

Implementation

8

Maintaining the momentum

The next step is to implement the plan. With the assistance of the Hartford Downtown Council, the Capitol Region Growth Council and the leagues of dedicated citizens, responsibility for implementation will rest largely with the City of Hartford and will need to be coordinated with the city's newly strengthened economic development agency. There are many different aspects to consider, procedurally, legislatively and financially.

8.1 Organizational amendments required

- **Create a design center.**

As a first step, immediate consideration should be given to the creation of a design center - a group of professionals representing urban design / architecture, transportation and landscape architecture - that will review and shape projects to achieve the greatest benefit. The design center could be a component of the city's renewed economic development agency, and would play a key role in negotiating with developers and in reviewing public investments, to ensure that the vision is upheld and advanced.

- **Create a Downtown Economic Development Corporation to spearhead and serve as a public / private catalyst for downtown investment decisions.**

While the characteristics and full array of powers / responsibilities of this organization would await definition by its ultimate incorporators, some key considerations would be as follows:

- Institutionalize a public / private partnership or alliance.
 - Assemble equity capital for investment in strategic development projects.
 - Acquire, hold and affect development of key sites to enable strategic development projects as well as to establish development guidelines, sponsor competitive procedures for developer selection, and participate in providing public and private incentives as required.
 - Promote both public and private investment in downtown, including infrastructure, in the interest of a healthy region and city.
- **Consolidate major downtown parking resources under a common management and marketing umbrella.**

The city's current system of public parking management should be carefully assessed to ensure that the most effective tools are deployed to address parking needs while encouraging efficient allocation of this important resource for downtown stability and advancement. The newly created Parking Authority is a positive move. A still more comprehensive effort would include coordinated management of public and private parking facilities relative to hours, rates, signage, etc.; provide incentives for joint or multiple use of garages and lots; limit the amount of parking dedicated to any one facility or use; and creative pricing and funding strategies. This Authority should work in coordination with the Design Center.

8.2 Legislative amendments

- **Action Strategy adoption as a statement of policy, procedure and practice by both public and private interests.**

The Downtown Action Strategy should be accorded official standing in both the public and private sectors. This would suggest its formal adoption by resolution by the city's Commission on the City Plan and City Council. Likewise, it should be similarly endorsed by major private business and development organizations like the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce, the Hartford Downtown Council, and the Capitol Region Growth Council.

- **Refine and calibrate city land use regulations in support of the plan**

At the city level, the plan needs to be brought forward into public policy. The city's development regulations, especially the Plan of Development and zoning ordinances, should be revised as necessary to achieve certain key development objectives:

- Preservation of key sites for residential use, recognizing the fact that, otherwise, office and commercial uses can command higher land values and hence preclude residential use where most desirable, i.e. properties fronting on Bushnell Park, property along Capitol Avenue near the Capitol and Bushnell Park, sites with river views, etc.
- That development responds to the general and facility specific urban design guidelines.
- Preservation of historic resources.

8.3 Budgetary amendments

- **Define a capital budget and plan for public improvements and infrastructure investments in downtown.**

While this activity might be seen as the singular responsibility of the City of Hartford, the special needs and potential of downtown justify a broader coalition of interests to sponsor the establishment and annual updating of a plan and budget for capital improvements downtown.

Ideally, this could be a responsibility of the previously discussed Downtown Development Corporation. It would focus both public and private resources and interests on upgrading and maintaining the physical resources of downtown to ensure its economic viability and regional attraction as a special place to live, work, visit and recreate.

The public component of the capital budget would include federal, state, city resources while the private component would undertake to project and induce façade improvements, pedestrian and streetscape improvements associated with private property; upgrade private utility systems; and enhance parking facilities. Some key functional elements of the budget would be:

- Streets, sidewalks, streetscape and pedestrian amenities
- Parks and open space
- Lighting and landscaping
- Utilities
- Signage and way-finding
- Parking facilities

A full implementation strategy needs to be fleshed-out. However, the immediate creation of a design-center would be a significant move forward for the city, establishing a positive momentum and precedent. A gap exists between where the City of Hartford is today and where it needs to be in the future. Options for bridging this gap in the short term need to be considered as part of the implementation strategy.

There are still many bridges to be crossed, but the potential for downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods is exciting. The vision for downtown Hartford and the Action Strategy provide a solid basis on which to build.