

FAJC Project Description

Background

For the last 15 to 20 years Farmington Avenue as a commercial and cultural district has been declining -- to the point where it is negatively impacting perceptions of the neighborhoods. FAJC has identified issues that collectively describe Farmington Avenue's problems, particularly in its two major retail areas. Farmington Avenue as a commercial and cultural district does not adequately support the civic and residential life, the business life, and the property values of the neighborhood. Unless the situation is remedied, it suggests that the long-term trend for the Avenue and its neighborhoods is downward. The major issues are:

1. Market/Economic Issues

- ◆ An ill-defined and ill-served market, resulting in a downward trend towards lower-value uses and storefront vacancies.
- ◆ Declining commercial property values, but high costs of occupancy, especially property taxes.
- ◆ Public perception of the area as a low-value, "problem" area.
- ◆ Too few uses that serve surrounding residents.
- ◆ Indifferent property owners.

2. Traffic and Parking Issues

- ◆ Farmington Avenue has become a drive-through arterial where traffic is inadequately managed; it has become an automobile-dominated environment that discourages walking or biking.
- ◆ The Avenue increasingly is becoming a feeder for commuters going to and from I-84.
- ◆ Parking is inadequate and often in the wrong places to properly serve the businesses; where it is convenient to the businesses, it is provided at the expense of the pedestrian environment.
- ◆ There are too many curb cuts and turning actions by cars for safety.
- ◆ The Sisson Avenue and Woodland Street intersections in particular have traffic-control problems, traffic violations, and are daunting and dangerous to pedestrians.

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3. Public Safety Issues
 - ◆ Quality of life crimes such as public drinking, panhandling, noise and vandalism.
 - ◆ The perception of an unsafe environment.
 - ◆ Not enough police presence, especially foot patrols and bicycle patrols.
 - ◆ Incidents of burglary and theft.

4. A Degraded Pedestrian And Visual Environment
 - ◆ Pedestrian ways are generally narrow and inadequate; sidewalks are continually interrupted by curb cuts, parking lots, and turning automobiles, which contribute to an uncomfortable and unsafe pedestrian environment.
 - ◆ Most store entrances can only be reached by crossing a parking lot.
 - ◆ The aesthetic and visual environment is cluttered, out of scale and uncoordinated.
 - ◆ The discontinuity of shopping frontage discourages walking.
 - ◆ Trash and litter are excessive.

5. Poor Planning and Development Controls.
 - ◆ The present zoning contributes to the problem by encouraging automobile-oriented uses.
 - ◆ City zoning decisions allow additional curb cuts, parking in front of the building line, out-of-scale signs, etc. that contribute to the ongoing degradation of the physical environment and the general sense of clutter.
 - ◆ Poor notification, other procedural laxness and a general failure to enforce existing planning and development controls.
 - ◆ The lack of commitment among city officials to planning and civic design.
 - ◆ Failure of the neighborhood to monitor the political process and insist that it be responsive to residents' needs on Farmington Avenue.

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The Vision

Despite its decline, however, Farmington Avenue retains many strengths. FAJC believes that it can become a major asset again, and that it has the potential, if turned around, to have a very positive impact in stabilizing and revitalizing the western side of the city, and in contributing to and drawing from the revitalization of the Downtown. Consequently all of the organizations that comprise FAJC have adopted this vision for a revitalized Farmington Avenue:

We envision Farmington Avenue in Hartford as a gateway to the City, as a charming and beautiful public realm, as a vital urban place that serves the residents of the neighborhoods it passes through, and as a Grand Avenue uniting Greater Hartford's western suburbs with Downtown Hartford. This renewed Avenue supports a high-quality mix of unique commercial, cultural, professional, residential and academic activities; it is home to some of the most important institutions in the Capitol Region. The Avenue is a place where elderly people feel safe and where parents are comfortable bringing their children. It is a profitable business location. It is a center of entertainment and recreation. Streets and facilities welcome pedestrians and bicyclists. Commercial buildings and public improvements complement the architectural heritage of the adjacent residences to create a unique sense of place. The Avenue reflects the diversity of families and life styles that is one of Hartford's most valued features. People are drawn from around the region to this vibrant center of community life.

The Farmington Avenue Corridor Plan

The study by Project for Public Spaces for the Farmington Avenue Joint Committee has two key components – economic and traffic analysis. The study team will work with the community, review existing studies and develop a strategy for creation a sense of “place” on the Avenue. The FAJC study of Farmington Avenue will be developed through dialogue with area residents, businesses, institutions and City officials. A final report will be completed by the end of 2001.

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Economic Analysis

An economic analysis will be completed to resolve the following questions:

- ◆ What markets are currently being served by the three focus areas and how could they be better served?
- ◆ What is the potential of *existing* uses and assets along the corridor, based on an understanding of the trade areas for the Avenue's diverse attractions?
- ◆ What is the competitive advantage of Farmington Avenue as a whole and who are its potential new markets?
- ◆ What potential *new* market niche opportunities could the focus areas take advantage of in the future (based on research collected through residents' and merchants' surveys)?

Existing studies and statistics, such as data on pass-by commuter volume, daytime worker population, workforce characteristics (typical hours of work, etc.), population, ethnic and income characteristics, and information from the Downtown Strategy and neighborhood projects, will be incorporated into the analysis.

A map will be prepared indicating the different characteristics of the corridor from a market perspective. These characteristics include the following:

- ◆ retail uses
- ◆ traffic levels along the corridor, which underline the support for different types of stores
- ◆ key traffic intersections, where there is additional support for particular types of stores
- ◆ location of traffic lights, which is a prerequisite for particular store categories
- ◆ location of bus stops, which provide added support for stores catering to local residents
- ◆ depth of lots, which influences the ability to create different retail formats
- ◆ concentrations of like stores, e.g., fast food establishments, convenience stores
- ◆ proximity to major generators of retail demand, e.g., concentrations of employees, roads leading to the hospital or highway, etc.

Street and Traffic Alternatives

Alternative recommendations will be developed on two levels: overall recommendations for the entire length of the study area, relating to issues such as reducing excessive vehicle speeds, improving safety, and improving pedestrian and bicycle continuity; and specific recommendations for the

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West End commercial area modifying vehicle circulation patterns, increasing pedestrian space, improving access, and modifying intersections and signalization to balance vehicle and pedestrian needs. Possibilities for reconfiguring and increasing parking, both off-street and on, will be investigated. Suggestions for relocating and/or redesigning bus waiting areas to better accommodate pedestrians and passengers will be made.

The development of traffic and parking alternatives will be coordinated with a “place-making” plan and land use/zoning changes as they may affect the volumes and patterns of future traffic conditions along the corridor. The traffic management plan for the corridor will include specific roadway improvements that may be needed to accommodate projected future vehicular traffic volumes. Such improvements, which could be integrated into any feasible alternative, and which may also enhance pedestrian mobility, may include:

- ◆ traffic channelization through the use of painted or raised pedestrian refuge islands
- ◆ installation of pedestrian crosswalks, including high visibility crosswalks with special pavement materials (brick, concrete block, cobble stone, etc) and raised crosswalks
- ◆ traffic signal coordination including timing and phasing changes
- ◆ bulbouts/curb extensions and provision of pedestrian amenities
- ◆ installation of warning, information and directional signage
- ◆ restriping of roadways
- ◆ modification of traffic control devices
- ◆ installation of traffic signals
- ◆ turn prohibition
- ◆ street direction changes
- ◆ driveway relocation/consolidation/management
- ◆ designated turn lanes for traffic movement
- ◆ better coordination of curb-cuts