

Built Form Guidelines

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7.1 The issue: “Introverted” versus “extroverted” buildings

The way a building relates to the surrounding context profoundly impacts the sense of place. The location of the doorway and windows shapes a visitor’s experience, as well as the quality of the adjacent street for passers-by, in cars and on foot. The amount and location of parking determines how people travel to the facility and their choice of entrance. The siting and configuration directs the flow of people to and from it, which in turn affects the sense of connection between the building and other parts of the city, and ultimately the vitality of adjacent areas.

A more vital and animated city can be created by shaping and locating buildings and spaces according to principles that validate and reinforce the street level: doors and windows that look out on the street; animated ground floors; configurations that encourage people to walk, site plans that forge links to the rest of the city.

Hartford has a strong tradition of buildings designed to contribute vitality to the city and a strong sense of place. Hartford’s building stock includes houses, office buildings, entertainment venues, department stores, and corner retail stores designed to respond to the streets, local built and topographical context. Many of the best examples were built before the 1950s. The G. Fox Building, the Richardson Building, the Old State House and City Hall, are all examples of buildings that relate strongly to the street, and the surrounding context. These are “extroverted” structures.



Building and shopfront design on Trumbull Street help support retail life

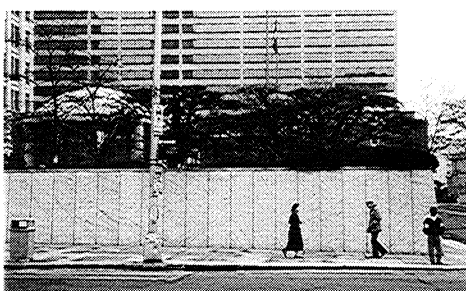
Over the last several decades, Hartford abandoned these principles, creating a wave of development that turned its back to the city and eschewed urbanity, diminishing downtown's vitality. Constitution Plaza and the Civic Center are examples of these mega-complexes. Inwardly-oriented islands of activity, they make few connections to the surrounding city. In some cases, a separate pedestrian level was created, part of a trend which saw streets emerge as places for cars, not people. A walk through the streets of downtown reveals a seam, or a "fault line," where the historic, grade-related city has shifted and been replaced by a new era of "introverted" or non-grade related structures, erasing the vitality at street level along its course.

Building on this trend, downtown Hartford today is dotted with buildings whose mirrored walls, elevated doorways or blank facades isolate the structure from the street and passers-by, revealing little about the occupants, and adding little vitality. State House Square contains a food court that is neither easily accessible nor visible from the street. One State Street has an attractive front lobby. However, after regular business hours it is not possible to enter from the street-level. Pedestrians and drivers alike must enter through the parking garage, the only place where a guard stands ready to admit visitors.

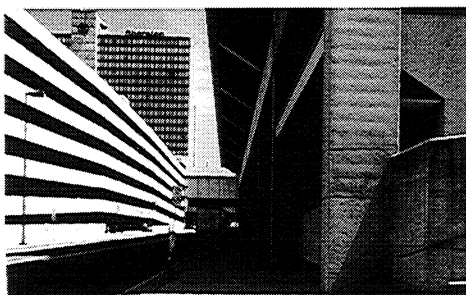
In other cases, vitality is disrupted by buildings that are too large: too tall, too dense, too big in girth. Given Hartford's relatively limited market, they absorb a disproportionate amount of Hartford's total growth into a single structure, preventing the benefits of investment from being more broadly distributed.

Hartford is now embarking on a new wave of investment. Along with some much needed commercial and residential development, several major civic facilities are proposed: a stadium, a convention center, and a higher education center. Every development, large and small, has an impact on the feel of a city and attention must be paid to the relationship of each and every building to its context. However, these civic facilities are enormous in scope and their impact will be significant. It is imperative that they be designed according to principles that embrace the city, its streets and pedestrian activity.

Below, a series of urban design guidelines are outlined that speak to the characteristics of successful urban buildings. These apply to all types of buildings, and function as "rules of thumb" for creating vitality. They are followed by more detailed guidelines and comments on a number of specific building types.



Traveler's Building Plaza



Church Street

Several decades of building have turned their back on the public realm.

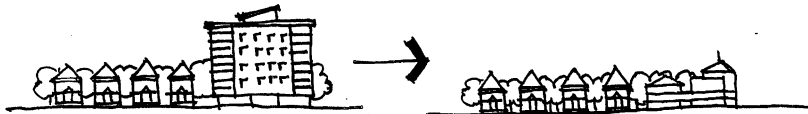
7.2 Urban Design Guidelines

The following general guidelines identify the important design elements in building a strong relationship between buildings and the surrounding context, the vitality of the street and the sense of place.

- **Buildings should define the street edges**, establishing a more comfortable and intimate pedestrian environment.



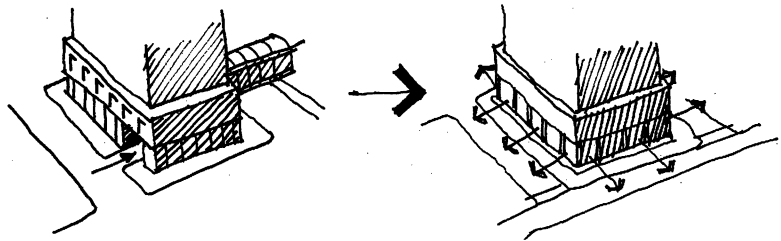
- **New development should make appropriate transitions with adjacent uses, in scale and use**, in order to be compatible with existing structures and fit in.



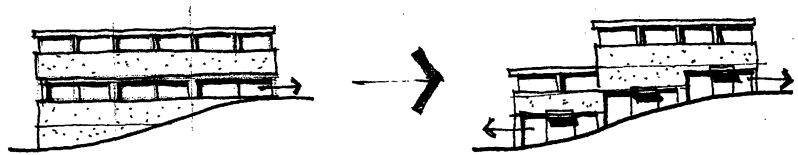
- **New development should be of an appropriate size** in order to be compatible with the surrounding uses and to contain a reasonable proportion of total proposed development. Large development initiatives should be broken down into city-scale elements rather than treated as internalized superblocks.



- ***Buildings should have active ground floor levels*** to create a more animated and interesting environment for pedestrians. By locating “eyes on the street,” retail stores, restaurants and service uses on the ground floor create an informal means of surveillance and greater personal security.
- ***Buildings should have animated facades*** to add to the visual interest and sense of place. Windows and doors that look out over the street, create an informal means of surveillance, and a greater sense of safety. They also animate the street for pedestrians and drivers.



- ***Building should be easily accessible from grade-level*** to create a stronger relationship with the street and animate the street level.



Policies in Hartford’s Plan of Development and zoning ordinance need to be revised to require buildings to respond to these guidelines.

7.3 Guidelines for specific uses

Given the importance of shaping new development so that it contributes to the rejuvenation of downtown, specific thoughts and guidelines are identified below respecting each of the major uses proposed.

● ***The Stadium and Convention Center***

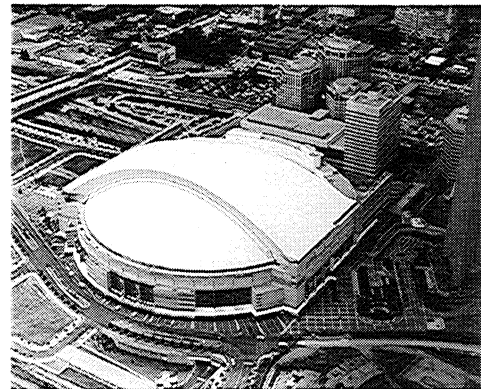
While requiring major public subsidies to develop, stadiums and convention centers can be important catalysts for the local economy. They are also big, bulky facilities that require large service entrances, significant amounts of parking and typically, blank walls on at least some of the sides. These are all characteristics which make them difficult to fit into a fine-grained city context.

They also have unique patterns of use. Stadiums in particular hold events when thousands of people will come and go simultaneously, creating surges in travel patterns and parking requirements, which are interspersed by periods of dormancy. Large crowds coming and going represent a potential boom to local, small businesses, but only if patrons visit the rest of downtown during their visit. The siting and configuration of each facility plays a role in linking the facility to downtown, creating a lifeline to local retailers, restaurateurs and entertainment venues.

The challenge in designing the stadium and convention center is to minimize the negative impact of the bulk, the blank walls, and the service and parking requirements. Often conceived as isolated mega-structures, the challenge will be to “tame” these facilities to act as urban buildings that fit into the street and block pattern and add to the city’s vitality. At the same time, the structure needs to be configured to contribute to downtown’s revitalization by allowing for the capture of economic benefits from the crowds as they come and go from events.

To respond to these challenges the facilities should be:

- hospitable at the street edges
- built in conjunction with streetscape improvements along adjacent streets to improve the pedestrian environment
- sited to minimize the negative impact of blank walls and the servicing requirements
- tied into the regional transit system to reduce the number of people driving



Toronto’s Sky Dome is situated so that surrounding plazas and entries are knit into the grid of surrounding city streets. The walls of the stadium are lined with restaurants and other commercial spaces that open out to these streets and plazas. Only 500 parking spaces were built; patrons rely on parking lots dotted throughout the downtown.

- sited where the travel and parking demands will not disrupt residential uses
- configured so that patrons will be encouraged to visit restaurants and retail stores in the surrounding areas. In particular, entrances should be located to create a direct relationship to other uses.
- planned to rely on the large supply of parking available throughout the city, rather than attempting to locate all parking on site.
- configured to relate to other uses in the neighborhood.

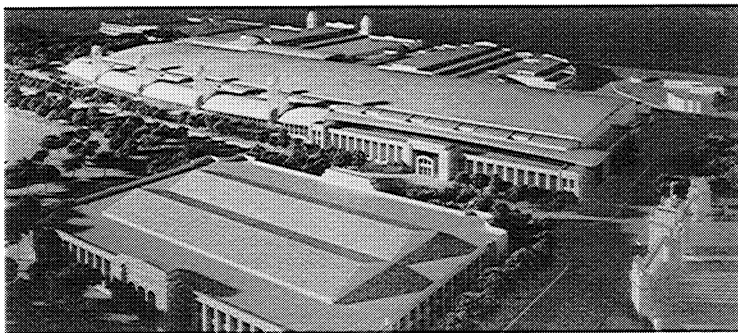
The Opportunity: Greater flexibility can be created by combining stadiums with convention centers, allowing the floor of the stadium to be used for trade shows, etc. However, combining facilities will increase the scale of the project and the design challenge.

The Patriots' decision to move to Hartford has determined that the stadium will be at Adriaen's Landing. However, either the 12B site or Adriaen's Landing is considered appropriate for the stadium and convention center. Both sites could be used as a catalyst for other activities, adding to the vitality of the downtown.

Adriaen's Landing has a number of advantages over the 12 B site. Adriaen's Landing is a large vacant site, situated at the edge of the downtown. Parking and blank walls can be sandwiched adjacent I-91, minimizing the visual impact. The site is positioned to benefit from the new Founders Bridge connection to the river and will not block connections to other parts of downtown. Care needs to be taken that the facility does not present its back to the Whitehead Highway and the Sheldon Charter-Oak Neighborhood immediately to the south.

The challenge on the 12B site, is to prevent a large, bulky facility from creating a visual divide between north and south downtown. As well, parking will be more difficult to accommodate on the site and will likely have a much greater visual impact than on Adriaen's Landing.

The Toronto Trade Centre has the largest floor plate of any non-industrial building in Canada, but by fronting the building with an active galleria and creating several internal public routes through the building, the huge size of the center has been mitigated.



● *The Higher Education Center*

Because of the large numbers of people who will be using the Higher Education Center, it holds the opportunity to make a major contribution to downtown's revitalization. Because of the large number of students who will be commuting, parking is an important issue to address in selecting a site.

The Challenge will be to locate the Higher Education Center in a building that is sufficiently large to accommodate the use, while accommodating the large number of parking spaces required. Any building selected or designed should strive to meet the design guidelines outlined in Section 6.2. Without knowing whether the building will be newly built or a renovated existing structure, specific recommendations are premature.

Key at this point is the selection of a site where it will be possible to establish a relationship and synergies with adjacent uses. The location needs to be adjacent to restaurants, cafes, and residential buildings which can attract and benefit from staff, faculty and student patronage and add to downtown's vitality.

The Opportunity: The Higher Education Center should be located at the northern edge of downtown on a site between the river and Union Station. Part of the parking issue can be resolved by making use of more remote parking lots and encouraging students to use the Circuit Line.

A location in or near the Hartford Civic Center is ideal as it would promote and support the Bushnell North neighborhood, including the emerging entertainment district. As well, students, faculty and staff wanting to live near the campus could find housing in the units proposed on the vacant sites north of Bushnell Park.



The Hartford Civic Center (above) and Constitution Plaza (below) are both possible sites for the Higher Education Center.

- **Grocery Store**

One of the amenities required for current and future downtown residents is a grocery store. However, the major grocery store chains increasingly use a design template that calls for a large floorplate and significant amounts of parking in front of the store, up to the street edge. This standard is often difficult to fit within an established urban environment.

The Challenge will be to either “tame” the emerging template to fit into an urban context, or to identify a grocery store, chain or independent, that is either willing to try a more urban format, or is of such a specialized nature as to serve a region-wide market from the central location of downtown. In either instance, a major issue to resolve is parking. Negotiations with the store should aim to bring the building up to the street edge, to establish a more urban environment, and to site the parking either beside or behind the store. In addition, the design should aim to respond to as many of the guidelines outlined in Section 6.2 as possible.

The Opportunity: Any number of vacant sites within downtown are appropriate for a grocery store. Sites immediately north and south of I-84 would be particularly appropriate as they provide high visibility and could accommodate parking without significant visual impact on the rest of downtown.



The supermarket defines and supports the street with an active building edge.



Parking is located under the supermarket.



A supermarket in Toronto which has adapted to an urban context

● **Housing**

Housing can be created in all shapes and sizes. Housing in the core will most likely be multi-family dwelling units in the low- to mid-rise range. Infill housing on vacant sites in the neighborhoods should be lower density, likely single family, to be compatible with existing structures and to assist the city in meeting its housing targets.

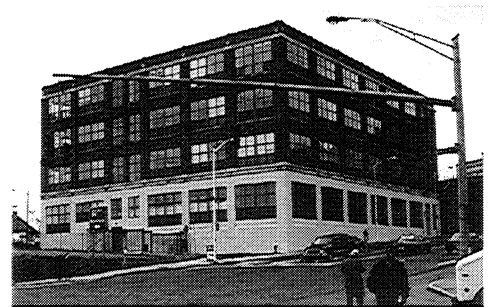
The Challenge will be to respond to a variety of housing needs in downtown Hartford, catering to a wide range of incomes, lifestyles and family sizes. Multi-family dwellings should respond to the urban design guidelines established in Section 6.2.

The Opportunity: Housing should be located in the Bushnell North and Bushnell South neighborhoods, to benefit from the park and to be in close proximity to retail stores, offices and entertainment venues.

In Bushnell North, housing should be slightly denser to be compatible with the existing warehouse and commercial structures. Sites fronting on the north side of the park have the greatest chance for success. Prime sites for housing are also located along Capitol Avenue, one block south of Bushnell Park. Housing in this area should be low- to mid-rise (2 - 6 stories) to be compatible with the existing brownstones.

Under-utilized office and retail buildings within the core form an important opportunity for reuse. Buildings with the potential to be adapted with a residential component include the G. Fox and the Sage-Allen buildings as well as the SNET building and 410 Asylum Street.

Infill housing in the neighborhoods can also play an important role in revitalizing the core. Lower density row house/townhouse units and loft apartments are the preferred typology in the neighborhoods that ring downtown (Frog Hollow, Barry Square, South Green, Sheldon-Charter Oak, Asylum Hill, Clay-Arsenal, and North Meadows) as well as other outlying city neighborhoods.



Artspace is a good example of the kind of conversions to residential space that are possible.



A mid-rise residential building in downtown Toronto. Similar, mid-rise housing with retail at street level has been proposed for north of Bushnell Park.

● **Office**

Office buildings can be built at a variety of scales. It is projected that demand exists for some 500,000 square feet of office space by the year 2000. Too many of the recent office buildings in downtown have been large, internalized structures, that make few gestures to the street and contain internalized food courts and cafeterias that discourage workers from patronizing downtown's shops and restaurants.

The Challenge will be to respond to create new office space that responds to the urban design guidelines established in Section 6.2. As well, new office structures should be:

- designed to contain active uses on the ground floor that relate to the street
- discouraged from including internalized food courts in order to encourage office workers to frequent local restaurants
- most likely in the medium size range in order not to absorb too great a percentage of projected total growth within a given time period
- constructed with shared parking facilities, rather than stand-alone, dedicated parking structures.

The Opportunity: New office space should be encouraged east of Main Street and south west of the Capitol, adding to the existing focus of state office uses in this area. Sites along Columbus Boulevard and Market Street would be particularly appropriate.



Simcoe Place in Toronto is an office development that supports a lively street edge with an arcade.



● **Retail**

The emergence of suburban retail malls in recent decades has put downtown retailers in stiff competition for spending dollars. More recently, retail is beginning to move back into downtowns across the country to support reemerging residential communities, and thriving tourist and commercial markets. Attempts to duplicate the suburban mall in central cities has not been successful.

The challenge will be to compete with suburban retail stores by creating a unique shopping destination in downtown Hartford. To create a physically unique shopping experience, that competes with suburban locations on its own terms, downtown retail stores should be:

- street related: doors should open out onto the street and be easily accessible; windows should provide visual interest
- clustered into concentrations of activity that line both sides of the street, whether located in stand-alone facilities or in the ground floor of residential or commercial structures
- located to benefit from existing and proposed convention / stadium/ residential / hotel uses

The Opportunity: New retail uses should be concentrated around the historic crossroads of Main Street and Asylum Street. A number of existing street-related spaces are available for re-use, particularly along Main Street.



Main Street was once a strong example of how shop, building and street design can support street life.

● **Hotels**

In many cities around the world, the old hotels are the center of activity and grandeur. Hotel patrons bring life to the streets, and frequent local stores. In many ways, they require the same types of services as residents, and support the same diversity of retail uses. Physically, hotels come in a wide range of sizes and shapes. However, increasingly the major hotel chains use prescribed formulas to design their facilities.

The Challenge will be to encourage a hotel design that contributes vitality to the city to the greatest extent possible. This means that any formulaic approach needs to be adapted to respond to the particularities of the Hartford context. In general, hotels should strive to achieve the urban design guidelines set out in Section 6.2. In particular, hotels should be:

- located near existing and proposed restaurants, cafes, stadium / convention centers
- designed so that the curb-cut for the drop-off creates a minimal disruption to the pedestrian realm
- configured so that the lobby has a direct relationship to the adjacent street
- designed so that supporting retail services are street-related, not buried within the interior of the building

The Opportunity: There is a market for downtown hotels. The creation of new hotels in downtown will increase Hartford's capacity to build a strong business travel / convention / tourist market. New hotels are also an important opportunity to increase demand for downtown's small retailers, restaurants and entertainment venues. A number of locations within the downtown core are appropriate. New hotels are an opportunity to add much needed new development and / or to renovate existing under-utilized or vacant buildings.



Hotel entrances should be designed so that the curb-cut for the drop-off creates a minimal disruption to the pedestrian realm. The entry can be directly from the street (above) or from an interior courtyard (right).



● **Parking**

Many parking structures in Hartford are designed as stand alone facilities that occupy an entire site. By locating parking at the street level, these facilities deaden entire blocks, creating little visual interest for pedestrians, little aesthetic appeal, and a certain lack of safety because they provide no “eyes on the street.”

The Challenge will be to create parking that has no negative impact and contributes to a lively urban environment. In general, parking structures should strive to achieve the urban design guidelines set out in Section 6.2. In particular, this means that stand alone-parking facilities should be designed to have active uses - restaurants, retail stores, service outlets - on the ground floor. The facades should be designed to provide visual interest and appeal.

Ideally, at least some parking structures would not be stand-alone facilities. Instead, they would be constructed on the interior of a block, as part of a larger development, and wrapped by other uses in order that they are less visible from the street. For example, the proposal for the Cutter Block, which locates parking at the center of the block, wrapped by housing, is an ideal solution for a downtown parking structure.

As well, a move away from dedicated parking structures toward a greater sharing of facilities among different users, would introduce flexibility into the existing system and help reduce the amount of land occupied by parking structures. It is the achievement of these design elements, more so than the selection of a specific site, that will help to create successful parking facilities comprising an effective overall parking system for downtown.



Parking structures should be attractive, with retail at street level.

