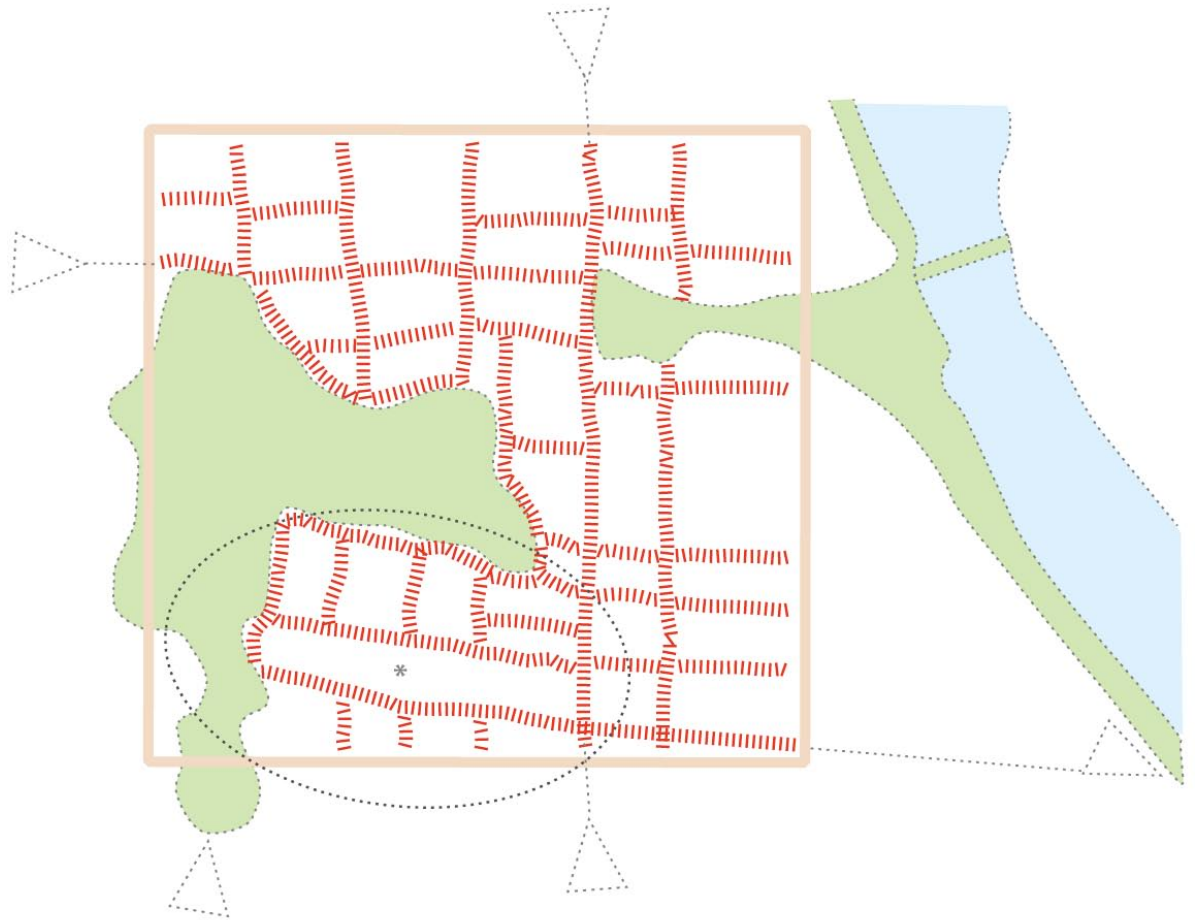


DRAFT

Proposal to Develop:

the iQuilt

Capitol District Vision Plan and Hartford's Pathways of Innovation



A Project of
The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts
and the Greater Hartford Arts Council

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Urban Land Institute (ULI), the nation's preeminent authority on land use policy, conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Hartford's built environment and the consequent challenges to the city's economic growth. ULI's principal recommendation was to focus not on "mega projects" but rather on thoughtful and creative "in-fill" projects which would link and leverage Hartford's existing assets of significance. In subsequent Hartford Courant articles and editorials, the development of Capitol Avenue was cited as one of the two top priorities for in-fill projects.

Two of Hartford's key cultural leaders - The Bushnell and the Greater Hartford Arts Council - are proposing to develop a concept plan for a network of downtown cultural pathways. This plan would be a natural next step in the ongoing state, city and private sector efforts to revitalize Hartford's economy and neighborhoods. It would fit within Hartford's broader strategy of leveraging the city's thriving cultural assets to achieve targeted economic and social goals. The project would include the creation of a vision plan for the redevelopment of a critical part of the cultural network, the district from the State Capitol to Main Street.

Specific Purpose of Funding

1. Development of a strategic plan for the "iQuilt", a loose grid of park-to-river pedestrian routes which weave together downtown Hartford's key cultural sites and institutions around the theme of cultural innovation.
2. Design of a Capitol District Vision Plan, nested within the iQuilt project and covering the approximately 64-acre rectangle immediately south of Bushnell Park (including the State Capitol, Bushnell Memorial, Trinity Street, Capitol Avenue, and the SoDo neighborhood).

Hartford's Cultural Assets

As Connecticut, Metro Hartford, and the City of Hartford make continued progress in their joint efforts to revitalize the capital city region, almost every study and report has cited the strength of Hartford's cultural assets and institutions. From the Capitol and Bushnell Park, The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, and the Wadsworth Atheneum to the Hartford Stage Company, Old State House, and Riverfront Plaza, these cultural anchors continue to draw visitors to Hartford, improve the quality of life, help attract and retain a well educated workforce, and contribute significantly to economic activity in the city and region. Strengthening these institutions has been widely and repeatedly recommended as a key strategic building block in the overall effort to improve prospects for Hartford's future.

The Value of Linking Them

Many cities, such as Brooklyn, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, are also discovering that great value is added when cultural institutions are not only strengthened but linked together, both programmatically and physically, with streets, plazas and parks playing a critical connective role. In many cases, it is the cultural institutions themselves which initiate and lead these projects. Through well-designed and meaningful linkages, the institutions see improved content and increased audience

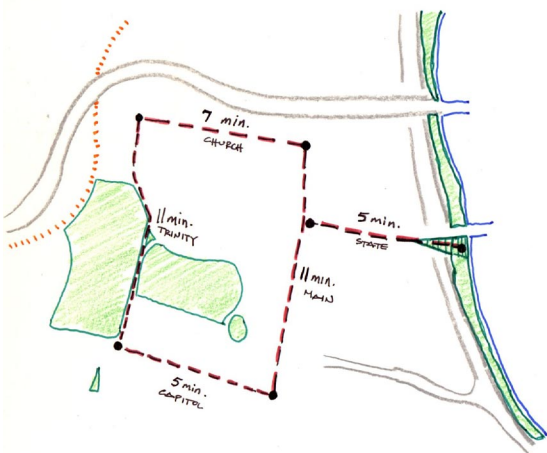


Hartford's cultural assets are exceptionally strong, but in order to have their full social and economic impact, they need to be better connected - both programmatically and physically



The new Connecticut Science Center, a major new world-class downtown attraction, will surely lead to a boost in visitors. Moving forward, the Urban Land Institute has recommended Hartford must focus less on "silver bullets" and more on long-term strategy, for example, on how to link the Science Center to other cultural assets.

numbers; the public perceives a network of attractive destinations; the length of typical visits is extended; and the related economic benefits are increased. In this same period, new buildings with striking architecture have been shown capable of sparking fresh interest in a city (the so-called "Bilbao Effect" after the impact of the Frank Gehry-designed museum in Bilbao, Spain). The soon-to-open Connecticut Science Center, with its ambitious programming and dramatic architecture, may well offer such positive attention for Hartford. Linking the Science Center and adjacent Riverfront Plaza to the rest of Hartford's cultural assets through a well-designed pedestrian network will maximize the benefit of the State's investments in the Science Center and the rest of downtown.

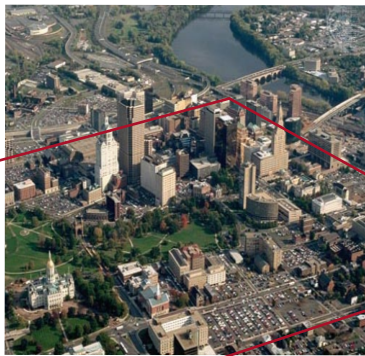


Hartford's downtown is exceptionally and favorably compact, and almost all of its cultural assets could be linked together in walks of no more than 11 or 12 minutes.

THE iQUILT

Hartford's Compact Downtown

Making these pedestrian links would not be difficult, as Hartford - unlike many American cities - enjoys a remarkably compact and clearly bounded downtown. Within the small square area (just over a half mile square) bounded by Buckingham / Charter Oak Avenue, I-84, and the Connecticut River is a loose grid of north-south and east-west streets which, in map view, form a kind of charmingly irregular quilt. Within this quilt, almost all the key destinations are within a fifteen minute walk of each other. This proximity is a valuable but underperforming asset, in which a relatively small investment could produce a large return. In non-physical terms, the cultural institutions themselves are already well connected through their interwoven audiences, board members, and benefactors, and the Greater Hartford Arts Council has comprehensively linked them with respect to promotion, ticketing, and funding. But for a visitor on foot in downtown Hartford, the city's excellent cultural assets - and important accessory locations like hotels and restaurants - can seem physically disconnected and even psychologically remote, to the extent that many people actually drive from one location to another.



A Walkable Quilt of Pathways

Downtown Hartford should be highly walkable. A Convention & Visitors Bureau sponsored walking tour in the late 1980's called "The Walk" is a helpful precedent for such walkability, and recent efforts to improve Hartford's streetscape and pedestrian environment are very positive. What is needed now is a focused program - keyed to the region's overall economic strategy on workforce and tourism - to produce an enhanced downtown pedestrian network which interweaves downtown's cultural sites and institutions. The "quilt" of streets and pathways becomes a useful symbol of the project, and helps establish an "imageable" pedestrian framework for downtown. At the larger scale, the quilt would link downtown's two great natural assets: Bushnell Park and the Connecticut River waterfront. At the smaller scale, the quilt would make it easy and enjoyable to walk from one cultural asset to another, while linking them conceptually under a proposed theme of cultural innovation - in science, art, and human affairs. The "quilt" becomes "The iQuilt": urban fabric interwoven with cultural innovation.



The grid of downtown streets and paths forms a loose "quilt" which could define and link the key cultural assets, while also connecting Bushnell Park to the river.



Hartford's "Tradition of Innovation" weaves across many domains, from politics and technology to architecture, literature and landscape



For cities in the 21st century, cultural innovation will include a new integration of lifestyles and transport systems which produce sustainable forms of urban development



The pathways of the iQuilt should be planned integrally with existing, planned, and desired land uses downtown, including retail and housing

Hartford: A Tradition of Innovation

The theme of cultural innovation has a number of virtues. It allows for a broader definition of Hartford's "cultural" assets: it can highlight the creativity of the political mind or industrial inventor as readily as the performer or visual artist. It encourages positive associations between knowledge and creativity, between industry and culture, between science and the arts.

Though rooted in the new, innovation also invokes the past. Hartford has a long and proud tradition of innovation in a wide range of areas such as democratic government (first written constitution), the press (oldest newspaper in continuous publication) precision manufacturing (first brick-making machine, first American bicycle, guns, tools, jet engines, helicopters), education (first school for the deaf in the New World), finance (insurance industry) and civic engagement (first publicly purchased park, first free public art museum). In the present, Hartford is committed to innovative strategies for its economic and civic revitalization, perhaps best symbolized by the new science center. And innovation as a theme also lays down a future challenge to the Hartford to find ways of competing and thriving in a globalized economy while reducing its negative environment impact - the latter includes sustainable transport projects, of which the iQuilt could serve as an innovative prototype and shining example.

The theme of innovation could find physical expression not only in traditional cultural expressions such as outdoor sculpture, fountains, or architecture, but, for example, in an interactive kiosk relating to the State Constitution, or a full-scale helicopter or jet engine on outdoor display. Even cultural destinations outside of the downtown core - for example, Coltsville or the Mark Twain House - could find representation within the iQuilt through the use of markers, kiosks, or displays. These are the kinds of strategies the project is intended to explore.

Pedestrian Integration with Car, Bus, Rail and Bike

A constant test for any pedestrian network is its ability to integrate with other means of transport beyond walking. In the case of downtown Hartford, this means arrival by car at any one of countless parking spaces, lots or garages; arrival by bus at one of many stops or terminals; arrival by train at Union Station; and arrival by bike almost anywhere. Walking distances, walkability, pedestrian amenities, biking facilities, weather considerations, variable activities for day and evening, weekend and weekday, by holiday and by season must all be factored in to test the resilience of any proposed downtown Hartford pedestrian network, and its capacity to respond to changing conditions over time. This effort should be placed in the context of national policy challenges including global warming, environmental degradation, and energy dependence, and the growing importance of sustainable transport strategies for all cities.

Economic Integration with Retail and Sustainable Land Uses

The proposed pedestrian network must also be tested for its ability to both integrate and catalyze economic activity along its edges. This involves checking compatibility of Hartford’s cultural uses with accessory functions such as cafes, restaurants, shops, and hotels, identifying areas of strength and weakness, and developing strategies to fill in missing links and provide critical support amenities. The network should also dovetail with larger land use strategies, embraced by Hartford, such as infill housing in walkable neighborhoods served by transit. An enhanced pedestrian network can add value to adjacent property and encourage sustainable forms of urban development.

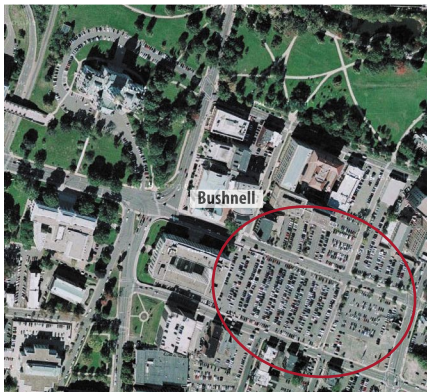


The Bushnell’s adjacency to Bushnell Park has advantages and disadvantages as day turns to night

CAPITOL DISTRICT VISION PLAN

The Two Bushnells

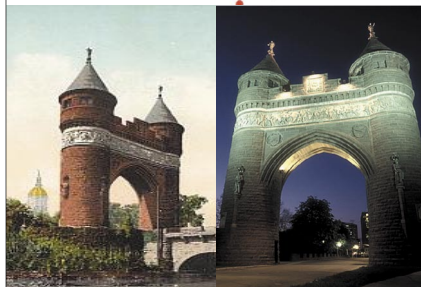
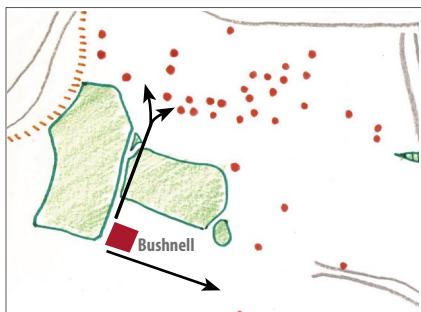
Of all the cultural assets within the downtown “quilt,” The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts is among the most culturally vibrant and economically dynamic - more than 350 events per year, average annual audience of more than 300,000 - but it is also perhaps the most disconnected because of its location at the far southwest corner of the quilt. This remoteness is exacerbated by its adjacency to the beautiful Bushnell Park and the Capitol grounds. Performing arts centers and parks are not always ideal neighbors, as the former is most active at night, and the latter are generally active during the day. For a pedestrian, what would be an attractive walk through the park at midday becomes a dark barrier at nightfall.



The Bushnell benefits from the State’s large parking lots, but suffers from the lack of an urban neighborhood

The Bushnell and the State

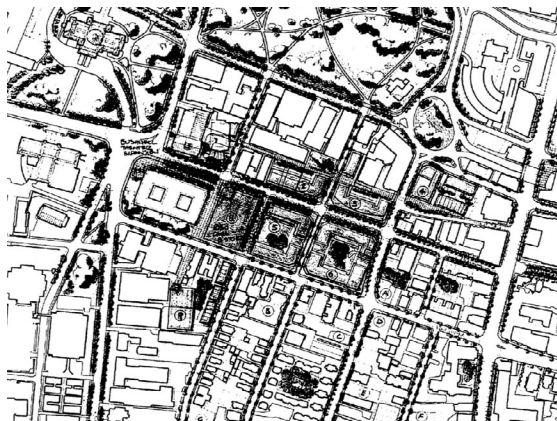
The Bushnell’s other neighbor is the State of Connecticut. This is another case of mixed compatibility. Government offices are closed at nights and on weekends, precisely when performing arts centers are most active. This can be a benefit with respect to sharing parking space, and The Bushnell and the State have long cooperated in this area. But the relationship is less positive when it comes to creating an area of urban vibrancy, as neither the government nor the theaters bring life to the streets at the same time, and the large areas of surface parking lots deaden the experience for pedestrians. The Bushnell needs to be woven into the pedestrian quilt, while spurring the vitality of the district which surrounds it.



The existing cluster of hotels and restaurants - important for a performing arts center - are across Bushnell Park; the nighttime link along Trinity Street could be strengthened

Pedestrian Linkages

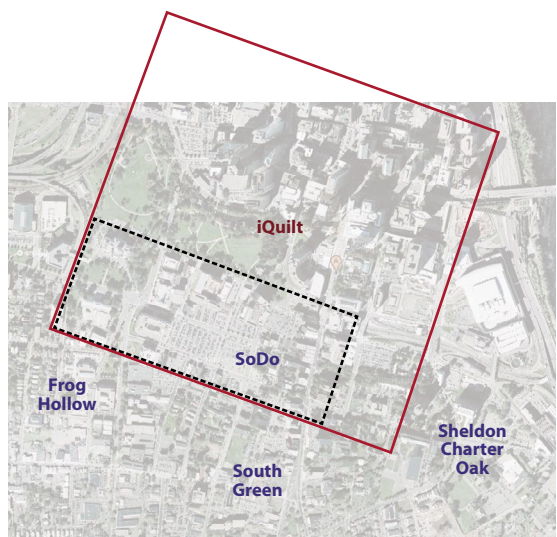
Through creative strategies in lighting, signage, kiosks, and programming, it is very feasible to improve the compatibility of the two Bushnells. For example, improvements along Trinity Street could provide a safe and attractive pedestrian link across the park from The Bushnell to the many existing hotels, apartments, restaurants, and nightspots around Union Station and the Civic Center, all of which are considered



Hartford's 1998 Economic and Urban Design Strategy (Greenberg et.al.) called for significant new and rehabilitated housing along Capitol Avenue and Buckingham Street.



The extraordinary interior architecture of the State Capitol and the exhibits at The Museum of Connecticut History at The Connecticut State Library should be recognized as important cultural assets and incorporated into the iQuit network.



The Capitol District study area (black rectangle) part of or adjacent to four neighborhoods: SoDo, Frog Hollow, South Green, and Sheldon Charter Oak. The vision plan should include elements which identify and connect with the "natural" cultural assets of the neighborhoods.

potential economic assets for a performing arts center. At the same time, new development along Capitol Avenue could provide new venues for cafes and restaurants, while linking to venues on Main Street.

A Mixed Use Vision for the Capitol District

There are examples, including parts of Washington D.C. and downtown Los Angeles, where vibrant mixed use areas have been created which include government offices and cultural institutions. Success is usually increased when housing is added to the mix. Indeed there have been longstanding recommendations to add a significant amount of housing along Capitol Avenue (up to 1,200 units have been proposed), which would anchor the emerging "SoDo" neighborhood and activate the link between the Bushnell, Main Street, and the Atheneum. Street-level retail that serves the neighborhood, perhaps with an arts orientation, would be an essential addition to the mix. The construction of housing and retail would need to be linked to the construction of one or more parking structures to accommodate residents, state workers and Bushnell patrons. In addition, because architecture has increasingly become a cultural attraction in its own right, the State Capitol building itself, along with the impressive Museum of Connecticut History at The Connecticut State Library, could be more actively promoted as part of the pedestrian cultural experience in this district. It is in order to explore these and other possibilities that the Bushnell and the Arts Council believe that the time is propitious to develop a vision plan for the 64-acre Capitol District, running from the Capitol to Main Street and from Elm to Charter Oak, nested within the larger downtown pedestrian network.

Economic Flexibility

The vision plan must reflect not only the highest and best use as imagined collectively by district stakeholders, but also identify gaps between the vision and existing market conditions (for example, the current collapse of the housing market); strategies for interim use; and identification of alternatives and backup strategies to maximize the chances of long-term success.

"Natural" Cultural Districts

A growing body of research* indicates that for long-term prosperity and social well-being, cities should not only invest in their premier cultural institutions, but should strengthen the "natural" cultural assets of their neighborhoods. These include commercial arts firms, informal cultural associations, and resident artists. Neighborhoods with high indexes for such assets, usually accompanied by high social diversity, have been called "natural" cultural districts". The Capitol District Vision Plan provides an opportunity to create positive connections between institutions like the Bushnell and nearby neighborhoods, through outreach, programming, job training, commercial arts opportunities, and even housing and cultural residencies. Such an effort would go a long way towards validating and refining the Hartford region's strategy of focusing on culture as a primary tool for economic and social change.

* See "Culture and Urban Revitalization: A Harvest Document", Stern and Siefert, 2007, University of Pennsylvania

SUMMARY OF INTERESTS AND ISSUES

State of Connecticut

- Long-Term Commitment to the Hartford's Revitalization
- Investments in the Connecticut Convention and Science Centers
- Interest in Maximizing State Assets around the Capitol
- Promoting Connecticut River Tourism

Greater Hartford Region (Metro Hartford Alliance)

- Improving Economic Activity
- Attracting and Retaining Talented Labor Pool
- Creating Research and Development Clusters
- Expanding Vocational Training
- Competing in the Global Economy

City of Hartford

- Urban Revitalization both Downtown and in Neighborhoods
- Improving Education and Job Opportunities for Youth
- Capitalizing on Strong Cultural Institutions and Programs
- Increasing Quantity and Quality of Retail Offerings
- Expanding Both Market-Rate and Affordable Housing Stock

Greater Hartford Arts Council

- Enhancing the Strengths of Cultural Institutions and Programs
- Encouraging Joint Programming and Marketing
- Linking Cultural Efforts to Economic Activity and Job Training



Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts

- Building Audiences over the Long Term
- Physical and Institutional Links to Hartford's other Cultural Assets
- Long-Term Development Plan with the State for the Surrounding Properties
- Long-Term Solutions for Parking, Transit and Access
- Improving Hotel, Restaurant and Retail Options for both Patrons and Visitors



South Downtown (SoDo) and Other Neighborhoods

- Neighborhood Identity and Stability
- Neighborhood Cultural Assets
- Economic Revitalization
- Impacts of Redevelopment

Private Sector

- Opportunities for renovation of existing structure
- Opportunities for investment in new housing, hotel, and retail

SCOPE OF WORK

The planning process will encourage public dialogue through a number of community forums and stakeholders meetings, include a careful assessment and integration of previous research and reports to add value and avoid duplication, and through the creation of two documents with a clear set of recommendations and next steps. This work would be led by Suisman Urban Design, an internationally acclaimed 2007 AIA Honor Award winner for Urban Design, in collaboration with Hartford-based Smith Edwards Architects.

iQuilt Assessment and Community Input

Review of precedent efforts and input from the cultural innovation community - arts, science, industry, government - on ideas, themes, strategies, and projects for a culture-based pedestrian network downtown.

Capitol District Assessment and Stakeholder Input

Review of precedent efforts and a current needs assessment study of current and prospective stakeholders within the Capitol District, including the State, Bushnell Park Foundation, performing arts community, churches, community groups, property owners, merchants, and others.

iQuilt Strategic Plan

Creation of a culture-based vision, along the lines of the iQuilt, for linking and promoting Hartford's cultural sites and institutions, including recommendations for locations, wayfinding, displays, streetscape and public space enhancements, interactivity, cross-promotion and cross-programming.

Capitol District Vision Plan

Design of a vision plan that incorporates the iQuilt strategy, focuses it on the cultural assets in and around the Capitol Avenue corridor, and shows programming and development options for housing, commercial, streetscape, and transit

Existing Plans and Studies to be Consulted

Hartford 2000
 MetroHartford Millenium Project
 Downtown Urban Design & Economic Action Strategy (Greenberg 1998)
 Hartford Image Project (2000)
 Metro Hartford Regional Assessment Study (Angelou 2005)
 Metro Hartford Alliance Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (Angelou 2006)
 Hartford 2010 (Greenberg 2007)
 Redeveloping an Urban Gateway (ULI 2007)

AMOUNT OF REQUEST

The Bushnell is seeking \$152,042 to support Phase I planning.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Bushnell and the Greater Hartford Arts Council are the lead partners on this project. As such the two organizations will assume responsibility for managing the planning process and raising all funds necessary to conduct this first phase of the development. To ensure success The Bushnell and the Arts Council recognize the need for broad collaboration.

Partners that have agreed to participate include:

- State of Connecticut, Central Regional Tourism District, Paul Mayer, Executive Director
- State of Connecticut, Department of Public Works, Raeanne Curtis, Commissioner
- City of Hartford, The Honorable Mayor Eddie Perez
- City of Hartford, Mark McGovern, Acting Director, Division of Planning
- MetroHartford Alliance, R. Nelson Griebel, President & CEO
- Greater Hartford Arts Council, Ken Kahn, Director
- Hartford Stage, Michael Stotts, Executive Director
- Connecticut Landmarks, Shery Hack, Executive Director
- The Wadsworth Atheneum, Beth Pite, Director of External Affairs
- Charter Oak Cultural Center, Donna Berman, Executive Director
- The Hartford Public Library, Louise Blalock, Chief Librarian
- Connecticut Science Center, Matt Fleury, Executive Vice President
- Riverfront Recapture, Joseph Marfuggi, President and CEO
- Connecticut Historical Society and The Old State House, Kate Steinway, Executive Director
- Greater Hartford Convention & Visitor's Bureau, H. Scott Phelps, President
- Hartford Preservation Alliance, Laura Knott-Twine, Executive Director
- Bushnell Park Foundation, Anne Bartosewicz-Mele, Board member
- South Downtown Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (SODO), Thomas Nenortas, Board member



Quilt incorporating the Soldiers and Sailors Monument
From the Freedom Trail Quilt Project
of the Museum of Connecticut History

Partners pending confirmation include:

- Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, Karen Senich, Executive Director
- Spanish American Merchant Association (SAMA)
- The Metropolitan District (MDC)
- Hartford Hospital
- Connecticut Transit District
- Bradley Airport
- Business Improvement District, Michael Zaleski, Executive Director
- Capitol Regional Council of Government (CROG)
- United Technologies Corporation
- The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.
- Lincoln Financial Group
- Travelers
- Albermarle Equities, Philip Schonberger, Managing Member
- Bank of America
- Hartford Steam Boiler
- Northland Investment Corporation
- XL Center
- Several area churches including St. Peter's, South End Church, etc.

PRIMARY CONTACT

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