

Keys To The City

WHAT IS — OR SHOULD BE — HAPPENING IN HARTFORD'S NEIGHBORHOODS

Blue Hills

Police presence stronger under new district system. Community Officer Omayra Martinez made detective, leaves beat she has served well. Rawson school construction booming. City needs to clean streets of winter litter, sand. University of Hartford plans autumn start of first phase of performing arts center at old Cadillac site. UHart playing fields work begins; next year baseball team has home games.

West End

Restaurant Row on Farmington Avenue booming, with opening of new Spanish restaurant and plans for Ethiopian eatery. At last, vacant Shell Station property sold, to be converted into two-story building with stores and apartments. Hot rumor: Starbucks coming. City Hall has signed contract with URS for design of Farmington Avenue streetscape improvements. First phase to extend from Marshall to Kenyon.

Asylum Hill

Residents unhappy about city approval of St. Francis garage with pedestrian bridge across Woodland Street. The bridge looks ugly, sends negative message about the neighborhood. Connecticut Culinary Institute still deciding where to locate. Hastings has right mix of housing and training facilities. New Habitat houses on Huntington Street are welcome sight. Crime down, a sign new policing system works.

Parkville

Real Art Ways hottest venue around with its avant garde films, lectures, concerts and contemporary art gallery. April 9 Real pARTy/fundraiser and auction drew fab crowd of 450. New Portuguese restaurant, O'Porto, had grand opening in March in restored factory building at west end of Park St. New ethnic restaurants flourishing. Police patrols on rise in area bordering Capitol Ave. Drugs busts are up.

Frog Hollow

Park Street improvements are noticeable as spring vitality spills outdoors. Solomon Building renovation a stunner, a fine new home for Mi Casa Family Center. Meanwhile, blighted neighborhood housing torn down to make way for 74 rental units scattered throughout Frog Hollow and Barry Square. Will fill a big need for affordable housing.

Southwest

A serene and pretty place these nice spring days, so litter and occasional deterioration look all the more unwelcome. How about a community cleanup of curbside trash on the few streets where it's a problem and in some areas of Hyland Park? We hate to nag, but the former eyesore residence that's being renovated on New Britain Avenue across from St. Lawrence O'Toole Church is in danger of a relapse unless work is finished soon. Broken window is bad sign.

Upper Albany

Hartford approves redevelopment zone for empty lot at Albany Avenue and Woodland Street; maybe owner ExxonMobil will finally come to the table. Foundation laid for a Weed and Seed program to weed out crime and seed with social programs, neighborhood restoration projects, economic development. At Artists Collective, jazz concert series continues with drummer Chico Hamilton due in June.

Clay-Arsenal

This place is hot. Five Belden Street historic homes will soon undergo \$3.4 million restoration by same consortium that beautified Morton-Putnam Heights. New House of Restoration church is getting sheetrocked, hoping for August opening. Lovely \$32 million SANA apartments' overhaul is done. A Chinese restaurant and a police field office to open soon in new Metro Center at Main and Pavilion. And Boston-area group is developing Firestone site, other properties.

Northeast

Plans to level Nelson Court and build private homes in limbo due to suspension of HUD's Hope VI funds. Housing Authority now looking at short-term rehabilitation. Mayor Perez asks HUD Secretary Alfonso Jackson for funding alternatives. Meanwhile, state attorney general's probe into ONE/CHANE community improvement organization finances having a demoralizing effect. New Johnson Stewart Community Center on Martin Street bustling with activity.

North Meadows

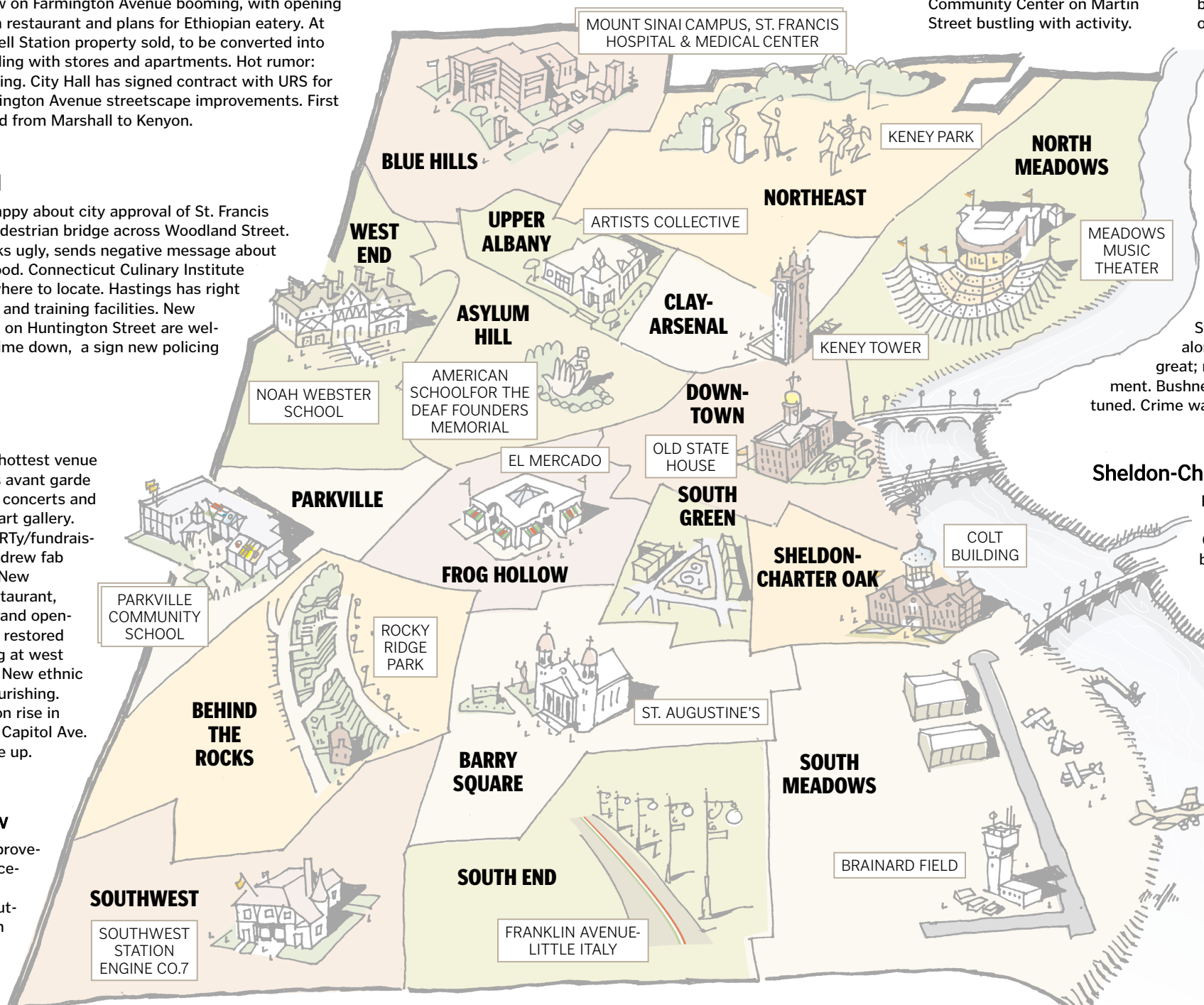
Demolition of massive jail-alai fronton making way for two auto dealerships: CarMax Auto Superstores and Subaru of New England. Dunkin Donuts will open outlet in front of nearby post office. Winstanley Enterprises of Concord, Mass., has purchased vacant Advo building, with plans to overhaul and lease. Property owners still grumble about expanding dump on east side of I-91; this eyesore should be closed.

South Downtown

Things happening in all directions: The convention center opens in June; library reconstruction under way; and Trumbull on the Park, second of the major new downtown housing complexes, about to open. Streetlights and landscaping along Capitol Avenue look great; now for some development. Bushnell appears interested; stay tuned. Crime way down.

Sheldon-Charter Oak

Positive stirrings. Former horse-nail factory, Capewell, will have offices by late summer. Demolition of Dutch Point housing project starts. Developer gets \$28 million mortgage to begin work on south armory of Colt Building. Still, buildings at 72-82 Main St. a magnet for crime; owner 72-82 Main St. LLC (agent Ira Nagel) needs to get act together. Charter Oak Cultural Center keeps pace with free dance performances this month, next month and June.



Hartford's Neighborhoods And Their Recognizable Landmarks

ILLUSTRATION BY PHIL LOHMAN / SPECIAL TO THE COURANT • TEXT BY COURANT EDITORIAL STAFF WRITERS

Behind The Rocks

Good news. Look for an early summer opening of the Goodwin Memorial Branch public library on New Britain Avenue. The library has been closed for more than a year for \$2.3 million in major renovations and additions, including larger book collection, many more computer stations, a much bigger area for family activities, community meetings and evening programs, and more room to park.

South End

New restaurants, such as Roxies, keep neighborhood lively. Planned July start of Metzner Center expansion is welcome, overdue news. Policing has improved, but residents are right to seek more foot patrols. Keep pushing for shuttles between convention center and South End — it's worth doing. Neighborhood Revitalization Zone has compiled list of local sites for convention center brochure — a great way to draw visitors.

Barry Square

Lose one, win one. Great Harvest Bread Co. closes, First & Last bakery/deli opens. Focus intensifies on streetscape, choosing sidewalk material, street furniture. Design in place by fall, contractor ready to begin next spring. All this effort undermined by litter and filthy streets. Pigs, you know who you are. City needs to enforce litter rules, insist cars get off the street periodically to make way for cleaners. Sweeping on major streets spotty.

South Green

City finally advertising for developers for barren lots at key intersection of Main and Park. Meanwhile, Community Renewal Team's fancy new assisted-living facility on Retreat Avenue is rapidly filling. Blocks away, developer plans to construct 22 condo townhouses on Alden Street across from Colt Park; promise of new housing is exciting for neighborhood.

South Meadows

New businesses continue to move in. Preliminary traffic study by city and CRCOG confirms something must be done to allow for better movement of cars and protect the pedestrians the growing area is attracting. Merchants pony up money to keep problem-solving committee afloat after federal funds are cut. Public works finds that if you dredge the drainage ditch off I-91 and destroy the beaver dams, the ditch won't overflow when it rains.