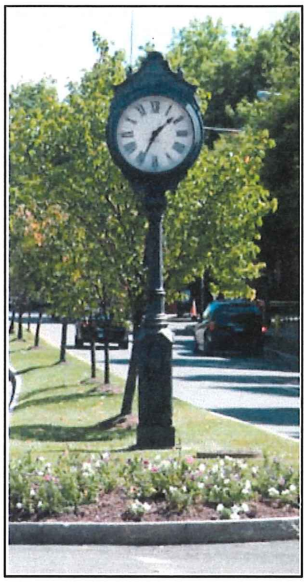
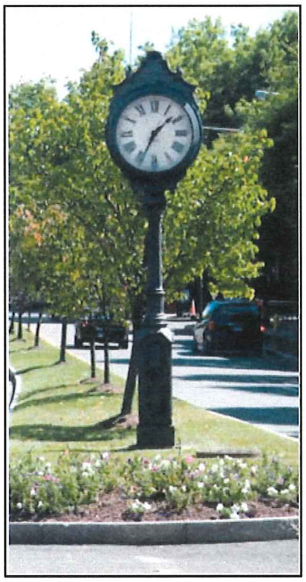


DOWNTOWN DANBURY:
Issues & Recommendations
2010

MAIN STREET RENAISSANCE TASK FORCE



DOWNTOWN DANBURY:
Issues & Recommendations
2010

MAIN STREET RENAISSANCE TASK FORCE

City of Danbury
Department of Planning & Zoning
155 Deer Hill Avenue · Danbury · Connecticut

MARK D. BOUGHTON
Mayor
City of Danbury

MAIN STREET RENAISSANCE TASK FORCE

John Kline, Chairman
President, Union Savings Bank

Stephen Bull, President, Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce
Frank Cappiello, Owner, Cappiello Jewelers
Joseph DaSilva, DaSilva Real Estate
Jane Didona, Principal, Didona Associates
Dennis Elpern, Planning Director, City of Danbury
Andrea Gartner, Executive Director, CityCenter Danbury
Nicholas Gazetos, Sr. Vice-President, Savings Bank of Danbury
Usha Kumar, Danbury
David Null, Engineer, City of Danbury
Gail Null, Branch Director, Boughton Street YMCA
Agostinho Ribeiro, Attorney, Ventura Ribeiro & Smith
Wayne Shepperd, Office of the Mayor, City of Danbury

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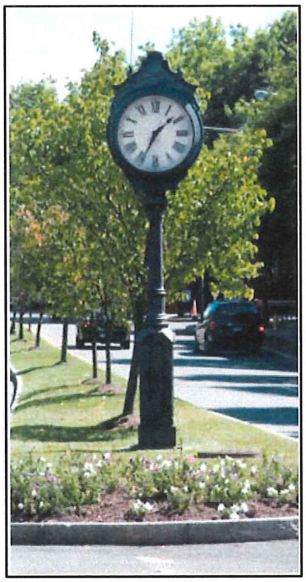


Downtown Danbury: Issues & Recommendations 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, Mayor Mark D. Boughton appointed the Main Street Renaissance Task Force to study downtown Danbury and prepare a report designed to strengthen its social and economic position within the City and surrounding region. This Executive Summary is a synopsis of that report.

The report identified issues and proposed recommendations for the revitalization of downtown Danbury by: fashioning a vision and setting objectives for the future of the downtown; establishing planning principles to guide decision makers; analyzing issues and presenting recommendations to promote and enhance economic development, urban design, historic preservation, and public improvements; and, devising an organizational structure for its implementation.

The study area[1] for the report encompasses the core of the central business district of the City, a walkable area exemplified by concentrated development, historic buildings, and a diversity of uses, including retail stores and services, offices, banks, churches, restaurants and entertainment, public facilities, and housing. The study area also serves as a primary venue for community activities, including the Summer Concert Series, the Taste of Greater Danbury, numerous parades and other festivities.

Although the report provides a vision of what the downtown can become, it should not be considered a final or end-state document, but rather a flexible report that can be revised over time to reflect changing attitudes, conditions and needs.

Nor should one assume that adoption of the report alone will guarantee its ultimate success. For while the report provides a vision of the future and recommendations for action, its ultimate success will depend upon a community-wide commitment without which no single document, no matter how well crafted, can fully succeed. In the end, success requires the confidence to act rather than simply react to change, and summons all of us to express, in our deeds as well as our words, the will and the determination to shape the future of downtown Danbury.

---

[1] The study area extends along Main Street from the railroad tracks near Garamella Boulevard in the north to the end of Elmwood Park in the south and from Patriot Drive in the east to Kennedy, New, and Foster streets to the west. Consult the full report for detailed maps.

1. Key Issues & Policies

People who have grown up in Danbury remember a time not long ago when the downtown was clearly the focus of community life, the place to work and to shop, to see and be seen. But, like so many other downtowns in America, Main Street has since lost its once preeminent role as the commercial core of the City as suburban shopping and employment centers have spread out to other areas of the City and into surrounding towns. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many established downtown stores closed or moved to new locales. In some cases, older shops were replaced by stores and services catering to a growing Brazilian and Hispanic immigrant population.

Much of the decline of the downtown as the City's commercial center could have been anticipated as it simply did not have the space or the facilities to accommodate the growing consumer appetite of the population, or to meet the demand for more office and industrial space, or to offer the convenience provided by commercial centers closer to suburban housing. The downtown may find renewed economic development by providing 'niche' housing and retail services targeted to specific demographic groups who may find living in the heart of the City appealing, groups which may include, among others, young singles, students, retirees and the elderly.

Vision Statement

Visioning is the process of providing an overall image of what is desired for the downtown and how it will look in the future. This process leads to the creation of a vision statement, the starting point for the creation and implementation of action plans.

The Task Force, after analyzing the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the downtown, fashioned the following vision statement as their expression of the ultimate image desired for the future of the downtown.

VISION STATEMENT

The downtown will be the primary focus of City life, with a diversity of activities and thriving businesses, high quality housing, exceptional urban design, preservation of historic buildings, varied entertainment, and a vibrant street life.

Objectives of Downtown Revitalization

The Task Force identified the following major objectives for a successful downtown revitalization effort:

- encourage market-rate housing for those with disposable incomes who will patronize downtown businesses;
- promote and expand a diversity of quality retail stores, services, offices and restaurants;
- expand entertainment and cultural activities;
- support colleges, churches and medical centers;
- improve nearby residential neighborhoods;
- encourage excellence in urban design and the preservation of historic structures and landmarks;
- enhance pedestrian safety and convenience;
- improve public spaces and facilities, sidewalks and parking;
- coordinate public and private programs of downtown improvement and management;
- bring together established business owners and new immigrant groups to improve and promote the downtown; and,
- foster cooperative actions among businesses, merchants, property owners, developers, city government, and civic, religious and educational institutions.

Downtown Danbury is a unique place deserving of community support and commitment. It is the City's heart and center, a place for business and a place for fun, home for those who live here and cherished by all who value it as the focus of City life. Achieving these objectives will help to preserve and enhance the strength and promise of the downtown for present and future generations.

2. Economic Development

While the downtown may no longer be the retail center of years past, it is still characterized by pedestrian-scaled streets, a wealth of historic buildings, and a diversity of local and regional businesses, community facilities and activities. The basis of any revitalization strategy must be to build upon these strengths and provide incentives for private investment that will energize the downtown. This effort cannot rest upon the hope that a vanished past can be restored. Rather, it must recognize new realities and seize new opportunities for the future.

Revitalization Strategies

Success in this effort begins with maintaining and improving the pedestrian experience of all those who come downtown. This requires the encouragement of a mix of complementary uses and activities that reinforce one another – housing, retail stores, services, offices, restaurants, and entertainment which will attract different people at different times to create a "critical mass" of pedestrian-scale uses.

For downtown Danbury, the diversity of mixed uses which can contribute to the establishment of a critical mass include the following: (1) commercial development (retail stores, services, restaurants, business and professional offices); (2) housing (high-density housing for young singles and couples, students, empty nesters, retirees and the elderly); (3) recreation and entertainment (theaters, museums, sports complexes, art galleries, festivals, concerts); (4) civic uses (public offices, library, community centers); and, (5) institutions (colleges, churches, medical centers). Some of these uses may act as catalysts which will kick-start revitalization efforts by initiating a series of major private investments that will bring significant commercial energy downtown to achieve infill development, private redevelopment, and the reuse and renovation of existing buildings.

Recommendations: Private Efforts

- **Market analysis.** Prepare a market analysis which focuses on several factors of downtown development: (1) an analysis of the downtown trade area, existing downtown retail and office business development, consumer attitudes, and business needs, (2) identification of the mix of retail and office niches best suited for the enhancement of business and real estate opportunities, and (3) the formulation of realistic strategies and recommended programs for business retention and recruitment.

- **Business incubator program.** Prepare a feasibility study for a business incubator program designed to assist start-up entrepreneurial firms by providing inexpensive office space and support services, common shared resources, management training for inexperienced business owners, and positive interaction among tenant businesses.

- **Private development opportunities.** Assuming market demand and adequate financing are available, encourage infill and private redevelopment of vacant or underutilized lots, including, among others, the following sites of high visibility and potential for intensified development: (1) ESCAPE to the Arts at 293 Main Street; (2) 12-18 Crosby Street; (3) Main and State streets; (4) the former O'Faia Restaurant at 195-7 Main Street; (5) Firestone at 99 Railroad Place; (6) the Palace Theater parking lot on Keeler Street; (7) the former Police Department complex at Main and Boughton streets; (8) Redevelopment Parcel 9 at 32 Patriot Drive; (9) Kennedy Place at Kennedy Avenue, Rose and Main streets; and, (10) Elm Street and Tower Place.

- **Palace Theater.** Encourage restoration of the Palace Theater to its former excellence and potential to act as a catalyst for downtown revitalization, to promote historic preservation, and to provide a regional destination for the arts and entertainment.

Recommendations: Public Incentive Package

The City can play an important role in downtown revitalization by providing incentives to encourage private investment for desirable development. The objective is to create a package of incentives which will send a clear message from the City to potential developers that downtown Danbury is the most hospitable environment in the City to do business.

- **Zoning amendments.** Petition the Zoning Commission to amend the Zoning Regulations to create a Downtown Revitalization Zone (DRZ) overlay zone which revises regulations for portions of zoning districts located within the Zone with the following provisions.

  Multi-family housing. Change multi-family housing from a special exception to a permitted use in the C-CBD Zoning District. Revise selected area and bulk regulations in the CL-10 and RH-3 zoning districts within the DRZ to emulate those in the C-CBD zoning district.
  Residential development. Prohibit new first floor residential units from fronting on Main, White and West streets.
  Restaurant sales. Eliminate the restriction that sales of alcoholic beverages cannot exceed forty percent of the total monthly food and beverage sales in restaurants.
  Parking. Reduce the amount of required on-site parking for 2-bedroom multi-family units to 1½ spaces per unit; eliminate requirements for on-site visitor parking in RH-3 if public parking is within 500 feet; and, eliminate on-site parking requirements for employees if permit parking is made available by the employer at a public parking garage or lot or by long-term lease from a private lot, regardless of the distance from the use.

- **Deferral of Assessment Increases.** Amend the Code of Ordinances to expand uses eligible for a deferral in the DRZ by including office uses, retail uses, permanent residential uses, information technology, recreation facilities, and transportation facilities, as allowed by the Zoning Regulations.

- **Sewer and water fees.** Reduce connection fees and permit application fees in the DRZ.

- **Sidewalk policy.** Accept responsibility by the City for repairing and replacing sidewalks in the DRZ provided abutting property owners keep them clean, safe and unobstructed at all times.

- **Permits.** Give high priority to processing permit applications for new development in the DRZ by placing them on "top of the pile."

- **Reduced fees.** Reduce most permit fees by 50%.

Ancillary Support

Ancillary support includes actions which, though not directly involved in promoting economic development, nevertheless contribute to the revitalization of the downtown through a variety of related means.

Recommendations

- **Neighborhood plans.** Because of their proximity to the downtown, nearby medium to high density residential neighborhoods can offer support for downtown development by residents who may find such goods and services within convenient walking distance. Neighborhood plans, prepared in close consultation with local residents, can make these areas more attractive by bringing about significant

and lasting improvements in housing conditions, land use patterns, transportation, community facilities, security, and the environment.

- **Ambassador program.** Establish an "ambassador program" through which WCSU students patrol downtown streets, offering assistance to visitors and a presence that will allay security fears.

- **Noise.** Adopt an ordinance to control excessive noise in the downtown that is reasonable in scope and flexible in application. The ordinance would make it unlawful to create noise deemed to be unreasonable when it disturbs, injures or endangers the peace or health of neighboring persons of ordinary sensibilities or when it endangers the health, safety or welfare of the community.

- **Danbury Cultural Museum.** Prepare a feasibility study for the creation of the Danbury Cultural Museum which will highlight and celebrate the contributions immigrant groups have made to the City throughout its history. The proposed museum would tell the story of their journey, what they found here, their triumphs and frustrations, their hopes and achievements. In return, it would reward visitors with new knowledge of our shared history and a renewed pride in our heritage.

3. Urban Design & Historic Preservation

Urban design strives to improve the spatial character of an area through attention given to all of its constituent elements and their interrelationships. Though related to architecture, it differs in that its chief focus is on the context within which buildings, however attractive by themselves, contribute to the overall visual mosaic of an area.

The special character of the downtown study area is largely determined by its predominant coherence in urban design and the architectural styles of its older buildings. Its strongest elements are typical of major commercial districts dating from the 19th century: wide sidewalks and street trees; buildings with little or no setback from the sidewalk; on-street parking and off-street parking to the rear of buildings; and, a mix of commercial, residential, public and institutional uses.

Recommendations

- **Reverse setbacks.** Petition the Zoning Commission for design controls to require that new buildings be setback no farther than the mean setback of adjacent buildings on the block. First floors of new buildings would have to build on the front property line or within a certain distance to maintain the existing street wall or to better integrate buildings with streets.

- **Rear parking lots.** Petition the Zoning Commission to require new parking lots to be located to the rear of buildings fronting on major streets, wherever feasible. Parking lots along major streets generate little pedestrian interest and break-up the continuity of stores and services which benefit from their close proximity to others.

- **Design guidelines.** Prepare downtown design guidelines for new construction, a clear set of policies backed by enforceable standards and placed within a review process understood by both applicant and reviewer alike. The publication of design guidelines can be used as a vehicle for providing design review boards and private developers with standards by which proposed construction can be evaluated in a fair and consistent manner. Standards typically relate to architecture, site design, signs and historic preservation principles and guidelines.

- **Village Districts or Historic District Commissions.** Consider the creation of a village district or historic district commission to encourage the conversion, conservation and preservation of existing buildings and sites in a manner that maintains the historic or distinctive character of the district.

- **Demolition delay.** Enact a demolition delay ordinance to impose a waiting period of not more than 90 days before granting any permit for the demolition of historic buildings or structures or any part thereof. Although such an ordinance does not have the power of preventing such actions, it does give the City time to negotiate alternative actions with the property owner.

4. Public Improvements

Public improvements play a critical supporting role in downtown revitalization and include parking, streets, transit, sidewalks, parks, public buildings and other facilities. Many downtown plans place considerable emphasis on these elements and assume that their improvement alone will spur downtown development. That, of course, is not the case, for downtown revitalization requires a multi-faceted attack that also includes economic development strategies, sensitive urban design, and the preservation of historic properties. Nevertheless, public improvements are key ingredients in making the downtown more functional, convenient, safe and attractive.

Recommendations

- **Short-term parking improvements.** Add perimeter landscaping or low brick walls along Delay and Liberty streets to screen adjacent public parking lots; connect the lot behind the Hull Building to the Palace Theater parking lot and improve pedestrian access and lighting to Liberty Street; provide regular maintenance for parking lots, including paving and striping of spaces; and, provide directional signs to municipal lots and garages from major streets.

- **Long-range parking study.** Hire a consultant to prepare a future parking plan which would include management options (e.g. changes to regulations, time limits on parking for certain spaces, improved signage), expansion proposals (e.g. new construction, cost assessments, and potential users), recommended fee structures, and enforcement measures.

- **HART trolley service.** Communicate to HART suggestions regarding improved trolley service to better serve the downtown by expanding service from Monday through Saturday at times integrated with other bus schedules and to focus the route on connecting the downtown with WCSU, the Danbury Hospital and the Danbury Fair Mall.

- **Streetscape improvements.** Undertake streetscape improvements for White Street, West Street, Crosby Street, and Lee Hartell Drive, and extend Main Street improvements to South Street. Install enhanced crosswalks to the Danbury Green and at the following Main Street intersections: Kennedy/Crosby and Elm/White streets; Library Place; West/Liberty streets; and, Boughton Street and Wooster Street crosswalks at Elmwood Park.

- **Sidewalk repair/replacement.** Recommend a phased program to improve secondary downtown sidewalks, including Bank, Boughton, Chapel, Elm, Foster, Keeler, Kennedy, Library, New, Park, Rose, State, Terrace, Tower, and Wooster streets. Improvements would be primarily limited to the replacement of sidewalks and curbs but without full streetscape treatment.

- **Kennedy Park.** Undertake landscape improvements to Kennedy Park.

- **Public buildings and infrastructure.** Implement improvements to public buildings and infrastructure in accordance with the City's Capital Improvement Program.

These and other recommendations of the report which require the expenditure of public funds are made with an appreciation of the budgetary limitations facing City government. Not everything can be done at once. Consequently, these recommendations require phased implementation over time in a financially prudent manner as funds become available.

5. *Implementation*

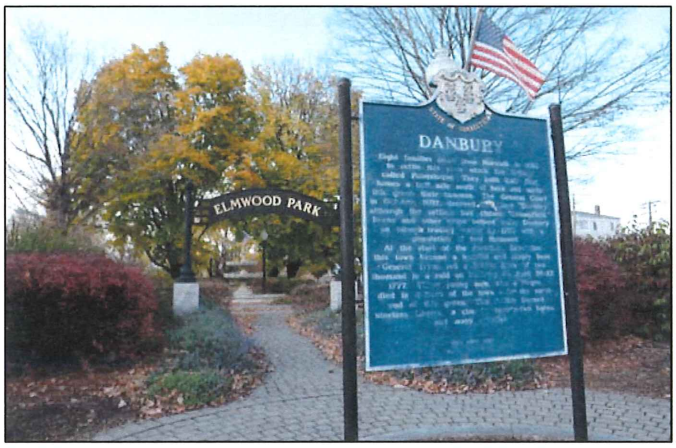
Far too often, reports similar to this one which contain recommended actions are adopted with much fanfare and then ignored, as if their proposals will implement themselves. Accordingly, this report is not being touted as the end of the process of downtown revitalization, but only the beginning. An organization needs to be established to set priorities, monitor progress, consult with individuals and organizations responsible for implementation, provide a forum for the general public, and promote timely planning, programming and budgeting initiatives.

Recommendations

- **Downtown Revitalization Commission.** Create a Commission to promote the revitalization of the downtown in accordance with the vision, objectives and recommendations of the *Downtown Danbury: Issues & Recommendations* report. Duties would include: (1) preparation each year of an annual program of public and private actions necessary to implement report recommendations; (2) meeting with property owners and merchants on development proposals; (3) consulting with public officials on all proposed downtown plans, programs, regulations and public improvements; (4) monitoring downtown progress, evolving conditions, and needs; (5) entertaining and soliciting public opinions, attitudes and concerns; and, (6) providing leadership in all other ways to make the downtown vision a reality.

- **Economic Development Director.** As funding becomes available, the Economic Development Director should be restored to a full-time position to, among other things, encourage and promote downtown business retention and recruitment efforts.

This report provides both a framework and a set of recommendations for a sustained revitalization effort in downtown Danbury. Its success demands constant resolve and vigilance, not sporadic, timid, or quixotic efforts. It requires both a broad vision and an attention to detail, recognizing that even small improvements can add up to significant results. But, in the final analysis, success also demands an intuitive understanding that you can't have a great city without doing great things.



INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Mayor Mark D. Boughton appointed the Main Street Renaissance Task Force to study downtown Danbury and prepare a report which would identify major issues facing the downtown and generate recommendations and strategies designed to strengthen its social and economic position within the City and surrounding region.

The Task Force is composed of individuals aware of evolving patterns of change within the downtown and who are committed to its improvement. The Task Force sought the advice and suggestions of stakeholders and those who could offer specific expertise on current conditions and suggestions for new directions in the future. In February 2009, the Task Force sent out a survey to all property owners in the CityCenter Danbury area soliciting their opinions on a wide range of issues facing the downtown. This was supplemented with a meeting in June 2009 with eight developers and downtown business owners to discuss strengths, impediments and opportunities for downtown revitalization. The findings gained from these efforts (see Appendix) provided guidance for the preparation of this report.

This report presents the results of the effort of the Task Force. *Downtown Danbury: Issues & Recommendations* identifies key issues facing the downtown, provides an overall vision for its future, sets objectives, and posits fundamental planning principles to guide change. The report then recommends methods to promote economic development, ensure proper urban design, preserve historic buildings, and identify needed public improvements. It concludes with a presentation of management tools necessary for successful implementation of the report and a summary implementation plan.

In its study and deliberations, the Task Force found broad public support for the revitalization of downtown Danbury. This affirmed the findings of the *Community Attitude Survey* conducted in 2007 by the Department of Planning and Zoning. When a random sample of all city residents were asked about the importance of improving the downtown, fully 87% of respondents felt that it was important, up from 82% when the same question was asked in a similar survey in 1997.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to identify issues and propose recommendations for the revitalization of downtown Danbury by:

- fashioning a vision and setting objectives for the future of the downtown;
- establishing planning principles to guide decision makers; and,
- analyzing issues and presenting recommendations to promote and enhance downtown economic development, urban design, historic preservation, and public improvements, and devising implementation strategies.

Study Area

The study area for the report (Figure 1) encompasses the core of the central business district of the City, a walkable area exemplified by concentrated development, historic buildings, and a diversity of uses, including retail stores and services, offices, banks, churches, restaurants and entertainment, public facilities, and housing. The study area also serves as a primary venue for community activities, including the Summer Concert Series, the Taste of Greater Danbury, numerous parades and other festivities.

Use of the Report

Although this report was reviewed and adopted by the Main Street Renaissance Task Force, it is recognized that a number of individuals and organizations will need to share primary responsibility if implementation is to succeed:

- the proposed Downtown Revitalization Commission will need to promote the recommendations of the report, monitor its progress, and periodically update it as necessary;
- the Mayor will have the responsibility of directing the implementation of City plans, programs, projects, regulations and public improvements identified in the report, including public incentives and capital expenditures;
- CityCenter Danbury and other community groups will need to continue to promote the downtown, host community events, and encourage the private sector to comply with recommendations of the report that affect their businesses; and,
- the private sector should consult the report to fashion development decisions consistent with its recommendations.

Although this report provides a vision of what the downtown can become, it should not be considered a final or end-state document, but rather a flexible report that can be revised over time to reflect changing attitudes, conditions and needs.

Nor should one assume that adoption of this report alone will guarantee its ultimate success. For while the report provides a vision of the future and recommendations for action, its ultimate success will depend upon a community-wide commitment without which no single document, no matter how well crafted, can fully succeed. In the end, success requires the confidence to act rather than simply react to change, and summons all of us to express, in our deeds as well as our words, the will and the determination to shape the future of downtown Danbury.

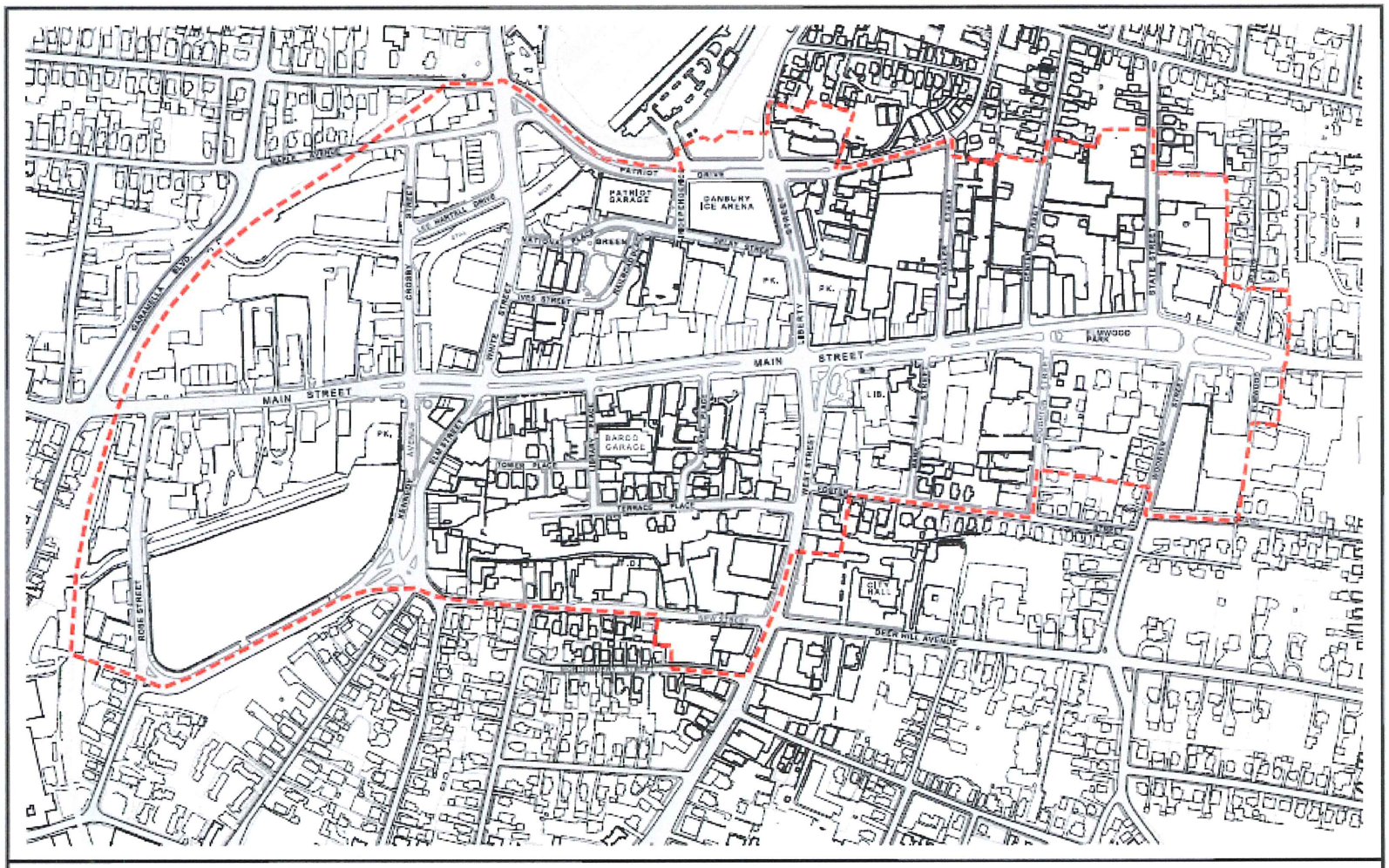


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FIGURE 1
DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

NORTH

1. KEY ISSUES & POLICIES

People who have grown up in Danbury remember a time not long ago when the downtown was clearly the focus of community life, the place to work and to shop, to see and be seen. But, like so many other downtowns in America, Main Street has since lost its once preeminent role as the commercial core of the City as suburban shopping and employment centers have spread out to other areas of the City and into surrounding towns. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many established downtown stores closed or moved to new locales, including, for example, Addessi jewelers, Feinson's men's store, the Henry Dick & Son furniture store, Judd's florists, Markoff's shoe store, Martin's men's store, Previdi's office supply store, Steinbach's department store, Sturdevant's photo shop, and Woolworth's. In some cases, older shops were replaced by stores and services catering to a growing Brazilian and Hispanic immigrant population.

Much of the decline of the downtown as the City's commercial center could have been anticipated as it simply did not have the space or the facilities to accommodate the growing consumer appetite of the population, or to meet the demand for more office and industrial space, or to offer the convenience provided by commercial centers closer to suburban housing. However, the recent influx of immigrant businesses may provide clues to future prosperity. The downtown may find renewed economic development by providing 'niche' housing and retail services targeted to specific demographic groups who may find living in the heart of the City appealing, groups which may include, among others, young singles, students, retirees and the elderly.

Development Patterns

Today, downtown Danbury is a relatively small area for a city with a population of 80,000. The study area consists of approximately 116 acres with a total building floor area of 3,536,331 square feet (Table 1). But, within this area is a rich mixture of land uses (Figure 2) and architectural styles. Commercial and mixed-use developments account for 60% of the total floor area in the study area. The total assessed value of the study area was $ 229,749,080 in 2008.

Prominent downtown buildings include, among others, Brookview Commons, the Galleria, the F.A. Hull Building, the Ice Arena, Meeker's Hardware, the Palace Theater/Martha Apartments, the Pershing Building, two offices of the Savings Bank of Danbury, the Stetson building, and Union Savings Bank. Major churches include the Danbury Lighthouse Church, St. James Episcopal Church, and St. Peter Church, school and rectory. The downtown study area also boasts a number of prominent public buildings, including the Danbury Library, the old Fairfield County Courthouse, Ives Manor, the Old Jail, the old Library, the Patriot and Bardo garages, and the Post Office. Three major parks serve the downtown: the Danbury Green, Elmwood Park and Kennedy Park.

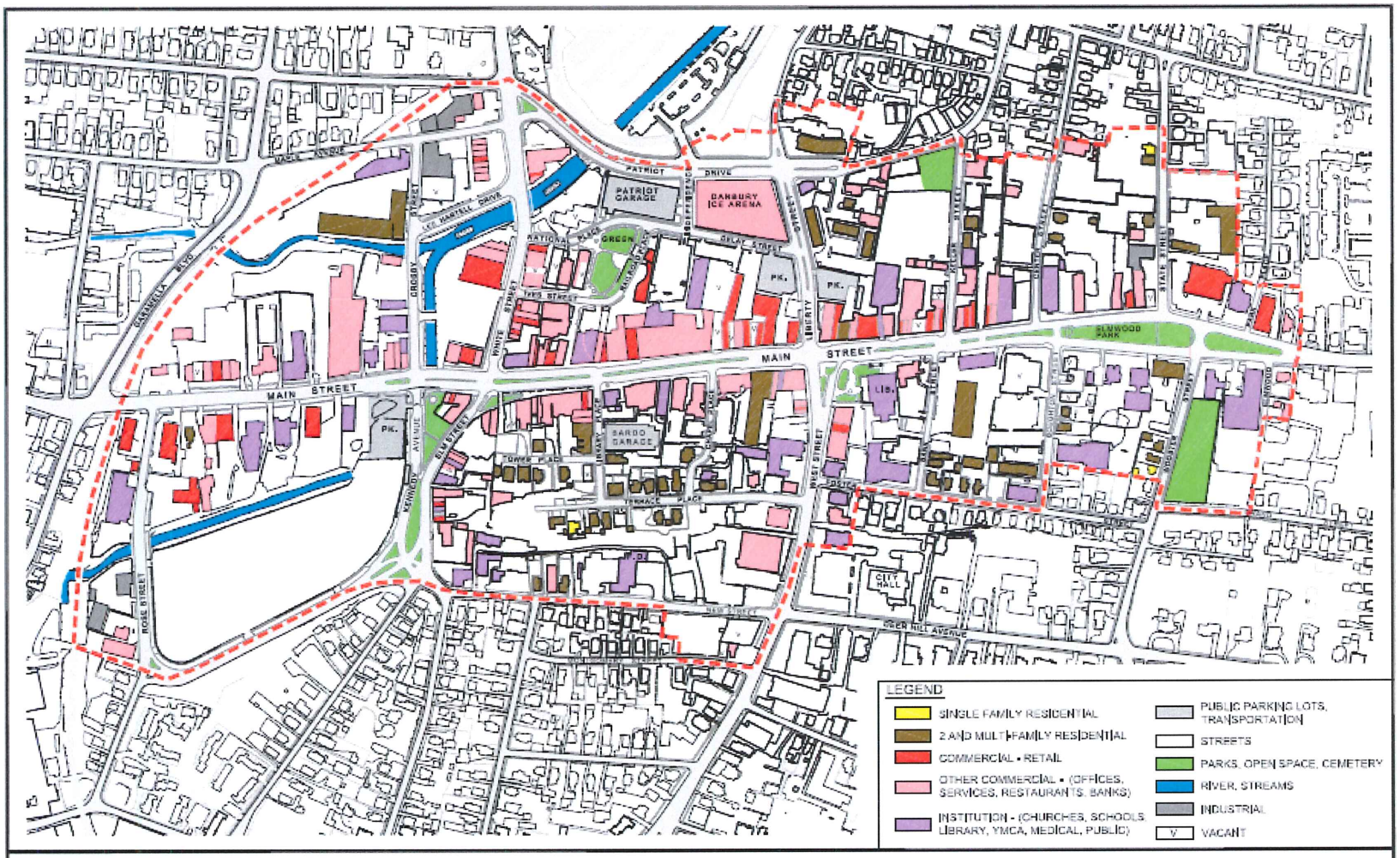

FIGURE 2
1ST FLOOR LAND USES, 2009

TABLE 1
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY
2008

	Lot Acreage	Building Gross Floor Area	Percent Total	Dwelling Units
Commercial	46.39	2,118,606	59.9	510
Multi-family	16.14	562,261	15.9	526
Quasi-public	13.34	386,271	10.9	9
Public	11.39	383,828	10.9	-
Single Family	1.27	25,616	0.7	7
Vacant	27.22	59,749	1.7	-
Total	**115.75**	**3,536,331**	**100.0**	**1,052**

Notes:
Commercial includes retail stores, services, offices and mixed commercial-apartment development. Building gross floor areas may not be completely occupied.
Multi-family includes dwellings with two or more units, whether occupied or vacant.
Quasi-public includes private schools, churches, clubs, medical clinics and other institutions. Building gross floor areas may not be completely occupied.
Vacant includes completely vacant lots and buildings and lots devoted solely to parking, but do not include portions of buildings which may be vacant.
All numbers exclude street rights-of-way.

Source: City of Danbury, Department of Finance, Assessor's Office, 2008.

Key Issues

Developing a strategy to revitalize the downtown requires more than a description of current conditions. It must identify key issues facing the downtown, formulate a vision for the future, set objectives and establish principles to guide decision making, and conclude with recommended actions.

This begins with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (i.e. SWOT analysis) which may help or hinder the goal of revitalizing the downtown. The four components of SWOT analysis can be defined as follows:

- *strengths* are those attributes of the downtown that can be used to achieve planning objectives;
- conversely, *weaknesses* are attributes that are harmful to achieving objectives and highlight issues that need to be addressed;
- *opportunities* are potential conditions that could be exploited to achieve objectives; and,
- *threats* are conditions that need to be mitigated.

The Main Street Renaissance Task Force reviewed downtown conditions and generated the following list of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Table 2). Subsequent actions designed to revitalize the downtown may be derived and refined from the analysis.

TABLE 2
STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

STRENGTHS

- The diversity of the population, strong immigrant community groups, and cultural pride.
- Good access to major roads and mass transit; adequate parking.
- Extensive public amenities (e.g. streetscape improvements and parks).
- Favorable tax rate.
- Availability of office space.
- The variety and beauty of historic buildings and other attractive buildings.
- Functions as the urban core of the Housatonic Valley.
- Location of many community events, the Danbury Library and the Ice Arena.
- Location of CityCenter Danbury, the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce and the Western Connecticut Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- Financial center of the region.
- A concentration of churches.

WEAKNESSES

- Ingrained image of 'old' Danbury and nostalgia for the past inhibits support for needed change.
- Perception that the downtown is unsafe.
- Perception that there is not enough parking downtown.
- Lack of retail interest for area residents.
- Excessive litter.
- Lack of market rate housing.
- Too few young professionals living downtown.
- Bias against immigrant community.
- Lack of downtown coordination and assistance for new businesses.
- Absentee landlords, resulting in a lack of a cohesive vision for the downtown.
- Lack of legitimate and appropriate nighttime activity.
- Attitude that improving the downtown is not worth the effort.
- Lack of inter-city transit and mass transit connections.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Greater interface with WCSU and NVCC.
- Additional housing (especially for singles, elderly, students).
- Additional commercial development.
- Palace Theater opening.
- Historic preservation, façade and signage improvements.
- Additional parking lot landscaping and streetscape improvements.
- Enhancing neighborhood sidewalks and lighting.
- Expanding efforts to promote downtown as a destination for culture, arts and entertainment.
- Capitalizing on social trends portending strong futures for downtowns.
- Additional promotion/public relations.
- Additional community activities and facilities.
- Establishing cooperative efforts with the Chamber of Commerce.
- Expansion of cultural activities.
- Availability of parcels for new development.
- Additional pedestrian safety amenities (e.g. brick crosswalks).

THREATS

- Insufficient development of owner-occupied housing.
- Too much public negativity, defeatism and skepticism.
- No collective vision for the downtown.
- Loss of commercial development.
- Demolition of historic structures.
- The current state of the economy hampers redevelopment efforts.

Source: Main Street Renaissance Task Force, 2008.

Vision Statement

Visioning is the process of providing an overall image of what is desired for the downtown and how it will look in the future. This process leads to the creation of a vision statement, the starting point for the creation and implementation of action plans.

The Task Force, in considering the findings of their SWOT analysis, fashioned the following vision statement as their expression of the ultimate image desired for the future of the downtown.

VISION STATEMENT

The downtown will be the primary focus of City life, with a diversity of activities and thriving businesses, high quality housing, exceptional urban design, preservation of historic buildings, varied entertainment, and a vibrant street life.

Objectives of Downtown Revitalization

The Task Force identified the following major objectives for a successful downtown revitalization effort.

- encourage market-rate housing for those with disposable incomes who will patronize downtown businesses;
- promote and expand a diversity of quality retail stores, services, offices and restaurants;
- expand entertainment and cultural activities;
- support colleges, churches and medical centers;
- improve nearby residential neighborhoods;
- encourage excellence in urban design and the preservation of historic structures and landmarks;
- enhance pedestrian safety and convenience;
- improve public spaces and facilities, sidewalks and parking;
- coordinate public and private programs of downtown improvement and management;
- bring together established business owners and new immigrant groups to improve and promote the downtown; and,
- foster cooperative actions among businesses, merchants, property owners, developers, city government, and civic, religious and educational institutions.

Planning Principles

Downtown planning principles have evolved over the years. Concepts which once embraced such popular elements of urban renewal as massive redevelopment, enclosed malls, skywalks, and mega-structures divorced from street life have been replaced with a growing appreciation of traditional urban form, mixed-use development and historic preservation.

Expanding on the work of critic Jane Jacobs and others, new philosophies based on the functional social and economic interrelationships of cities have advocated the need to encourage compact areas of high density development, an intensity of public life, a small grain pattern of development, and a diversity of uses and activities as essential ingredients of successful urban life. There has been a growing appreciation of downtowns as unique places that can offer special opportunities for business, shopping, entertainment and housing. But, there is also the recognition that there is no single panacea, no one simple solution for complex problems that have developed over many years.

This evolution in philosophy and strategy has led to the identification of the following planning principles for downtown revitalization, principles which amplify the vision statement.

1. A diversity of activities which bring people downtown, including businesses, entertainment, community facilities and public events, should be encouraged. Downtown should be "the place to be," with different people doing different things at different times.

2. A cohesive downtown should be maintained. Compatible development should be intensified, not diluted, for "(s)uccessful downtown programs show that bringing many functions together, in a tight, compact way, reinforces their mutual support."[1] Techniques such as in-fill development, redevelopment, and the reclamation of brownfield sites, all ingredients of smart growth, should be employed wherever applicable.

3. There must be a mixture of basic land uses and a combination of buildings "...that vary in age and condition, including a good proportion of old ones...This mingling must be fairly close-grained."[2] Nothing defeats the functioning of an urban area more than monotony and standardization.

4. Plans should target areas capable of more intense development, encouraging catalysts which will stimulate the creation of centers that attract people and activity and the interchange among them. It should build upon the inherent strengths of the downtown and the opportunities they present for the future.

5. Residential growth within and adjacent to the downtown should be encouraged, providing a ready market for downtown goods and services. This includes a mix of market rate housing types for a variety of socio-economic groups. On major streets, residences should be part of mixed-use developments which combine first floor commercial development with upper floor housing.

6. Parks should be located in secure areas of public interaction, providing needed space for outdoor community activities or a quiet respite from urban excitement and hustle.

7. Pedestrian amenities, including safe and attractive linkages to adjacent residential neighborhoods, are critical, for "...urban sidewalks can serve as the predominant form of public space in denser neighborhoods..."[3] Busy and interesting sidewalks make downtowns safe, exciting and successful, and they should be enhanced with streetscape improvements in areas of high pedestrian activity. Uses which engender little pedestrian interest (e.g. parking lots) should not front on major streets.

8. Urban design principles should be recognized and applied to ensure that new construction projects are designed within the context of their surroundings and that they facilitate pedestrian interest. Buildings of historic value need to be preserved and maintained.

9. Any evaluation of proposals should be sensitive to the interrelatedness and needs of different uses and activities to ensure that the benefits to be gained by new uses and public improvements will not come at the expense of existing downtown development.

10. And finally, cooperative actions should be explored among merchants, property owners, developers, and City government, actions which may include joint development projects, redevelopment, tax deferrals and other incentives to leverage new development.

Downtown Danbury is a unique place deserving of community support and commitment. It is the City's heart and center, a place for business and a place for fun, home for those who live here and cherished by all who value it as the focus of City life. Achieving these objectives will help to preserve and enhance the strength and promise of the downtown for present and future generations.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN DANBURY

- Danbury began as a settlement in 1685 when eight families trekked north from Norwalk and laid out home lots along each side of a central trail between Town Hill and Deer Hill south of the Still River. The early economy of the small village was based largely on agriculture, supplemented by a few trades established to serve the local population. Growth patterns were haphazard.

- Danbury was largely a supporter of the Revolutionary War and became a military supply depot. In 1777, British troops, having learned of the arsenal, marched into Danbury, seized or destroyed rebel supplies, and burned many of the town's buildings before retreating.

- After the Revolution, manufacturing flourished, with silver spoons, boots, shoes, saddles, guns and hats among the initial items produced. Settlement patterns progressed northward and Elmwood Park was created when Towne Street (Main Street) was divided to form a green island.

- By 1850, hat shops were producing up to a million hats a year and downtown development crept northward toward 'Exchange Place,' the present-day intersection of Main Street with Liberty and West streets. By 1852, promoters succeeded in providing rail service to the City with the advent of the Danbury and Norwalk Railroad. Construction of the initial railroad depot at the current site of the post office spurred development northward around the depot and along the east side of Main Street. Development was dense, with buildings typically three to four stories in height.

- Hat shops clustered along the Still River to satisfy their demand for vast quantities of water and to provide a convenient open sewer to carry away dyes and other wastes. By 1880, urban problems had become so acute that storm sewers and paved streets became necessary. The fire hazard posed by wood frame buildings led to the passage of an ordinance prohibiting wooden buildings in congested parts of the downtown.

- From the mid-1800s on, downtown Danbury and its adjacent neighborhoods began to experience an influx of racial and ethnic minorities, beginning with German and Irish immigrants and then followed by Italians, Poles, Slovaks, Lebanese, Syrians, Portuguese, Greeks and others from the turn of the century throughout the twentieth century. Though immigrant groups initially clustered together in segregated neighborhoods, many of these areas became integrated over time. The 1990s saw a major influx of Hispanics and Brazilians.

- Devastating floods of the Still River around Wooster Square in 1955 did more than require cleanup and renovation to damaged buildings. They led to a major urban renewal effort which not only rechanneled the river into a culvert but also leveled much of White Street and destroyed many architectural landmarks and other buildings in good condition.

- Though unrelated to the urban renewal effort, the sixties and seventies also saw many pleasant old homes along north and south Main Street demolished or renovated beyond recognition. Haphazard commercial development did much to destroy the early design coherence found in these areas.

- Though there were some early successes, redevelopment efforts became mired in controversy and made little headway during the 1980s. But the 1990s saw renewed progress with the adoption and implementation of a new redevelopment plan by the Danbury Redevelopment Agency in 1990. The plan led to the construction of the Patriot Garage, Danbury Green, Webster Bank, Liberty Terrace, and the Ice Arena. Streetscape improvements were completed on Main Street and Elmwood Park was later improved. To these changes were added restoration of the old train station and construction of a new one. With the new century came the redesign of Library Plaza and Kennedy Park, improvements to White Street, and the construction of the Bardo Garage on Library Place.

See "We Crown Them All" by William E. Devlin, 1984.

2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While the downtown may no longer be the retail center of years past, it is still characterized by pedestrian-scaled streets, a wealth of historic buildings, and a diversity of local and regional businesses, community facilities and activities. The basis of any revitalization strategy must be to build upon these strengths and provide incentives for private investment that will energize the downtown. This effort cannot rest upon the hope that a vanished past can be restored. Rather, it must recognize new realities and seize new opportunities for the future.

Revitalization Strategies

Success in this effort begins with maintaining and improving the pedestrian experience of all those who come downtown. This requires the encouragement of a mix of complementary uses and activities that reinforce one another – housing, retail stores, services, offices, restaurants, and entertainment which will attract different people at different times to create a "critical mass" of pedestrian-scale uses.

> *The appeal of traditional downtowns – and the defining characteristic that sets those that are successful apart from their suburban competitors – is largely based on what can be summarized as* walkable urbanism*…A "critical mass" of these pedestrian-scale uses must be established as quickly as possible, before the initial revitalization efforts stall for lack of support…Ultimately, reaching critical mass means that the redevelopment process is unstoppable and cannot be reversed. At that point, an upward spiral begins to create a "buzz," increases the number of people on the streets, raises land and property values, and makes the community feel safer.*[4]

For downtown Danbury, the diversity of mixed uses which can contribute to the establishment of a critical mass necessary to attract a varied group of residents and visitors include the following:

- commercial development (retail stores, services, restaurants, business and professional offices);
- housing (high-density housing for young singles and couples, students, empty nesters, retirees and the elderly);
- recreation and entertainment (theaters, museums, sports complexes, art galleries, festivals, concerts);
- civic uses (public offices, library, community centers); and,
- institutions (colleges, churches, medical centers).

Some of these uses may act as catalysts which will kick-start revitalization efforts by initiating a series of major private investments that will bring significant commercial energy downtown to achieve infill development, private redevelopment, and the reuse and renovation of existing buildings. For downtown Danbury, these catalysts may include: a major increase in market-rate housing to bring those with disposable incomes close to downtown stores, services and restaurants; major investment in retail or office

development; new entertainment and cultural venues to attract visitors; and, linkages to the Western Connecticut State University and Naugatuck Valley Community College that will attract significant numbers of students, faculty and administrators downtown on a regular basis.

Dolores P. Palma, the President of HyettPalma, Inc. and one who is familiar with downtown Danbury, identifies a number of elements necessary for revitalization, including (1) creating cooperative partnerships among business, government, civic organizations and residents, (2) defining and pursuing a shared vision of the downtown's future, (3) identifying and supporting a market analysis that addresses customer needs and wants, (4) creating and implementing a downtown business plan which identifies a course of action based upon a shared vision and realistic market analysis, (5) creating a particular niche in the market place by accentuating the uniqueness of the downtown, (6) concentrating limited resources in critical areas, and (7) recognizing the indispensable Five M's: downtown management, marketing campaigns, property maintenance, market-knowledge to create a niche for downtown, and sufficient funding for on-going quality management and enhancement. "While our downtowns should not try to compete head-on with shopping malls, they should learn and use these essential management techniques."[5]

Just as important is to avoid errors in promoting a successful program. Palma lists ten popular myths (see box with our comments) that can undermine well-intentioned efforts to revitalize the downtown.

Private Efforts

To succeed, revitalization efforts should be treated as a shared responsibility between private developers and public officials, with each playing complementary roles in energizing the downtown. Kenneth Olson, President and CEO of POKO Partners LLC, a successful downtown development firm headquartered in Port Chester, New York, lists several essential roles to be assumed by the developer, including: (1) an awareness of and respect for the existing downtown environment, (2) active community engagement, (3) working with city government, neighbors and development teams, and (4) recognizing that they are not just involved with a development project but with a broader effort to revitalize the downtown.

Market Analysis

The last time a market analysis was undertaken for the downtown was in 1990 when the firm of HyettPalma, Inc. completed two reports for CityCenter Danbury entitled "CityCenter Danbury Retail and Office Market Assessment" and "CityCenter Danbury: Retail Business Recruitment Strategy." These reports included an inventory and analysis of retail and office market opportunities and recruitment strategies.

Much has changed in the downtown during the past twenty years and an updated market analysis is long overdue. The study should focus on several factors of downtown development: (1) an analysis of the downtown trade area, existing downtown retail and office business development, consumer attitudes, and business needs, (2) identification of the mix of retail and office niches best suited for the enhancement of business and real estate opportunities, and (3) the formulation of realistic strategies and recommended programs for business retention and recruitment.

Business Incubators

Business incubator programs can provide a means of achieving a variety of economic and community objectives by assisting in the creation and retention of businesses, by diversifying the economy, and by revitalizing communities. They are designed to assist start-up entrepreneurial firms by providing inexpensive office space and support services, common shared resources, management training for inexperienced business owners, and positive interaction among tenant businesses. A study conducted by the University of Michigan, et al., in 1997 found that approximately 87% of graduates from established incubation programs were successful.

Ten Myths About Downtown Revitalization

Dolores P. Palma

"Myth 1 – If We Build It, They Will Come." Comment: This is the erroneous belief that making physical improvements alone (e.g. streetscape improvements, façade improvements) will cause customers and investors to come back downtown. It also requires a market analysis and business plan implemented cooperatively between the public and private sectors.

"Myth 2 – If We Demolish It, They Will Come." Comment: A remnant from the old urban renewal playbook, this myth maintains that if you tear down old buildings and clear land, developers will flock to the downtown. The experiences of many redevelopment efforts, including Danbury's, have often proved otherwise.

"Myth 3 – If We Complete One Major Project, They Will Come." Comment: The silver bullet approach holds that there is one panacea (e.g. convention centers, festival marketplaces, parking structures, pedestrian malls) to downtown revitalization. But, revitalization requires a multi-faceted approach rather than one isolated project.

"Myth 4 – If We Can't Get a Department Store to Come Back to Downtown, Downtown Will Never Be Healthy Again." Comment: A department store is not the only anchor option available. Although retail is a desirable component, other anchors include cultural and entertainment facilities, tourist draws, housing, professional offices and specialty shops.

"Myth 5 – We Can't Get a Department Store to Locate Downtown, So Downtown Can No Longer Support Any Kind of Retail Trade." Comment: While the downtown is no longer the primary retail center of the City, efforts should be made to retain and strengthen its retail base. That requires businesses to define their target customers and cater to their needs.

"Myth 6 – Competition Is Bad Business." Comment: Clustering compatible businesses is very good for business by expanding and magnifying the market that the cluster and its individual businesses can draw upon.

"Myth 7 – For Downtown to Be Successful, Downtown's Retail Business Must Keep Uniform Business Hours." Comment: Downtown businesses should not try to copy the uniform approach of malls, but should set their store hours to best meet the needs of their targeted customers.

"Myth 8 – We Have to Be as Lenient as Possible with Developers or They Won't Do Business in Our Community," and "Myth 9 – We Have to Be as Tough as Possible with Developers or They'll Take Advantage of Us." Comment: The objective should be to attract quality development which will, in turn, attract developers who want assurances that their investments will be protected. Conversely, unreasonable public demands can discourage quality developers. The public and private sector need to cooperate to secure quality projects beneficial to all.

"Myth 10 – If We Had More Parking, They Would Come!" Comment: This attitude holds that *all* of downtown's ills result from a lack of parking. Unfortunately, adequate parking is but one of many improvements needed for successful downtowns. Those who ignore the complex needs of downtowns may find that their stores remain as empty as the parking facilities constructed to serve them.

From Dolores P. Palma, "Ten Myths About Downtown Revitalization," Main Street Renewal, ed. Roger L. Kemp (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, Inc., 2006) pp. 374-380.

The key to a successful incubator program is to provide clients with training on how to run successful businesses through practical courses and mentoring in all phases of business management. It should

> *...catalyze the process of starting and growing companies by providing entrepreneurs with the expertise, networks and tools they need to make their ventures successful...Many incubation programs offer clients educational seminars covering a variety of business topics, from developing a marketing plan to locating potential angel investors. Others offer networking events to bring together entrepreneurs and local business and community leaders.*[6]

Consequently, the establishment of a successful business incubator program requires more than just securing cheap office space and providing shared facilities. Fortunately, there are a number of existing resources in the region which could be solicited to provide the instructional services which would become the heart of the program (e.g. the Connecticut Small Business Development Center). A business incubator could coordinate and focus these programs toward start-up businesses enrolled in a multi-faceted program.

These and other details go beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, creation of a business incubator program in downtown Danbury holds great promise and merits further investigation, beginning with a feasibility study to determine entrepreneurial interest, identify potential sites, and explore administrative and financial issues.

Private Development Opportunities

Infill and redevelopment strategies are an important aspect of smart growth policies designed to intensify downtown development. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, they are quite different: "infill" refers to the development of vacant parcels which have, for whatever reason, been cleared or ignored over the years; "redevelopment" refers to the reuse of developed parcels which are underutilized or which may be cleared and rebuilt with more productive uses. Either way, these sites offer new opportunities to contribute to the downtown economy, though in some cases they may require a concerted public-private effort to overcome existing obstacles to development.

The following properties represent a selective list of downtown sites with high visibility and potential for infill development or private redevelopment, assuming market demand and adequate financing are available. Note that the list does not include buildings with substantial amounts of vacant space (e.g. Pershing Building) that offer additional opportunities for growth. Design concepts are suggestive only and were prepared by H&R Design, Inc. of Danbury.

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1. ESCAPE to the Arts, 293 Main Street

This one-story building, located on a 0.18 acre lot at the corner of Main and White streets, contains several uses and is the former site of Feinson's men's store. A three-story building with contextual linkages to the Historic District and corner accents would make a more powerful and distinctive statement while retaining tenants and intensifying development. Parking is limited, though off-site public parking is available.

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2. 12-18 Crosby Street

These two parcels under single ownership consist of 0.33 acres, of which 0.26 acres are used as offices. The remaining 0.07 acres are vacant and could be used for new building development.

3. Main and State streets

This site consists of twelve parcels under single ownership totaling 3.7 acres. Of these, 2.46 acres are developed and the remaining 1.24 acres are vacant. The site offers the opportunity for an intensification of housing and commercial development.

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4. Former O'Faia Restaurant, 195-7 Main Street

These two small vacant parcels consist of only 0.09 acres and were the former site of the O'Faia Restaurant before being destroyed by fire in the 1990s. The site provides the opportunity for new development on Main Street.

5. Firestone, 99 Railroad Place

This one story building lies adjacent to the Danbury Green on a 0.22 acre lot. Should the tenant relocate, the parcel could be redeveloped into a three-story brick commercial building which would intensify development and be more in keeping with adjacent buildings and uses. The Patriot Garage is nearby.

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6. Palace Theater Parking Lot, Keeler Street

Six abutting lots under single ownership include the Palace Theater and Martha Apartments, though the bulk of the site, about two acres, is used largely as a parking lot. The parking area is of sufficient size for construction of a parking facility or a combination building/parking structure.

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7. Former Police Department complex, Main and Boughton Streets

This city-owned site consists of three parcels: the old Police Department headquarters and Community Services Building on Main Street, and a garage and maintenance building on Boughton Street. The total complex consists of 1.79 acres and could accommodate business offices and/or housing.

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8. Redevelopment Parcel 9, 32 Patriot Drive

This City-owned 0.63 vacant site at the corner of Patriot Drive and Pahquioque Avenue is the last parcel of the redevelopment site to remain undeveloped. A professional office was once proposed, though environmental contamination and poor access were inhibiting constraints. An access easement from abutting property on Pahquioque Avenue may be necessary to allow development to proceed. The site is close to the Patriot Garage and Metro-North Train Station.

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9. Kennedy Place, Kennedy Avenue, Rose and Main Streets

The former site of Amphenol totals 9.8 acres on four lots under single ownership and borders the Still River. Although it has been approved for over 500 dwelling units and a commercial structure at the corner of Main Street and Kennedy Avenue, the recession has delayed construction.

10. Elm Street and Tower Place
Commercial development on Elm Street and five adjacent residential lots on Tower Place under single ownership provide the opportunity for redevelopment, including new retail and services on Elm Street and a significant increase in market rate housing. This offers easy pedestrian access to Main Street but removed from the clamor of the downtown.

It should be emphasized that the privately-owned examples specified above do not constitute a directive from the City for private action or an indication of impending condemnation and public redevelopment. They are presented only to illustrate the potential for more intensive development by the private sector in a manner which will contribute to a more vibrant downtown.

Financial and Technical Assistance Programs

A number of organizations provide funding and technical assistance to businesses in Connecticut. Some of the major ones include the following.

- **Community Economic Development Fund**
  CEDF has numerous loan programs with flexible terms to assist small businesses who may have encountered problems securing traditional financing. Ongoing business support services designed to assist borrowers in reaching the goals of their business plan are available. CEDF also provides technical assistance and grants to community-based organizations working to improve their neighborhoods.

- **Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development**
  DECD works directly with businesses, developers, housing advocates, community groups and municipalities to promote business development, job growth, affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. It also maintains support functions that provide technical assistance, engineering, construction and architectural assistance, research data, legal guidance, programmatic support and training.

- **Connecticut Development Authority**
  CDA provides debt financing and investment capital to help businesses grow in Connecticut. They seek to stimulate business investment and create jobs by financing companies and projects that (1) contribute to the state's economy, technology base, intellectual capital, urban infrastructure, employment or tax revenues, or (2) cannot be accommodated by private sector financial institutions.

- **Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc.**
  CERC is a nonprofit corporation that provides clients with comprehensive marketing services and economic development resources to promote the state as a prime business location.

- **Connecticut Innovations**
  CI was created by the state in 1989 to provide strategic capital and operational insight to promote high-tech industries in research, development and marketing of new products and services.

- **Connecticut Small Business Development Center**
  SBDC is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Connecticut State University System, and public and private partners throughout the state. Its purpose is to promote and encourage the creation and growth of small businesses by providing sound business advice through free professional counseling, seminars, technical assistance and education for business owners and entrepreneurs in one-on-one or group training environments.

- **Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce**
  The Chamber promotes business development and advocacy through a variety of programs, including, among others, seminars, networking, leadership training, entrepreneurial development, legislative oversight, job training, trade shows, and educational programs at area colleges and secondary schools. The Chamber operates the SBDC.

- **Housing Development Fund**
  HDF provides financing to facilitate affordable housing development, preservation and ownership. HDF also provides technical assistance to communities, developers and corporations to help them address their affordable housing needs, services and programs.

- **SCORE**
  SCORE is a non-profit association of volunteers who provide free counseling services through online programs, face-to-face counseling and workshops to help small businesses to start, grow and succeed. Volunteers are working or retired business owners, executives and corporate leaders.

Public Incentive Package

The City can play an important role in downtown revitalization by providing incentives to encourage private investment for desirable development. The objective is to create a package of incentives which will send a clear message from the City to potential developers that downtown Danbury is the most hospitable environment in the City to do business.

It must be recognized, however, that although the City can initiate a strategic process of revitalization "...it must quickly be led by the private entities whose time and money will ultimately determine the effort's success."[7] This requires a sustained partnership through which the public sector acknowledges the value of providing developers with the faith that their proposals will be processed expeditiously without unnecessary delay or prejudice. Requirements must be clear and outcomes predictable and all applicants must be treated equally.

Not all incentives may be greeted by the public as positive actions. To avoid such criticism, the focus should be on incentives which are clearly desirable.

In the broadest possible terms, a desirable incentive is one that is financially profitable to the city and its redevelopment...and produces jobs...Another criterion for a desirable incentive is that it does not immediately create a charge of unequal treatment of businesses in similar circumstances. Lastly, a desirable incentive should be one that causes an investment or relocation that would not have otherwise happened.[8]

Most importantly, incentives offered as part of a revitalization package must be limited to the downtown study area and not applied to other areas of the City. This is essential, for if they are applied elsewhere or everywhere, their ability to act as inducements for downtown investment will be compromised. They will no longer be special incentives for a special place.

The following regulatory, financial and procedural incentives are proposed for properties located within the study area. To make them operational requires the creation of a "Downtown Revitalization Zone" (DRZ), an overlay zone coterminous with the study area and enacted as an amendment to the Zoning Regulations. As with other overlay zones, the underlying zoning remains in place but with additional features not found outside the DRZ. Note that most of the properties within the study area are zoned C-CBD (Central Business District), though some on the edges of the area have other zoning designations, including Light Commercial, CL-10, and High-Rise Residential, RH-3 (Figure 3).

Zoning and Other Regulations

1. Multi-family Housing

   Multi-family housing (e.g. apartment houses, garden apartments and townhouses) is treated as a special exception in the C-CBD Zoning District, though other multi-family zoning districts treat them as permitted uses (e.g. all RMF and RH-3 residential zoning districts). Special exceptions require public hearings and Planning Commission approvals, adding an element of uncertainty to anyone contemplating housing construction downtown. It is proposed to make multi-family housing a permitted use in the C-CBD zoning district. This would still require submission of a site plan for review and approval by the planning staff. Large scale multi-family developments which would generate over five hundred motor vehicle trips per day would still require special exception approval.

   In addition, lands within the DRZ zoned CL-10 and RH-3 should be entitled to the same regulations applicable to the C-CBD Zoning District pertaining to lot area, width, density, setbacks and building coverage.

2. Mixed-Use Development

   All properties in the DRZ permit mixed-use development for land uses allowed in their respective zoning districts, though first floor residential development should not be allowed for properties fronting on Main, White and West Streets to maintain pedestrian interest.

3. Restaurants

   Under restrictions for restaurants, the requirement that monthly sales of alcoholic beverages shall not exceed forty percent of the total monthly sales for food and beverages should be eliminated throughout the City. This provision is difficult to enforce and a disincentive for development. But, to prevent restaurants from mutating into bars, the requirement that no less than sixty percent of all patron seats shall be devoted to the consumption of meals at tables in a dining room separate from a patron bar should be retained.

4. Parking

   Parking for downtown development is a responsibility shared by both the Parking Authority and private landowners. The Authority provides for on-street parking and for off-street parking in two

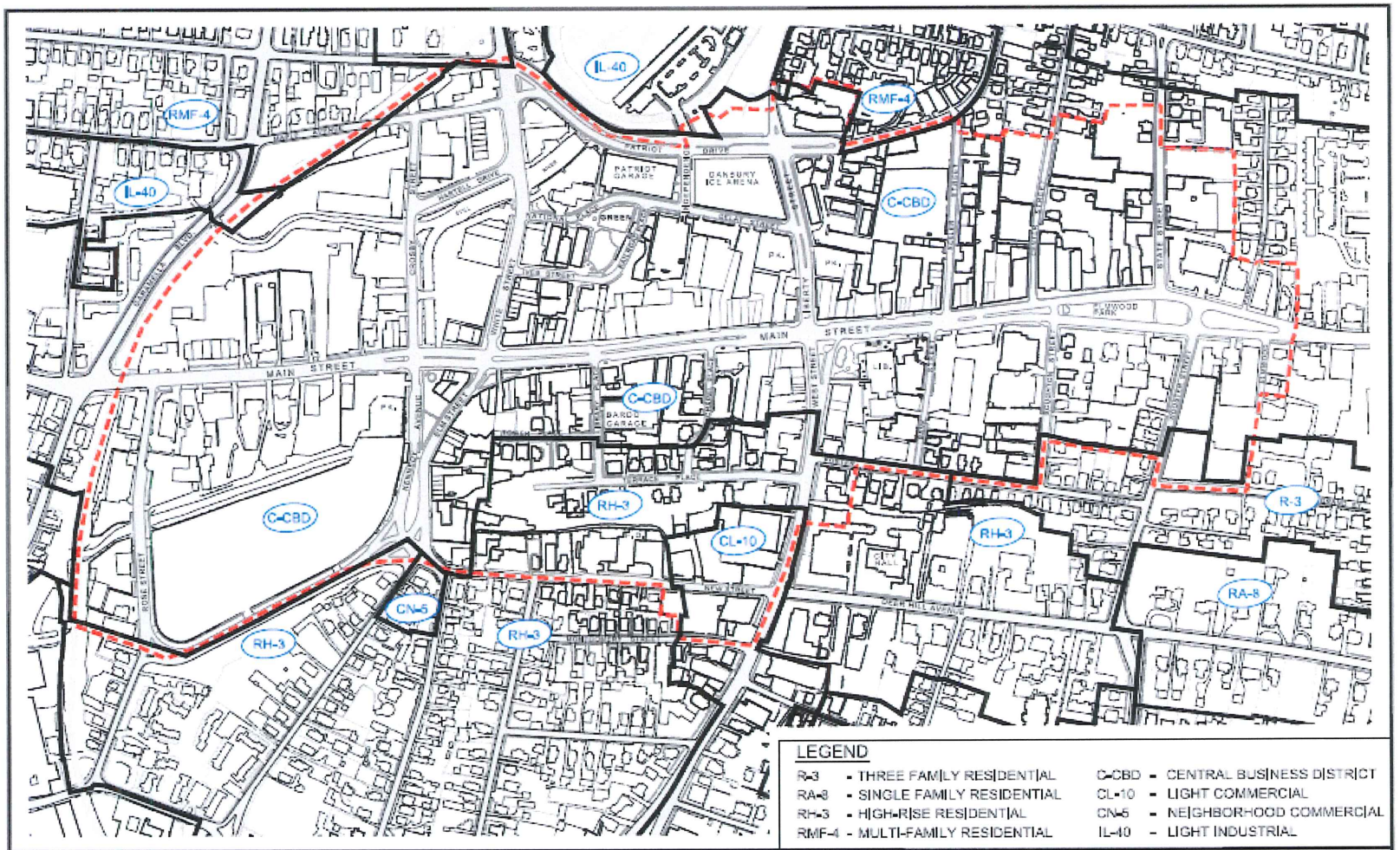


FIGURE 3
DOWNTOWN ZONING

garages and on municipal lots. The Zoning Regulations require landowners to provide a set number of on-site parking spaces based on the land use, the size of the building, the number of employees, the number of dwelling units, and an allowance for visitors and handicap spaces.

But, providing sufficient parking often presents a conflict between the desire to promote high intensity downtown development and the demand by patrons for close, convenient parking. Consuming large expanses of valuable land for sterile parking lots can reduce or even prevent desirable development and makes the downtown less pedestrian friendly.

In response, a number of zoning provisions allow for a relaxation of parking requirements in the C-CBD without compromising the need for adequate parking: (1) off-street parking may be shared among uses with different demand schedules; (2) a landowner may provide the necessary parking by arranging for off-site parking on another lot within five hundred feet of the use; and, (3) the number of spaces required downtown is reduced for retail and medical offices, business and professional offices, and personal service uses.

These provisions recognize that downtown parking can be treated differently than in other areas of the City because of the availability of public parking and the possibility of sharing parking among several nearby users.

Recognizing the availability of on- and off-street public parking, the zoning requirements for private on-site parking in the DRZ can be further reduced, as follows, in a measured, responsible manner without undermining the need for sufficient parking.

- Reduce the amount of on-site parking required for residences by (1) decreasing the amount for two bedroom multi-family units from 2 to 1½ spaces per unit, and (2) eliminating the need for on-site visitor parking where required in the RH-3 zoning district if public parking is available within 500 feet of the site.

- Eliminate the parking requirement for employees if (1) permit parking is made available by the employer at a public parking garage or lot or (2) by long-term lease from a private lot, regardless of distance from the use. Reduced permit fees should be considered for employee parking to encourage parking in garages or lots.

These actions only require amendments to the Zoning Regulations for property within the Downtown Redevelopment Zone.

Financial Assistance

While the City cannot offer cash grants for private development, there are several financial incentives which can reduce the cost of doing business downtown.

1. Deferral of Assessment Increases

   Section 18-25 of the Code of Ordinances grants City Council the authority to abate tax increases for certain land uses which would result from the increase in property assessments after new construction or improvements are made to a property, subject to a variety of conditions and restrictions. The number of years the abatement can last depends on the cost of the new construction or improvements. For example, if an office building is expanded to the extent that its tax assessment increases from, say, one million dollars to four million dollars, the assessment increase of three million dollars could, upon approval, be abated for up to seven years.

   The list of land uses eligible for the abatement varies depending on location. One list is applicable city-wide while two others pertain only to the C-CBD Zoning District or the Downtown Redevelopment Area. Of the three areas, the one which comes closest to including desirable uses in the study area is the latter, the Downtown Redevelopment Area, a largely developed area zoned

C-CBD located mainly behind Main Street businesses from White Street to Liberty Street. It is completely within the study area and allows tax abatements for the following uses: permanent residential uses on blighted property, offices, retail stores, and for manufacturing, warehouse, storage or distribution uses. Note that the latter four uses cited are not permitted in C-CBD.

Other uses which could be eligible for tax deferrals under state law include, among others, permanent residential uses on property which is not blighted, information technology, recreation facilities and transportation facilities.

In an effort to encourage uses the Task Force finds desirable for the study area, it is recommended that the provision of the Code of Ordinances pertaining to the Downtown Redevelopment Area [§18-25(b)(1)c.] be amended to encompass the entire DRZ, specifying eligible uses as follows:

a. *If the real property is located within the Downtown Revitalization Zone, for office use, retail use, permanent residential use, information technology, recreation facilities, and transportation facilities, as allowed by the City of Danbury Zoning Regulations.*

This amendment would craft tax deferral regulations to fit the entire DRZ. Under this scenario, tax deferrals could be granted by City Council for permanent residential uses, whether or not on blighted property, and would also include offices, retail uses, information technology centers, recreational and transportation facilities, as allowed by the Zoning Regulations. As used here, information technology refers to firms which study, design, develop, implement, support or manage computer systems and applications.

However, while City Council is urged to give sincere consideration to deferral applications in the DRZ, such deferrals should not be granted for cheap or poorly designed buildings or those which conflict with the rehabilitation and contextual design guidelines for the Main Street Historic District (see Sec. 3, "Urban Design & Historic Preservation"). Accordingly, architectural renderings of the facades of new construction should accompany all deferral applications for projects in the DRZ and the Main Street Historic District.

2. Sewer and Water Service

Most if not all of the properties within the study area are connected to municipal sewer and water service. The Code of Ordinances provides for reduced connection fees for buildings located in the C-CBD Zoning District. It is proposed that this area be expanded to include the entire DRZ. Moreover, permit application fees for sewer and water service should be reduced by half in the DRZ.

3. Sidewalks

Sidewalks within the DRZ should be repaired or replaced by the City, although abutting property owners should be responsible for keeping them clean, safe and unobstructed at all times.

Permits

1. "Top of the Pile"

Attracting new investment in the downtown should include efforts to streamline the regulatory process. Typically, applications for permits for new development are processed in the order in which they are received in City Hall, although city projects are given priority. Given the limited number of permit applications received for projects located within the DRZ, these applications should receive a high priority and go to the "Top of the Pile." Moreover, every effort should be made to ensure that applicants understand that properly prepared permit applications will be processed as quickly as possible. The City "...should foster an environment of 'certainty' or

'clarity' in terms of what it will and will not accept. To the extent that time is money, uncertainty has both an economic cost as well as an opportunity cost to the developer."[9]

2. Reduced Fees

The following City permit fees should be reduced by 50% for development within the DRZ to further encourage investment. Eligible permit and license fees would include the following.

- Zoning and Subdivision fees for zoning permits, special exceptions, special permits, site plans and waivers, grading and floodplain permits, and subdivisions, free splits and lot line revisions.
- Building permit fees for commercial and residential development.
- Health and housing fees for EIC regulated activities, Certificates of Apartment Occupancy, Food Service Establishment Licenses for restaurants, and Hotel Licenses (including hotel pools and spas).
- Fire Marshal fees for site plan reviews.
- Engineering fees for site plan reviews.

Implementation of these fee reductions will require approval by the Zoning Commission for zoning fees, by the Planning Commission for subdivision fees, and by City Council for all others. Fee reductions cannot include fees imposed by the State of Connecticut.

Ancillary Support

Adjacent Neighborhoods

The study area is surrounded by a number of medium to high density residential neighborhoods within walking distance of the downtown, including the Blind Brook, Deer Hill, Elm and Beaver, Town Hill, and the Maple Avenue/WCSU neighborhood areas. Because of their proximity to the downtown, they offer support for downtown development by residents who may find such goods and services within convenient walking distance. But, these neighborhoods exhibit a wide range of conditions, opportunities, and threats for both positive and negative change. They also offer opportunity for infill development and private redevelopment of specific sites including, for example, the old Mallory hat shop site at 89 Rose Hill Avenue and condemned property at 63 Osborne Street.

Neighborhood Plans

Neighborhood plans, prepared in close consultation with local residents, can bring about significant and lasting improvements to an area by identifying needs and recommending specific actions to implement local goals and objectives. Neighborhood planning typically addresses the following issues: housing conditions, land use, transportation, community facilities, security, and environmental concerns, including an analysis of sidewalk conditions and the adequacy of street lights.

Some of these issues, including needed public improvements, may possibly be addressed without the necessity of a prolonged or data-heavy needs study of conditions apparent to all. But, zoning regulations need to be scrutinized on a block-by-block basis to determine if they are appropriate for specific areas or if they destabilize development patterns by allowing inappropriate land uses and densities. For example, the application of high density residential zoning to areas dominated by older single family residences can lead

to overcrowding and blight as homes, designed and built for one family, are divided into multiple dwelling units. Zoning amendments can be crafted to ensure that future development is consistent with current conditions or desired changes, provided the amendments reflect reasonable market expectations.

Housing Redevelopment Option

The Zoning Commission recently enacted new zoning regulations designed to encourage the replacement of old, deteriorated housing with new, attractive and safe housing. The amendment applies to deteriorated apartment houses, garden apartments, row houses, and two and three family dwellings in the RMF-4 and RH-3 zoning districts, though properties on the National Register of Historic Places would not be eligible.

Under this Option, a deteriorated residential building may be demolished and reconstructed with the same number of dwelling units, even if the maximum number of units allowed by the Zoning Regulations would otherwise be less. That is, there would be no loss or penalty for reconstruction. For example, if a lot contained an existing deteriorated apartment house with twenty dwelling units, and current zoning density restrictions would allow only sixteen units if it were demolished and rebuilt, the landowner would still be eligible to replace it with a building housing up to twenty new dwelling units. The deteriorated building would be replaced with new, code compliant dwelling units.

The Unified Neighborhood Inspection Team

The Office of Neighborhood Assistance operates the Unified Neighborhood Inspection Team (UNIT), an interdepartmental effort charged with the responsibility of resolving various neighborhood concerns ranging from illegal apartments, blight, parking violations, and overcrowded, unsafe living conditions. The UNIT is made up of representatives from the Fire Marshal, Building, Health and Housing, and Police departments and frequently partners with personnel from the Planning and Zoning and the Public Works departments to assist in efforts to preserve neighborhoods.

The UNIT focuses on blight remediation, code compliance, safety, and quality of life objectives by proactively patrolling neighborhoods, performing visual inspections, and interacting with local residents. It is a valuable means of maintaining and improving City neighborhoods.

Enhanced Security

The City of Danbury is fortunate in having an extremely low rate of serious crime. According to a report published by the CQ Press, statistics from the F.B.I. "Crime in the United States 2009" report indicate that Danbury has the lowest serious crime rate of any city with a population of 75,000 or more in Connecticut and is the fourth safest city in New England. Moreover, the City's safety record falls within the top 14 percent of all cities with a population of 75,000 or more in the United States. Police Chief Alan Baker rates downtown safety as extremely good.

These statistics were supported by the findings of the opinion survey of downtown property owners undertaken by the Task Force in 2009. Fully 88 percent felt that the downtown was safe.

Nevertheless, there remains a perception by some that the downtown is unsafe. Several efforts to curtail these unfounded fears and to discourage crime are suggested.

1. Establish an "ambassador program" through which WCSU students patrol downtown streets, offering assistance to visitors and a presence that will allay fears. A similar program was undertaken in the early 1990s and was extremely effective. It should be reinstated.

2. New development or expansions should be designed to include features intended to reduce or eliminate the opportunities for crime through the design or redesign of buildings, parks, plazas, playgrounds, parking lots and neighborhood streets. This includes (1) the promotion of territoriality, the reinforcement of a sense of ownership of a space or neighborhood by its legitimate residents and users, (2) access control that decreases the opportunities for crime, and (3)

enhanced surveillance. Common errors to avoid in design include: the creation of concealed places; obscured or an insufficient number of storefront windows; the unsafe placement of back doors or rear entries; inadequate lighting; unkempt conditions; separate and unmonitored parking areas; inadequate fencing; and, the unintended use of a space as a short-cut.

Entertainment and Community Activities

Downtown Danbury has traditionally been the center of community events and activities. These are not only valued for the enjoyment they provide to members of the community, but also because they enhance the downtown as a tourist destination and promote downtown businesses by attracting people of all ages to shop in stores and eat at restaurants. Community events and activities distinguish the downtown as "the place to be," the center of the City.

Events and Programs

CityCenter Danbury promotes the downtown as a destination for culture, arts, dining and entertainment by sponsoring the Summer Series Concerts on the Danbury Green, the annual Taste of Greater Danbury, 1st Night Danbury, the Farmer's Market in Kennedy Park, and many other downtown events. But more can be considered. The Taste of Danbury, the Farmer's Market, and functions on the Green can be enhanced, events targeted to students of WCSU and the NVCC can be initiated, arts and crafts festivals and similar events can be introduced, and holiday programs and lighting can be expanded.

Several other facilities provide venues for entertainment and community activities:

- The Library sponsors a number of events in the arts and entertainment for children;
- The Ice Arena provides public skating, figure and ice skating lessons, and ice hockey;
- The Danbury Music Centre provides musical events throughout the year;
- The Connecticut Film Festival sponsors the annual week-long film festival featuring independent movies and musical performances;
- The Housatonic Valley Cultural Alliance sponsors a three-day "Accessible Art" program of music performances and art;
- The YMCA and its 'ESCAPE to the Arts' program offer a full line of recreational and artistic programs; and,
- holiday and ethnic parades down Main Street take place throughout the year.

The Dining and Entertainment District

The downtown Dining and Entertainment District, created in the early 1990s, includes that area of the downtown from White Street to Railroad Place, Main Street to Patriot Drive, with restaurants, bars and clubs clustered principally along Ives Street. Shops, apartments, and other businesses are also located within the District. This mix of uses in close proximity with one another has led to complaints about the incompatibility of bars and clubs with restaurants and apartments. The chief issue is loud amplified music which makes it difficult if not impossible for patrons to enjoy a quiet meal or for nearby residents to sleep.

While music is a form of expression protected by the First Amendment, the courts have held that cities have a significant interest in controlling the levels of noise in downtown business areas. Downtown businesses, their patrons, and passersby are a captive audience, unable to escape unwelcome noise. Consequently, cities have a right to enact content-neutral, time, place and manner restrictions on excessively loud music and noise.

The City could adopt an excessive noise ordinance for the downtown area that, although general in terms, is reasonable in scope and flexible in application to the myriad contexts in which noise may be considered excessive. That ordinance could contain the following language:

> *It shall be unlawful for any person to make or cause to be made any loud or unreasonable noise. Noise shall be deemed to be unreasonable when it disturbs, injures or endangers the peace or*

health of neighboring persons of ordinary sensibilities or when it endangers the health, safety or welfare of the community. Any such noise shall be considered to be a noise disturbance and public nuisance.

This type of ordinance, upheld by the courts, embodies a flexible approach to noise control by examining the particular circumstances to determine if a noise is unreasonably loud. Unreasonableness is defined by reference to persons of ordinary sensibilities.

Other measures to control noise could include: (1) prohibition of the outdoor use of bullhorns, amplifiers, microphones or speakers, (2) requiring windows and doors of buildings to remain shut during performances of amplified, recorded or live music, or (3) requiring sound installation in such buildings, especially if they are near residences. The success of any of these measures to control excessive noise depends, of course, on effective enforcement.

Palace Theater

Restoration of the Palace Theater and its return as a venue for the performing arts, film and special events has been a long-standing goal of the City. The privately-owned Theater, built in 1926, is located within the Main Street Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Theater initially hosted live vaudevillian acts and later featured such famous performers as Louis Armstrong and Bob Hope. More recently, it was used exclusively for motion pictures until its closing in 1995, although a portion of it has recently been reopened for special events. Restoration of the Palace Theater to its former excellence could act as a catalyst for downtown revitalization, foster historic preservation, and once again provide a regional destination for the arts and entertainment.

Through a grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the City contracted with JCJ Architecture to conduct the "Palace Theater Restoration Study" to determine restoration needs, management imperatives and community impact. The study consisted of four major parts: (1) a site analysis, (2) a needs assessment and structural evaluation, (3) a market assessment and analysis, and (4) an assessment of the impact the restored Theater should have on the City and region.

The study concluded that the estimated cost to restore the Theater would total $ 16,465,000, including preservation work to the interior and exterior façade, ADA improvements, replacement and upgrading of mechanical, plumbing, fire protection and electrical systems, seating improvements, backstage support space and the provision of appropriate stage equipment, stage lighting, stage audio and stagehouse rigging. This does not include costs associated with improvements to public spaces (lobby, concession, and merchandise sales) that meet contemporary standards ($ 539,000) or the creation of needed administration spaces ($ 864,000).

Regardless of the cost, the study found that there is ample evidence that opening of the Theater could make a significant contribution to the City and region.

Danbury Cultural Museum

Danbury is one of the most diverse cities in the state, a place where people from six continents have come to call home. This rich blend of different ethnic, racial and national groups have all contributed to the City's culture and development and is indeed responsible for the place we call Danbury. The proposed Danbury Cultural Museum (see box) would tell the story of their journey, what they found here, their triumphs and frustrations, their hopes and achievements. In return, it would reward visitors with new knowledge of our shared history and a renewed pride in our heritage.

But, establishment of the Danbury Cultural Museum would not be a simple or inexpensive undertaking. Interest must first be assessed, sites analyzed, costs determined, and an administrative structure outlined. A feasibility study needs to be undertaken to explore these and other issues before further action is considered.

Museums are often cited as a means of attracting visitors to downtowns, of enlivening city sidewalks, enriching the urban experience, and infusing dollars into local stores, restaurants and other businesses. But, the Danbury Cultural Museum would do more. It would celebrate the contribution that all of these groups have made and are continuing to make to the City's way of life. It is a uniquely American story, a story worth telling.

THE DANBURY CULTURAL MUSEUM

Concept:

Danbury, Connecticut is home to a wide range of peoples who have ancestral roots from other nations around the world. This rich blend of different ethnic, racial and national groups have all contributed to the City's culture and development and is indeed responsible for the place we call Danbury. The proposed Danbury Cultural Museum would tell the story of their journey, what they found here, their triumphs and frustrations, their hopes and achievements, and how they influenced the social, economic, and political mosaic of the City and country. In return, it would reward visitors with new knowledge of our shared history and a renewed pride in our heritage.

Facility & Program:

The Museum would house a number of different venues, beginning with a historic timeline showing major migration waves to the region from Colonial times to the present. The emphasis of the Museum, however, would be exhibits, films, and inter-active displays illustrating the history and contributions different immigrant groups and individuals have made and are making to our culture in art, literature, entertainment, education, commerce, science, technology and government. Permanent displays would focus on major national, racial and ethnic contributions, supplemented by changing exhibits highlighting smaller groups, individuals, and specialized aspects of cultural change.

Included would be a small theater for the performing arts, interpretative talks, and films giving an overall orientation to the Museum and the evolution of American culture. A gift shop would be included and convenient parking would need to be available near the Museum. Architectural design of the Museum should complement the Main Street Historic District.

Management & Funding:

The organization and management of the Museum would require the participation of persons with a diversity of knowledge, skills and experience: scholars from a variety of related disciplines, experienced exhibit designers, and a professional curator and staff to manage and operate the Museum. Local, state and federal funding would be pursued, though all major racial, ethnic and national groups and clubs would be invited to participate.

Local Benefit:

The Museum would celebrate cultural diversity in a positive way that may help bring different groups in the City closer together and, as a tourist destination, would aid in the revitalization of the downtown. Since the Museum would be located within the greater New York area, it should attract visitors from the nation's largest and most diverse population center. It would cover the entire spectrum of cultural diversity which has come to define not only our City but, by extension, America and Americans.

3. URBAN DESIGN & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Urban design strives to improve the spatial character of an area through attention given to all of its constituent elements and their interrelationships. Though related to architecture, it differs in that its chief focus is on the context within which buildings, however attractive by themselves, contribute to the overall visual mosaic of an area. It recognizes that "...(d)esigning individual buildings, one at a time, is not at all the same thing as designing a city. Even selected examples of great architecture do not necessarily look well together as a group".[10]

The special character of the downtown study area is largely determined by its predominant coherence in urban design and the architectural styles of its older buildings. Its strongest elements are typical of major commercial districts dating from the 19th century: (1) wide sidewalks and street trees, (2) buildings with little or no setback from the sidewalk, (3) on-street parking and off-street parking to the rear of buildings, and (4) a mix of commercial, residential, public and institutional uses.

Principles of Urban Design

Recognition that the downtown is not homogeneous but rather exhibits varying patterns of style and use is necessary to successfully shape design policies and regulations. One single set of rigid criteria should not be uniformly applied throughout the downtown. New construction, renovations, rehabilitation, and additions should complement existing architectural features, though actual architectural styles may vary if design linkages are used to ensure compatibility with adjacent structures and the general character of the downtown.

A number of recognized urban design principles have emerged which offer flexible guidelines that can be adapted to a variety of design situations.

1. Cohesion

Good urban design rarely demands uniformity or replication. In most instances, a building designed within the context of its surroundings "...need not ape the stylistic mannerisms of its neighbors..." in order to achieve visual unity. Design linkages can be employed in varying degrees to achieve the desired effect, including similarities in (1) building silhouette, (2) spacing between buildings, (3) setbacks from the street, (4) the proportion of windows, doors, and other features, (5) massing of building form, (6) location and treatment of entryways, (7) façade materials, (8) shadow patterns, (9) building scale, (10) architectural style, and (11) landscape treatment.[11]

2. Contrast

Strong contrasts among buildings should be reserved as a method of underscoring the significance of major community structures. A civic center, for example, may vary greatly from its neighbors. The desired effect is achieved precisely because it is the exception.

3. Height

The height of new buildings should be related to important attributes of the downtown pattern and to the height and character of existing development.

4. Setbacks

Buildings should be setback a distance appropriate to assure continuity in the predominant street wall. Frequent and significant variations in building setbacks along the street discourage pedestrian interaction with retail and other commercial uses by loosing contact with the street.

5. Building Bases

Building bases should relate to the street and generate pedestrian interest. The first floors of buildings have the most immediate impact on pedestrians. Bases may be distinguished from upper floors by a variety of devices, including materials and detailing such as cornices, moldings and belt courses. Visually interesting details should be employed, while blank walls, reflecting glass and similar materials which isolate the interior of buildings from the street should be avoided.

6. Continuity

Major disruptions to the continuity of commercial activity in the downtown core should be avoided. Parking lots and extensive open spaces can all discourage pedestrian exploration of the downtown and disrupt shopping patterns. Buildings and uses should be concentrated to encourage customers to travel from one store to another without encountering dead spaces caused by major breaks.

7. Open Space

Open space should be limited to areas with sufficient concentrations of people. In key spots, they can add a comfortable respite from the intensity of the downtown, while in isolated areas they will be of little use. Too much open space can be as bad as too little if it robs the downtown of an intensity of development.

8. Views and Vistas

Significant views and vistas should be preserved and enhanced. Examples in downtown Danbury include views from Main Street toward St. Peter Church, the Danbury Green and Patriot Garage, and the Congregational Church.

Mechanisms for Design Control

An increasing number of mechanisms have been developed over the years to influence design and shape urban form, including traditional zoning controls, innovative applications of land use regulations, and the use of grants and other financial inducements to influence design. Growing numbers of communities have developed urban design plans and policies to influence development and to mark the location of future facilities and amenities.

Regulatory Measures

1. View Angles

Where permitted building heights exceed the predominant heights in an area, view angles and stepbacks are often used to control the visual impact of the greater heights on adjacent property. View angles permit additional height provided the upper floors are stepped back so they are not visible from the adjacent public right-of-way. Existing provisions in the Zoning Regulations require such stepbacks in the Main Street Historic District to promote contextual design.

2. Reverse Setbacks and Street Walls

On streets where existing buildings abut sidewalks or are setback a fairly uniform distance in a tight, compact way, several measures can be used to prevent new buildings from breaking up the existing pattern and to promote pedestrian interest as people walk through the downtown. Reverse setbacks require new buildings to be setback no further than the mean setback of adjacent buildings on the block. First floors of new buildings are required to build on the front property line or within a certain distance to maintain the existing street wall or to better integrate buildings with streets. Other measures require that new buildings extend substantially across the front of the property to prevent gaps or dead spaces of little pedestrian interest.

3. Parking to the Rear

For similar reasons, parking lots are often required to locate to the rear of buildings fronting on major streets, where feasible. Parking lots along major streets generate little pedestrian interest and break-up the continuity of stores and services which benefit from their close proximity to others.

4. Other Measures

Other legislative methods of influencing urban design, including transfer of development rights, incentive zoning, special zoning districts, form-based zoning, and view corridors, have been used elsewhere to a limited degree in downtown zoning. Special sign regulations tailored to a downtown have also been used, especially to maintain the historic character of an area. A number of cities have also adopted regulations requiring that first floors of buildings within the commercial core be devoted to retail and other commercial uses which generate high levels of pedestrian activity.

Public Improvements and Financial Investment

Financial involvement of local government in public or private projects provides more direct influence over design than through the legalistic channels of regulations. Construction of municipal buildings and facilities (e.g. police station, library, parking garages) and other public improvements offer complete public control over design. Moreover, financial incentives to promote private redevelopment (e.g. financial assistance, tax abatements) may carry with them the opportunity of adding a measure of design control.

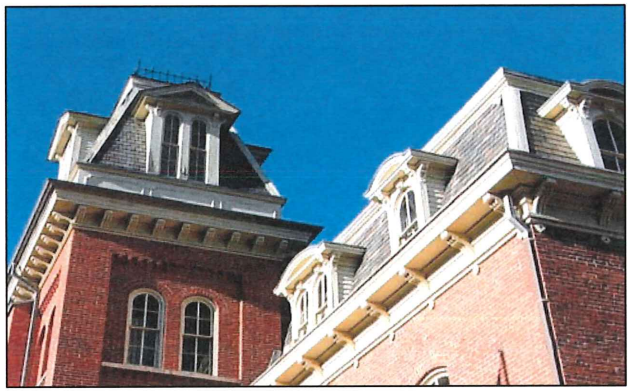
Design Review

Design review has been defined to encompass "…all the criteria and methods used in implementing urban design policies and/or plans, including both functional and aesthetic concerns."[12] To be truly effective, design review must begin with a clear set of policies backed by enforceable standards and placed within a review process understood by both applicant and reviewer alike. The lack of such policies and standards may too often result in a review process that is arbitrary, time consuming, or ineffective. This typically involves the preparation and adoption of design review policies which illustrate the desired effect of promoting contextual design.

Currently, design review is both formal and informal, self-administering and discretionary. CityCenter Danbury has an appointed Architectural Advisory Committee which reviews proposed signs, awnings and building facades in much of the study area. However, such reviews are suggestive only and cannot be enforced by law except through the City for those considerations that are supported by provisions of the Zoning Regulations.

Review of site plans in which the only design considerations are those which can be reduced to quantifiable standards is limited to simply determining compliance with the law. However, in those cases wherein review is based on the achievement of performance objectives or a relaxation in other requirements in exchange for greater design control, the review process will require a much greater amount of discussion and accommodation. The publication of design guidelines is often used as a vehicle for providing design review boards and private developers with standards by which proposed construction can be evaluated in a fair and consistent manner. Standards typically relate to architecture, site design, signs and historic preservation principles and guidelines.

Historic Preservation



The preservation of buildings and other structures of historic and architectural value provide benefits to both the community and property owner alike. Maintaining a diversity of historic architectural styles not only adds to the visual appeal of the City but can also stimulate private investment in neighboring sites, often turning rundown areas into viable, tax producing districts. The special appeal of historic districts can also help revitalize retail and entertainment centers by offering unique experiences not found elsewhere. And, by protecting distinctive community resources, historic preservation can help maintain community identity and foster interest in local history and culture.

Historic Sites and Districts

A systematic effort to identify historic sites and districts was initiated by the Danbury Preservation Trust in 1980 with the *Comprehensive Historical and Architectural Resources Survey*. The *Survey* contains a wealth of information, including a description of each structure, its construction date, architectural style, and notes on its history and significance. The criteria used to evaluate the properties were based on those of the National Register of Historic Places established by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Historic Sites

The essential ingredient of any successful preservation effort lies with the maintenance and restoration of buildings by their respective owners. Caution is advised when renovating any historic property for, unless it is done with care and in keeping with the historic style of the building, the very features that render the property of value may be lost.

Historic Districts

A broader perspective on preservation activities is needed when undertaking such activities in historic districts. Here, buildings of historic worth should not be viewed solely as isolated units, for much of their value is often derived from their relationship to adjacent structures. The architectural character and use of old and new buildings must be compatible with one another.

The major concentration of historic properties in the City can be found within the Main Street Historic District, most of which is located within the study area. Of the one hundred thirty-two properties included within the District, ninety-seven have been identified for their historic or architectural significance. A wide-range of architecture can be found, demonstrating popular styles that date from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Major landmarks include the old County Courthouse, Old Jail, old Library, St. Peter Church and School, the Savings Bank of Danbury, and Union Savings Bank.

Preservation Resources and Techniques

A variety of resources and techniques are available to the City to promote historic preservation activities. These range from passive efforts designed to heighten public understanding and appreciation to programs and regulations designed to actively control their disposition.

Historic Properties Commission

In 2010, City Council established a Historic Properties Commission to review and approve plans to erect or alter buildings or structures on designated historic properties. Under provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS), no building or structure located on a historic property may be erected or altered until after an application for a certificate of appropriateness as to exterior architectural features has been approved by the Commission. Nor may earthworks or sites of recognized historic or archaeological importance within the historic property be altered until approved by the Commission. To date, only the old Library at 254 Main Street has been established as an historic property under the purview of the Commission.

Education and Review

Community-wide educational programs seek to expand the public's understanding and concern for historic resources and the contribution they make toward enriching our environment. These efforts have been undertaken by the Danbury Preservation Trust and the Danbury Museum. The Trust issued certificates for historically significant buildings, another effort aimed at increasing appreciation of the value of these structures. And, as previously mentioned, this effort was further promoted by nominating buildings and districts for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and, more recently, by placing historic markers throughout the downtown.

The National Historic Preservation Act requires all federal agencies having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed federal, federally assisted, licensed, or permitted undertaking to take into account the effect of the undertaking on any property listed on the National Register. This includes making comments and rendering advice on the impact of publicly funded projects on the state's significant historic, architectural, engineering, and archaeological resources. The Connecticut Historical Commission is the mandated review agency for state-funded projects.

Similarly, the state Environmental Policy Act requires state agencies to assess the impact of their actions on cultural properties, including an evaluation of any "disruptive or alteration" activities affecting an historic, architectural, or archaeological resource or its setting. The Act goes further, permitting legal recourse for unreasonable destruction of the state's resources, including, among others, resources on the National Register and resources that are a part of a district on the National Register and which have been determined by the State Historic Preservation Board to contribute to the historic significance of the district.

Financial Incentives

A variety of federal and state tax credits and grants are provided to approved applicants through programs administered by the Historic Preservation and Museum Division of the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. There are a range of programs that are designed to identify, register and protect buildings, sites, structures, districts and objects that comprise the state's cultural heritage. The division administers the federal and state tax credit programs for historic rehabilitation in addition to several grant programs.

1. Tax Credits

- Federal tax credits allow owners of depreciable residential, commercial and industrial buildings listed on the National Register to elect a twenty percent investment tax credit in conjunction with the substantial rehabilitation of certified historic structures.

- State historic homes rehabilitation tax credits are designed to encourage new homeownership and to assist existing homeowners in maintaining or renovating their property. It provides a thirty percent tax credit, up to $ 30,000 per dwelling unit, for the rehabilitation of one to four family buildings that are on the National Register and located in targeted areas.

- The state historic structures rehabilitation program provides tax credits for the conversion of historic commercial and industrial buildings to residential use.

- Tax credits are also available for the conversion of historic commercial and industrial buildings solely to mixed residential and nonresidential uses.

2. Grants

- Survey and planning grants are available for a variety of planning projects, including nominations to the national and state registers of historic places, pre-development studies, surveys and other planning documents.

- Basic operational support grants are available to allow historic preservation non-profit groups to survey historic resources, provide public education, and undertake historic preservation planning.

- The Certified Local Governmental Program promotes preservation of historic resources by establishing a partnership between local governments and the State Historical Commission. The program provides matching grants-in-aid for cultural resource surveys and the preparation of National Register nominations, preservation plans, and historic building restoration.

- Historic restoration fund grants may be used for the restoration, rehabilitation or purchase of historic buildings, structures and objects.

3. Local Financial Incentives

Locally, the City allows for a deferral of assessment increases for the rehabilitation of eligible historically significant properties under §18-14 of the Code of Ordinances. All rehabilitation work must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.[13] Increases in the tax assessment due to rehabilitation of the property are reduced according to a sliding scale in which the entire increase is abated for the first year following rehabilitation and then, for the next five years, a lessening of the abatement by 20 percent each year.

A number of other grant programs are available to promote culture and tourism in the state. In addition, federal Community Development Block Grant funds may be used for the rehabilitation, preservation, restoration and acquisition of eligible historic properties.

Legal Restrictions

Land use regulations can be crafted to help support harmonious development in historic districts, to allow adaptive reuse, and to discourage clearance by reducing the incentive to replace historic structures with more intensive uses. Some of the more extensive methods available to local municipalities include the following.

1. Village Districts

Amendments to §8-2j of the CGS permit zoning commissions to establish zoning regulations or other special acts to create village districts in areas of "...distinctive character, landscape or historic value that are specifically identified in the plan of conservation and development...." The regulations must encourage the conversion, conservation and preservation of existing buildings and sites in a manner that maintains the historic or distinctive character of the district and may regulate

> *...new construction, substantial reconstruction and rehabilitation of properties within such districts and in view from public roadways...the commission shall consider the design, relationship and compatibility of structures, plantings, signs, roadways, street hardware and other objects in public view.*

The commission must establish criteria relating to building exteriors and sites which are consistent with the Connecticut Historical Commission and The Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* or distinctive characteristics of the district as identified in the Danbury *Plan of Conservation and Development* (see box).

2. Historic District Commissions

Just as sweeping is the creation of a commission to control the construction and alteration of structures within designated districts. Through procedures established by law, commissions are empowered to review development applications and determine the appropriateness of each proposal. Two-thirds of the voting property owners within the proposed district must consent to the creation of such a commission. A similar commission can be established to control the disposition of individual historic properties not located within a designated district.

3. Demolition Delay

Under §29-406b of the CGS, the City is authorized to impose a waiting period of not more than 90 days before granting any permit for the demolition of buildings or structures or any part thereof. A local ordinance would need to be adopted that establishes criteria for determining which properties are subject to a delay of demolition, criteria that may include historic factors and a definition of historic properties. Although such an ordinance does not have the power of preventing such actions, it does give the City time to negotiate alternative actions with the property owner.

Related Activities

Finally, the City can continue to promote historic preservation through the acquisition, restoration, and adaptive reuse of historic structures for public purposes. Indirect support can also be achieved by targeting public improvements to historic areas. The repair of streets and sidewalks, the installation of decorative street lights, the planting of shade trees, and the elimination of unsightly overhead utility wires can all help to improve the desirability of historic areas as places to live and work.

In addition to a creative and realistic attitude toward preservation, success in the application of preservation techniques demands the support and active involvement of a wide-range of citizens, especially property owners affected by the program. Proper attitude is essential. Whether one plans for preservation, or plans *with property owners* for preservation, often spells the difference between success and failure.

REHABILITATION GUIDELINES FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Source: U.S. Department of the Interior, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, 1995.

CONTEXTUAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS:

New Construction & Renovation of Non-Historic Buildings

1. Height. Proposed buildings should not be significantly higher or lower than the buildings directly adjacent to them. The established horizontal lines of facades on the block, created by elevation features and rooflines, should be respected.
2. Setbacks. The front setback should be no greater than setbacks typical for the immediate area. New construction should assure continuity of the prevailing street wall.
3. Massing. Proposed buildings should have a similar massing as those of the surrounding significant buildings. The rhythm established by the repetition of façade widths and spacing between buildings should be maintained.
4. Materials. Façade materials should be similar to those established in the area. Proposed buildings should be of permanent materials requiring low or no maintenance (e.g. brick, cut stone, masonry, or precast concrete). Corrugated metal, bronzed aluminum, fiberglass, stucco, dryvit or imitation material should not be used as the primary exterior construction material. Buildings should be designed homogeneously with the same materials at all elevations. Traditional façade components (e.g. kickplates, transoms, first floor display windows, recessed entries, sign bands) should be incorporated in new designs. Loading areas and docks should be screened from view and constructed of the same exterior materials as the overall structure.
5. Fenestration. There should be punched windows or large masonry wall planes. Window glass should be clear or lightly tinted, but mirrored or highly reflective glass should not be used. Clear anodized window frames should be avoided. The established pattern of upper story windows, the proportion of windows, doors, and other features, and the location and treatment of entranceways should be reflected in new construction.
6. Color. Colors on building exteriors should be muted. The overall color scheme of the area is a feature that can be used to visually link buildings with one another.

Source: City of Danbury *Plan of Conservation & Development*, 2002.

4. PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

Public improvements play a critical supporting role in downtown revitalization and include parking, streets, transit, sidewalks, parks, public buildings and other facilities. Many downtown plans place considerable emphasis on these elements and assume that their improvement alone will spur downtown development. That, of course, is not the case, for downtown revitalization requires a multi-faceted attack that also includes economic development strategies, sensitive urban design, and the preservation of historic properties. Nevertheless, public improvements are key ingredients in making the downtown more functional, convenient, safe and attractive.

Parking and Transportation

Public Parking

The number and distribution of public parking spaces and facilities is important for the success of the downtown, not because people will be attracted to the downtown simply because parking is available, but rather because people may be discouraged from traveling downtown if they perceive there is an insufficient amount of parking near their intended destination. Parking will probably always remain an issue in downtown planning for, although the total number of spaces may seem to be sufficient to meet overall demand, development patterns make it difficult to ensure that convenient parking will be available adjacent to each and every business or activity.

The Danbury Parking Authority manages on-street metered parking and operates three municipal parking lots and the Patriot and Bardo garages within the study area (Table 3). The lots include Lot 8 at the corner of Liberty and Delay streets, Lot 13 on Liberty Street behind the Hull Building, and Lot 16 at the corner of Main Street and Kennedy Avenue.

Because they do not require the periodic feeding of meters, parking garages are most suitable for long-term parking, while lots which allow both metered and permit parking may be attractive to both short and long-term parking. For streets with a concentration of retail and service businesses, "...there is a strong consensus that the most efficient use of commercial curb space is for short-term parking."[14] The high demand for convenient parking in these locations makes the retention of on-street parking essential for downtown revitalization.

During a typical workday, about one-third of the spaces in the Bardo Garage and three-fourths of the spaces in the Patriot Garage are occupied. Although Lot 13 is near capacity during the workday, there is much less demand on the other two lots. Demand does, however, increase on Lot 8 in the evening.

Metered on-street parking is concentrated on Main, West, White, Elm, Railroad/Ives and White streets. According to the Parking Authority, parking along Main Street peaks at about 85 percent capacity while

parking on the other streets peaks at about 70 percent. The area in the downtown with the greatest deficiency in parking is along Main Street from Liberty to Keeler. There is an acute demand for more parking to serve the Danbury Library.

Additional metered municipal parking outside the study area can be found on Deer Hill Avenue, Moss Avenue and Fifth Street and in municipal lots at the Metro-North railroad station and at West and Division Streets. Unmetered on-street parking can also be found on many other downtown streets.

TABLE 3
DOWNTOWN MUNICIPAL PARKING
2010

	Regular Spaces	Handicap Spaces
On-street Parking		
Crosby Street	4	-
Delay Street	4	-
Elm Street	32	-
Ives Street	7	1
Keeler Street	7	-
Kennedy Avenue	6	-
Main Street	113	9
Railroad Place	14	2
State Street	7	-
Terrace Place	8	1
West Street	28	4
White Street	41	1
Sub-Total	(271)	(18)
Municipal Parking Lots		
Lot 8 – Delay/Liberty	45	2
Lot 13 – Liberty (Hull)	34	1
Lot 16 – Main/Kennedy	83	1
Sub-Total	(162)	(4)
Garages		
Bardo Garage	376	10
Patriot Garage	556	10
Sub-Total	(932)	(20)
TOTAL	**1,365**	**42**

Source: Danbury Parking Authority, adjusted to include study area only.

Principles of Parking Design

According to the 2002 *Plan of Conservation and Development*, the following principles should be used to guide decisions relating to the management and expansion of parking facilities in the downtown:

- parking is a basic need for a vital downtown, with responsibility shared by both the City and the private sector;
- parking must be adequate to meet demand both in the overall number of spaces *and* in their distribution;
- a combination of parking structures, lots, and on-street spaces are needed to accommodate demand for long and short-term parking;

- the operation of public parking facilities should pay their way without relying on public subsidies;
- parking structures and lots should be located in areas with easy vehicular access where there is sufficient demand; and,
- structures should be attractively designed and ensure traffic and pedestrian safety.

David Sousa, a landscape architect and planner with Clough Harbour & Associates LLP, provides several guidelines to ensure that parking does not detract from, but rather reinforces, a walkable downtown.

- Avoid large surface parking lots.
- Provide direct connections between rear parking lots and retail to integrate uses.
- Make short-term parking convenient to retail uses.
- Provide on-street parking wherever possible. It not only provides convenient parking, but also creates a buffer between pedestrians and moving cars and reduces the area needed for off-street parking.
- Ensure sensitive design and siting of parking garages.
- Hide garages with "liner buildings."
- Develop a parking plan that emphasizes shared parking.[15]

Short-term Parking Improvements

Several steps can be taken now to improve the condition of existing public parking facilities.

1. Add perimeter landscaping or low brick walls along Delay and Liberty streets to screen Lots 8 (Liberty/Delay streets) and 13 (Liberty Street).
2. Connect Lot 13 to the Palace Theater parking lot with a one-way drive and improve pedestrian access and lighting to Liberty Street.
3. Provide regular maintenance for parking lots, including paving and striping of spaces.
4. Provide directional signs to municipal lots and garages from major streets.

Several other items are of major concern. First, there should be no loss of existing on-street parking and opportunities for additional parking need to be explored. The recent elimination of parking along Main Street near Library Place should be reconsidered. Second, the impending loss of public parking on Lot 16 due to the proposed development of Kennedy Place suggests the need to explore other parking alternatives to serve this area.

Long-range Parking Study

As Table 3 indicates, municipal parking within the study area is limited to two garages, three lots and on-street parking. If revitalization efforts are to succeed, an increase in the supply of off-street public parking may be required. However, the City does not have a long-range strategy for meeting future demand. That requires the preparation of a long-range parking study which can be used to guide future acquisitions and management initiatives. Such a parking study should include the following elements.

1. Data collection, including an inventory of public and private spaces, use and occupancy rates, the number of downtown employees and residents, and issues and needs identified by the public or stakeholders who use downtown parking.
2. An analysis of future conditions and opportunities, including parking demand projections and a study of alternative parking solutions.
3. A fee strategy to balance the demand for affordable long-term employee and resident parking with effective parking turnover to accommodate service and retail business needs.
4. A future parking plan, including management options (e.g. changes to regulations, time limits on parking for certain spaces, improved signage), expansion proposals (e.g. new construction, cost assessments, and potential users), recommended fee structures, and enforcement measures.

Street Improvements

In 2009, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) prepared a study[16] for the City containing recommended improvements for traffic signal cycle lengths and intersection designs throughout the central business district to improve safety and mitigate congestion. Of the thirty-eight intersections studied, seven were in the study area. Adjustments in cycle lengths were recommended for all seven intersections. Recommended design improvements are noted below.

- **Main Street at Franklin Street, Garamella Boulevard and Rose Street**
  Proposed improvements to these adjacent intersections were judged by VHB to be critically needed. They included (1) converting Rose Street to a one-way westbound street, and (2) at the Franklin Street/Garamella Boulevard intersection, widening both north and south bound approaches on Main Street to three lanes, including an exclusive left turn lane, a through lane, and a shared through/right turn lane. *Comment.* Although these improvements will help mitigate congestion, the proposed conversion of Rose Street into a one-way westbound street will impede access to local businesses and may increase traffic on nearby streets (e.g. Elm). Cost may be an inhibiting factor if the Housatonic Railroad requires extensive improvements to the crossing on Main Street.

- **Main Street at Elm Street and Crosby Street**
  If Rose Street is converted into a one-way westbound street, VHB advises that Elm Street may have to be widened to three lanes at the Main Street intersection to accommodate increased traffic, including a left turn lane, through lane, and a shared through/right turn lane. *Comment.* The additional lane may require the elimination of some on-street parking, a serious concern.

- **Main Street at Wooster Street**
  Proposed improvements at this intersection were judged by VHB to be critically needed. It was proposed by VHB to widen southbound Main Street lanes to accommodate an additional lane, resulting in two through lanes and one left turn lane toward the Walgreen Drug Store. Main Street would be widened to two lanes southbound past the intersection *Comment.* Widening of Main Street at the intersection could require infringement onto Elmwood Park, an action we oppose. Additional widening should take place on the west side of Main Street.

- **West Street at Deer Hill Avenue and New Street**
  Proposed improvements at this intersection were judged by VHB to be critically needed. Long term intersection improvements included the widening of West Street to three lanes: one left turn lane, one through lane, and one shared through/right turn lane. West Street would be widened to include two through lanes in both directions beyond the intersection. *Comment.* The widening of West Street beyond the intersection could require the elimination of on-street parking, a concern.

No physical improvements were recommended in the VHB study for (1) Main Street at West Street and Liberty Street, (2) Main Street at Bank Street and Keeler Street, and (3) Main Street at Library Place.

The VHB study also included 31 additional intersections outside the study area. Two of these directly affect Main Street intersections.

- **Main Street at North Street and Downs Street**
  Proposed improvements to these adjacent intersections were judged by VHB to be critically needed. The major recommendation was to convert Downs Street into a one-way eastbound street. Modifications to through and turning lanes on all four intersecting streets would be made. *Comment.* An assessment of the impact to businesses and residences on Downs Street should be made and considered before it is converted to a one-way street.

- **Main Street at South Street and Memorial Drive**
  Proposed improvements to this intersection were judged by VHB to be critically needed. In addition to changes to turning lanes, VHB included a long-term recommendation to make

Memorial Drive one-way south into Rogers Park. *Comment.* Converting Memorial Drive to a one-way street is ill-advised, regardless of the traffic consequences. Access would be severely restricted from the War Memorial, Rogers Park Middle School, Rogers Park playfields, elderly housing, and CVS. Those wishing to exit the Rogers Park area, including school buses, would have to travel on Lions Way to its intersection with Coal Pit Hill Road, causing inconvenience and serious congestion and safety issues. Traffic issues at South Street would be transferred to Coal Pit Hill Road.

Public Transit

The downtown trolley was initiated in the 1990s to provide frequent and convenient public transit throughout the downtown. Since that time, however, the route of the trolley has been expanded and now runs as far west as Kenosia Park and north to Hayestown Avenue from 9:30 a.m. to 2:55 p.m., Wednesday through Friday. To better serve the downtown, HART should consider expanding service from Monday through Saturday at times integrated with other bus schedules. The focus of the route should be to connect the downtown with WCSU, the Danbury Hospital and the Danbury Fair Mall.

Sidewalk and Streetscape Improvements

Achievement of a walkable downtown depends on adequate and appealing sidewalks, for sidewalks not only provide pedestrian access to downtown stores and services, they also constitute the major form of downtown public space. Wide sidewalks on Main Street and White Street provide opportunities for sidewalk sales and outdoor cafes. To promote pedestrian safety, curb cuts should be curtailed and drive-through restaurants and stores prohibited in the study area.

Sidewalks within the study area can be categorized as those experiencing either major or secondary pedestrian activity caused by the concentration and diversity of adjacent land uses. Major sidewalks are candidates for full streetscape improvement, while on secondary streets, new sidewalks, curbs and enhanced street lighting should be adequate.

Major Sidewalk Streetscape Improvements

Streetscape improvements typically include the following embellishments:

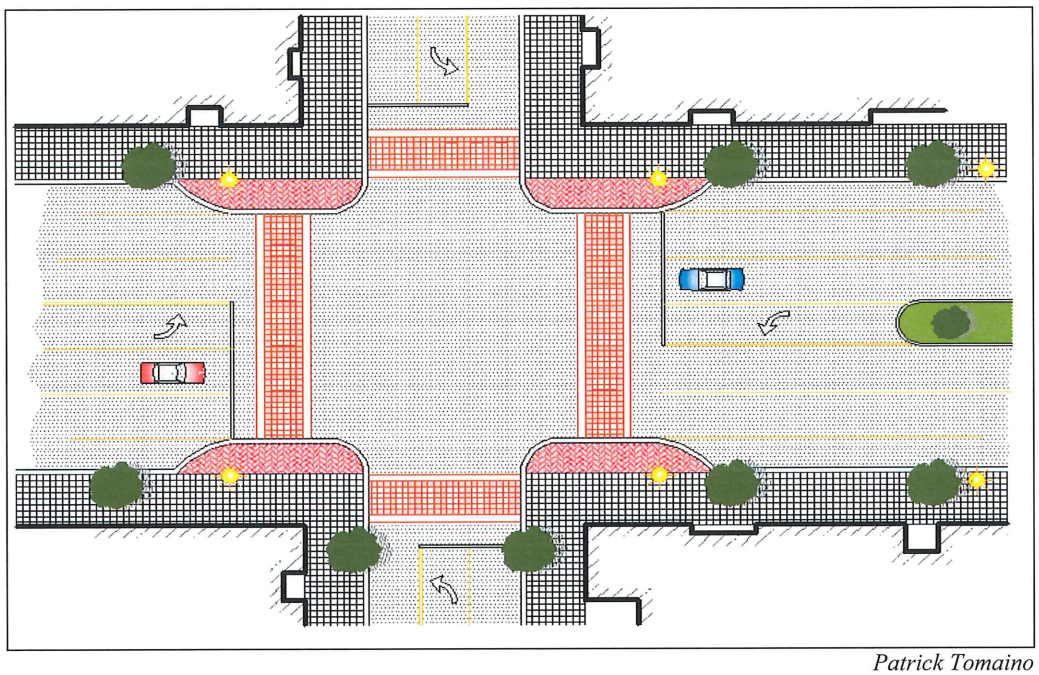
- replacement of sidewalks with scored paving patterns;
- decorative pavers to accent intersection crosswalks;
- granite curbing, as needed;
- 'neckdowns' on Main Street and White Street to improve pedestrian safety and to promote traffic calming;
- street trees and appropriate landscaping;
- ornamental lighting;
- handicap ramps;
- street furniture, including benches and waste receptacles, where appropriate; and,
- placement of utility lines underground.

Previously completed street improvements for Main Street in the early 1990s incorporated many of these features in an effort to beautify the downtown, though repairs are now necessary from Center to Crosby streets. Similar streetscape treatment was recently completed for the northern end of Main Street from Crosby Street to North Street and on White Street from Patriot Drive to Fifth Avenue. Other downtown streets recommended for streetscape improvements in the 2005 *Transportation Plan* included the following.

- White Street: Main Street to Patriot Drive.
- West Street: Main Street to Deer Hill Avenue/New Street.

- Crosby Street and Lee Hartell Drive: Main Street to White Street.
- Main Street: Boughton Street to South Street, including widening to four travel lanes.

To improve pedestrian safety, enhanced crosswalks (Figure 4) are proposed at crosswalks to the Danbury Green and at the following intersections along Main Street: (1) Kennedy/Crosby and Elm/White streets; (2) Library Place; (3) West/Liberty streets; and, (4) Boughton Street and Wooster Street crosswalks at Elmwood Park.



Patrick Tomaino

FIGURE 4
SAMPLE STREETSCAPE

Secondary Sidewalks

On secondary downtown sidewalks, simple replacement of sidewalks and curbs should suffice without full streetscape treatment, although additional street trees and enhanced street lighting are always welcomed where needed. Secondary sidewalks include Bank, Boughton, Chapel, Elm, Foster, Keeler, Kennedy, Library, New, Park, Rose, State, Terrace, Tower, and Wooster streets. Some of these sidewalks (e.g. Chapel Place, Keeler Street and State Street) are in worse condition than the others.

Public Parks and Facilities

Public Parks

There are three public parks in the study area: the Danbury Green, Elmwood Park and Kennedy Park. The Danbury Green was opened in 1992 as part of the downtown redevelopment effort and serves as an open space venue for the Summer Series Concerts, the annual Taste of Greater Danbury, 1st Night Danbury, and other community events. Elmwood Park, the oldest park in the City, was renovated in 1998 and provides passive recreational use in a verdant setting.

Kennedy Park

Kennedy Park extends from Main Street between Elm Street and Kennedy Avenue to near their juncture at New Street. The Park has many mature trees and provides space for the Farmer's Market and a gathering place for day laborers. While a fountain and landscaping have been added in the front of the Park at Main Street, there is an opportunity for additional landscaping on the remainder of the Park (Figure 5).

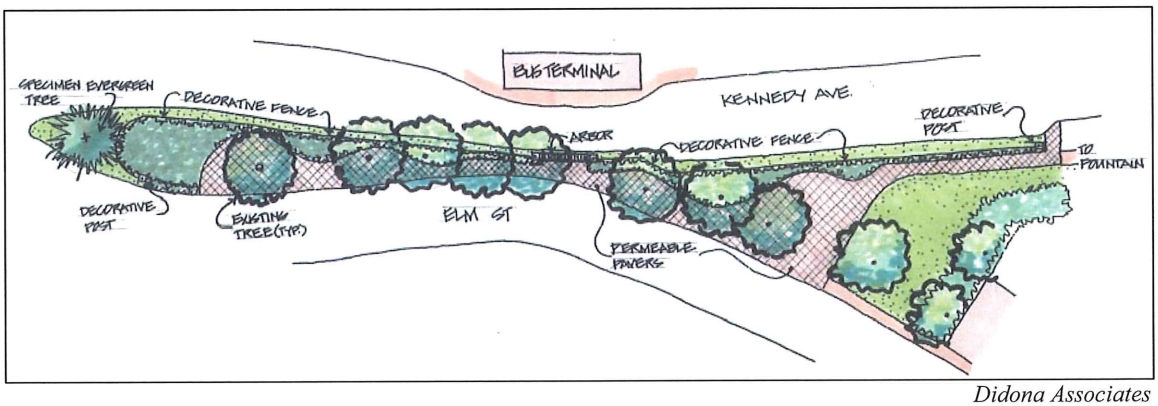


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FIGURE 5
KENNEDY PARK SCHEMATIC PLAN

This schematic plan includes a decorative fence along Kennedy Avenue with an arbor entrance to channel pedestrian access to the Park. Permeable pavers would create a plaza environment suitable for the Farmer's Market while protecting mature trees. Planting accents would provide visual interest and color while the proposed evergreen at the western end provides definition, screening from the busy intersection, and the possibility for holiday tree lighting.

Public Buildings and Infrastructure

The study area contains six public buildings, including the Fire Department headquarters on New Street, the Danbury Library, Old Jail and old library on Main Street, and the Bardo and Patriot garages. The following list includes projected improvement needs included in the City's Capital Improvement Program.

- **Danbury Fire Department headquarters, 19 New Street**
  Expand parking lot: $ 75,000.
- **Danbury Public Library, 170 Main Street**
  Modernize HVAC system, phase 3: $ 500,000.
  Renovate fountain wall/masonry, sound system: $ 117,117.
  Replace book elevator: $ 36,729.
  Renovate 1st floor technology center: $ 116,064.
- **Senior Center Old Jail, 80 Main Street**
  Replace HVAC in large meeting room: $ 36,600.
- **Old Library, 256 Main Street**
  Rehabilitate masonry, deterioration prevention: $ 626,400.
  Restore mural: $ 120,000.
  Modernize elevator: $ 70,000.
- **Patriot Garage, 21 Delay Street**
  Make structural repairs: $ 166,320.

Other public improvements identified for the study area include (1) Phase II drainage improvements for the Old East Ditch ($ 2,500,000) and (2) periodic removal of vegetation, dredging and river wall repair for the Still River.

These and other recommendations of the report which require the expenditure of public funds are made with an appreciation of the budgetary limitations facing City government. Not everything can be done at once. Consequently, these recommendations require phased implementation over time in a financially prudent manner as funds become available.

Farmer's Market

5. IMPLEMENTATION

Far too often, reports similar to this one which contain recommended actions are adopted with much fanfare and then ignored, as if their proposals will implement themselves. Accordingly, this report is not being touted as the end of the process of downtown revitalization, but only the beginning. An organization needs to be established to set priorities, monitor progress, consult with individuals and organizations responsible for implementation, provide a forum for the general public, and promote timely planning, programming and budgeting initiatives.

Downtown Revitalization Commission

This effort begins with the creation by City Council of a standing Downtown Revitalization Commission, a joint public-private organization which is semi-autonomous in composition and function. The purpose of the Commission would be to promote the revitalization of the downtown in accordance with the vision, objectives, and recommendations of this *Downtown Danbury: Issues and Recommendations* report as adopted by the Main Street Renaissance Task Force and amended from time to time by the Commission.

Duties

The duties of the commission would be to: (1) prepare each year an annual program of public and private actions necessary to implement report recommendations; (2) meet with property owners and merchants on development proposals; (3) consult with public officials on all proposed downtown plans, programs, regulations and public improvements; (4) monitor downtown progress, evolving conditions, and needs; (5) entertain and solicit public opinions, attitudes and concerns; and, (6) provide leadership in all other ways to make the downtown vision a reality.

Membership and Appointment

Membership of the Commission should include eleven (11) members chosen for their leadership, involvement, and expertise in downtown business, development, planning and activities, including representatives of the following:

1. retail merchants and service professionals (3);
2. property owners (2);
3. financial institutions (1);
4. City Office of Economic Development (1);
5. City Department of Planning and Zoning (1);
6. CityCenter Danbury (2); and,
7. design or historic preservation professionals (1).

Initial membership of the Commission would be recommended by a sub-committee of the Task Force to the Mayor to reflect the categories specified above, followed by confirmation from City Council. Future members would be recommended by the Commission following the same procedure. Terms would be staggered.

Moreover, it should be understood that implementation of the recommendations contained herein will require the ongoing assistance and cooperation of many other individuals and organizations with related skills, responsibilities and jurisdictional authority affecting the downtown.

Economic Development Director

As funding becomes available, it is recommended that the Economic Development Director be restored to a full-time position in City Hall and staffed by an individual with training and experience in management, business administration, economic development, downtown revitalization or a related field. This requires a knowledge of public and private economic development services and programs as well as funding opportunities.

A primary responsibility of the Director would be devoted to downtown business retention and recruitment efforts, including acting as an ombudsman to assist local businesses as well as an agent to promote the downtown as a place to invest, develop and open businesses. The position would require frequent interface with downtown merchants, property owners and residents as well as regular consultation and cooperation with the Commission.

A Final Word

This report provides both a framework and a set of recommendations for a sustained revitalization effort in downtown Danbury. Its success demands constant resolve and vigilance, not sporadic, timid, or quixotic efforts. It requires both a broad vision and an attention to detail, recognizing that even small improvements can add up to significant results. But, in the final analysis, success also demands an intuitive understanding that you can't have a great city without doing great things.

DOWNTOWN DANBURY: Issues & Recommendations 2010

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN SUMMARY

VISION STATEMENT

The downtown will be the primary focus of City life, with a diversity of activities and thriving businesses, high quality housing, exceptional urban design, preservation of historic buildings, varied entertainment, and a vibrant street life.

OBJECTIVES FOR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

- Encourage market-rate housing for those with disposable incomes who will patronize downtown businesses.
- Promote and expand a diversity of quality retail stores, services, offices and restaurants.
- Expand entertainment and cultural activities.
- Support colleges, churches and medical centers.
- Improve nearby residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage excellence in urban design and the preservation of historic structures and landmarks.
- Enhance pedestrian safety and convenience.
- Improve public spaces and facilities, sidewalks and parking.
- Coordinate public and private programs for downtown improvement and management.
- Bring together established business owners and new immigrant groups to improve and promote the downtown.
- Foster cooperative actions among businesses, merchants, property owners, developers, city government, and civic, religious and educational institutions.

All plans, programs, regulations, public improvements and development proposals should remain true to the *planning principles* specified in the "Key Issues & Policies" section of this report.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Development

- Market analysis. Prepare an analysis of downtown economic development and strategies and programs for business retention and recruitment.
- Private development opportunities. Encourage infill and private redevelopment of vacant or underutilized lots.
- Business incubator program. Prepare a feasibility study for a business incubator program.
- Zoning amendments. Create a Downtown Revitalization Zone (DRZ) overlay zone to revise the following zoning regulations within the study area.
  - -Multi-family housing. Change multi-family housing from a special exception to a permitted use in the C-CBD Zoning District. Revise selected area and bulk regulations in the CL-10 and RH-3 zoning districts within the DRZ.
  - -Residential development. Prohibit new first floor residential units fronting on Main, White and West streets.
  - -Restaurant sales. Eliminate the restriction that sales of alcoholic beverages cannot exceed forty percent of the total monthly food and beverage sales in restaurants.

-Parking. Reduce the amount of required on-site parking for 2-bedroom multi-family to 1½ spaces per unit; eliminate requirements for on-site visitor parking in RH-3 if public parking is within 500 feet; eliminate on-site requirements for employees if parking is made available elsewhere.

- Deferral of Assessment Increases. Amend the Code of Ordinances to expand eligible uses in the DRZ.
- Sewer and water fees. Reduce connection fees and permit application fees in the DRZ.
- Sidewalk policy. Accept responsibility by the City for repairing and replacing sidewalks in the DRZ, provided abutting property owners keep them clean, safe and unobstructed at all times.
- "Top of the Pile." Give priority to processing permit applications for new development in the DRZ.
- Reduced fees. Reduce most permit fees by 50%.
- Neighborhood plans. Prepare plans to improve nearby neighborhoods, as needed.
- Ambassador program. Reinstate the guide or "ambassador" program through CityCenter.
- Noise. Adopt an ordinance to control excessive noise in the downtown.
- Palace Theater. Encourage implementation of the findings of the Palace Theater Restoration Study.
- Danbury Cultural Museum. Prepare a feasibility study for a museum to highlight and celebrate the contributions immigrant groups have made to the City throughout its history.

Urban Design & Historic Preservation

- Zoning design controls. Petition the Zoning Commission for design controls to require that new buildings be setback no farther than the mean setback of adjacent buildings on the block. Require rear parking lots on major streets wherever feasible.
- Design guidelines. Prepare downtown design guidelines for new construction.
- Village Districts or Historic District Commissions. Consider the creation of a village district or historic district commission.
- Demolition delay. Enact a 90 day demolition delay ordinance for historic structures.

Public Improvements

- Short-term parking improvements. Add perimeter landscaping or low brick walls to screen municipal parking lots; connect Lot 13 to the Palace Theater parking lot and improve pedestrian access; provide regular maintenance for parking lots; and, install directional signs to lots and garages from major streets.
- Long-range parking study. Hire a consultant to prepare a future parking plan.
- HART trolley service. Communicate suggestions regarding improved downtown trolley service to HART.
- Streetscape improvements. Undertake streetscape improvements for White Street, West Street, Crosby Street, and Lee Hartell Drive, and extend Main Street improvements to South Street.
- Sidewalk repair/replacement. Recommend a phased program to improve other downtown sidewalks in the DRZ.
- Kennedy Park. Undertake landscape improvements to Kennedy Park.
- Public buildings and infrastructure. Implement improvements in accordance with the City's Capital Improvement Program.

Implementation

- Downtown Revitalization Commission. Create a Commission to promote the revitalization of the downtown in accordance with the vision, objectives and recommendations of the *Downtown Danbury: Issues & Recommendations 2010* report.
- Economic Development Director. As funding becomes available, restore the Economic Development Director to a full-time position to, among other things, encourage and promote downtown business retention and recruitment efforts.

Main Street Renaissance Task Force

Further Assistance

Though there are a host of organizations which address issues of downtown revitalization, some of the major ones which could assist the Downtown Revitalization Commission in the performance of their duties include the following.

- **American Planning Association**
  With roots dating back to 1909, APA is an independent, not-for-profit educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning. APA provides information and training through various publications, training seminars and conferences for its 40,000 members. The American Institute of Certified Planners is the professional arm of APA.

- **American Society of Landscape Architects**
  Founded in 1899, ASLA's mission is to lead, educate, and participate in the careful stewardship, wise planning, and artful design of the natural and built environments including, among others, historic preservation and restoration, land planning, parks and recreation, streetscapes and public spaces, and urban design.

- **Connecticut Main Street Center**
  The Connecticut Main Street Center provides tools and resources to help downtowns once again to be thriving centers of commercial and social activity. The CMSC assists communities to bring together public officials, business owners, financial resources, community activists, and the economic development and historic preservation communities under one umbrella organization.

- **Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation**
  The Connecticut Trust promotes the rehabilitation and restoration of historic properties by assisting individuals and communities through research and professional expertise on restoration tools, funding, economic development incentives, historic districts and local regulations.

- **Downtown Research & Development Center**
  For over fifty years the Center has acted as the information clearinghouse on practical strategies and tactics for revitalizing downtowns. Main activities include publishing the *Downtown Idea Exchange* and *Downtown Promotion Reporter* newsletters and relevant books and reports.

- **Urban Land Institute**
  ULI was founded in 1936 as a multidisciplinary real estate forum which provides research, publications, and professional development for public and private firms and individuals involved in urban development.

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APPENDIX A

CITYCENTER DANBURY
DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDERS OPINION SURVEY RESULTS
February 2009

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1. To what extent would the following kinds of additional development promote downtown revitalization?

	Great Impact	Some Impact	Little Impact	No Impact
a. Retail stores	16	6	3	0
b. Restaurants	15	8	1	0
c. Education and training	7	8	8	1
d. Business and professional offices	17	6	1	1
e. Hotels	10	10	4	1
f. Taverns and clubs	6	9	7	2
g. Cultural and entertainment centers	13	8	3	0
h. Housing	13	9	2	0

2. What kinds of additional housing would be most beneficial to downtown businesses? (Check as many as you wish.)

Socio-economic groups
a. Senior citizens, retirees - 7
b. WCSU student housing - 5
c. Young singles and couples - 23
d. Other singles, couples and families - 22
e. Low and moderate income people - 6

Cost
f. Market rate housing - 25
g. Subsidized housing - 3

Tenure
h. Rental - 13
i. Owner occupied - 20

3. How important are the following conditions for downtown businesses?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
a. Business mix	16	8	0
b. Quality of goods for sale	18	6	1
c. Variety of goods for sale	13	9	2
d. Longer store hours on Saturday	6	12	6
e. Open stores on Sunday	5	15	4
f. Quality of restaurants	20	4	0
g. Variety of restaurants	18	7	0
h. Feeling of personal safety	22	1	1
i. Pleasant pedestrian environment	23	2	0
j. Physical appearance	23	2	0
k. Attractive window displays	14	11	0

4. Would you say downtown Danbury is:

a. Very safe - 9
b. Somewhat safe - 13
c. Somewhat unsafe - 2
d. Not safe at all - 1

5. Would you say downtown Danbury is:

a. Very clean - 1
b. Somewhat clean - 18
c. Somewhat dirty - 5
d. Very dirty - 1

6. Overall, how attractive are most downtown buildings?

a. Very attractive - 3
b. Somewhat attractive - 16
c. Somewhat unattractive - 5
d. Unattractive - 1

7. How important are the following public actions for encouraging new business downtown?

		Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
a.	Provide financial incentives	16	5	1
b.	Increase police presence	10	10	1
c.	Increase public parking	13	9	2
d.	Increase business recruitment efforts	18	7	0
e.	Additional streetscape improvements	15	9	0
f.	Additional street lighting	11	12	0
g.	Increase enforcement of parking regulations	3	12	7

8. How many properties do you own in the downtown CityCenter area?

a. 1 15 b. 2-4 9 c. 5+ 1

9. What is the approximate total square footage of all buildings that you own downtown, if known?
8,000 sq. ft. median; 33,390 sq. ft. mean

10. What type of businesses occupy your property(ies)? Check all that apply.

a. Commercial - 21 b. Residential - 10 c. Other - 6

Among the open ended questions, the top three things mentioned that ought to be done to revitalize the downtown included (1) more diversity in retail, cultural arts, and entertainment, (2) greater business recruitment efforts and incentives, and (3) more market rate housing. The three biggest challenges included (1) filling vacancies, (2) immigrants and day laborers and language barriers, and (3) perceptions of public safety.

Of the 165 surveys that were sent out, 25 responded, representing about 40-50% of the properties downtown.

APPENDIX B

TASK FORCE FOCUS GROUP MEETING
June 25, 2009

Dr. Eugene Buccini of WCSU facilitated the discussion among focus group invitees regarding development issues facing downtown. Invitees present were Dan Bertram, Tony Rizzo, Jr., Joseph DaSilva, Roy Steiner, Mark Nolan, David Hawley, Tom Devine, and Agostinho Ribiero.

Dr. Buccini led the discussion by asking the panel five questions regarding downtown development. Questions and answers from the focus group were as follows.

1. Identify strengths of the downtown.

- Nighttime residential use;
- Perception that downtown is the center of Danbury;
- Diversity of businesses and people;
- Streetscape improvements, including new sidewalks, lighting and landscaping;
- Location along state transportation routes;
- Ability to leverage public improvement funds due to location on state transportation routes; and,
- Skating rink.

2. Identify impediments to redevelopment.

- Current credit markets restrict the ability to access funds by developers; developer uncertainty in the market;
- Day laborers on Kennedy and Elm Streets;
- Time it takes to complete a project, including state approvals;
- Lack of a destination point;
- Negative perception of downtown;
- Feeder streets onto Main Street that need to be improved;
- Perceived difficulty in transportation access to the downtown;
- Demographics that do not support national franchises; and,
- Confidence by developers to invest for fear of not attracting clientele with disposable income.

3. Identify opportunities that could be exploited to foster development.

- Potential for new housing;
- Potential to support specific businesses;
- Ability to initiate an incubator program;
- Infrastructure in place to support development (need to prioritize maintenance);
- Enhanced linkage with WCSU;
- Existence of public spaces and open/recreational spaces , i.e., ice rink, the Green, Palace Theater;
- CityCenter Danbury;
- Tax Incentives;
- Naugatuck Valley Community College; and,
- Palace Theater.

4. Identify businesses that would be most beneficial to the redevelopment of the downtown.

- coffee shop;
- art gallery;
- food establishments/restaurants for lunch and dinner;

- theater;
- music;
- big event venues (i.e., film festival);
- uses that generate daytime activity (e.g. offices, upscale housing, outlet franchises); and,
- bookstore.

5. Suggestions for what government can do to help downtown redevelopment.

- Partner for a more comprehensive marketing program, focusing on ease of access, convenient parking, safety;
- Enforce existing ordinances by police and zoning officials;
- Expedite the permit process by educating City employees involved in the process to act as consumer advocates;
- Offer economic incentives and market more aggressively in tri-state region;
- Make it easier to get things done;
- Support improvements to Metro North; and,
- Undertake additional public improvements around the theater.

General comments.

- Reinstitute ambassador program (guide program);
- Consider banners announcing events promoting the downtown;
- Task Force members should go to Two Steps on a Saturday night and sit on the patio to observe activity; and,
- The City should enforce public littering codes.

Dr. Buccini asked the panel to identify three things that the panel can support and reevaluate success in a year.

- Clean up Kennedy Park, including provision of services so day laborers can get training and assimilate;
- Initiate an incubator program to attract a business or group of businesses; and
- Create a purpose for an activity (i.e. film festival or related activity at other time(s) throughout the year, use ice rink, theater or Green as a venue for an activity).