Preliminary Findings

Hartford 2010: Phase I Workshop
Emerging Themes

May 31, 2006

Landscape and Ecology

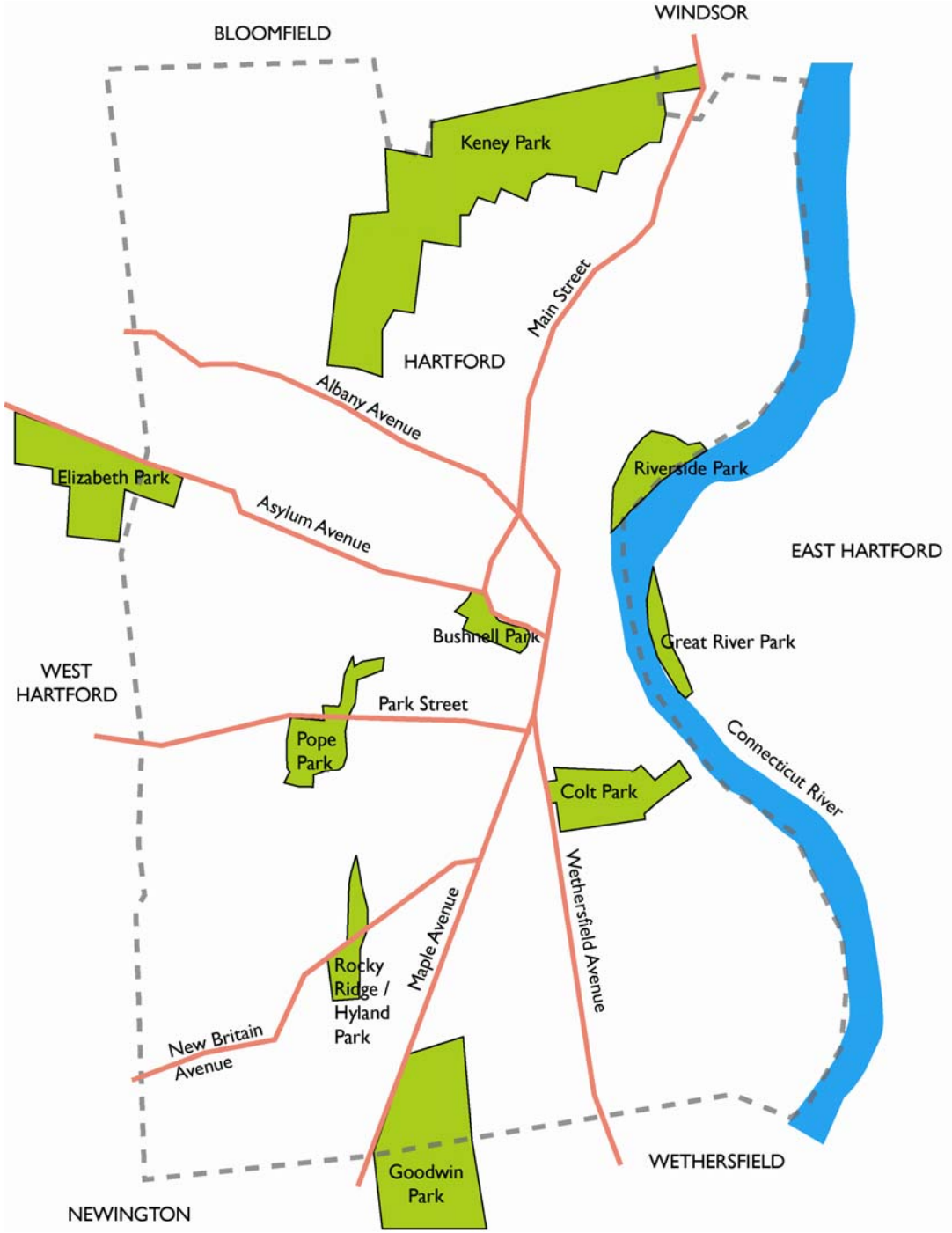
Agnes Denes, Wheatfield – A Confrontation, 1982, Battery Park Landfill, New York City

Guiding Philosophy: Landscape and ecology are agents of positive transformation in cities.

Views to downtown formerly provided from high points in several of the parks have now been lost to unmanaged tree growth.

Convergences of major thoroughfares are often confusing for both drivers and pedestrians.

The basic structure of large parks connected to downtown by radial avenues exists, but is largely illegible.



Hundreds of forested acres in Keney Park provide access to nature within sight of Downtown Hartford.

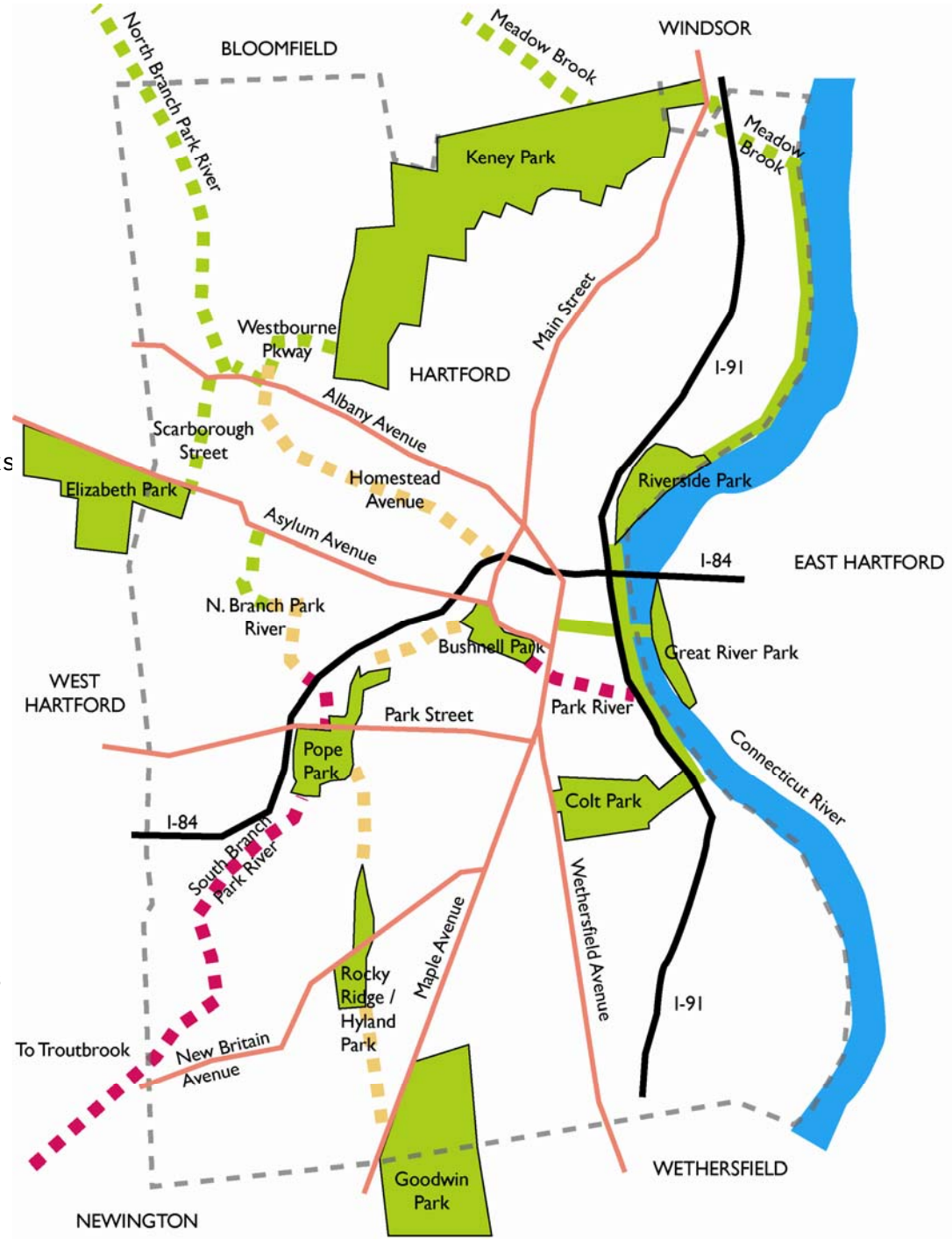
The distribution of amenities within the large parks would benefit from a larger vision of park structure and use.

While in some cases benign neglect has led to positive results within the large parks, an approach to park programming and maintenance is needed that acknowledges the immense size of the parks and the limited resources with which to manage them.

Aptly named, the Park River once connected parks to downtown and to the Connecticut River.

With significant portions of the river now in underground culverts, how might new connections be made?

Innovative approaches to re-connecting the park system are needed in light of contemporary realities.



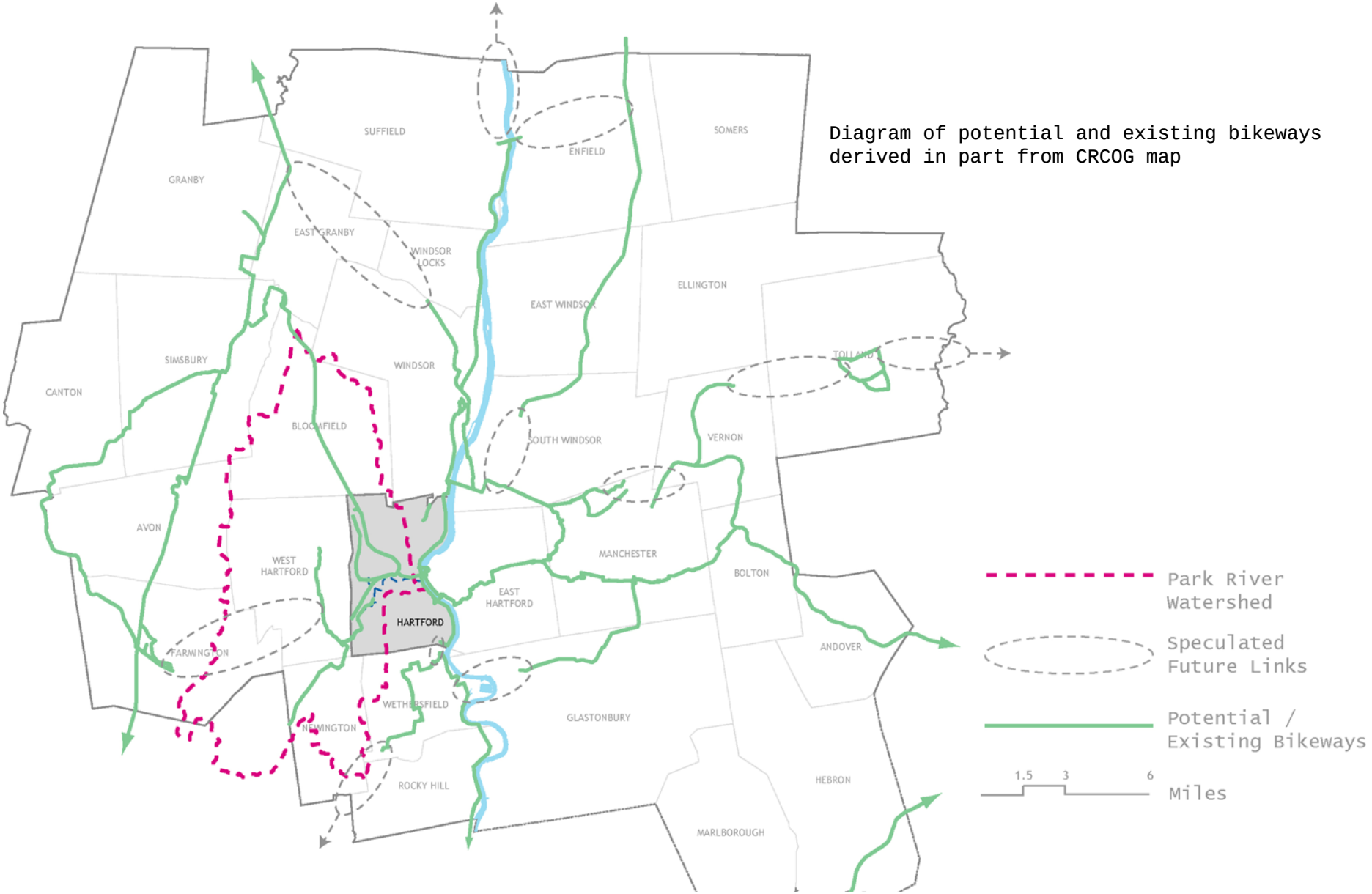
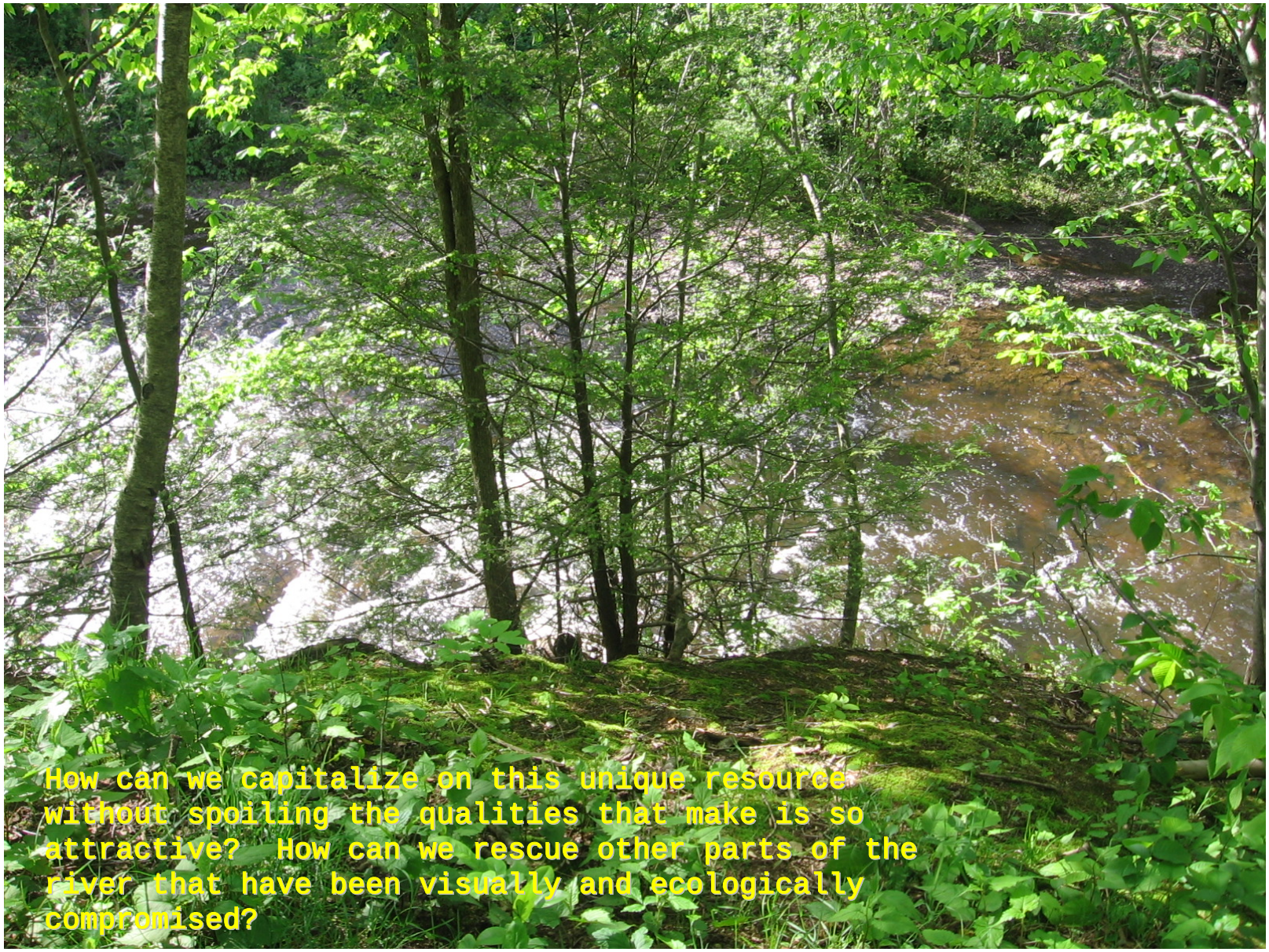


Diagram of potential and existing bikeways derived in part from CRCOG map

These connections could become critical links in what is an emerging regional network of multi-use trails with Hartford as the hub.



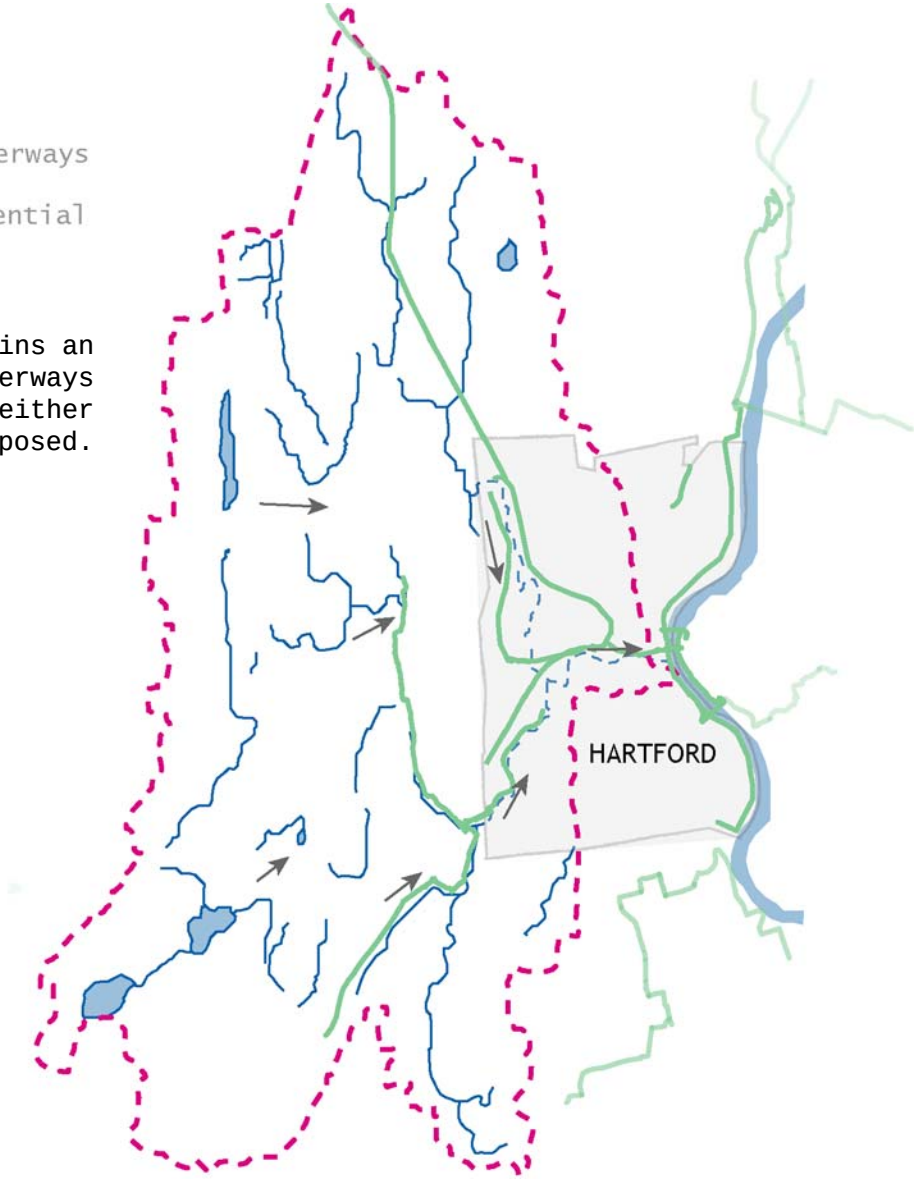
Still, the Park River beckons…

Park River Watershed

Permanent and Intermittent Waterways

Existing and Potential Bikeways

The Park River watershed contains an interconnected network of secondary waterways along which several multi-use trails have either been built or proposed.



Watersheds connect adjacent communities ecologically. Planning and design at the watershed scale can lead to stronger physical and psychological connections as well.

With an aging infrastructure for carrying stormwater about to undergo a significant overhaul at great expense, the obligation exists to protect waterways from future sources of pollution, and the opportunity exists to identify synergies between infrastructural and urban design objectives.

Image Source: Metropolitan District Commission Long Term Control Plan

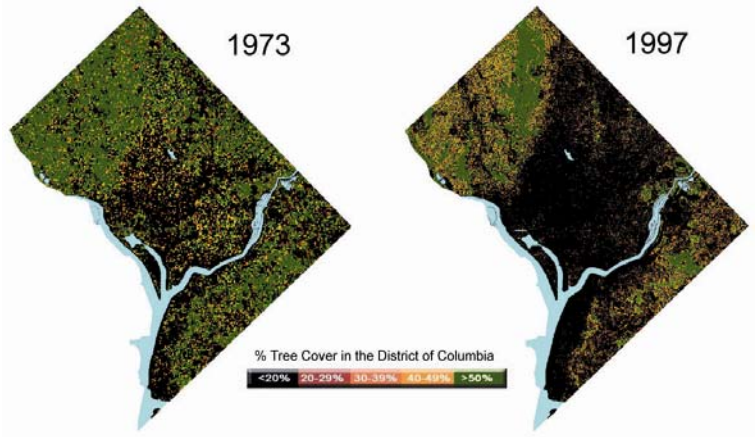
Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA

Marion Square, Charleston, SC

Still, if current and new residents are to remain in the city, it will be in part because the collection of smaller public spaces can support a full range of outdoor activities.

Mature Pin Oaks in the South End.

Another South End street that has lost most of its trees due to, among other factors, the cumulative impact of repeated pruning to avoid conflicts with utility lines.



Washington D.C. lost an alarming proportion of its legendary tree canopy over a 25 year period due to a similar pattern of issues.

While the tree canopy in Hartford's neighborhoods is in large part still in tact, the ravages of time have begun to take their toll.

American Elms planted at regular intervals highlighted the scale and status of Washington Street, Hartford (date unknown).

Clusters of more intimately scaled trees provide refuge for outdoor dining near DuPont Circle, Washington, DC.

The multiple roles that street trees play within the city should be considered when planting the next generation of Hartford’s urban forest.

Initial Assessment of Strengths

1. Ample open space – 18% of total land area.
2. Major parks distributed equitably among neighborhoods.
3. Tree canopy relatively in tact in many areas.
4. Access to Connecticut River strengthened by recent improvements.
5. Variety of landscape types – natural, civic, active and passive recreation, memorial, others…
6. Right-of-ways and setbacks allow for street tree planting in areas away from street and with larger soil volumes.
7. Landscape patches of significant size to support wildlife and prolonged experience of nature.
8. Historic significance – Olmsted legacy, Colt, others…
9. Unique amenities – Eliz. Park rose garden, Bushnell park carousel, others…

Initial Assessment of Weaknesses

1. Connections between parks inadequate.
2. Inadequate active recreation space in close proximity to work centers.
3. Lack of cohesiveness among parks – design vocabulary, uses, etc…
4. Safety issues and perceptual issues related to safety.
5. Illegal dumping of trash and yardwaste along Park River and in Keney Park.
6. Overhead utility lines interfere with existing and new street trees.
7. Aging canopy trees subject to multiple prunings, storm damage, etc… beginning to die off.
8. Lack of cohesiveness to street tree planting strategy: species, spacing, etc…
9. Pope Park severed by I-84 and other roads.
10. Connection to CT River still compromised by I-91.
11. Not enough neighborhood scale parks of adequate size to be useful for recreation (?)

Some Opportunities…

1. Utilize a combination of secondary waterways and boulevards as connections between peripheral parks and to neighboring towns.

2. Utilize radial avenues to strengthen connections between peripheral parks and Bushnell Park at the core.

3. Explore potential overlaps between MDC infrastructure upgrades and strategic improvements to parks and streetscapes.

4. Emphasize low-impact development practices to reduce runoff and impacts on watershed.

5. Explore concept of ‘urban wilds’ and management implications for existing and proposed parks and greenways.

Are there others???