

# DRAFT

December 4, 2008

Honorable Eddie A. Perez  
Mayor, City of Hartford

Mr. R. Nelson Griebel  
President & CEO  
MetroHartford Alliance

Dear Mayor Perez and Mr. Griebel,

The Downtown Convergence Steering Committee for the Hartford 2010 initiative is pleased to report our recommendations for the Implementation Phase of the project.

## **Background**

You assigned us stewardship of the following Mission:

**To further refine and prioritize the Hartford 2010 recommendations with respect to the Downtown Convergence Trident and provide input, feedback and recommendations to the Implementation Committee.**

Our recommendations are based on a series of meetings of our members, including outreach to, and input from, various specific stakeholders represented both within and beyond our Committee membership. Among myriad formal and informal information and viewpoint sources, we specifically heard from the City of Hartford Department of Development Services Planning Division, the South Downtown Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Strategic Planning Committee, the Hartford Parking Authority, the Hartford Business Improvement District (HBID), Connecticut Transit/DOT, the Capital Region Council of Governments/Northwest Corridor Study on Downtown Circulation, and streetcar advocate and urban planner Jonas Maciunas. We also considered presentations and information regarding the concerns, aspirations and activities of organizations represented on the Committee, including cultural, residential, retail, real estate, civic, and convention/tourism interests. These included the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, the Connecticut Science Center, Phoenix, Travelers, the Main and Temple Street developers, the MetroHartford Alliance, the HBID, the Connecticut Convention Center, and Business for Downtown Hartford. Importantly, the Steering Committee also reflects a cross-section of downtown residents, employers, employees and customers. Throughout our process, the Committee benefited from the capable support of the City of Hartford Department of Development Services team and the MetroHartford Alliance staff.

The Downtown Convergence section of the Hartford 2010 Plan published in the summer of 2007 characterizes its vision for our target area as follows:

**“A historic Main Street that looks and functions as the central “address” for Downtown, spurring further high-value development throughout the center city. This involves amplifying the physical hospitality of Main Street and environs to invite more shopping, dining, tourism and center city living. Potentially, over 2,100 jobs will be created and the trident will attract 550 new residents.”**

The report identifies four “Target Sites”:

- a) Signature mixed-use development at Asylum/Main
- b) Signature cultural building on I-84

- c) Opportunities for re-use of existing Civic Center site
- d) Continuous retail on the key cross streets

The report recommends the examination of the re-design of Main Street, including:

- Signal timing
- Rationalize lane widths. Add bump outs at crossings
- Opportunities for short-term, on-street parking
- Alternatives to reduce the use of Main St for bus staging
- Provide higher-amenity bus stops
- Further upgrade way-finding signage

The report proposes Streetscape Improvements, including:

- Lighting, landscaping, and other design elements for the length of Main, Asylum and cross streets
- Programming and public art

The report concludes with the following Action Agenda for Economic Development

- Potential development of 1.8 million square feet of residential, office, retail and hotel space
- Modern home furnishing store
- Apparel store
- Book, music, entertainment superstore retailer
- Attract large-scale developer, with experience in high profile, mixed-use, entertainment and hospitality-centered developments in high density environments

### **Downtown Convergence Steering Committee Recommendations**

#### **Focus**

As outlined above, the Hartford 2010 Final Report envisioned downtown as the logical nexus of the citywide “trident” approach. Further, the report specifically emphasizes physical and operational improvements to Main Street, while variously referencing the need to extend certain strategies throughout the corridor. Certain exceptions include reference to the Civic Center site. Hence, our report will focus on Main Street, but will also make recommendations for a broader range of improvements that are needed for downtown to achieve its full potential.

Particularly in view of the need to prioritize actionable steps in today’s resource-constrained environment, we recommend a focus on selected, highly strategic efforts that leverage existing or imminently available assets and resources. While we concur with the identification of strategically important development sites, we do not engage the question of how to develop them. Rather, we focus on specific, practical actions that can foster the success of the current investors/investments and assets in a way that will build confidence that will lead to future economic vitality and development as public and private capital becomes more readily available.

#### **Premise**

Downtown needs to compete and contribute effectively in the regional marketplace. Businesses and people vote with their feet. Hartford needs to manage the downtown so that it is attractive for the full range of uses required to create a vibrant, 24/7 environment.

*We envision a street-level environment with the energy and comfort level necessary to attract residents, businesses, employees and retailers to come, return/stay. This environment capitalizes on existing human, economic and cultural assets with enhanced “connective tissue”, attracting more people and satisfying their expectations and demands. We define “connective tissue” as the*

*combination of infrastructure, services, amenities, business/cultural and consumer inhabitants/users and interactions that together comprise an environment.*

### **Priorities Discussion**

We endorse the Target Key Sites identified in the Hartford 2010 Report and the emphasis on physical and operational improvements to Main Street. However, in response both to the City's request that our report include fiscally feasible near-term actions, and out of appreciation for the practical realities of the current economic cycle, we recommend the re-ordering and amendment of the priorities as follows:

#### ***Priority 1***

Completely re-conceive and rebuild the public infrastructure of Main Street in a manner similar to Trumbull Street but with its own distinct design (e.g. sidewalks, lighting, street furniture, landscaping, traffic calming, on-street parking, etc.)

- a) Position Main Street to compete successfully for significant State and/or Federal transportation investment to fund the Hartford 2010 Final Report recommendations for the Re-design of Main Street and proposed Streetscape Improvements. Maintain planned 2009/2010 City funding for planning of Main Street re-design, and dedicate sufficient planning staff to advance the planning project. An experienced design firm should be engaged via RFP, to produce conceptual and bid-ready documents with significant input from the Downtown Convergence Steering Committee. In particular, coordinate re-design with 1(b) and 1(c) below, and the "connective tissue" concept set forth in Priority 2(b) below.

**Recommended Leaders: City of Hartford, Department of Development Services, Downtown Convergence Steering Committee**

#### **Timetable:**

- Assign a existing staff planner by the end of 2008
  - Complete Main Street streetscape design by the end of 2009
  - Complete construction by the end of 2010
- b) Relocate bus transfer points from Main Street. Assure that the ongoing Downtown Transit Center and Northwest Corridor/Downtown Circulation (CRCOG) and Hartford/New Britain Busway projects meaningfully redistribute through-transit away from Main Street to alleviate bus congestion and waiting time; rethink and dramatically improve the esthetics of bus stops. Integrate these projects with the Main Street re-design. Consider alternative downtown circulation solutions, from the Star Shuttle route to Streetcars.

**Recommended Leaders: CRCOG, CT Transit, City of Hartford, Planning Department**

#### **Timetable:**

- Complete Main Street transit plan by the end of 2009
  - Complete construction by the end of 2010
- c) Rationalize parking (e.g. pricing, method of payment, on-street vs. off-street parking structure to serve commuters but also be more conducive to street-front retail and cultural uses.

**Recommended Leaders: Hartford Parking Authority, Business for Downtown Hartford**

#### **Timetable:**

- Complete downtown parking plan by mid 2009.
- Implement downtown parking plan by the end of 2009

**Priority 2**

Expand the public/private partnership between the City and its civic, real estate, business and cultural leaders to commence immediate operational and “presentation” improvements to the Main Street and Downtown Corridor experience.

- Maximize the impact of the HBID as a leading strategy to continue improvements in the cleanliness and security of Downtown (appendix), and consider potential geographical extension of services.

**Recommended Leaders: Hartford Business Improvement District/MetroHartford Alliance**

**Timetable:**

- In advance of HBID reauthorization, communicate HBID performance and strategic plan in Spring, 2009
  - Conduct referendum on HBID re-authorization in Fall, 2009.
- Engage property owners and users in a commitment to improve the public face of their addresses and expand this positive footprint to close the unappealing “gaps” between destinations, as envisioned by The Bushnell/Arts Council’s iQuilt concept “...a loose grid of park-to-river pedestrian routes which weave together downtown Hartford’s cultural institutions...” (appendix).

**Recommended Leaders: Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts/Greater Hartford Arts Council**

**Timetable:**

- Identify funding for and launch iQuilt initiative in Spring, 2009
- Engage the City of Hartford in immediate discussion of resource dedication and strategy planning to head-off disruptive street activity, including high speed vehicles and motorcycles violating traffic and noise ordinances with enforcement beginning Spring 2009. Re-evaluate night club and event code and policy to reflect Downtown’s transition to a combination commercial and residential district requiring basic peace and quiet conditions for comfort and rest at night.

**Recommended Leaders: City of Hartford, Hartford Police Department, HBID**

**Timetable:**

- Develop plan for eliminating disruptive street activity by Spring, 2009
- Review and revise club and event code by Spring 2009
- Implement plan beginning in June, 2009.

**Priority 3**

As a precursor to attracting future development and business investment, evaluate and address the economic condition of existing developments, retail, residential and commercial owners and users to improve their performance.

- Evaluate conditions, development agreements, code, policy and review processes and consider approaches to promote occupancy of existing empty retail frontage, particularly in high profile

locations.

**Recommended Leaders: City of Hartford Department of Development Services, Capital**

**City Economic Development Authority, Business for Downtown Hartford**

**Timetable:**

- Complete analysis and develop an action plan by Spring, 2009
  - Commence implementation of the plan by mid-2009
- b) Create a specific strategy to define the Downtown as a unique and attractive place for retailers and shoppers/diners; develop a plan to sustain and attract boutique and other retail activity.

**Recommended Leaders: City of Hartford Department of Development Services, Business for Downtown Hartford, HBID**

**Timetable:**

- Complete analysis and develop an action plan by Spring, 2009
  - Commence implementation of the plan by mid-2009
- c) Evaluate activities and results of existing Downtown marketing and promotions structure, strategy and investments and increase focus and impact of the most strategically advantageous approaches and performers.

**Recommended Leaders: HBID, Hartford Rising Star Committee**

**Timetable:**

- Develop a Downtown marketing and promotions plan by Fall, 2009
- Commence implementation of the plan by year end 2009

**Next Steps**

The following steps are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the Downtown Convergence Steering Committee's recommendations:

1. The Hartford 2010 Implementation Committee adopts the Downtown Convergence Steering Committee Report.
2. The City of Hartford and MetroHartford Alliance endorse the recommendations of this report.
3. The Downtown Convergence Steering Committee, with the support and approval of the Mayor and Alliance, engages Recommended Leaders as outlined by Priority above, and they accept the role.
4. The City designates a single official who is responsible for coordinating the recommended actions that are the responsibilities of public agencies and interfacing with the Steering Committee.
5. The Downtown Convergence Steering Committee contributes ongoing advocacy and stakeholder input, and monitors implementation of the recommendations for strategic consistency throughout the process, advising on planning and course corrections, and supporting campaign for resources/funding.

**Conclusion**

Amid substantial economic challenges confronting every community, it should be noted that the future of Downtown Hartford should still be viewed with enthusiasm and hopefulness. While these conditions, and

the nascent status of the ongoing Hartford renaissance may necessitate that certain large scale investments await their moment, Hartford nevertheless enjoys ongoing investments and ideas that are the envy of many. Property owners overwhelmingly voted to invest in the HBID, major property owners such as Phoenix, Travelers, Northland Investment Corporation and 20 Church Street have re-invested in substantial building improvements; residential occupants have gradually but steadily increased with the availability of new dwellings; high-impact capital projects such as 410 Asylum Street, Front Street and the Connecticut Science Center are underway, while cultural occupants such as the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford Stage, TheaterWorks and the Bushnell develop ways to expand their contributions to their immediate and extended neighborhoods. Despite the challenges, new flavors offered by small entrepreneurs continue to improve the Downtown restaurant menu, with still others on the horizon.

Considered objectively, Downtown Hartford is scarcely recognizable from its condition ten years ago. Certainly, too many familiar challenges persist. But the results of extraordinary investment and vision by both the public and private sectors, at levels large and small, are evident. The economic fate of these investments remains promising, yet unproven. It is our ability to facilitate their success, through strategies such as those recommended here, which the Downtown Convergence Steering Committee believes will be the most important factor in the viability of future investments.

Successful implementation of these recommendations requires leadership, commitment among those who accept leading roles, and infrastructure with resources or the ability to acquire resources for the effort.

- High level leadership will continue to be required by the Mayor and the Alliance to steward the planning and implementation process, including resource advocacy.
- Significantly, Downtown Convergence benefits from a capable infrastructure of organizations, investors and individuals, some of whom are identified herein, to take ownership of or support activation of these recommendations. (Leadership roles are recommended above, by Priority).

At times of retrenchment, winning competitors re-evaluate their focus, but continue to invest to be first in line to capitalize on the imminent return of more favorable economic conditions. They prepare themselves to make the most compelling case for future investment from the public and private sectors, and they work harder to maximize their existing assets, from corporate citizens and residents to dining and retail establishments and cultural destinations and to identify and exploit opportunities for promising participants.

Accordingly, we recommend this aggressive course of action so as to capitalize on the progress already achieved and position Downtown Hartford for further success as we move toward the inevitable upturn in the economic cycle over the next several years.

Submitted Respectfully,

The Members of the Downtown Convergence Trident Steering Committee:

Matt Fleury, Connecticut Science Center/Downtown Resident (Chair)  
David Fay, The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts  
Marc Levine, Marc S. Levine Real Estate Interests  
Thomas Luszczak, Travelers Companies, HBID  
Thea Montanez, Connecticut Convention Center/South Downtown Resident  
Gerald Hayes, The Phoenix Companies, HBID  
Susan Lubowsky-Talbott, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art/Downtown Resident

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