas, and co-working spaces focused on multiple industries
- **business development and growth support**, including leasable maker, studio, and production spaces designed to offer affordable, below-market options for emerging entrepreneurs
- **community market and retail opportunities** through versatile indoor and outdoor market spaces, café or dining options, and chances for small-scale retail or pop-up activations
- **cultural and community programs**, including cooking classes, arts and performance events, and public access to gallery, gymnasium, and event spaces
- **food access and local entrepreneurship**, supported by shared commercial kitchen infrastructure, local food-focused events, and integration with the broader community campus

This concept model imagines a revitalized Oldham school that acts as a hub for community life and economic growth, featuring a flexible facility where residents, small businesses, and partner organizations can work together, innovate, and create lasting impact.

The proposed concept model divides the building into three zones, encompassing both the newer and historic sections. These zones allow for designated access to specialized spaces for different user groups: building tenants and their staff, short-term users or participants in classes or programs, and the public, community members, visitors, or event attendees. The model includes central transit corridors that run through the building both horizontally and vertically, connecting users and guests to exterior spaces and campus walkways. This zoned approach enables specialized spaces to assign or secure specific access for their staff or user groups, which can be managed through a key card or similar security system.

Modeling

Overview of Modeling

The feasibility study for East Providence Oldham School involved developing a detailed financial and operational model to assess if redeveloping the facility is feasible. The analysis included assumptions about construction, equipment, pre-development, and operations, resulting in a model that evaluates both capital and operational performance. The model was built around key assessment tools incorporated into a modeling workbook, which is included as part of the appendix documents with this report.¹⁹ The complete modeling workbook, with all supporting data sheets, serves as the foundation for assessing both the financial feasibility and long-term sustainability of the proposed redevelopment.

Building Program and Cost Model

The building program and cost model describe the initial building plan, assigning estimated square footage and construction costs to each area within the facility. This cost-per-square-foot analysis is guided by the construction costs sheet, which compares redevelopment options with new construction scenarios and highlights potential savings through adaptive reuse. Additional inputs include pre-development costs (expenses such as architecture, engineering, and site preparation) and equipment costs (a detailed, line-item equipment budget based on national standards). These costs for each space reflect specific programming opportunities identified in the feasibility study. For example, the gymnasium and recreation space offer a relatively low-cost redevelopment option due to minimal build-out requirements, allowing activation by partners such as the parks and recreation department for youth and senior fitness classes, camps, or indoor sports leagues.

Consolidated Development Cost Model

The Cost Roll-Up sheet gathers all construction, design, and equipment costs to create a complete capital budget for the facility. This includes both basic construction and site work, along with soft costs and tenant allowances, providing a full picture of the project's initial financial requirements. This consolidated model allows analysis of how different types of users, such as food entrepreneurs, makers, artists, or public agencies, might occupy and share the cost of space improvements aligned with their programmatic roles.

Revenue Model

The Revenue Build-Out and associated Pricing Model tabs provide detailed revenue forecasts by estimating pricing, utilization, and capacity for each revenue-generating space (e.g., shared kitchen, event spaces, maker studios). The model considers a range of user and tenant scenarios, applying varied lease rates that reflect both revenue-generating

¹⁹ The EPROV_Model workbook is included in the appendix resources as PDFs of each tab of a master Excel data workbook. The various inputs, tabs, or sheets referred to in the sections above are references to this workbook.

uses and mission-aligned, community-focused offerings, such as subsidized or no-cost access for anchor or nonprofit partners. Revenue estimates are based on anticipated partners and scenarios; for example, leasable kitchen and maker spaces assume operators or anchor tenants similar to the pricing structure used at Farm Fresh RI, while event space and gym rentals are modeled with usage by local cultural and community groups, such as neighborhood associations, public health organizations, or the parks and recreation department.

Operating Model

The operating costs (SG&A) and labor matrix model projected staffing levels and general operating expenses. These assumptions support a five-year outlook of ongoing costs based on the proposed facility size, usage, and service offerings. Operational assumptions include a lean staffing model complemented by tenant partnerships and program collaborators. For example, maintenance for shared facilities like the gym may be coordinated with the parks and recreation department, while oversight of creative space could involve rotating residencies or cooperative models managed by artists or small business groups.

Profit and Loss Statement (P&L)

The consolidated P&L merges all revenue and expense assumptions into a single five-year financial projection. It includes debt service modeled in the debt amortization schedule and provides insights into the project's ability to maintain sustainable operating margins. The model outlines the pathway to breakeven and supports planning for a stabilized operating scenario by year 5. The P&L analysis shows that, with blended occupancy from mission-aligned users and anchor partners, the facility can reach operational stability by year 5, with the gym and event spaces generating reliable community-based revenue streams that offset variable usage in maker or innovation areas.

Incorporating Housing as a Project Addition

As part of the larger redevelopment plan for the Oldham school site, the concept includes adding new housing units along with the adaptive reuse of the school building. This mixed-use strategy supports both financial sustainability and community revitalization goals by combining income-producing residential development with a versatile, mission-driven community facility. As noted earlier, housing is explored as part of the concept design and funding plan development of this study.

Initially, the proposed concept design included about ninety-six housing units in a three-story layout, with a mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units. However, after community feedback during the second community presentation in June 2025, the plan was revised to lower the total number of units by limiting the building height to a maximum of two stories. This change ensures better alignment with the surrounding residential scale and character and reduces the overall occupancy at the site. These adjustments demonstrate a commitment to incorporating community input and ensuring the project enhances the neighborhood's fabric.

The residential component continues to be a progressive part of the overall site strategy, and its potential inclusion in the project vision offers several clear benefits:

- supports a walkable, connected campus environment with shared outdoor spaces, market zones, and gathering areas accessible to both residents and community members
- boosts site activity and density, supporting the long-term viability of the school building's commercial, programmatic, and community uses
- introduces a supplementary funding and development track, aiding in offsetting infrastructure and site preparation expenses

- creates opportunities for intergenerational programs and local services. Residents, especially seniors and families, can benefit from on-site wellness and recreational activities offered in the gymnasium, kitchen, and event spaces, led by community organizations, the parks and recreation department, or public health agencies.

The final evaluation of how the housing development can be integrated into the project is expected to be provided by a private development partner. However, the design and development opportunities it offers have been considered to shape key assumptions about site layout, infrastructure, parking, and access. It also establishes a built-in customer base that can support tenant spaces and community programming within the school building. For example, residents might participate in cultural events at the gallery, attend markets or performances, or take arts and maker classes, which can boost demand for local entrepreneurial services and strengthen neighborhood ties.

Design Recommendations

A preliminary site plan and concept layout were created for the Oldham school facility to support the feasibility study's cost analysis, program alignment, and possible operating model. This design process allocated specific square footage to each intended use based on stakeholder input and projected tenant or program needs, while also considering the scope of renovation, functional zoning, and site limitations. The following design notes directed this next phase.

Primary Interior Space Components of Design

All interior program spaces (as described in the following bulleted items) are located within the existing school building, covering roughly 31,585 square feet. Spaces were designed to focus on accessibility, operational efficiency, and program compatibility.

- Commercial kitchen and prep/pack spaces are centrally located to serve shared users and food entrepreneurs. The kitchen's central location allows easy access for multiple tenants and supports the logistics needs of food-based operations. The goal is for these spaces to support the "acceleration" of graduates from other incubation kitchens in the area, such as Hope & Main, and/or could be leased to medium- to large-scale food companies (like catering firms, food trucks, or product development companies and consumer packaged goods). The facility will feature four autonomous kitchen units designed for cooking, production, scullery, and storage. The kitchen corridor also includes garbage holding areas and access points for other users of the facility to have food-safe space access on a more flexible or short-term basis.
- Maker studios and production spaces include five studios, one of which can be converted into an event or gallery space. These versatile studios accommodate various artists and tradespeople, such as visual artists, textile workers, sculptors, and performance instructors. Potential program partners might include the East Providence Arts Council, DESIGNxRI, or artist-run collectives. The convertible studio supports both tenant operations and community exhibits or classes. The spaces are designed to be adaptable or "white box" to serve a wider range of users and purposes.
- Demonstration kitchen and café/event space are located near central corridors to support community engagement and public-facing programming and to improve overall flow. The café space could be active with tenants offering grab-and-go service or used for pop-up events. Workforce development programs may use the demonstration kitchen for culinary training, with potential partners such as the RI Hospitality Association or Center for Southeast Asians.
- Storage spaces—including dry, cold, and frozen storage for kitchen users, along with dedicated café and maker storage areas—were sized and located based on survey responses. They also include specialized environments for food safety and arts material preservation, which may involve climate control or ventilation systems.
- Training and incubation spaces include a multi-user office, training rooms, a classroom or flex space, and a multi-functional computer lab. These are designed to support technical assistance, entrepreneurship programs, and

job-skills training. Stakeholders such as Social Enterprise Greenhouse, RI Skills for RI Future, and the Education Exchange could offer programming in these rooms.

- Community-serving spaces, including a retained gymnasium and adjacent gallery and event areas. The gymnasium is expected to be used by the East Providence Recreation Department for community fitness, youth sports, and senior wellness programs. It may also host cultural events or be available to nonprofit partners for mission-aligned activities. The gallery and event spaces can support rotating exhibits, community theater, or multipurpose events organized by local arts groups, such as the East End Theater.
- Facility support areas include scullery, lockers, janitorial rooms, shared restrooms, and utility/storage rooms. These support spaces are designed to serve both daily tenant needs and high-volume event requirements, ensuring functionality in all programs.

Exterior Space Components of Design

In addition to interior renovations, the model includes approximately 6,660 square feet of exterior space programmed for public and flexible use.

- A ground-level patio and market area are designed for outdoor events, vendor activations, or community markets. This space supports seasonal pop-up markets, craft fairs, or small festivals and can be programmed in partnership with local entrepreneurs, cultural organizations, or community groups like the Riverside Renaissance Movement.
- Paved parking and site drives, supporting logistics, tenant access, and ADA-compliant entry and loading zones near the kitchen, are included to facilitate food distribution or mobile vendors.
- Landscaped and circulation zones promote walkability and improve site aesthetics and usability. Outdoor spaces will boost the site's appeal and accommodate future outdoor activities such as garden installations, arts activation, or passive recreation.

Design Schematics

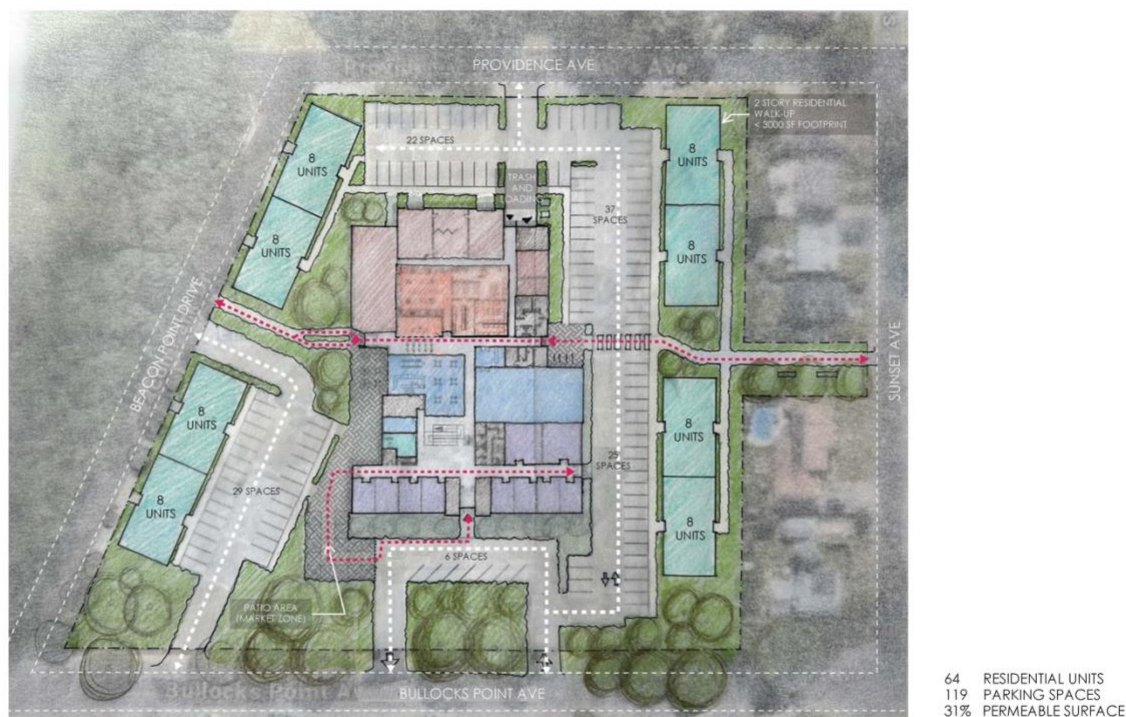
Two design schematics were created to support this project scope. One interior design diagram was developed to illustrate the allocation of space within the Oldham school facility and how the desired objectives could be achieved through space specialization. Figure 3 below is a thumbnail of this design, which was also shared with the project team, community members, and potential partner organizations for feedback and final approval.

Figure 3: Design schematic — interior spaces (Oldham school facility)



The second design schematic, figure 4, is an exterior site plan showing how the campus could be updated to meet the needs of the Oldham school site update, along with the potential integration of housing elements as discussed. The site plan, as noted, is a study of the possible integration of housing and other outdoor spaces that support the Oldham school assessment and study.

Figure 4: Design schematic — site plan of Oldham school and full parcel



	PREPARED FOR: CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE JULY 15, 2025	FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR MUNICIPALLY OWNED PROPERTY. THIS IS NOT AN ARCHITECTURAL OR CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENT. BUILDING FOOTPRINT AND AREAS SHOWN HEREIN ARE ESTIMATES BASED ON ARCHIVED PLANS AND PHOTOGRAPHS. ALL INFORMATION MUST BE FIELD VERIFIED, REVIEWED AND FINALIZED BY A STATE LICENSED ARCHITECT PRIOR TO OFFICIAL USE.	SITE DIAGRAM SCALE: NTS ISSUED FOR CLIENT REVIEW OLDHAM SCHOOL FEASIBILITY STUDY	PUBLIC MAKER BUSINESS INCUBATOR	KITCHENS RESIDENTIAL

Both designs were used to inform the building program space allocations, as discussed in the next section of this report, as well as to provide visual context for potential operating and program partners to discuss workflow and process flow opportunities within the site. Full versions of both designs are included in the appendix resources.²⁰

Building Program Assumptions and Details Informed by Design

A snapshot of the building program is provided in table 43 below. The complete building program is included in the appendix resources and details the following assumptions:

- Total interior square footage modeled: 31,585 square feet
- Total exterior program square footage: 6,660 square feet
- Revenue-generating space allocation: approximately 77 percent of interior square footage
- Non-revenue or support space allocation: approximately 23 percent of interior square footage

²⁰ All design resources are provided and developed as concept documents to support the feasibility study and should not be used or represented as final architectural or build development documents. An architect licensed in the state of Rhode Island will be required to provide final design development documents to support any future development of the project as it transitions into development and construction.

- All program spaces were evaluated for renovation intensity using three categories:
 - NC (new construction): full build-out required (e.g., kitchen, demo kitchen)
 - BR (basic reuse): partial reuse of structural components
 - USR (use as-is or light reuse): limited renovation, typically for storage or circulation areas
- Current budgets assume stair and ramp upgrades as needed for ADA compliance

Table 43: Building program summary snapshot

	Interior	Exterior	Total	% of total	Total cost of construction (hard)	AV/SF
Total building gross square footage	31585.00	6660.00	38245.00		\$8,018,313.25	\$209.66
Total non-revenue-generating square footage	8875.00	0.00	8875.00	23%	\$1,312,018.75	\$147.83
Total revenue-generating square footage	22710.00	6660.00	29370.00	77%	\$6,706,294.50	\$228.34

Operating Models

The operating model for the Oldham school redevelopment explains how the facility will support local entrepreneurs, community organizations, and workforce training. Based on market demand, stakeholder feedback, and space feasibility, the facility will feature production, incubation, educational, and public-facing functions. The proposed operational structure divides the building into functional areas that align with the vision of a multi-use community business incubator.

Overview of Programmed Spaces

The redevelopment model contemplates the adaptive reuse of approximately 31,600 square feet of interior space and 6,600 square feet of exterior space. The internal layout is divided into several core components:

Table 44: Programmed spaces (summary table)

Space type	Primary function	Potential operator
Core facility and kitchens	Shared-use food production, incubation, storage, aggregation	Site developer or third-party food incubator operator
Community event and training space	Workforce training, community engagement, educational programming	Local nonprofits, workforce training providers, parks and recreation department
Maker/studio spaces	Business incubation for arts, trades, and light manufacturing	Small businesses or shared management entity
Demonstration kitchen and café/event space	Public events, culinary education, revenue-generating rentals	Community partner or culinary program lead
Logistics and storage	Dry, cold, and frozen storage; cleaning and prep zones	Managed by core operator
Tenant stalls and offices	Long-term or short-term use by nonprofits and small businesses	Direct leaseholders (nonprofits, small businesses)

Each space's viability and inclusion in the model were evaluated based on its ability to support the facility's financial sustainability, either by generating direct revenue (such as leasable studios and commercial kitchens) or by strengthening the facility's mission and attracting partners (such as community event spaces and classroom areas).

Key Operating Assumptions

- **Shared management model:** The building is expected to operate under a shared management structure, with a central operator overseeing site-level tasks (leases, maintenance, utilities), while specialized partners manage individual components (e.g., kitchens, maker spaces).
- **Incremental revenue strategy:** Revenue is expected to be generated through various formats: per-square-foot leases, rentable space use (kitchens, classrooms, offices), and rentals of event space, each with tiered pricing assumptions reflecting below-market rates to promote accessibility and align with the mission.
- **Phased occupancy and utilization:** The operating forecast considers phased leasing, with projected total space utilization rising from about **52 percent in year 1** to **74 percent in year 5**, as tenant recruitment, program activation, and marketing efforts expand. This increase reflects the time required for tenant recruitment, buildout completion, and marketing.
- **Support for diverse users:** Spaces were designed to accommodate food, arts, and other activities. Ventilation, sound isolation, and food safety features were integrated into the layout to enable multiple industries to operate at the same time.

Management Models

The management model for the Oldham school redevelopment clearly distinguishes between property ownership, campus operations, and specialized space management. The City of East Providence plans to keep ownership of the property while engaging third-party partners to manage individual facility components and programs.

Role of the City

According to the operational framework developed as part of this study, the City of East Providence will retain ownership of the Oldham school property and act as landlord and long-term steward of the site. The City is ready to potentially offer lease incentives or phased lease arrangements to support early-stage facility activation among mission-focused partners. To help identify a key development partner and operator, the City is prepared to assist in identifying and vetting development and operating partners for individual spaces if needed and to support measures that ensure community-serving goals such as affordability and equitable access are maintained through any lease or operating agreements. The City is eager to see this project move into development and is also prepared to support zoning adjustments and capital investment strategies as needed to launch the project.

The City's role will not include managing the daily operations of the facility but will instead focus on governance, oversight, and aligning with public interests. The City may also continue to engage through departments such as the Department of Planning and Economic Development to support neighborhood integration, public programming, and alignment with municipal initiatives.

The City has expressed a desire to maintain an operational role in community-serving gymnasium spaces to ensure these areas primarily support youth, summer sports, senior activities, and arts programming managed by the parks and recreation department. The model offers free access to this space for the City (no assumed lease) in exchange for preferred or deferred lease terms for any potential operator.

Primary Campus Management

Day-to-day oversight of the facility is expected to be delegated to a site developer or primary operator, which could be a nonprofit, mission-aligned enterprise, or third-party developer chosen by the City. This operator will mainly be responsible for leasing management of all spaces throughout the facility; maintenance and janitorial staffing, including a two-person maintenance team; and oversight of shared infrastructure, including access corridors, common kitchens, and shared-use areas.

It is expected that, if a development partner takes on this role, they would also oversee the lease or sale of any housing related to the site. To this end, the design includes an office space where staff can manage site-wide marketing and tenant engagement efforts, ensuring cross-sector coordination and maintaining facility cohesion.

It is possible that, if the campus operator is a mission-aligned organization (or even a developer), they might handle some specialized activities such as booking event spaces, leasing maker spaces, or managing cross-programming space functions throughout the facility. If not, partners (as discussed below) or sub-tenants would operate and oversee these special use areas.

Special Use Area Management

In addition to the site-wide manager, space-specific operations may be delegated to partners or organizations with expertise in the respective focus areas. The model expects that the following partners or organizations with specialized programming, skill sets, or capacity might be needed to oversee these spaces:

- A culinary partner, small-business acceleration organization, or maker collective could operate the shared kitchen, maker/production spaces, and gallery or event areas. Specific knowledge of food safety and food skills would support some of the functionality here.
- Nonprofit organizations or training institutions could manage the classroom, workforce, and event spaces. This could also include a group of smaller organizations sharing the lease on larger workforce spaces and utilizing the classroom, offices, computer labs, and other facilities to support programs and training.
- Retail and café spaces could be leased to food-based businesses or rotating pop-up vendors.
- As mentioned earlier, the gymnasium and some outdoor areas may be scheduled or jointly managed with the East Providence Recreation Department, allowing for public programs such as youth sports, senior fitness, or cultural events.

Each operator would handle staffing, programming, and revenue generation for their respective spaces, while contributing to shared facility operations through lease or use fees. This distributed model enables specialized expertise and community-focused leadership across sectors, while maintaining financial responsibility and overall site coordination. To facilitate collaboration, a site-wide operators' working group or advisory body could be established, providing coordination among stakeholders in culinary, arts, education, retail, and recreation.

Cost Models (Project Budgets)

The cost model for the Oldham school redevelopment provides a detailed overview of the capital and pre-operational investments needed to transform the former school site into a multi-use community and entrepreneurial center. Planned as a single-phase project, it utilizes both public and private funding support to deliver programs aligned with its mission in food, arts, and workforce development.

The model was developed through a detailed, space-by-space program fit and reflects investments in areas prioritized through stakeholder interviews, including the commercial kitchen, training and incubation zones, and community-serving gym and outdoor spaces. This customized approach helps ensure feasibility across a diverse range of partners and users.

Development Budget (Cost Roll-Up)

The total redevelopment cost is estimated at **\$24,658,658**, encompassing all hard and soft expenses, as well as working capital and contingency funds. These costs encompass both the core rehabilitation and customized build-out required to

support various uses, including shared kitchens, market stalls, creative studios, classrooms, and community gathering spaces.²¹ This development budget (also referred to as a cost model) draws from two primary sources in the financial workbook, and table 45 illustrates the summary data from three sheets:

1. The **Cost Roll-Up** sheet, which aggregates high-level budget categories and creates a total development budget including all construction, pre-development, equipment, starting capital and associated potential increases in cost and inflation
2. The **Building Program/Cost Model** sheet, which provides a detailed breakdown of each programmatic space, its square footage, construction assumptions, and buildout costs
3. The **Pre-Development** sheet, which includes projections of hard and soft costs associated with the construction such as design and development, site costs, insurance and associated permit fees, financing costs, and marketing/staff costs

Table 45: Cost model summary

Category	Estimated cost
Construction (hard costs)	\$15.97 million
Soft costs (design, permits)	\$5.24 million
Working capital reserve	\$65,582
Startup operating reserve	\$1.37
Owner contingency (9.5%)	\$2.01 million
Total project cost	\$24.66 million

These costs support approximately **31,600 square feet of interior space** and **6,600 square feet** of exterior space, including essential outdoor areas such as vendor patios and loading zones. The exterior investments aim to develop vibrant community areas, including a versatile market patio and walkable landscape design that allows for activation by vendors, cultural events, or city programs.

Building Program

The building program in the financial workbook details each interior and exterior area by type and program function and specifies the construction assumptions for each space that affect the totals of the cost/development model.

- **Kitchen and production spaces** include five maker studios, prep and packaging areas, and a commercial kitchen, totaling over **7,000 square feet**. The kitchen has higher per-square-foot rates (\$420–\$448) due to necessary utilities, food-safe finishes, and specialized ventilation. These higher-cost spaces support infrastructure needed for anchor users such as culinary training programs, small food producers, and value-added manufacturers.
- **Storage spaces**, including dry, cold, and frozen storage, as well as maker storage, are constructed to commercial standards and support both vendor and kitchen users.
- **Retail and event spaces**, such as the café, demo kitchen, and gallery/event areas, total nearly **4,000 square feet** of indoor space and **6,660 square feet** of outdoor market patio. These spaces are expected to be actively used for seasonal events and rotating vendors.

²¹ The total project budget and development costs are based on the Oldham school redevelopment only and do not include the cost to develop housing infrastructure on the parcel. Some allocation of expenses has been developed for site preparation, roadways, parking lots, etc., but these costs will increase if housing is added. Similarly, pre-development costs allow for minimum budgets for the finalization of some remediation, demolition, and site prep work, but it is assumed that the developer and/or City will have a separate remediation budget that will address mold, asbestos, and lead issues identified in preliminary assessments of the site that the City commissioned via other authors.

- **Training and incubation spaces**, including classrooms, computer labs, and multi-user offices, total over **6,000 square feet** and are expected to undergo light to moderate renovation to accommodate a variety of users and flexible use over time. They will also be adaptable for multiple tenant types and programming partners, including nonprofits, workforce trainers, and business support organizations.
- **Community spaces**, including a gym and flexible-use event rooms, encompass over 4,000 square feet and are designed with minimal renovations. They include dedicated community access areas that may not generate direct income. While not revenue generators, these spaces offer important neighborhood value and support equitable access and ongoing community engagement, which are priorities identified by stakeholders during planning.
- **Building support spaces**, which include circulation, restrooms, and building operations offices, account for nearly 8,000 square feet of the building and require basic renovations to complete.

Each space in the building program area was assigned a cost per square foot based on the projected construction type and whether any cost savings might be seen due to existing conditions.²² The three levels of construction estimate included

- **NC (new construction)**: full build-out required
- **BR (basic renovation)**: selective rehab or moderate fit-out
- **USR (use as-is or light reuse)**: minimal investment for use-readiness

This space-by-space modeling approach guarantees alignment between architectural scope, construction budgets, and programmatic goals. It also offers future operators a clear understanding of the investment levels needed for each use, assisting in matching appropriate tenants, funders, and operators to each space.

Revenue-Generating vs. Non-Revenue-Generating Space

Out of the total 31,600 interior square feet, about 24,280 square feet (76.8%) are designed for revenue-generating activities. This includes leasable kitchens, studios, vendor stalls, training rooms, and event spaces that can generate income through rental agreements, program fees, or enterprise participation. The remaining 7,320 square feet (23.2%) is allocated to non-revenue-generating functions, including

- circulation and entryways
- bathrooms and janitorial areas
- mechanical and storage space supporting the core operations
- community gathering zones and the gymnasium, which support inclusive programming and community health objectives, particularly for youth and seniors

This balance enables high space utilization while ensuring accessibility, safety, and compliance with building codes and operational needs, reflecting the dual goals of financial resilience and public mission impact at the heart of the redevelopment.

²² Construction costs provided are aggregated from three national resources providing total cost per square foot for specialized construction build and development. The assumptions are updated bi-annually from the reference reports and quantify costs to include fluctuations in materials, labor, and finishing costs for specific regions across the country. East Providence was classified as an urban build in a northeastern U.S. city center. It is important to note however that current construction costs due to changing tariff and labor market fluctuations are highly inflationary and subject to increases daily. The project will be requested by a development and construction build firm as the actual date of development nears. These cost projections are for planning purposes only and based on the conceptual renderings.

Equipment Matrix

A portion of estimated costs reflected in the cost model are informed by equipment and furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FF&E) for all primary interior spaces. The model estimates a **\$1.36 million** equipment budget to outfit spaces, support tenant allowances for space outfitting, and provide basic FF&E for common or office spaces (desks, tables, basic fixtures, etc.). The equipment budget includes allowances for technology program offsets, parking and traffic structures for outside areas, and A/V support for event and training spaces. An allowance or basic outfit budget is applied to all specialized spaces (training, maker, office/co-work, kitchens), assuming minimal outfitting or allowances. It is understood that some anchor tenants or sub-tenants may choose to outfit the spaces differently, with those costs at their expense. The budget assumes all equipment ordered, delivered, and installed, including a 12.6 percent freight allowance. All equipment budgets are detailed in the Model Workbook “Equipment” sheet and are based on spec quotes from national suppliers.

Capital Sources and Financing Strategy

The model estimates that **\$21.2 million** in total funding needs to be raised to reach financial close. This “total to fund” excludes contingency and startup reserves, which are optional or discretionary percentages of the budget that the developer or the City can choose to include in capital raises. The model assumes the financing/capital raise mix illustrated in table 46 in order to burden the revenue and P&L models with some debt financing due to the high overall cost of this project (i.e., it is assumed that debt will be required as a funding tool or vehicle to support the project). This blend of capital sources reflects both the community-serving nature of the project and its potential for long-term financial sustainability.

Table 46: Capital mix for project funding (summary)

Capital source	Amount	% of total to fund
Debt financing ²³	\$2.12 million	~10%
Grants/public funding	\$5.30 million	~25%
Equity/philanthropic capital	\$13.78 million	~65%
Total to fund	\$21.21 million	100%

Implications for Implementation

This model supports a flexible construction and operational plan that emphasizes financial viability without compromising the project's mission. With over three-quarters of the facility dedicated to income-generating uses and a phased budget that accounts for capital sourcing, the redevelopment positions the Oldham school as a versatile hub for entrepreneurship, training, and neighborhood activation.

Revenue Models

The revenue model for the Oldham school redevelopment offers a year-by-year forecast of earned income across key operational areas. Based on utilization growth and tiered pricing, the model shows how revenue will increase as the facility becomes fully operational. The analysis uses assumptions about occupancy, rental prices, and operational readiness to guide projections. These projections are informed by feasibility interviews and case studies of similar

²³ A debt amortization schedule is included in the Model Workbook in the appendix resources and includes a projected annual interest rate of 10.4 percent, which is a midpoint rate between construction and mortgage CRE bank loan estimated rates for the time based on a twenty-year loan tenure with twelve payments per year.

facilities, assuming a strong regional market for flexible food production, creative workspaces, and accessible community event and training venues.

The primary revenue model is based on a leasing system, assuming that the main operator may be a developer or a larger organization managing the entire facility. Each specialized space was compared to local facilities to benchmark lease rates, and then a discount or a percentage below market rate was applied to encourage use by start-ups, early-stage, or mission-focused nonprofit partners. All lease arrangements are structured as triple-net leases to account for high utility usage—assumed across functions like food and cooking, skills and trades training, computers, manufacturing, and others—and to cover common charges, with a central operator responsible for maintaining cleanliness, safety, and overall upkeep.

Table 47: Lease baseline rates for all leasable spaces

Individual space lease rates	Lease structure	Discount applied ²⁴	Price
Kitchen space lease rate	SF/YR	10–15%	\$10.67
Maker space lease rate	SF/YR	10–15%	\$11.67
Café space lease rate	SF/YR	30%	\$9.57
Office space lease rate	SF/YR	30%	\$6.30
Training space lease rate	SF/YR	30%	\$4.65
Community space lease rate	SF/YR	100%	\$0.00
Average base rate			\$6.44
Triple net lease rate	30%		\$8.37

Core Revenue Components

The primary revenue-generating components of the project are

- **Shared kitchen space:** Reserved kitchen facilities meant for mid-sized food businesses, caterers, and food entrepreneurs on a rotating or lease basis. Operators may include a nonprofit culinary incubator or technical assistance provider, offering subsidized access for early-stage entrepreneurs and generating additional revenue through training programs. Leases are assumed for these spaces and built on an incremental increasing (over three to five years) lease value that starts below market and matches local market rates for comparable production or food-service spaces in the area.
- **Demonstration kitchen:** A flexible, public space used for classes, tastings, community events, and culinary education. This area can also be scheduled with local schools or culinary professionals to offer public classes, creating extra income from ticketed events or partnerships. The demo kitchen may be operated by a sub-operator who leases the space hourly, in three-hour blocks, or daily and might charge fees for cleaning, safety, or penalties related to following the rules for usage.
- **Maker studios:** Spaces for artists, makers, and small-scale producers designed as studios or light manufacturing areas. Lease terms usually involve stable monthly agreements, with opportunities for rotating residencies, retail collectives, or artisan cooperatives. Similar to kitchens, maker spaces are built on incremental lease assumptions with a minimum of 30 percent below market rate as a starting assumption.
- **Event and training spaces:** Flexible areas for community gatherings, professional training, workforce development, and organizational activities. These spaces are especially suitable for collaborations with

²⁴ A minimum of three marketplace comparable lease rates were taken for East Providence or adjoining communities to establish baseline rents before a discount “below market” was applied to make the space more accessible even with a triple-net lease assumption. The goal was to establish rents that would allow small businesses to access the resources while still supporting the operator’s ability to sustainably operate the facility.

workforce development agencies, the parks and recreation department, cultural presenters, and educational nonprofits. The lease for these spaces combines them into a single leasing structure, which typically assumes a below-market annual lease that could be held by one sub-tenant or a group of organizations working together.

- **Dedicated tenant spaces:** Long-term leased areas for anchor tenants, shared office users, and flexible training spaces. These are vital for financial stability and generate consistent income through base rental agreements. These leases may offer reduced rates for nonprofits or mission-aligned groups and might include hybrid lease-service contracts in exchange for programming or job training.

Each area includes assumptions regarding use frequency, rentable square footage, and pricing per assumed lease or rental term (hourly, daily, monthly, annual). Utilization assumptions increase steadily over the five-year period, based on the projected need identified in market analysis.

Table 48: Consolidated revenue model summary

	Allocation ²⁵	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Kitchen space — component pro forma	6.2%					
Utilization		75%	80%	85%	90%	100%
Total component revenue		\$18,410	\$20,713	\$24,333	\$25,735	\$28,524
Revenue growth (YoY)			12.5%	17.5%	5.8%	10.8%
Component operating income / EBITDA		(\$2,015)	(\$296)	\$1,615	\$2,374	\$4,488
Margin		-10.9%	-1.4%	6.6%	9.2%	15.7%
Demo kitchen space — component pro forma	17.1%					
Utilization		40%	45%	50%	55%	60%
Total component revenue		\$54,415	\$59,437	\$64,474	\$69,530	\$74,603
Revenue growth (YoY)			9.2%	8.5%	7.8%	7.3%
Component operating income / EBITDA		(\$1,536)	\$1,886	\$2,241	\$5,538	\$8,760
Margin		-2.8%	3.2%	3.5%	8.0%	11.7%
Maker space — component pro forma	16.9%					
Utilization		75%	80%	85%	90%	100%
Total component revenue		\$49,760	\$56,113	\$66,116	\$69,973	\$77,672
Revenue growth (YoY)			12.8%	17.8%	5.8%	11.0%
Component operating income / EBITDA		(\$5,702)	(\$933)	\$4,428	\$6,542	\$12,406
Margin		-11.5%	-1.7%	6.7%	9.3%	16.0%
Event spaces — component pro forma	48.1%					
Utilization		40%	45%	50%	55%	60%
Total component revenue		\$154,791	\$168,382	\$181,974	\$195,565	\$209,157
Revenue growth (YoY)			8.8%	8.1%	7.5%	6.9%
Component operating income / EBITDA		(\$3,086)	\$5,994	\$6,373	\$15,001	\$23,370
Margin		-2.0%	3.6%	3.5%	7.7%	11.2%

²⁵ Allocation is the percent of total revenue that the space/function generates in comparison to other spaces and offerings. This allocation percentage is used to approximate the component operating costs.

	Allocation 25	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Leasable (tenant) spaces — component pro forma	11.6%					
Utilization		75%	80%	85%	90%	100%
Total component revenue		\$38,395	\$40,955	\$43,514	\$46,074	\$51,193
Revenue growth (YoY)			6.7%	6.3%	5.9%	11.1%
Component operating income / EBITDA		\$199	\$1,667	\$1,030	\$2,389	\$6,245
Margin		0.5%	4.1%	2.4%	5.2%	12.2%
Blended utilization		52%	57%	62%	67%	74%
Total component revenue:		\$315,771	\$345,599	\$380,411	\$406,876	\$441,148
Total component operating income:		-\$12,141	\$8,316	\$15,687	\$31,844	\$55,268

These projections show an increase of nearly 45 percent in annual revenue from year 1 to year 5, highlighting strong growth potential through scalable operations and increased occupancy. The event and training spaces are the main contributors because of their versatile design and high demand for flexible gathering areas. Tenant leases provide a consistent and dependable income throughout all years. The blended utilization rate is also moderately conservative (52–74%), reflecting a realistic approach to growth across the facility compared to the usage of similar facilities in the region.

Projected Revenue Trends and Growth Potential

Shared kitchen revenue initially reflects fluctuating user numbers and limited capacity. Over time, collaborations with small food businesses and vendor training programs lead to steady usage. Early activation strategies might include partnerships with regional food system nonprofits or technical assistance providers that offer subsidized production time for local food businesses, or a referral network with local incubators and other production spaces in the region.

Demonstration kitchen growth is slower because events and classes take time to build public engagement. Community-based education, cultural culinary programming, and evening pop-ups can help generate early interest.

Maker studios reflect more stable monthly leases, leading to steadier income growth over five years. Artists and tradespeople interviewed during the feasibility phase expressed strong interest in accessible, affordable workspaces with shared equipment and retail proximity.

Event and training spaces experience the most significant growth, especially in years 4 and 5, as the facility establishes itself as a community hub for workforce development, small conferences, and partner events. Partners like job readiness programs, adult education providers, and workforce development nonprofits could serve as anchor users.

Tenant leases provide a steady baseline income. They include a dedicated café space (815 square feet at a discounted community rate), a multi-user office (2,560 square feet), and a large training/meeting room (3,325 square feet). Office tenants may consist of nonprofit service providers, business support organizations, or workforce intermediaries.

Space Utilization and Revenue Capacity

Approximately **76.8 percent of the interior space** at the Oldham school is designated for revenue generation. These areas include leasable kitchens, studios, tenant spaces, training and event areas, while the rest support circulation, mechanical systems, storage, and restrooms. This ratio of revenue-generating to support space is typical for hybrid

community–commercial facilities and reinforces the financial viability of the model. It also supports a mix of market-rate, subsidized, and mission-aligned pricing strategies that can scale across various tenants and programs.

Strategic Implications

The revenue model emphasizes how the Oldham school redevelopment is designed to balance community access with financial stability. By year 5, as the site matures, income from operations is expected to cover direct costs and support ongoing reinvestment in programming, maintenance, and staff. With diversified income streams, phased growth, and high utilization of revenue-generating space, the project is positioned as a long-term community asset capable of sustaining its mission-driven activities. Partnership-driven programming, thoughtful operator selection, and flexible lease terms will be key to maintaining revenue performance while ensuring equitable access to space and opportunities.

Profit and Loss Models (Breakeven Analysis)

A breakeven model determines whether and when the projected model can cover its operating costs with revenue without needing external funding. These details are shown on a profit and loss statement (P&L), which includes a five-year financial forecast. The P&L displays the bottom line after all revenues and operating expenses have been assessed. The revenue models discussed earlier guide the P&L revenue estimates based on an average utilization rate across all potential revenue sources. The revenue inputs, as previously shown, come from four main space types: (1) the commercial kitchen leases, (2) demonstration kitchen, (3) event and training rooms, and (4) tenant studios and offices. Revenue was estimated using conservative tiered pricing and utilization patterns that reflect market benchmarks, community affordability, and gradual implementation assumptions.

Detailed operational assumptions were developed for all major cost categories, including²⁶

- **labor:** a combination of full-time and part-time roles, including general management, custodial, and administrative staff
- **building operations:** utilities, cleaning, maintenance, and equipment servicing, scaled based on occupancy and square footage
- **SG&A (selling, general, and administrative):** includes professional services, software, marketing, and general office administration
- **taxes and insurance:** based on anticipated property valuation and nonprofit or public facility status
- **bank and credit charges:** transaction fees, merchant services, and reserve fund management

Breakeven Trajectory and Financial Sustainability

The P&L shows stable EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) by year 2 with a potential EBITDA of \$55,268 by year 5 of operations, serving as an indicator of financial health and stability when reviewing projections. This trend highlights the facility’s scalable model and its potential for financial stability as EBITDA is a proxy or placeholder for financial sustainability in conceptual projections.

The complete profit and loss statement accounts for potential depreciation, loan amortization, and maintenance capital expenses to give a complete view of cash flow effects and to reflect long-term asset upkeep. In year 1, it predicts a net operating shortfall of \$356,073 due to partial occupancy and initial ramp-up costs as well as the burden of 10 percent debt assumed for the \$24 million dollar build out. Even carrying this debt repayment, over five years, total revenue grows by nearly 45 percent, reducing the annual shortfall to \$228,555 by year 5. This trend highlights the facility’s

²⁶ All staff and operating cost assumptions are detailed in the Model Workbook included in the appendix resources on the Labor Model sheet and the Ops Costs (SG&A) sheet. All assumptions are noted and provide context to the rates used.

scalable model and its potential for financial stability. The P&L demonstrates that although the development partner will need to consider their financing options for the full build of the development, the structure of the financial operating model (lease-driven) will allow for offset of basic operating and staff costs in day-to-day scenarios. If the operator can increase lease rates closer to market value, the building stability grows significantly.

A dedicated operating loss reserve of \$1.44 million is included in the full development budget to cover early-year shortfalls and allow the facility to stabilize. This reserve ensures no additional subsidies are needed for operations through year 5, positioning the facility for long-term self-sufficiency.

The model forecasts a gradual increase in space utilization, rising from about 52 percent in year 1 to 74 percent in year 5. This growth aligns with phased tenant recruitment and scaled program activation. Although the facility does not reach full cash breakeven within five years, the operating loss reserve keeps the project solvent and allows it to move toward sustainability.

The primary contributor to revenue is the event and training space (48.1%), which benefits from its versatile design and expected demand from the community and partners. Other regular contributors include long-term tenant leases (11.6%) and public programs in the demonstration kitchen (17.1%). The shared-use commercial kitchen and storage areas expand over time, reflecting increased vendor training and culinary business activity.

Table 49: Summary profit and loss statement through EBITDA

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Blended utilization	52%	57%	62%	67%	74%
<u>Building component revenue</u>					
Kitchen space — component pro forma	\$18,410	\$20,713	\$24,333	\$25,735	\$28,524
Demo kitchen space — component pro forma	\$54,415	\$59,437	\$64,474	\$69,530	\$74,603
Maker space — component pro forma	\$49,760	\$56,113	\$66,116	\$69,973	\$77,672
Event spaces — component pro forma	\$154,791	\$168,382	\$181,974	\$195,565	\$209,157
Leasable (tenant) spaces — component pro forma	\$38,395	\$40,955	\$43,514	\$46,074	\$51,193
Total revenue	\$315,771	\$345,599	\$380,411	\$406,876	\$441,148
<i>% growth (YoY)</i>		9.4%	10.1%	7.0%	8.4%
<u>Operating costs</u>					
General campus and component labor	\$170,306	\$175,415	\$198,080	\$204,022	\$210,143
Building lease (triple net)	\$79,283	\$81,661	\$84,111	\$86,635	\$89,234
Insurance and taxes	\$9,212	\$9,559	\$10,168	\$10,560	\$10,969
SG&A	\$21,426	\$22,703	\$24,160	\$25,346	\$26,797
Maintenance and grounds	\$34,965	\$35,097	\$35,230	\$35,365	\$35,501
Software and security	\$12,720	\$12,847	\$12,976	\$13,105	\$13,236
Total operating costs	\$327,912	\$337,283	\$364,724	\$375,033	\$385,880
		2.9%	8.1%	2.8%	2.9%
EBITDA	-\$12,141	\$8,316	\$15,687	\$31,844	\$55,268
EBITDA margin	-3.8%	2.4%	4.1%	7.8%	12.5%

Net After Five Years

When combining earned income, operating costs, and reserve application, the P&L statement projects a **net surplus of \$65,582** by the end of year 5. This signals that breakeven is achievable under the modeled conditions. This analysis reinforces that with a blended use model, phased activation, and a reserve-backed ramp-up strategy, the Oldham school facility can operate sustainably while fulfilling its community and economic development goals.

Community Workshops to Share Design and Modeling

Following the completion of the modeling phase (including design development), the project team hosted a community and stakeholder engagement workshop on June 4, 2025, to present the redevelopment concept for the Oldham school site and gather public input on site design, programmatic uses, operational assumptions, and financial feasibility. The day included a city stakeholder briefing, a project partner meeting, and a community-facing workshop with interactive feedback stations.

Key activities and outcomes from the day included

- **City stakeholder session with the mayor and city staff:** The mayor emphasized the importance of clearly communicating that the City of East Providence will not operate the redeveloped facility. Instead, third-party partners will manage daily operations, while the City retains ownership and a long-term stewardship role. The City showed strong interest in maintaining a programming and operational role for the gymnasium, especially through its recreation department, to support youth services such as after-school and summer programs. The gym could also be leased during non-programmed hours, with the City having the right of first refusal for all scheduling. Housing was identified as a top priority. The mayor asked the project to explore opportunities for affordable, senior (55+), veteran, or mixed-market housing, with a focus on homeownership or condo models. This was seen as both a policy goal and a strategic move to align with state-level housing initiatives and funding priorities.
- **Stakeholder meeting with Hope & Main:** Hope & Main expressed concern that branding the redevelopment as a “kitchen incubator” could conflict with its mission and existing facilities. Instead, they recommended positioning the kitchen as an “accelerator” or leasable culinary space for two to four semi-permanent users. The proposed model would reduce wrap-around services and incubation staffing while still supporting regional culinary businesses. Hope & Main provided kitchen design feedback, suggesting split white-box spaces for each user, with dedicated dry, cold, and frozen storage and basic equipment (e.g., three-bay sink, hood line). Their current buildout costs offered benchmarks aligned with the proposed investment. They reiterated that demand for shared, early-stage kitchen use is limited and that this semi-permanent setup would better meet regional needs.
- **Community meeting:** Residents participated in interactive stations focused on building layout, outdoor space, and program preferences. The café/community space and gymnasium ranked as the top priorities across all preference lists. Feedback showed strong support for public amenities, with multiple requests for a senior center, soundproof music rooms, and after-school care facilities. The proposed mixed-use model was well received, especially the preservation of community access to the school building and its assets. Responses to housing were mixed: while many residents supported adding housing, concerns were raised about the original scale (ninety-six units) and the proposed three-story layout. Residents preferred a smaller-scale housing model with no more than two stories, preferably as townhomes or individual units that support homeownership rather than just rentals. Several residents highlighted the potential of housing to create a campus-like environment, adding vibrancy and long-term sustainability but also warned that parking capacity must be addressed in future design phases.

Implications for the Model and Site Plan

The June 4 event confirmed the multi-use redevelopment plan for the Oldham school. Community members and stakeholders responded positively to the integrated approach that combines entrepreneurship, public space, and

supportive services. The financial model, which includes flexible assumptions for phased use and diversified income sources, was confirmed as workable when paired with an external operator structure and targeted adjustments to program uses. Key adjustments moving forward included

- reframing the kitchen space as an accelerator model with longer-term tenants
- formalizing the City’s operational role over gym spaces for youth and recreation programming
- right-sizing the housing component to reflect community feedback, with a goal of balancing affordability, design scale, and homeownership pathways
- exploring outdoor public amenities, such as gardens or courtyards, to enhance community use

The project team concluded that the model aligns with both financial feasibility and community vision.

Funding Development Plan

The redevelopment of the Oldham school will be funded through a varied capital stack that includes public funding, state-administered tax incentives, philanthropic donations, and mission-aligned financing. The approach highlights layering non-dilutive and low-cost capital sources to enhance leverage and ensure long-term sustainability.

Public Grants

Federal, state, and local grant programs will offer crucial non-dilutive funding to support construction, infrastructure, and programming.

- **Community development block grants (CDBG)** As an entitlement community, East Providence will apply existing and supplemental CDBG allocations to support site improvements and buildout of community-serving spaces.
- **Economic Development Administration (EDA)** Public Works and Build to Scale programs may fund infrastructure and sector-based business development, particularly for the food economy and maritime sectors.
- **Rhode Island housing and HUD programs.** If affordable or senior housing is incorporated into the project, applicable HUD or Rhode Island housing grant programs will be pursued.
- **Federal and state program grants.** Additional sources such as USDA (local food promotion) or state workforce development grants may support equipment purchases, training programs, and small business services.

Tax Credits and Incentives

These tools will enhance project value by generating equity or reducing upfront costs:

- **Tax increment financing (TIF):** A tool used for capturing the future tax revenues, or increment, of new development or redevelopment to pay for the present cost of site improvements
- **New markets tax credits (NMTC):** If the site qualifies, NMTCs could generate equity equal to 20–25 percent of project costs through private investment leveraged by federal tax credits.
- **Low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC).** If residential units are included, LIHTC can subsidize development costs and attract private equity for affordable housing components.
- **Historic tax credits** (federal and state). If the building is eligible and certified as historic, preservation tax credits will be used to support rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.
- **Utility and energy efficiency incentives.** Rebates for HVAC, solar, lighting, and energy-efficient systems will help offset green building costs and support sustainability goals.

Philanthropic Contributions

Philanthropic investment will help close funding gaps and support mission-aligned components:

- **Foundation support.** The project should consider grants from Rhode Island–based foundations (e.g., Champlin Foundation, Rhode Island Foundation) as well as national funders with interests in food systems, arts entrepreneurship, and community revitalization.
- **Corporate sponsorships.** Local and regional companies could be interested in investing in spaces or programs related to workforce development, small business incubation, and community health. There could even be opportunities to offer naming rights for key spaces (e.g., kitchen, studios, event spaces) and to highlight the project’s local impact.

Flexible Financing and Loans

Flexible, low-interest financing tools will supplement grant and equity funding to cover capital costs and bridge cash flow needs:

- **Below-market and commercial lending.** Loans from mission-aligned and nonprofit lenders to support the redevelopment of underutilized or community-serving spaces
- **Energy efficiency and clean energy financing.** Long-term tools like C-PACE enable investment in HVAC, solar, and green building systems to lower utility costs and boost sustainability
- **Community investment and construction loans.** Affordable capital from community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and similar lenders for construction, working capital, and tenant improvements
- **Tax-exempt bond financing.** Bonds issued by public agencies (e.g., RIHEBC) to finance capital costs for qualifying nonprofit or educational parts of the project

Funding Sources

Table 50 provides a list of grants, building incentives, and lenders that should be considered. As mentioned previously, certain grants will only be available based on the organizational structure of the developing entity, its partnership with local economic development departments, and the ability to demonstrate economic benefits.

Table 50: Funding plan sources

Funding source	Type of tool	Funding amount	Overview
<u>RI Community Development Block Grants</u>	Grant	Varies	East Providence receives money directly from HUD based on entitlement formulas. This project will need to be included in the City’s annual action plan for consideration.
<u>RIIB C-PACE</u>	Loan	Energy efficiency, renewable energy, environmental health and safety projects	Provides long-term, fixed-rate financing for building upgrades in commercial and industrial properties; subsidized, below-market interest rate
<u>Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation</u>	Bond	Renovation, land acquisition, new construction, major equipment	Issues tax-exempt and taxable bonds to finance capital projects for nonprofits, health centers, workforce training facilities, community centers, etc.
<u>Providence Revolving Fund</u>	Loan	Commercial loans range from \$1M to \$2.6M+	Provides customizable financing such as pre-development, construction, bridge, and mezzanine loans. Priority is given to projects that promote deed-restricted mixed-income developments with a preservation component.
<u>Waterfront District TIF</u>	TIF	Typically covers 10–20% of total project costs	TIF can be used for land assembly and acquisition, demolition, infrastructure development, and to provide incentives and technical support for businesses that are building new facilities, renovating existing facilities, or replacing failing equipment.

<u>Rhode Island Energy</u>	Rebate	NA	Provides incentives and technical support for businesses that are building new facilities, renovating existing facilities, or replacing failing equipment
<u>EDA Public Works</u>	Grant	Typically range between \$600,000 and \$5M	Supports construction of infrastructure projects such as business incubators, workforce training centers, and public facilities that advance regional economic competitiveness
<u>USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)</u>	Grant	\$500,000 + 25% match over 36 months	Establish, expand, and improve food enterprises and market channels. Project activities may include food incubator programs, mid-tier value chain development, food safety certifications and upgrades, virtual marketplaces, and route optimization and efficiencies.

Strategic Funding Considerations

Although the Oldham school site is not situated in a designated new markets tax credit (NMTC) or community development financial institution (CDFI) investment area, the project’s emphasis on serving low-income residents, small businesses, and underserved entrepreneurs could still qualify it for mission-aligned financing and grant programs.

Population-Based Eligibility

Many federal and state funding sources—including USDA, EDA, and CDFI lenders—grant eligibility based on programmatic impact rather than geography alone. Since this project targets low- and moderate-income populations, it remains competitive for funding streams related to workforce development, food system infrastructure, and community revitalization.

Partnership Opportunities

Forming strategic partnerships with nonprofits, workforce development agencies, and educational institutions broadens access to restricted grants and technical assistance. These partnerships can support applications for Department of Labor, HUD, and USDA programs focused on training, entrepreneurship, and community health.

Funder Priorities and Impact Measures

It is essential for the project to consider funder priorities from major foundations, potential partners, and grant sources to ensure they align with these objectives. Table 51 shows how the project can best align with these suggested focus areas.

Table 51: Funder priorities assessment

Funder priority	Description	Impact measures
Economic development	Support for local business growth, entrepreneurship, and job creation	Number of businesses incubated; local job creation; increased commercial activity
Workforce development	Training, skill-building, and career pathways for underserved populations	Participants trained; job placement rates; employer partnerships
Affordable housing	Access to quality, affordable housing for low-income or senior residents	Units developed or preserved; income-qualified occupancy; housing stability

Funder priority	Description	Impact measures
Community space/youth programs	Space and services for youth, families, and public use year-round	Program enrollment; seasonal participation; events hosted; youth served
Local food infrastructure	Improved access to locally grown, healthy food through infrastructure	Pounds of food distributed; number of producers served; community meal access

Program and Partnership Opportunities

Programming Opportunities

Community feedback and stakeholder engagement during the feasibility study highlighted a strong need for accessible, skill-building programs to support small business growth and workforce development in East Providence. Survey respondents and interviewees especially valued opportunities to help them start, stabilize, and expand their businesses, particularly in the food, arts, and workforce sectors (upskilling). Programming at the revitalized Oldham school facility can play a critical role in overcoming barriers such as high startup costs, limited access to production space, and a lack of specialized business support services.

Each space within the Oldham school redevelopment is designed with specific programming needs in mind, aligned to both community demand and the interests of potential operator-partners identified through the feasibility and market analyses.

- **Commercial kitchen and culinary training space program areas:**
 - recipe scaling, production workflow, and food preservation techniques
 - licensing, food safety, and dietary-specific production (gluten-free, allergen-safe)
 - business development for food enterprises, including fundraising and marketing
- **Demonstration kitchen and café/event space program areas:**
 - public-facing cooking classes, demonstrations, and tastings
 - café operations with community integration
 - event rentals, pop-up showcases, and food entrepreneur features
- **Maker studios and creative production space program areas:**
 - technical training in woodworking, textiles, and digital media
 - artist development and cooperative gallery/retail
 - production workflows for multimedia and craft goods
- **Multi-use classrooms program areas:**
 - business planning, branding, and financial management
 - job readiness and workforce pipeline programs
 - nonprofit-run workshops and organizational meetings
- **Gymnasium and recreation facilities program areas:**
 - after-school and youth enrichment programs
 - summer camps and senior wellness programs
 - public recreation and city-managed athletic events
- **Event and community gathering space program areas:**
 - community markets, festivals, and arts showcases
 - cultural food events, music and performance nights
 - public convenings and local networking forums
- **Top requested program types (community and stakeholder input)**
 - business development and scaling support: strategy, branding, marketing, finance, capital access
 - food business training: licensing, recipe development, preservation, dietary specialization
 - creative/maker programs: technical and creative skill-building, gallery/retail activation
 - workforce and trades training: job readiness, partner pipelines, inclusive program design

- community programming: culinary events, arts showcases, youth/senior programs

The feasibility study also identified numerous partner organizations interested in offering or co-developing programs in these areas. These partnerships, including nonprofits, incubators, arts councils, educational institutions, and city departments, will be crucial in ensuring the facility supports inclusive, mission-aligned, and economically driven programming for East Providence residents.

Partnership Opportunities

Throughout the feasibility study, multiple organizations from the food, arts, and workforce development sectors demonstrated strong interest in participating in the operation and use of specific spaces within the redeveloped Oldham school facility. These stakeholders emphasized how they could contribute to the ongoing use, oversight, or tenancy of dedicated spaces, helping to keep the project vibrant, accessible, and well-managed. The following bullets summarize space-specific operational and tenant opportunities, based on feasibility analysis and stakeholder input.

- **Commercial kitchen and culinary production spaces**
 - **Potential partners:** Hope & Main (accelerator/lease model), Education Exchange (culinary training), Farm Fresh RI (network/referrals)
 - **Operational opportunities:** Hope & Main proposed shifting from a kitchen incubator to an accelerator model, suggesting two to four semi-permanent tenants who lease the space and are responsible for partial outfit. This would reduce the burden of wraparound services. Farm Fresh RI and the Rhode Island Food Policy Council may advise on best practices for kitchen oversight, vendor vetting, and food system integration.
- **Demonstration kitchen and café/event space**
 - **Potential partners:** Rosa's Tavern, local food entrepreneurs, culinary business owners
 - **Operational opportunities:** Rosa's Tavern expressed interest in leasing kitchen or café spaces, contributing to ongoing activation; oversight of pop-up vendor coordination and event rentals
- **Maker studios and creative production areas**
 - **Potential partners:** East Providence Arts Council, local arts educators
 - **Operational opportunities:** leasing and managing gallery/event space or shared studios; providing access for instructors or small businesses needing affordable work or display areas; potentially overseeing a cooperative retail outlet or shared storefront for artists
- **Multi-use classrooms**
 - **Potential partners:** Education Exchange, regional nonprofit organizations
 - **Operational opportunities:** acting as anchor or co-tenants for dedicated office space; subleasing flexible desks or meeting rooms to aligned service providers; providing administrative oversight or coordinating shared services
- **Gymnasium and recreation spaces**
 - **Potential partner:** East Providence Recreation Department
 - **Operational opportunities:** city-led management and scheduling of youth and recreational programs; control over gym leasing with right of first refusal; maintenance and safety oversight
- **Outdoor and community grounds**
 - **Potential partners:** community groups, neighborhood associations, senior services organizations
 - **Operational opportunities:** stewardship of outdoor gathering spaces; maintenance and programming of open-air event spaces; use of outdoor areas for wellness or intergenerational gatherings
- **Event and community rental spaces**
 - **Potential partners:** cultural institutions, education partners, nonprofits
 - **Operational opportunities:** oversight of booking systems and use agreements; stewardship of evening and weekend access for rotating events; providing liability management and on-site supervision when needed

These partners provide essential capabilities and local insight to manage and activate specific spaces over time. As the project moves into implementation, formalizing space-level partnerships will be crucial to ensure efficient operations, responsive community use, and a sustainable, inclusive long-term model.

Development Plan

Development Timeline and Components

The Oldham school redevelopment will follow a multi-phase process, starting with this feasibility study and moving through further planning, design, and construction. Completed by July 2025, this study marks the first step in a larger effort to develop and confirm the concept. The development process is expected to include the following parts:

- **Concept development:** This phase includes the initial feasibility study—market analysis, community engagement, stakeholder interviews, and assessment of site suitability and potential uses. It confirms community support and the opportunity to turn the Oldham school into a multipurpose incubator space. This stage also identifies potential partners and key facility needs based on input from the community and small businesses.
- **Pre-development:** Following the feasibility study, the City will begin identifying development and operational partners. This includes gauging interest from potential development partners and/or operators for specialized spaces such as the shared kitchen, maker space, or community event space.²⁷ This phase will also involve refining the concept model, evaluating risks, and preparing for site and facility design. It may also include finalizing project objectives, funding strategies, and partnership agreements.
- **Development:** Once development partners are confirmed, the project team will bring in design and construction experts to start environmental cleanup, renovation, and new builds. This includes handling abatement needs (mold, asbestos, water damage), improving building accessibility features, and creating food-safe and sound-separated spaces where necessary. Site preparation and layout changes identified during this feasibility phase will guide the design and construction process.
- **Implementation and occupancy:** The final stage involves activating the facility. Operational partners, such as kitchen or program space managers, will begin outfitting spaces, onboarding tenants, and launching programs. Community, production, and training spaces will be brought online according to finalized designs. This stage also includes testing equipment, establishing scheduling systems, and initiating early programming and space usage.

Continuing Role of Partners, Advisory, and Stakeholders

As the project progresses beyond the feasibility stage, the partners, advisory members, and stakeholders involved throughout will continue to play important roles. These roles will be shaped by future decisions regarding final site plans, operational models, programming priorities, and the identification of managing entities and collaborators needed to move the project into implementation.

Many organizations interviewed during the market analysis and community engagement phases showed interest in staying involved as operators of specialized spaces, program leaders, or partners in workforce and small business development. As the City and its chosen development team refine the operating and financial models, it will be important to revisit these early relationships and determine the best way to maintain ongoing engagement.

Early stakeholder groups often develop into more formal structures, such as community advisory boards, project steering committees, or oversight bodies embedded within a development or operating agreement. These structures

²⁷ NVA has been engaged to support the continuation work for the Oldham school facility project including a development partner search, advanced and updated visualizations, and a business/management plan developed for the primary operating partner and/or city uses. This work will begin in July 2025 following the conclusion of the feasibility study and is being supported by EDA funding.

usually focus on maintaining the original mission and commitments outlined during the feasibility study, ensuring fair access, and providing guidance as the project evolves over time.

City Oversight of Recreational Spaces

Through discussions with city leadership and community feedback, a clear interest emerged in the City of East Providence maintaining operational oversight of the gym and related recreational spaces. The East Providence Recreation Department is expected to lead youth programming, including after-school and summer activities, while retaining the right of first refusal on space scheduling. This structure supports both public access and coordinated use through other organizational partners.

Governance of Food and Creative Spaces

Several stakeholders have expressed interest in participating in managing or co-managing core facility spaces. This might include oversight of kitchen areas, shared storage, or maker studios. Their involvement could lessen the administrative burden on a single operator while supporting specialized programming and compliance requirements.

Formation of a Community Advisory Board

To maintain ongoing stakeholder input and transparency, the project team might consider establishing a community advisory group. This group could include residents, organizational partners, and city representatives to help with implementation, monitor progress toward community goals, and offer feedback on space use and program development.

Alignment with City and State Priorities

The mayor and other city stakeholders have highlighted the importance of aligning the project with broader city goals, especially in developing affordable housing, supporting local businesses, and revitalizing neighborhoods. As the project progresses, this alignment will help secure funding, policy backing, and public-private partnerships.

Oldham School Feasibility Study – Feasibility Conclusions and Next Steps

Strategic Variables

The Oldham school redevelopment project offers a strong conceptual foundation and has garnered significant interest from the community and stakeholders. Its success depends on several strategic factors that can influence both feasibility and implementation results. Recognizing and managing these factors proactively will be crucial as the City and development partners pursue the redevelopment plans.

- **Operator identification and management structure:** A key factor in ensuring operational sustainability is securing a qualified lead operator or team of co-managers for the facility's various components, especially the commercial kitchen, creative spaces, and community areas. The City has indicated it does not want to serve as the operator (except for the gym); this opens up an opportunity to establish new partnerships.
- **Housing program scale and design:** Community feedback highlighted both support and concerns about the proposed housing component. Adjusting the scale and offering homeownership options could boost public support while aligning with city and state funding priorities. If scaled correctly, housing may also open up additional funding sources that help subsidize other community uses.
- **Phased development:** The project's \$24.66 million total cost requires a flexible funding approach. Combining public grants, philanthropic capital, tax credits, and debt, while considering phasing specific parts (focusing first on the kitchen and event space, then on housing or creative spaces), could make the project easier to finance and provide time to develop partnerships.
- **Partnership-driven programming:** A key strength of the project is the widespread interest from local and regional organizations in providing workforce development, creative programming, and food-based enterprise support. Formalizing these partnerships could lessen the burden on the City and operator while boosting long-term impact. Engaging partners early also helps ensure programming is demand-responsive and financially sustainable.
- **Community and political support:** The feasibility process showed strong interest in preserving the Oldham school as a publicly accessible space. Maintaining momentum through ongoing transparency, neighborhood outreach, and alignment with local priorities (youth programming, senior services, housing affordability) will be crucial for securing future approvals, funding, and community involvement.
- **Flexible use design:** Design strategies that promote multi-functional and shared use of spaces will improve space utilization and maximize return on investment. Infrastructure decisions that enable adaptability over time, such as modular partitions or scalable kitchen build-outs, can ensure the project remains relevant to evolving user needs.

Risk Assessment

The redevelopment and adaptive reuse of the Oldham school site into a revenue-generating facility that meets community needs is a complex effort that involves several operational and financial risks. The following are key considerations that may impact the project's implementation and long-term viability:

- **Model assumptions and operator alignment:** The operating model developed for the Oldham school is based on conservative projections, using benchmarks from similar facilities and regions. While the model presents a feasible and scalable approach to community-based operations, it serves as a framework rather than a fixed plan. Final projections will need to be adjusted to match the specific capacity, mission, and revenue strategy of a chosen operator or development partner.
- **Environmental and structural remediation risks:** Although the City has already completed initial remediation work—including roof patching, removal of a defunct oil heating system, and limited asbestos abatement—additional environmental remediation is expected. Mold from historic roof leaks, floor tiles with possible asbestos, and lead paint are present throughout the facility. Full cost exposure will not be known until further demolition and assessment occur. These conditions create uncertainty in both capital costs and project timelines.

- **Cash flow and early-year deficits:** While the operating model achieves EBITDA positivity by year 2, it remains cash-flow negative during the first five years of the ramp-up period. The facility will need approximately \$1.4 million in operational reserves to cover staffing, programming, and overhead during this early stage if debt is used for the build, as projected. Additional grant funding or philanthropic support might be necessary to bridge this gap.
- **Event space dependency:** About 48 percent of projected earned revenue comes from special events and training room rentals. While this shows the space’s versatility and ability to engage the community, it also poses risks from changes in event demand, seasonal variations, and user group availability. A diverse strategy to attract both mission-driven users and long-term tenants will be essential.
- **City use of the gymnasium:** The City of East Providence has shown interest in securing the first right of refusal for the gymnasium, possibly for parks and recreation programs or summer camps. While this aligns with public goals, it could limit the building’s overall revenue potential and will require careful coordination to prevent conflicts with other uses or operator duties.
- **Funding environment and market conditions:** Regional nonprofit and philanthropic partners have shown strong interest in the project; however, the broader funding landscape—especially at the federal and foundation levels—has become more competitive. This could impact the availability or timing of essential capital, particularly for fit-out or specialized programming.
- **Demographic and market trends:** Rhode Island’s population growth is expected to remain steady, with a projected 2 percent decline in East Providence between 2025 and 2030. Additional research may be needed to identify the types of housing, services, or public infrastructure that will best meet future demand if housing is to be used as a tool to support overall parcel development and funding options.
- **Competition and supply in the food sector:** The project’s kitchen incubation and small business support components align with regional and statewide priorities. However, two new shared kitchen facilities—Gate House and Hope & Main Providence—are also under development. These will increase regional supply and could impact occupancy or revenue from similar offerings.
- **Accessibility and visibility constraints:** The site’s location with limited access to public transit may decrease foot traffic and reduce participation from users outside the immediate neighborhood. This could impact both the performance of public-facing amenities (such as cafés or retail pop-ups) and overall tenant interest.

The project’s SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is summarized in table 52 below.

Table 52: SWOT analysis of the Oldham school project

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exterior envelope maintained to preserve building character and place within the neighborhood. • Preserving key facilities such as the gymnasium will help to reduce buildout costs and serve a noted community need. • Significant portion of facility (77%) projected to be allocated for revenue generating functionality further offsetting capital investment. • Incorporation of housing to support density and increased usage of facility programs. • Diversified range of uses offers multiple revenue streams – derisking revenue assumptions. • Lease-based revenue model reduces need for developer to directly manage operations and key functions. • Favorable property lease should incentivize project development & execution. • EBITA positive by year 2, despite conservative utilization outlook. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model is highly leveraged on revenue generated from event rentals (approx. 50%). • Model projects Net Loss during initial 5 years, requiring \$1.4M in operating cash reserves. • Location may not provide enough traffic for user-base from outside the immediate neighborhood / region • Lack of public transit options can increase challenges for utilization from populations without access to cars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversified use-cases provide community multiple offerings and touch-points for engagements. • Training and resources provided by East Providence Career & Technical Center will continue to increase the demand for spaces serving a variety of trades and creative functions. • Improvements to public infrastructure (Crescent Park & new public beach) along with increases in property values suggest growing demand for new and improved community, business, & economic development resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RI population growth is projected to be relatively flat with 2% population decline projected for East Providence between 2025-2030. • Growth of work-from-home policies have led to an excess of commercial real estate, potentially saturating the downstream market for flexible training and workspaces. • Local and regional partner interest may be impacted by recent wider nonprofit and federal grant funding constraints. • Forthcoming regional shared kitchens (Gate House, Hope & Main Providence) to increase supply for food business resources.

Feasibility Conclusions

The East Providence Oldham School Feasibility Study found strong and ongoing interest in turning the site into a versatile community and business hub. The study's results, based on thorough stakeholder interviews, market research, and financial analysis, show that a well-planned, phased redevelopment of the building is financially feasible and meets community needs, including support for small businesses, workforce growth, and the creative industry.

The proposed facility design, which includes commercial kitchens, maker spaces, classrooms, offices, community gathering areas, and potential housing, directly addresses identified gaps in the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. These uses were confirmed through citywide engagement efforts, community meetings, and detailed scenario modeling. The City of East Providence has clearly expressed its intent to retain ownership of the property while engaging third-party operators and partners to manage the facility components and lead programming.

Operational and financial models project strong growth in both utilization and revenue over five years, with 76.8 percent of space allocated to revenue-generating functions. The project reaches EBITDA stabilization in year 2 and includes reserves, debt service, and operational staffing costs in its long-term planning to accurately assess cash flow, considering financing the build and development as well as offsetting growth needs. Incorporating housing, especially ownership-based models with limited stories and smaller structures, can support both financing and community alignment if integrated carefully.

Stakeholder organizations have clearly shown interest in supporting program delivery, managing specific spaces, and acting as tenants. These partnerships will be key in developing a lively and inclusive facility that aligns with local priorities.

NVA has determined that redeveloping the Oldham school facility into a mixed-use space supporting community goals, small business growth, and workforce development is a feasible plan that should move forward to the next stages of development and planning.

Recommendations and Next Steps

To advance the redevelopment of the Oldham school from feasibility into implementation, the following immediate steps are recommended:

- **Secure development and operations partnerships:** Issue an RFP for a site developer and facility operator, incorporating feedback from the City and stakeholders. This should include language that potentially allows for phased activation of the community spaces (Oldham school facility) and further evaluation of the collaborative housing models.
- **Formalize programming and tenant partnerships:** Re-engage organizations that showed interest in space use, programming, or operations to establish letters of intent with key partners to clarify shared responsibilities and scheduling
- **Launch capital strategy:** Build a mixed capital stack, including public funds, philanthropic support, impact investment, and tax credits; and explore alignment with state housing priorities to access infrastructure or housing-related grants and determine whether incorporating housing adds value to the overall redevelopment of the parcel
- **Refine program and space plans:** Adjust site plans to include community feedback on housing density and parking and continue collaborative design to ensure usability for all ages, cultures, and business types
- **Establish governance and oversight structure:** Create a community advisory or oversight body to guide implementation and ensure accountability to feasibility goals; also, consider city- or nonprofit-led facilitation of a long-term governance entity

With a viable plan and strong community backing, the Oldham school redevelopment is well-placed to become a key community asset for East Providence. By partnering with local organizations, the project can provide meaningful economic, cultural, and social benefits to residents of East Providence.

Appendix of Supporting Documents and Resources

The following resources were created during the project and are provided to support future outreach and the development of the Oldham school facility.

General Project Documents

- E. Providence Oldham School Feasibility Study Project Hub (Workplan/Timeline, Communication Matrix)
- Project Kickoff Deck
- Project Information Sheet

Phase 1 Documents

- Phase 1A: Site Evaluation Resources
 - Site Workbook (Evaluation Summary)
 - Site Evaluation Presentation Deck
- Phase 1B: Market Analysis Resources
 - Research Plan and Areas of Research
 - Survey Resources (draft, final report, guide)
 - Interview Guide
 - Case Studies Presentation Slides
 - Market Analysis Final Presentation Deck

Community Meeting Resources

- Phase 1 Community Meeting Resources
- Phase 2 Community Meeting Resources

Phase 2 Documents

- Concept Model Presentation Deck
- Modeling Scope Presentation Deck
- Final Design Iteration (2 views)
- PDF exports of Modeling Workbook (multiple)

Finalization

- Final Feasibility Report (this document)
- Final Feasibility Presentation Slides (Full Project Summary)
- Executive Summary Slides