

# C. NEIGHBORHOOD VISION

*Ideas generated in Neighborhood Planning Workshop*

On Saturday, October 21, 2000, about 30 neighborhood residents and building owners from the neighborhood gathered together with planning professionals at South Congregational Church on Main Street to talk about neighborhood problems and ideas to solve them.

## **Workshop Questions**

After an overview of neighborhood issues, assets, and principles of good urban design presented by the consultant, they gathered in small groups asked themselves the following questions, and then began drawing their ideas on paper. *What problems need to be solved? What new things would you like to see? What kind of housing? Where are the neighborhood centers? Where can we put new streets? What will each street look like? (existing and new)*

## **Issues**

Neighborhood residents complained about the vast area on Capitol Ave. and Buckingham Street now occupied by surface parking. They recognized the need for parking but felt that it should have less visibility, as auto break-ins are the most frequent crime in this downtown neighborhood.

Residents felt that there could be better and higher uses for this land, were the parking relocated. This centrally located land is prime for development, with its adjacency to the Capitol and The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, not to mention downtown Hartford. New development may possibly be connected to the Bushnell, or contain amenities which State employees can enjoy, or provide more housing.

## **Workshop Ideas**

Ideas generated in the workshop were presented to all assembled. One by one, group representatives described their vision for South Downtown. Residents envisioned a neighborhood that looked a lot like their favorite parts of South Downtown today: more rowhouses, nice tree-lined streets with an intimate scale and attractive lighting, and more urban spaces where people could gather.

They thought it would make sense to build upon existing amenities in the neighborhood like the cultural asset of The Bushnell, access to jobs and downtown, and the historic fabric. They spoke often about the need to create uses that enliven streets for more than the hours of the workday: places to shop, dine, and find entertainment after 5 p.m. and on weekends.

In discussing retail, residents spoke often about how they would like a small- to medium-sized grocery store, a place where you could get fresh vegetables as well as some carryout prepared foods. They saw Capitol Avenue as a link between The Bushnell and Main Street: were there some shops along Capitol Avenue, merchants could move some of their wares out onto the sidewalk, and people could browse as they walked by. Residents described the importance of widening the sidewalk space to make this kind of interactive space possible. They did note, however, that the focus for retail should be on Main Street, at least initially.

Neighborhood residents recognized that, though Park Street was technically outside the NRZ boundary for South



*Vision for South Downtown:  
elegant streets*



*Vision: new shops*

Downtown, they believed anything that was suggested for the neighborhood area adjacent to Park Street should aid to supporting businesses there. Many admitted they'd like to shop on Park Street but few found stores that drew them there. Many also thought the street should promote itself by emphasizing its unique character as an ethnic shopping street.

In terms of new development, residents said that they felt that there were plenty of jobs but not enough housing. Outside of some development close to The Bushnell, they thought housing should be the focus of this plan. Housing would include a range of types and sizes, in attractive buildings, with many options for rental or ownership. Residents recognized how low-rise buildings (4-6 stories) reinforce security, and would encourage a lot of new development that would follow that form. Speculation was made about what the market would bear regarding other uses such as a hotel office buildings. But all agreed that a concentration of housing was lacking in downtown Hartford, and that this might be an opportunity to fill that need. *(Ideas from the five groups are summarized on the next page, but can be read in detail in the Appendix.*



*Vision: upscale market*

*What it's like to live in South Downtown*

The workshop gave residents an opportunity to share their perspective on what living in the neighborhood is like. One resident's opinion was echoed by others: "I moved here because I got a great job (health care) in Hartford. What especially attracted me to this neighborhood was the architecture. When I walked into this brownstone, I just knew this was the apartment for me: 2 marble fireplaces, tall ceilings, built-in bookcases! If this was Manhattan, I could never afford a place like this. You don't find brownstones in the suburbs. I consider it a privilege to live here. I even have a balcony facing a private back yard. And on Saturday, it's so quiet; you can hear the birds chirping. And it's convenient to everything. What could be sweeter

**Visual Preference Survey**

Residents at the workshop were invited to choose from 50 images of buildings and streets, and were asked to decide which of them would be most appropriate for new development in South Downtown.

Buildings chosen as LEAST APPROPRIATE had the following characteristics: single story; blank facades; set back from the street; franchise architecture; drive-thrus; non-descript or inharmonious facades; unrecognizable building types.

Buildings chosen as BEST models had the following characteristics: wide variety of building types; two stories or taller; windows in front facades; larger on the first floor for retail; close to street; parking on-street or behind building; distinctive design with architectural detailing; made of natural materials; front facade faces the street; familiar building types.

These building models and their characteristics will be the basis for the design requirements, an *Urban & Architectural Code*, that will be created to guide new development and rehabilitation of existing buildings in South Downtown.



*Rowhouses*



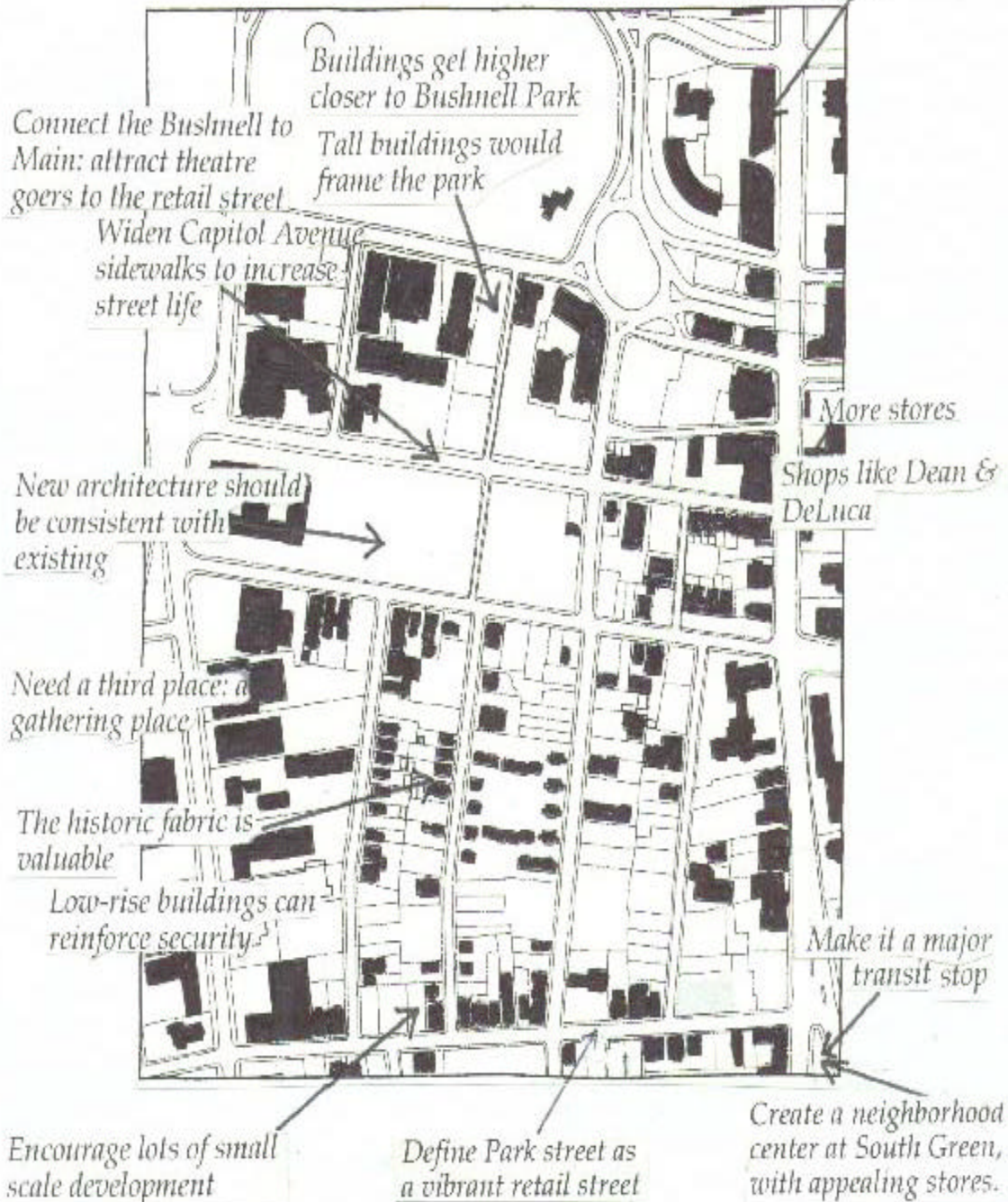
*New businesses would open on the neighborhood like this corner restaurant*

# NEIGHBORHOOD VISION

## Summary of Workshop Ideas

*Make neighborhood more attractive = more liveable*

*Turn stores next to the MDC around to face Main Street*



# VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

LEAST APPROPRIATE

BEST MODELS



*Blank facades  
Single story*



*Two stories or taller  
Distinctive design  
with architectural detailing*



*Set back from street*



*Windows in front facades,  
larger on 1st floor for retail*



*Drive thru*



*Front facade faces the street  
close to street*



*Parking in front of building  
non-descript facades*



*Familiar building types  
parking on street or behind building*