

A. INTRODUCTION

Few cities have a neighborhood with the State Capitol at one end, and the City Hall at the other, a beautiful city park, one of the country's oldest public parks and art museum, and a renowned performing arts center. South Downtown neighborhood contains all of these.

The neighborhood also includes some interesting neighbors. The State of Connecticut is the largest land owner. It will play a critical role in how many of these ideas ever come into being. It is a major employer, and until transit options are expanded and become more of the norm than the exception for commuting, the challenge of providing space to park well over 1800 cars everyday is extraordinary. The land now used for surface parking is in the center of downtown Hartford: how much longer will we wait to recognize the actual cost of this configuration?

Another neighbor is The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts. The Bushnell is one of the city's greatest assets, and it's right here in South Downtown. The neighborhood feels fortunate to have the Center as a neighbor, and recognizes the importance of working together with it on their mutual goals. The recent expansion of the Center, many years in the making, is now nearing completion, perhaps a hopeful sign of the neighborhood's impending progress.

The last key participants in the neighborhood are the residents and other stakeholders, who are actively involved in shaping a vision for the future of South Downtown. While the population is comparatively less than most of the other neighborhoods in Hartford, there may be a larger percentage of participants in the NRZ process in this neighborhood.

Issues

- plenty of jobs but not enough housing
- plenty of parking, but in the wrong location
- lack of street life after 5 p.m. and on weekends
- lack of security: car break-ins
- lack of places to shop
- degraded pedestrian environment

Vision

- create a vibrant, interesting neighborhood to live, work, shop and recreate
- make more of a 19-hour/day neighborhood rather than just 9 to 5

Primary Goals

- balance the neighborhood's needs with their neighbors': the State Capitol, Main St., Park St.
- attract more businesses
- offer more choices for housing and work space
- create safer streets and parking areas
- make streets and public space more attractive
- offer options in transportation to residents and to those who work downtown

Strategy

- use new development to heal problem areas
- build upon neighborhood assets: proximity to downtown, cultural institutions, historic fabric
- encourage small incremental development instead of mammoth projects
- build flexibility into new development: if building uses change over time, they can be easily adapted
- improve the quality of the street for the pedestrian
- reconnect neighborhood to downtown and adjacent neighborhoods



*Parking (white) uses > 50%
of land in SoDo*

Overview

This study was commissioned by the City of Hartford to enable residents of the South Downtown Neighborhood to determine the future of their neighborhood. This study looks ahead 10-25 years and beyond, to create a strategic plan of action to accomplish physical, economic and social goals. Working together with a consultant, residents identified issues and priorities and determined the strategies needed to realize different parts of the plan.

Scope of the Project

Capitol Improvements was formed in 1996 as a problem-solving committee. Several committees were formed, of neighborhood stakeholders, each assigned to tackle different issues: planning, public safety, etc. In May 2001, the neighborhood voted to change its name to *South Downtown* to better describe its physical location in the city, and be more appealing to potential residents and visitors.

In 1998, the neighborhood organized a Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) Committee to seek NRZ status and prepare a Strategic Plan for their neighborhood. This is a State of CT designation, granted to urban neighborhoods seeking to revitalize their neighborhood, and has three requirements: a recognized stakeholder group to act as steering committee, city approval of the zone, and an ordinance to declare the boundaries of the NRZ. This unique state initiative was created to enable residents, and property owners to determine their own future, and to shape the direction that new development or other changes would have in their neighborhood.

See Appendix for South Downtown Neighborhood NRZ By-laws.

Specific goals of the NRZ legislation are to:

- increase neighborhood self-reliance
- increase home-ownership
- improve property management
- promote sustainable economic development
- enhance effective relations between landlords and tenants
- coordinate and expand delivery of services to the neighborhood
- improve the neighborhood capacity of self-empowerment

In the fall of 1999, the City of Hartford sought planning consultants to help create *Strategic Plans* for its NRZ Planning Committees. Funding was provided by Urban Act funds from the State Department of Community & Economic Development. Catherine Johnson, Architect & Town Planner, was chosen by the South Downtown Neighborhood to lead its study, and to help develop a proposal reflecting the neighborhood's vision.

The planning study began in earnest in September 2000, and a public planning workshop was held in October. A survey of buildings and streets, followed by a planning workshop, indicated residents' preferences and ideas for redevelopment. Those ideas were the inspiration for the proposal described herein. The study process took the form of presentations which were made at monthly board meetings and work sessions with the neighborhood strategic planning committee, which included a member of the city's planning department. A final presentation was made to the neighborhood and the plan was approved in June 2001.

Evaluating the Needs of the Neighborhood

This study looks at the neighborhood holistically, an approach commonly known as *Traditional Neighborhood Design*. It is based on the idea that a healthy neighborhood can be characterized by containing all the essential components of daily life:

- places to live, work, shop and play
- variety of household types and sizes
- walking distance to stores
- parks and green space throughout
- streets that accommodate a variety of users
- connections to local and regional transit

Decisions that are made about what direction the neighborhood's future should take build upon its primary asset, namely, having a great diversity of uses in a compact space. It places an emphasis on creating public urban spaces of high quality, with safe and attractive streets. Connections within the neighborhood and to others are maximized, and opportunities are taken to improve the environment for the pedestrian. A variety of green space is created so that private gardens link to tree-lined streets, which link the neighborhood and city park, eventually leading to corridors of open space.

Possible Neighborhood Model: Beacon Hill, Boston

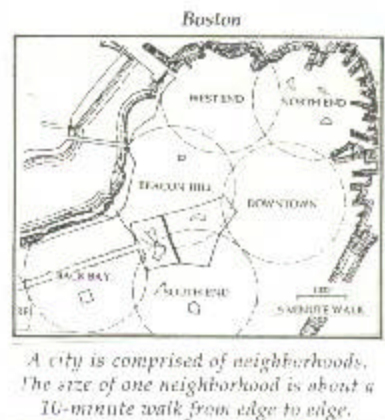
One neighborhood often mentioned in study sessions as a possible model for South Downtown was Beacon Hill in Boston, one of the country's most sought after urban neighborhoods. A number of characteristics make it similar to South Downtown, as it is primarily a residential neighborhood next to the state capitol.

Like South Downtown, Beacon Hill abuts the city park, and is located in the heart of the city. It has a commercial street (Charles) running down one side, which is both a regional and neighborhood draw. The housing contains a wide variety of types and sizes, but are predominantly one type, the rowhouse. The extraordinary flexibility of the rowhouse makes a very desirable building type. It permits multiple options for occupancy (one or many owners, etc.) and is instantly adapted according to the owner's wishes. It gives each lot a private outdoor space (a commodity in urban space).

And the buildings closest to the Capitol and commercial streets can have the option of some commercial space (offices) in them: the access to each, within walking distance, makes them ideal for anyone needing the close proximity. It is a very attractive building type.

Beacon Hill also demonstrates that the space *outside* the living unit is as important for attracting new residents. High quality urban spaces are often associated with the elegance of urban life. Nature weaves its way through the neighborhood in the form of small parks, tiny front gardens filled with flowers, and trellises climbing up brick walls, offering the best of both worlds.

Last, streets are designed to be comfortable, not only for those walking as well as driving, but for those who live along them, comfortable enough to consider them an extension of their own living rooms.



Beacon Hill Neighborhood
A neighborhood contains all the needs of everyday life: places to live, work, shop and recreate.



Louisberg Square
High quality urban spaces are shaped by buildings, creating small parks and attractive streets.



Description of Study Area

The South Downtown neighborhood is centrally located southeast of the State Capitol in Hartford, CT. It is adjacent to Downtown (*northeast*), the Sheldon Charter Oak neighborhood (*east*), South Green Neighborhood (*southeast*), and the Frog Hollow Neighborhood (*west*). It is within comfortable walking distance of the center of Downtown and Hartford Hospital to the south; the train and bus station, to the northwest links the neighborhood to regional and air transit. The proposed state sponsored and funded Adriaen's Landing project will be just north of Sheldon Charter Oak Neighborhood.

Neighborhood Boundary and Extension

The neighborhood area is west of Main Street, north of Park Street, east of Washington Street, and south of Elm Street. After a series of discussions with bordering neighborhoods, South Downtown voted in June 2001, to include two undesignated NRZ areas adjacent to its original southern boundary line. The area to the north of the neighborhood, east of Bushnell Park, containing Bushnell Towers and Bushnell on the Park, was also added.



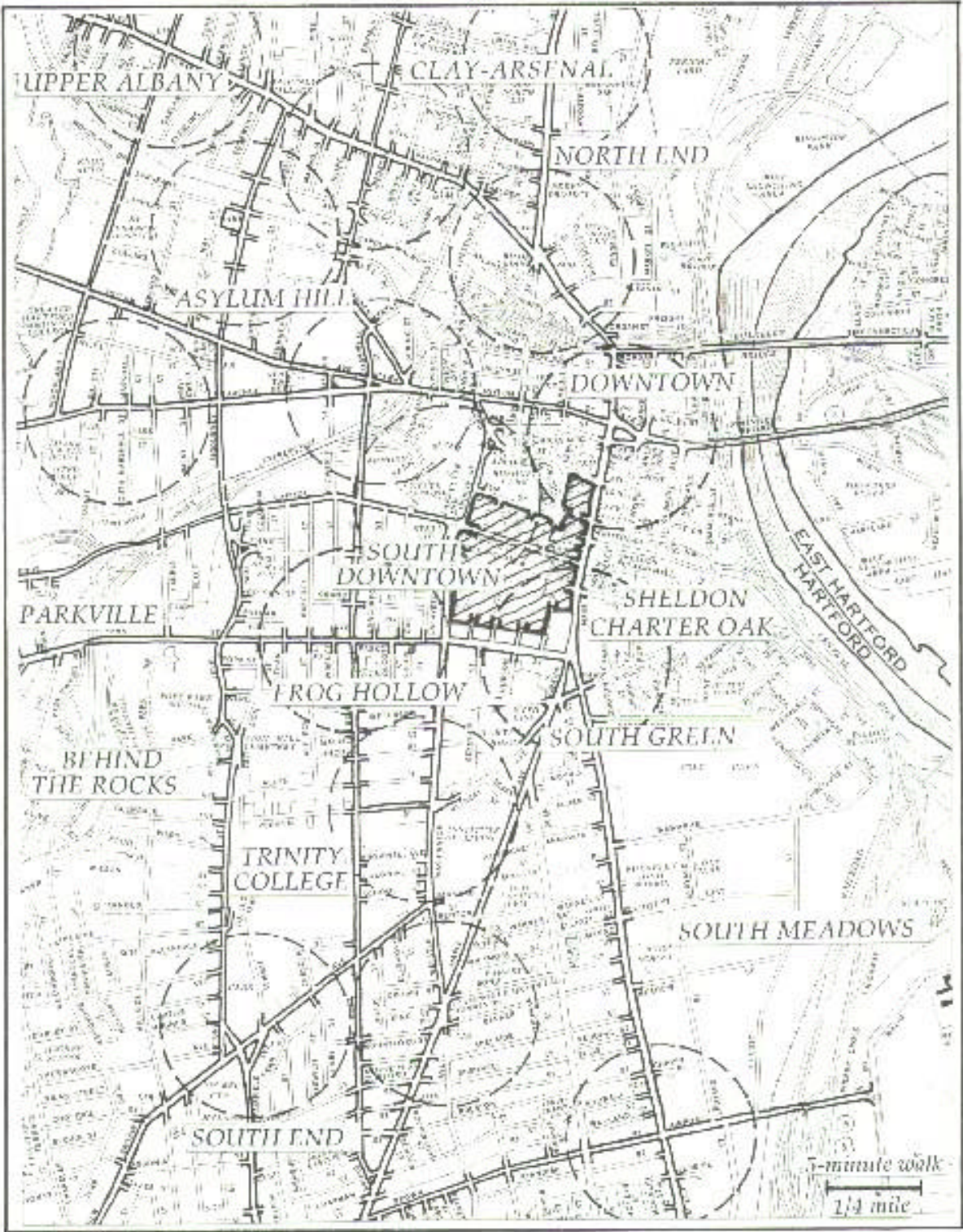
**BOUNDARIES,
South Downtown NRZ**

Note to Readers:

The South Downtown boundary (shown above) *does not include* businesses and buildings on Park Street or Main Street south of South Congregational Church. Strategies contained in this

proposal apply **only** to properties within the South Downtown Zone. However, every attempt has been made to build upon ideas from previous studies for these neighboring areas. Drawings contained herein may contain Park and Main in illustrating broader concepts encouraged in those prior studies. (*Park Street Revitalization Program 3/95*, and *The Downtown Hartford Economic and Urban Design Strategy, 12/98*).

Hartford Neighborhoods and Walkable Centers



NEIGHBORHOOD LOCATION

Hartford, CT

