

The Circuit Line

6.1 Introduction

From the full list of actions identified in Section 5, which need to be implemented first? What will be the most effective in setting downtown Hartford on the path to renewal? In this chapter, a series of high-priority initiatives is selected from the full list for implementation over the next 3 - 5 years.

To identify the high priority initiatives, the team went back to the work completed early on. The team wanted to understand where are the greatest concentration of resources on which to build and achieve immediate, high-profile benefit. We recalled the existing assets, the initiatives in various stages of development, and then the actions recommended by the Action Strategy. A band of opportunity ringing Bushnell Park emerged.

We have called this the Circuit Line. It is a band of rejuvenation. It is also a transit line that will link the resources together. The route follows the historic axes of the city and ties together the existing assets with emerging and proposed projects. It is an area toward which private and public initiatives should be strategically directed to leverage existing investments and resources. It responds to the principles of investing strategically, building early successes, confidence and optimism to carry downtown Hartford forward into the next millennium.

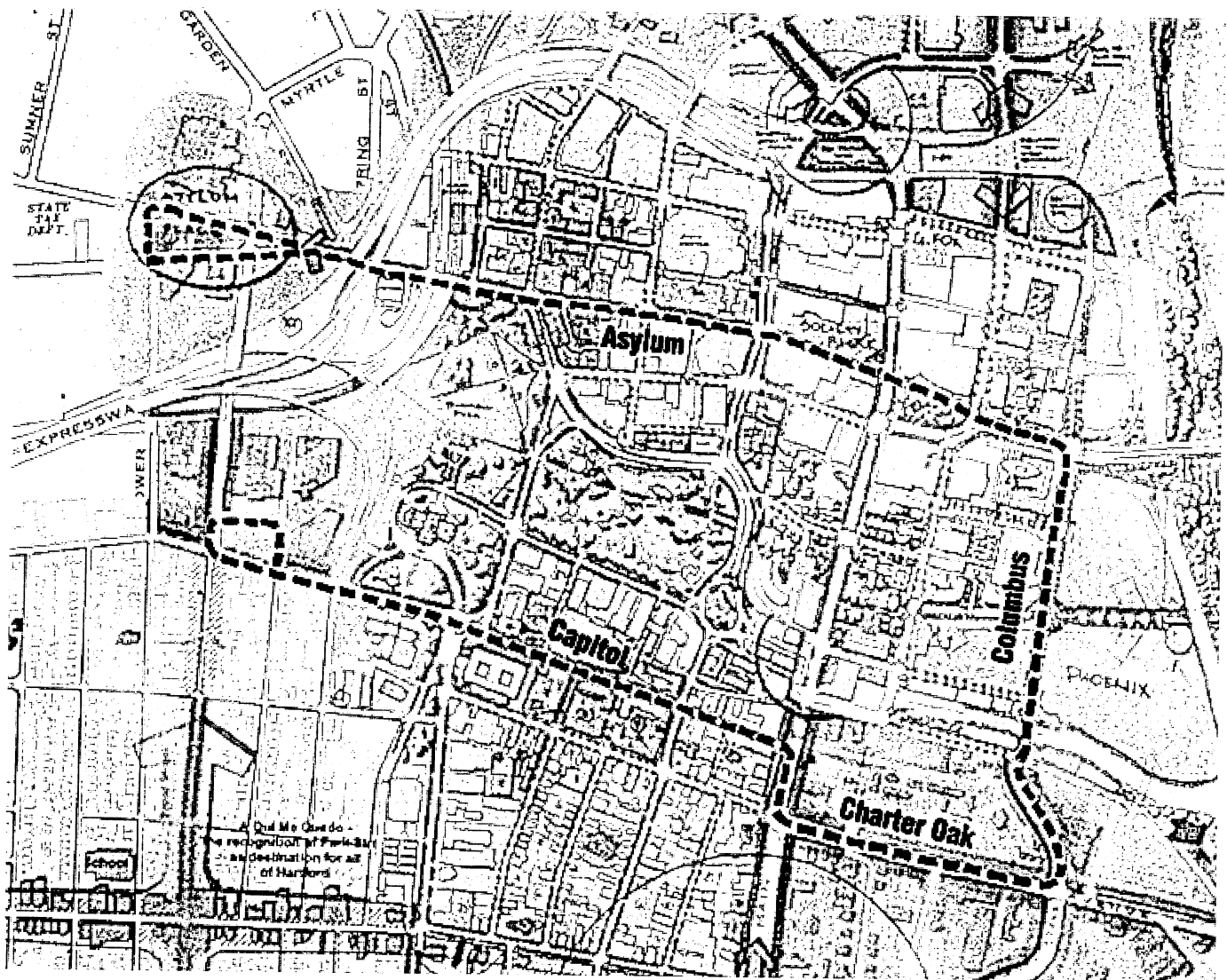
The Circuit Line will be created by implementing a select set of actions drawn from the full list in Section 5. Upon implementation, it will form a healthy piece of city fabric that will have a distinct sense of place and on which future investments can build.

The Circuit Line

An overall vision of the Circuit Line is described below. Then, drawn from the full list of Actions, the individual steps required to realize the Circuit Line are reiterated. The Circuit Line is also discussed in light of the principles for reinvesting strategically, establishing a methodology and way of thinking about reinvestment that can be applied to other parts of the downtown.

The Circuit Line is not the only set of initiatives that should be brought forward over the next five years. However, it is a single coordinated effort that will create a complete place, setting the stage for new development and providing a catalyst for new investment.

84



The Circuit Line is a route which connects downtown to the Capitol and Asylum Hill

6.2 The Circuit Line and Links to the Neighborhoods

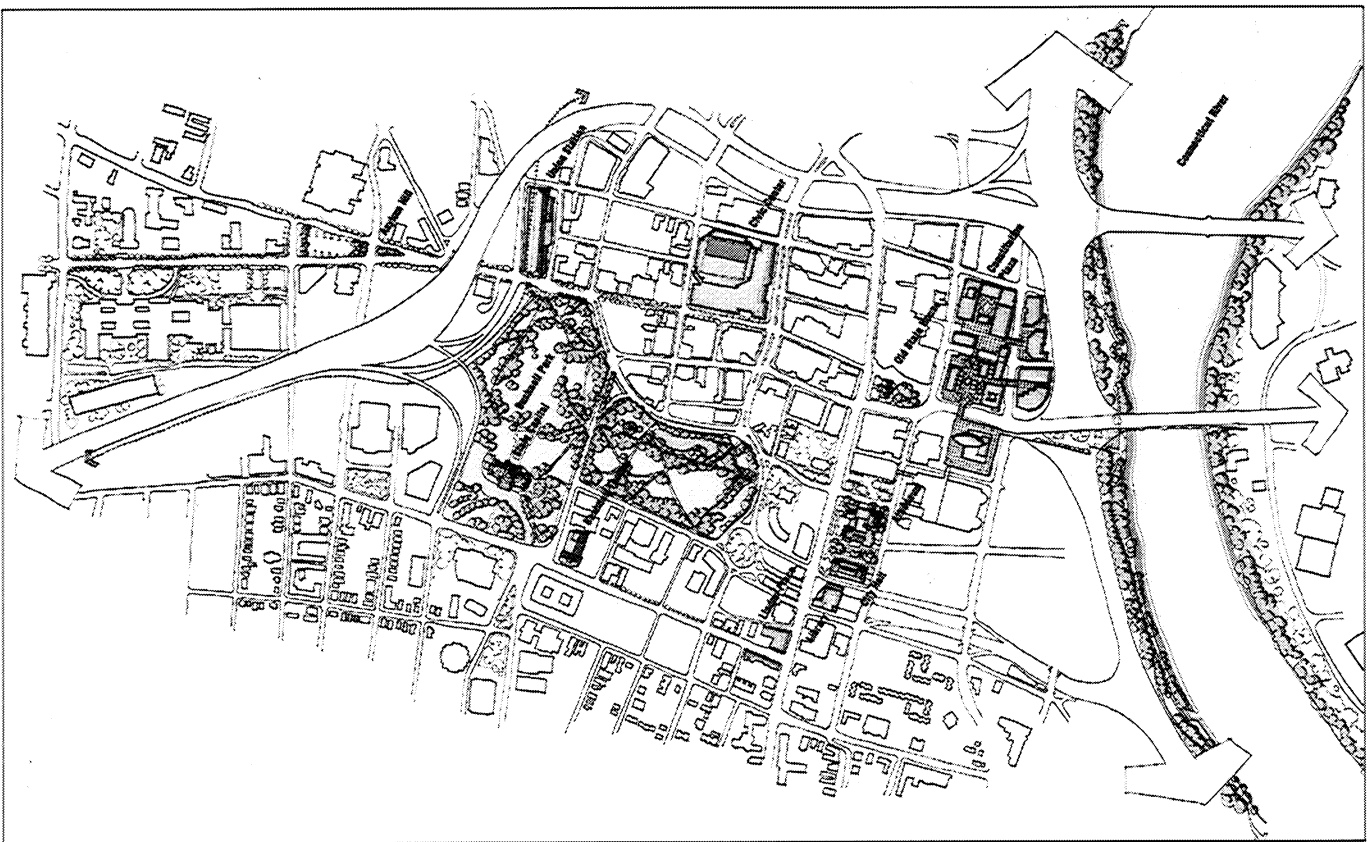
The Circuit Line forms an armature that will support a blend of new residential development, shared parking structures, streetscape and transit improvements to form a band of healthy city fabric around Bushnell Park and along Main Street that will invite visitors and new residents to the downtown and improve the downtown's image.

The Circuit Line will provide a target for public realm investments which in turn can be used to trigger additional private investment. Along the length of the Circuit Line, streetscape, landscape and development initiatives will forge together existing assets, creating synergy between them and a safe zone that will support a vibrant urban life. Capitol Avenue, Charter Oak Avenue, Columbus Boulevard, and Asylum Street will be improved by landscape and streetscape initiatives that will foster a more inviting pedestrian environment and sense of connections.

The Circuit Line will be linked by an electric shuttle bus that will transport people around Bushnell Park, from the Capitol to the River and up to Asylum Hill. It is planned as a small, electric-powered vehicle manned by drivers who will double as city ambassadors, providing historic and tourist information along the route. The Circuit Line will be a component of the regional transportation structure.

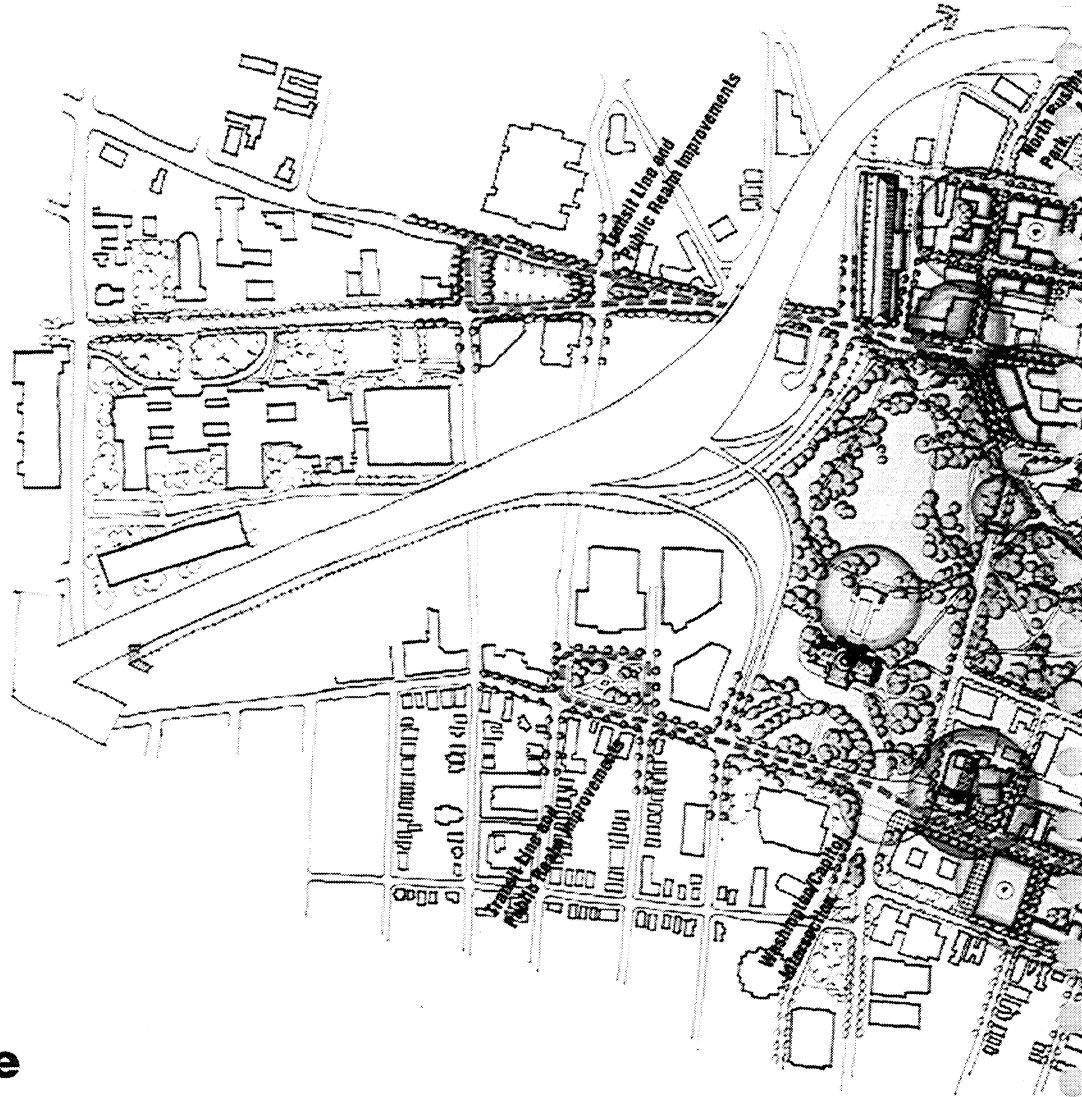
The Circuit Line will be built from small scale initiatives. North and south of Bushnell Park, surface parking lots will be collected into new, shared parking structures, making way for new housing development on the cleared sites. Some 600 - 800 low- to mid-rise units will be built around Bushnell Park. Retail stores will be focused along Main and Asylum Streets, in buildings designed to animate and address the street level.

Linking downtown to the neighborhoods will be a central component of the Circuit Line. Main Street will link downtown with north and south Hartford. Other linking routes will be Asylum Street, Charter Oak Avenue, Trumbull Street, Jewel Street, Ford Street, Elm Street, Washington Street, Park Street and Wyllys Street. Landscape and design improvements along the I-84 over- and underpasses will aim to diminish the barrier effect of this road and to strengthen connections between downtown and the neighborhoods .



Core Assets

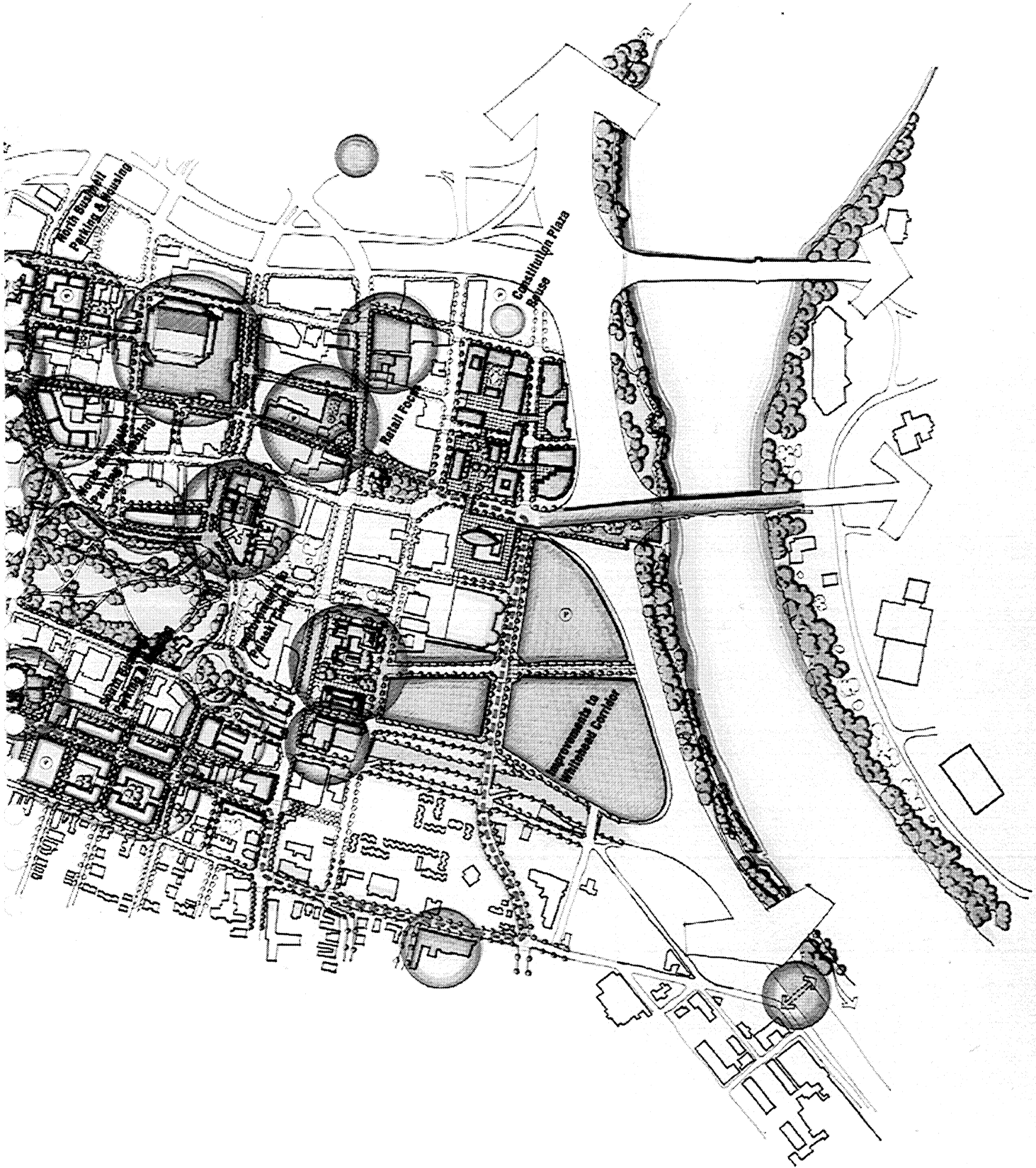
There are a number of amenities in the downtown that are, and have been, the anchors for city life for generations. They include open spaces such as Bushnell Park and the Connecticut River, historic structures such as Union Station and the Old State House, and relatively new buildings such as the Civic Center.

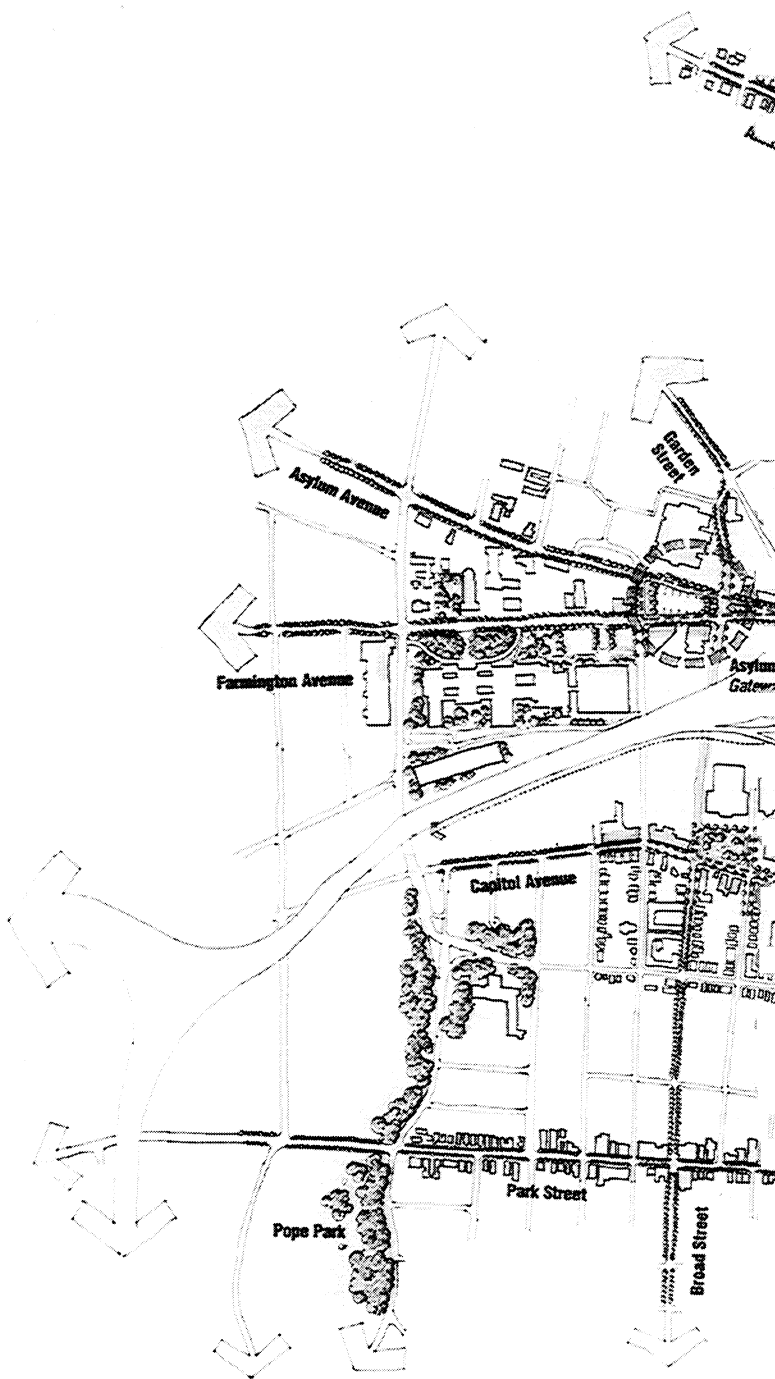


The Circuit Line

Core assets + Projects “in the pipeline” + New investments

Building on the core assets and the proposed projects a number of other investments have been proposed. These new investments, such as new housing and a shuttle route, will tie together the initiatives in the downtown, creating a continuous band of healthy city.





Connecting to the neighborhoods

The Circuit Line can grow, connect to other new initiatives, and knit downtown back into the neighborhoods.



6.3 Priority projects

To realize the Circuit Line in the next 3 - 5 years, specific actions are drawn from the Downtown Action Strategy as high-priority initiatives.

1. *Transit and movement*

- Introduce an electric-powered shuttle bus that follows the Circuit Line. Approximately 8 vehicles will be employed, serving 11 stops distributed over the 2.75 mile route. Head ways in peak periods will be 5 minutes and 10 minutes in off-peak periods.
- To implement the Circuit Line, Asylum Street must be converted to two-way operation (one lane in each direction) between Main Street and Jewel Street as soon as practicable.

2. *Street and public realm improvements*

- Implement streetscape plans along the Circuit Line route and for a short distance along the perpendicular, intersecting streets. The route includes:
 - Asylum Street
 - Columbus Boulevard
 - Charter Oak Avenue
 - Main Street
 - Capitol Avenue
- The perpendicular streets are:
 - Spruce Street, Union Place, High Street, Ann Street, Trumbull Street, Market Street, Grove Street, Arch Street, the Whitehead, Prospect Street, Whitman Court, Hudson Street, Wadsworth Street, Washington Street, Lafayette Street, and Oak Street
- Plans to beautify streets should address:
 - trees and plantings
 - tree planters and grates
 - paving materials
 - pedestrian lighting
 - bicycle racks
 - street furniture
 - signage, building from the work of 212 Associates.

- Related initiatives include restoring movement along closed streets. The Isle of Safety adjacent to the Old State House should be reopened for transit vehicles. Special paving materials should be used to signify limited use. A pedestrian connection should be created through the Civic Center to reconnect Allyn with Pratt Street
- Ongoing efforts related to the restoration of downtown's significant green spaces, Bushnell Park and the Connecticut River, should be strongly supported. Building on the new Founders Bridge and riverfront deck, connections to the Connecticut River and the downtown should be improved. Connections between Bushnell Park and downtown should also be improved by reconfiguring intersections to make them more pedestrian-friendly.

3. Strategic Uses

- Build 600 - 800 housing units, mostly in low- to mid-rise buildings. Construct, as early as possible, at least one and preferably two residential developments of 180- to 200-units to quickly broaden the market base for downtown housing. Key sites north of Bushnell Park include the Hilton site, the sites along Allyn Street and the SNET site. Key sites south of Bushnell Park include the existing state-owned surface parking lots along Capitol Avenue.
- Plan for a net gain of 50,000 to 70,000 square feet of new retail and entertainment space in the downtown core. Encourage street-related retail clusters along Main Street, Trumbull Street, Asylum Street, and Pearl Street.
- All new projects should be designed to define the street edges, make an appropriate transition with adjacent uses, be of an appropriate scale, have active ground floor levels, and be easily accessible from grade-level.
- Related initiatives include the construction of 400 to 600 units in the surrounding neighborhoods, mostly attached town home and infill apartments.

4. *Parking*

- New parking structures should be located along the Circuit Line to encourage a park-once strategy in downtown. Through a coordinated effort, new parking structures connected by the Circuit Line trolley can serve major uses such as Union Station, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Higher Education Center, downtown housing, entertainment venues, and retail.
- All new proposed parking structures in downtown need to be reviewed to ensure there is ground-floor retail or other activity to animate the street in front of the garage.

6.4 Investing Strategically and the Circuit Line

It is useful to think of the Circuit Line in relation to the principles for investing strategically as it provides a concrete example of how to use the principles as a framework for decision making. It points to a process and a way of thinking about reinvestment that can be applied to other parts of the downtown. Each principle for investing strategically is listed, followed by a description of how the Circuit Line responds.

Build on existing strengths: The Circuit Line embraces downtown's most prominent and important physical asset, Bushnell Park. It also embraces other important resources like the Wadsworth Atheneum, the State Capitol, the Old State House and the Library. It anticipates that greater links will be established between these important institutions and structures, thereby raising their profile and positioning them as important elements in the city fabric. Links will be established through streetscape improvements, improved transit services, streets that are modified to balance pedestrian and vehicular traffic, as well as by a greater sense of synergy.

Use public sector funds as levers: A blend of public and private sector projects are proposed, creating opportunity for the public sector funds to leverage private sector dollars. For example, a number of private developers are in various stages of proposals for residential development in the Circuit Line. A variety of improvements within the public right-of-way as well as in Bushnell Park, will supplement these initiatives, significantly enhancing the quality of life in this part of downtown.

The Circuit Line also includes a number of projects that are eligible for the \$300 million State of Connecticut bonds for the revitalization of downtown. A total of \$155 million is to be used for the development of a new convention center and sports mega-plex. The funds also provide \$35 million for housing projects; \$25 million for riverfront development; \$25 million for demolition ; \$15 million for Civic Center renovation and rejuvenation; \$15 million for parking; and \$30 million for the downtown higher education center.

To use these dollars most effectively, initiatives that combine eligible funds are proposed. For example, projects that include shared parking structures as part of the project will free up development sites and facilitate housing development, which is also eligible for funding.

Think holistically: The diversity of projects proposed encourages a holistic and coordinated approach to reinvestment. Initiatives include new residential development, shared parking structures, landscape and

streetscape improvements, improvements to the design of streets and timing of the signals, etc. As the proposed initiatives are designed, all of the individuals responsible for a project in the vicinity need to be in the room in order to ensure that efforts are coordinated, opportunities are seized and that shared objectives are met.

Think about the place, not the project: The Circuit Line is not about individual projects, it is about creating neighborhoods and districts north and south of Bushnell, and along Main Street.

In particular a mixed-use, residential / entertainment area is established on the north side of Bushnell Park, building off the emerging restaurant/entertainment venues. A cultural corridor is created along Main Street. A lower-density residential neighborhood is established on the south side of Bushnell Park, building off the brownstones along Capitol Avenue.

Although emphasis is placed on individual initiatives, the greatest emphasis is placed on establishing a mix of uses that in total, will create a more vibrant community nestled around Bushnell Park.

Encourage modest, incremental change: The Circuit Line is about modest, incremental change that in total, will revitalize the downtown. It includes many projects at various scales that will bring about change in the downtown in a balanced fashion, linking the existing assets together. Development on Adriaen's Landing must be compatible with the downtown and respond to market forces as it takes shape over time.

Draw upon the human capital of the city: The Circuit Line combines initiatives proposed by a wide variety of interests: private developers, the public sector, the Bushnell Park Foundation, the Library. It therefore has the opportunity to draw upon the experience and energy of a wide group of individuals. Further, it is a compelling image which will rally the broader Hartford community.

Build on early success: The Circuit Line builds on existing success stories. Perhaps first and foremost, it builds off the enormous accomplishments of the Bushnell Park Foundation, that has cleaned up Bushnell Park to create an oasis within the city. It also builds off the expansion of The Bushnell and the emerging restaurants south of Bushnell Park, such as The Savannah, and those north of Bushnell Park, such as Black-Eyed Sally's and Pastis Bistro. Through the improved streetscapes and the shuttle service, The Bushnell will be linked to the restaurants and other entertainment venues encouraging people to travel freely in the downtown, creating synergies that will improve the financial opportunities for all.