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The revitalization of downtown Hartford: this is the goal of the following Action Strategy, a set of actions to be implemented in downtown Hartford. The Action Strategy is a MetroHartford Millennium Project led by the Hartford Downtown Council in partnership with the City of Hartford and the Connecticut Capitol Region Growth Council. The focus of the Action Strategy is on action - short, medium and long term.

The Hartford Action Strategy springs from the Millennium Project, an economic plan for the entire MetroHartford region sponsored by the Connecticut Capitol Region Growth Council. Amongst other findings, it concluded that a healthy downtown is required for a healthy regional economy. The statement, "You can't be a suburb of nowhere," summarizes the recognition that while suburbs might provide a safe, comfortable and convenient place for many to live, they need to be centered on a dynamic core that is succeeding. A healthy downtown offers a range of cultural experiences, diversity of living accommodations and an intensity of activity that cannot be duplicated in the suburbs.

At the heart of the Millennium Project's recommendations is a new vision of downtown Hartford. Building on its existing cultural and entertainment venues, the Millennium Project suggests that the new role for downtown Hartford is as a regional arts and entertainment center. This is key, but only a part of the future role which will inevitably be more complex and multi-faceted, supporting layers of overlapping and inter-related uses. Downtown needs to evolve from a 9 - 5 workplace into a place where people also live and play, that remains active throughout the day and night, and which attracts tourist and visitors from local and far flung destinations.

The Millennium Project highlights the need for healthy neighborhoods that offer a high quality living environment. Bringing people back to the city to live, to support local retailers and restaurateurs, and to stroll on the streets in the evening is one of the keys to re-energizing downtown



A healthy downtown is required for a healthy regional economy



The new vision for downtown Hartford builds on its existing cultural and entertainment venues, such as The Bushnell Theater.

Hartford. This has implications in terms of built form. It is these implications that are the focus of the Action Strategy. What should downtown Hartford look and feel like?

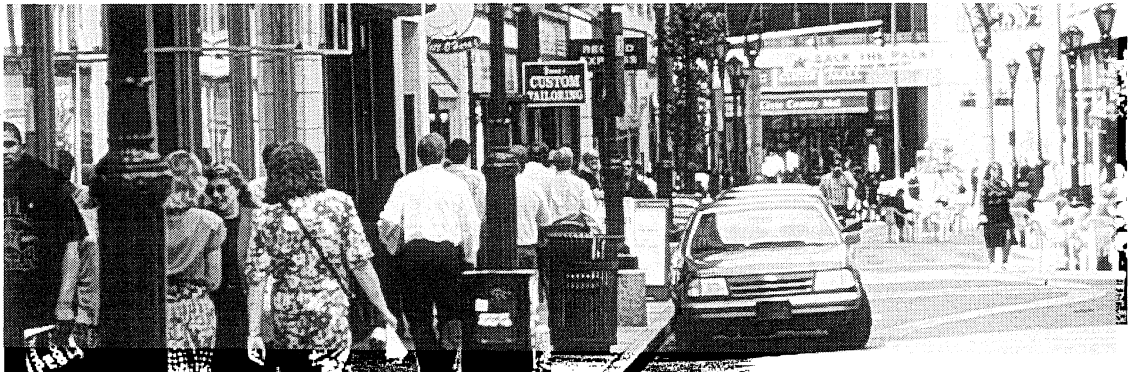


At Zuzu's Cafe street life means good business

Many elements impact the way a city looks and feels: the quality of parks, the design and feel of streets, the shape of buildings, the relationship between buildings and streets, and the relationship between uses. Above all, it is the partnership between these elements that creates a place, and a sense of vitality. The buildings, the streets, the transportation systems, and the landscape must all work together to form a healthy city. The Action Strategy addresses all these aspects of the urban fabric.

Downtown Hartford today

The timing for this Action Strategy is ideal. Downtown Hartford is on the cusp of a significant change. After decades of unprecedented economic shocks - downsizing in the defense, finance and insurance industries - the economy is slowly rebounding. Job creation is on the upswing. The office market is strengthening. A small group of individual investors are planning several significant new developments, albeit at a more modest



Pratt Street - bringing people back to live, to support local retailers and restaurants and to stroll the streets is one the keys to re-energizing downtown Hartford

scale than that proposed in the late 1980s. Governor Rowland and the Legislature have earmarked some \$300 million to kick-start the downtown revitalization. Beginning as early as the 2001 NFL season, Hartford will be the new home of the New England Patriots.

How can energies be directed to contribute to the emergence of downtown Hartford as the regional cultural and entertainment destination envisioned

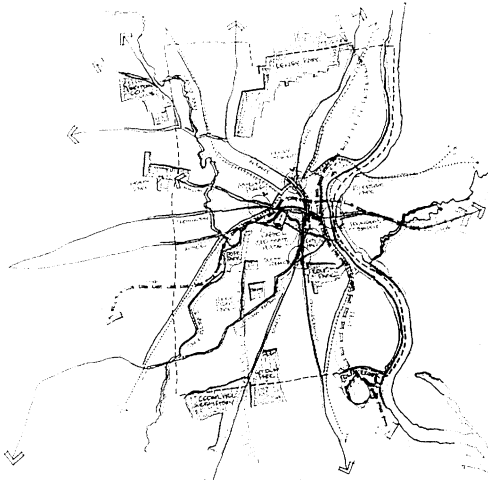
by the Millennium Project? How should existing proposals be modified? Where should new development be targeted? What are the important connections to be made, and how? What other initiatives need to be undertaken?

There are outstanding resources on which to build: historic, built, natural and social. For example, the “Rain of Parks” created an emerald necklace of parks ringing the downtown that includes Bushnell Park, an oasis within the city; Colt Park, waiting in the wings for rejuvenation; and Elizabeth Park, with the magical rose garden. Despite extensive demolition, there remain some beautiful heritage structures that reveal Hartford’s former wealth and stature. However, a long standing tendency to undervalue important resources means that many are diminished or stand alone as isolated objects. The opportunity now exists to establish new synergies between these resources and build from them.

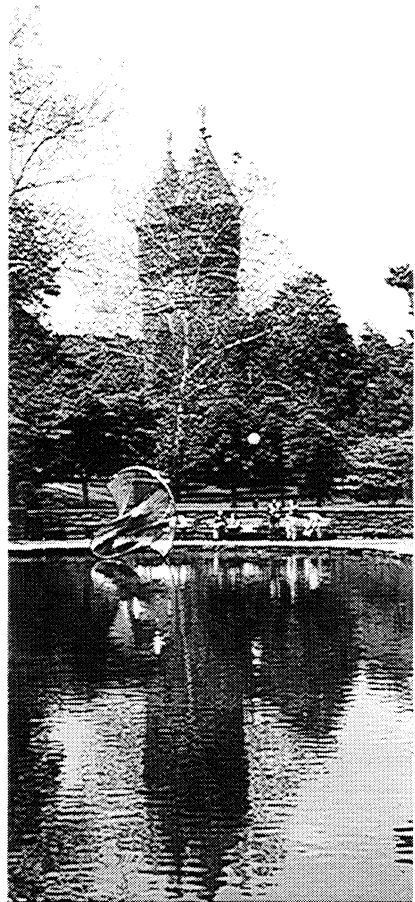
Current initiatives can be leveraged to support a more diverse future for downtown. These initiatives also provide an extraordinary opportunity to modify the quality and pattern of development. There is a need to shift from project driven development, which contributed to the fragmentation of the social and physical fabric of downtown Hartford, toward the creation of a place. Through an integrated and strategic approach to the siting and design of new projects, Hartford can reinvest itself for the next millennium, by creating a unique, inviting and human-scale destination. At the same time, there are significant challenges to overcome.

Hartford at the Crossroads

The metaphor of the crossroads is useful in a number of senses. First, literally: Downtown Hartford is focused on the Main and Asylum Streets crossroads, which form the hub of a once highly-coherent, radial system of streets and parkways that stretched out from the Old State House into the surrounding neighborhoods. This legacy was dwarfed in the postwar period by the dominating presence of the I-84 / I-91 interchange, a cross roads at an altogether different scale. Although the Interstate system provides excellent regional access, it cut a great swath through the historic street pattern, separating communities from the river and disrupting any intuitive sense of direction. There is now an opportunity to make these two crossroads, old and new, work in tandem, by building



The “Rain of Parks” ring downtown



Bushnell Park, created as part of the “Rain of Parks”, is an oasis within the city

Downtown Hartford is focused on the Main and Asylum Streets crossroads, which forms the hub of a radial system of streets and parkways that stretch out from the Old State House into the surrounding neighborhoods.



on the historic hub and spoke system and restoring the pre-eminence of downtown within the Region.

Socially, Hartford is also at the crossroads. Like so many American cities, the middle class fled to the suburbs, leaving a concentration of the most disadvantaged people in the city and downtown. In pursuit of purchasing power, the major retail stores also relocated to the suburbs, leaving the small downtown population with few services required with which to meet day-to-day needs. The creation of a holistic vision for downtown that supports an integrated community, holds the rare potential to forge bonds and unite currently disparate neighborhoods, identities and interests.

Finally, Hartford is at the crossroads between the car-oriented city of the past and a more balanced, pedestrian-oriented city of the future. Too many concessions have been made to the private automobile in isolation from other concerns. In the rush to accommodate cars, the downtown road system became heavily biased toward the automobile, making the streets uncomfortable and uninviting for pedestrians. Even for drivers, the road network is confusing. An “addiction” to immediate parking proximity sees the ground floors of many buildings used for parking and a pattern of



Too many concessions have been made to the private automobile in isolation from other concerns.

surface parking lots that fragments the city fabric. There is an opportunity to redress this imbalance and redesign streets to make them more comfortable for pedestrians once more.

The vision, principles for investing strategically, the actions and the Circuit Line

The Action Strategy provides a framework for decision making. It begins with the guiding “vision” for downtown Hartford and follows with the principles for investing strategically. From there on the Action Strategy outlines steps to be taken to achieve the vision and take maximum advantage of existing opportunities. The actions are broadly grouped under Urban Structure, Land Use and Transportation. Issues, opportunities, and actions are outlined.

Central to the Action Strategy is the Circuit Line, a set of high priority initiatives to be implemented over the next 3 - 5 years. The Circuit Line is an overlay of investments that builds on downtown’s core assets and new initiatives, proposed and in the pipeline. It is both a band of reinvestment and a shuttle line, the implementation of which can be structured as funds come available.

Building on downtown’s most significant physical asset, Bushnell Park, the Circuit Line links together virtually all of the existing and potential assets - Union Station, the emerging entertainment district north of Bushnell Park, Main Street, Constitution Plaza, the Connecticut River, Adriaen’s Landing, the Old State House, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the restaurants south of Bushnell Park and the State Capitol.

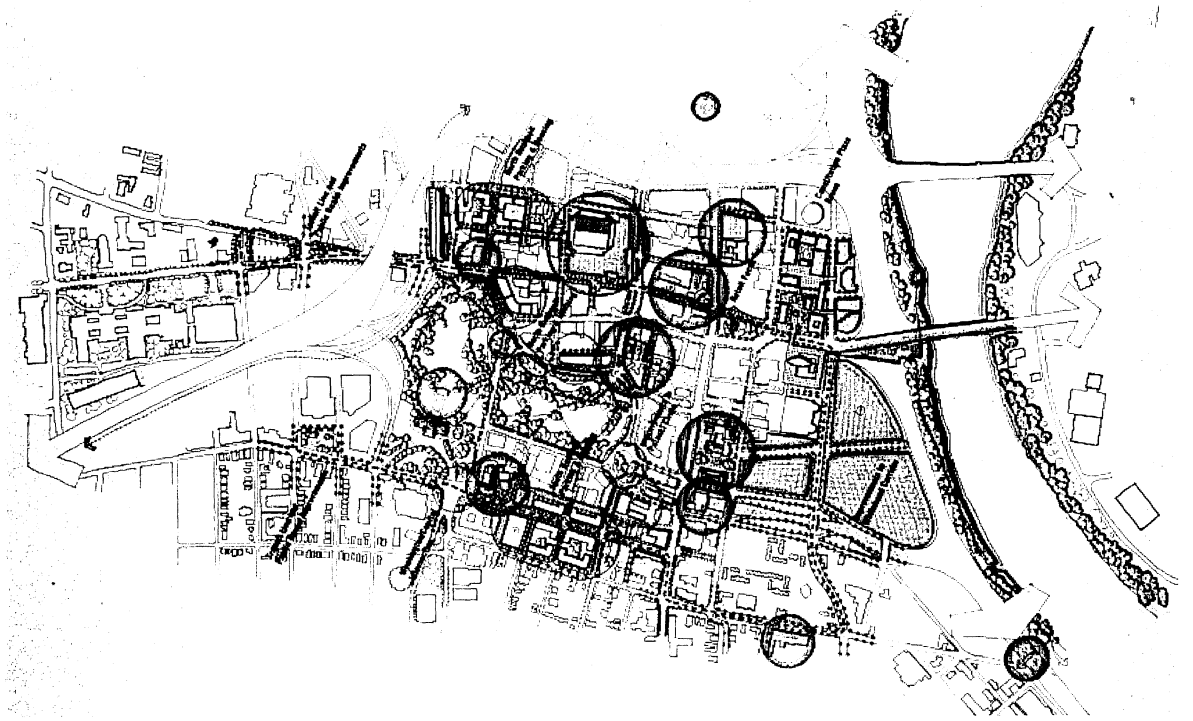
The Circuit Line anticipates a blend of new residential development, shared parking structures, streetscape and transit improvements that will form a band of healthy city fabric and a catalyst for further investment.

Introduction

Responding to each of the principles for investing strategically, this band of linked reinvestment facilitates the simultaneous achievement of many interrelated objectives and is recommended as the most effective means for revitalizing downtown Hartford. The Circuit Line provides a concrete example of how to use the principles for investing strategically as a framework for decision making.

Investment that has a sensible, understandable pattern is stronger. A series of urban design guidelines are outlined to shape buildings that embrace the city, its streets and pedestrian life, adding vitality to the city. A series of more detailed guidelines are then established for each of the major facilities and uses proposed for the downtown. The Action Strategy concludes with thoughts on implementation, outlining the next key steps that need to be taken.

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