

I. Introduction

The South Green Neighborhood is adjacent to Hartford's Central Business District (see Figure 1a). To the west is the Park Street/ Frog Hollow neighborhood, home to Hartford Hospital. To the east are Dutch Point and Colt Park. The South Green Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) board extended the boundaries of the South Green NRZ west to Washington Street in September 2001 as shown on Figure 1b. This extension includes both sides of Park Street between South Main Street and Washington Street.

In 1998, Urban Partners prepared the Strategic Plan of the South Green Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ). This was revised by the NRZ in 1999. The plan contained a profile of the neighborhood, a detailed a vision for South Green, an action and implementation plan, and performance measurements for monitoring the plan's progress.

The "Market Resource" and "Action and Implementation Plan" sections of the NRZ's report noted that enhanced retail opportunities exist within the established businesses of the neighborhood. The report specifically suggested the expansion of the C-Town supermarket and the possibility of siting apparel or other small stores on Park Street and around Barnard/ South Green Park.

Buckhurst Fish & Jacquemart, Inc. (BFJ) has been asked to provide a strategic plan for two key areas of the neighborhood: the corner of Park Street and Main Street, and the C-Town supermarket property and its immediate surroundings (see Figure 2). The remainder of this plan provides an overview of the existing conditions of both of the focus areas, and it details plans to improve their viability.

Figure 1a. Former South Green NRZ Boundaries



Figure 1b. South Green NRZ Extended Boundaries



Figure 2: Study Areas

II. Market Conditions in Hartford

Hartford's population peaked in 1950 at 177,397 and then declined steadily to 136,392 in 1980. Following a small rise to 139,739 in 1990, the population resumed its decline, reaching to 133,036 by the end of the century. The speed of decline appeared to accelerate in the past decade. This is largely the result of the loss of jobs during the recession of the early 1990s. This has been compounded by the push-pull effect of concerns about urban safety and education on the one hand, and the appeal of the suburbs on the other. The push effect was further intensified by the availability and transferability of housing subsidies from Hartford to suburban towns.

The impact of this decline was felt most directly in the city's housing market, where more than 650 multi-unit buildings were abandoned in the 1990s. These vacancies caused tremendous stress upon the economic and social fabric of the hardest-hit neighborhoods. In addition to the blighting influence of boarded buildings, retail and business services felt the impact, resulting in the loss of more marginal businesses. Businesses had to move with their clientele, face loss of business, or close. Together, these conditions created a period of considerable instability and declining investment.

The South Green neighborhood has historically been predominantly residential, with nodes of retail activity along Main Street, on Maple Avenue, along Franklin Avenue, and in one mid-block location on Wethersfield Avenue. Retail space in the neighborhood was almost completely occupied during the 1980s. The decline since has been stark. Today, the most desirable locations along Main Street, Wyllys Street, Congress Street, and Maple Avenue are almost completely vacant. Some space has been converted to office uses, frequently for use by non-profit agencies. Other prime locations were acquired by individual entrepreneurs, many of whom benefit from off-street parking and desirable traffic volumes. The overall loss of population not only reduces demand for housing, it also reduces demand for the amount of retail space needed to serve the remaining population. This is more problematic if the incomes of the remaining population are not as high as those of the population that left. Businesses that remain may move to more active retail areas that serve a larger market base, such as

downtown or Park Street.

Moreover, retailing in America also changed dramatically in the last 20 years, as malls, big box retail, and large specialized retailers (i.e. category killers) encroach on smaller retailers. Consumers seek out these new locations, while urban retailers must counter perceptions of crime as well as changing demographics, tastes, and demand for goods.

Main Street, looking north



III. Park and Main Street Area

Existing Land Use

The area is generally mixed with institutional, commercial and multi-family residential uses (see Figures 3 and 4). The Hartford Hospital is the most dominant single use. Other institutional uses in the immediate vicinity include St. Peter's Church, a fire station, the Hispanic Health Council



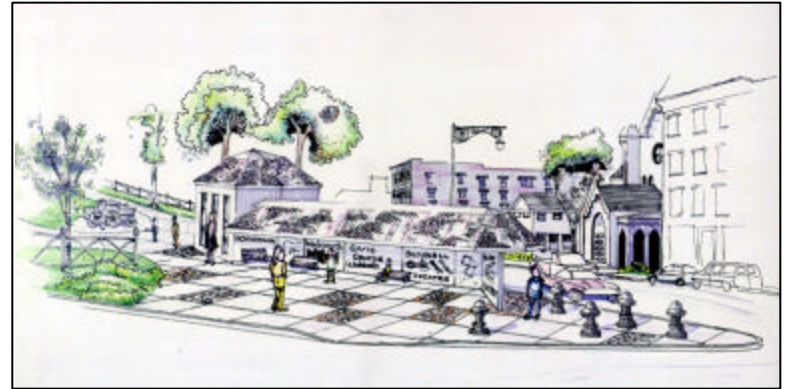
Park and Main, southwest corner

Building, the Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation and the South Park Inn. Other uses front along the main roads and include office (a credit union and law offices) and restaurants. It appears that employees from the nearby hospital support much of the commercial establishments. There is no single-family housing in the area, but there are numerous apartments on the upper floors of many commercial buildings in the study area.

Some vacant buildings can be found in and near the intersection of Park and Main Streets. These buildings have been boarded, making them targets for graffiti and vandalism. The northwest corner of Park and Main

is part of the Main John Hudson Redevelopment Area managed by the Hartford Economic Development Commission.

South Green Park, also known as Barnard Park, is the gateway to the neighborhood. It is landscaped with trees and park furniture and recently added walkways. Parts of the nineteenth-century fence that originally surrounded the park have fallen or have been damaged or removed.



Proposed redesign of South Green Park, northern tip

The next phase of improvements to the green include a landscaping for the northern end of the Park. A more formal bus stop area will provide waiting passengers with a more secure area. Additionally, a public display kiosk will architecturally link the Park to the neighborhood. The continued maintenance of the park is important to preserve the image of the area.

Figure 3: aerial – park & main

Figure 4: land use – park & main

Figure 5: zoning – park & main

The area is predominantly zoned Business District (B2) surrounded by Residence Office District (RO1) (see Figure 5). The B2 zone is primarily a commercial business zone allowing retail, office and residential floor area up to seven times the lot area (7.0 Floor Area Ratio) and no limit on building height. The B2 zone was historically built at four stories, well below the allowed height and FAR. The RO1 zone is a mixed-use district allowing housing and office uses. The maximum FAR permitted in 3.0 with a minimum lot size of 7,500 square feet.



Building Conditions

The buildings in the area are in fair condition (see Figure 6). The most distressed buildings are on the southwest corner of Park and Main. These four-story brick structures have some commercial occupancy in the first floor, but the rest of the buildings are vacant. The brickwork in the rear appears to be succumbing to weather and fire damage. The roofs in some places are entirely devastated. The foundations are stone and appear to be in good condition. Rehabilitating the buildings will



require significant investment. Perhaps the building facades could be salvaged.

Other buildings in the area are in fair or good condition. They are occupied by residential, institutional or commercial uses. A number of the buildings, including the South Park Inn, St Peter's Church, the residential complex at 130-140 Wethersfield Avenue and the "Hartford Flatiron Building" at Maple Avenue and Wyllys Street, exhibit architectural qualities that are both historic and significant.



Distinctive architecture in the Main/Park area

Market Conditions

The Main and Park area is being considered for separate developments, by different entities, on the north and south sides of Park Street.

The Broad Park Development Corporation has proposed a development for the southwest corner of Main and Park. Broad Park's development proposal consisted of artists' housing, a YMCA branch, additional retail, and residential development with a parking garage. The project incorporates existing building elements and new construction. As many as sixty live/work art spaces were considered as part of the proposal.

Artists' housing is key because it enables the developer to apply for State (CEDA) (CHFA) housing development tax credits to help finance the project. Broad Park has completed seven housing developments to date.

Additional financial support could come from the Hartford Neighborhood Support Collaborative, which includes LISC, United Way, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and others. Some funds may spin off from Adriaen's Landing, as part of the goal to include neighborhood projects. The federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) has \$5 million targeted to Park Street, between Park Terrace and Main Street, for street renovation and sidewalk replacement that could fit nicely into this project.



Hartford Hospital owns the parking lot adjacent to their nursing building as well as the warehouse that fronts onto Park Street. The hospital has expressed interest in disposing of the properties, provided that any new development include 150 parking spaces that would be leased to the hospital.

The YMCA is looking to decentralize to the neighborhoods with space to operate an athletic facility on a 10-year lease and could be a focal point in the development of first floor space. They have been looking at the site currently occupied by the Hartford Housing Authority at the corner of Park and Hudson. Although retail might be the primary focus on the first floor, market conditions may prohibit consideration until the area is upgraded.

Broad Park's plan calls largely for retention and renovation of the existing buildings, save for the scattered-site housing owned by Hartford Hospital. They claim to have technically acquired the Main Street frontage by securing the tax liens on that property. Funding for façade improvements would be helpful, adding to project financing.

This project seems to be on a good track given its complexity and current market conditions. The program for redevelopment appears to meet neighborhood expectations for historic preservation and activation of these old buildings. Broad Park will require significant support to obtain financing and move the project forward.

The development of the north side of Park Street appears to be waiting for market momentum and Broad Park to move forward. Preliminary plans indicate a multi-story building for office and retail use at the corner and a parking garage on John Street. Plans make no attempt to reflect the architectural context of the area. They also play down the role of this corner as a transit waiting area and gateway to the Park Street commercial corridor.

Property Ownership

Figure 7 depicts the property ownership for the block bounded by Main, Park, Hudson and Jefferson streets in the Park and Main area. This is a

critical block in the neighborhood since it acts as the gateway into Park Street and has significant frontage along Main Street. Within the block are a number of vacant lots, underutilized buildings, and expansive parking surfaces. Although the majority of these properties are not currently within the South Green NRZ, they can affect surrounding uses.

Hartford Hospital is a primary landholder in the area. Its former nursing facility on Hudson encompasses most of the block and the associated parking occupies the interior of the block. The City of Hartford also owns key parcels, including 11 and 95 Park Street and the two key parcels on the opposite side of the street.

Development of the vacant buildings on the southwest corner of Park and Main may be difficult to accomplish with multiple owners.



Alternative concept for Park and Main.



Proposed building for northwest corner of Park and Main.

Figure 6: building conditions – park & main

Figure 7: property ownership – park & main

Development Criteria

The criteria are offered as guidelines for any development or redevelopment at Main and Park. They are intended as measures to improve the area, rather than detailed design prescriptions. The criteria should be used as guidelines for site planning of individual properties or groups of lots.

The historical nature of the Park and Main area provides the basis for future redevelopment. Development criteria generally should retain the traditional town green focal point with building faces providing eyes on the Park. The mixed office, retail and housing uses will help to maintain activity during all hours and retain an urban vibrancy. Figure 8 illustrates the criteria for development in the area. The numbers listed below correspond to the numbers on the map.

1. Southwest Corner of Park and Main:

- Maintain existing low building scale, with maximum building height of four stories.
- Rezone all of the commercial B2 and B3 zones surrounding the Park to B4. This will limit building height to four stories and an FAR of 2.0.
- Maintain the façades of the existing buildings.
- Retail limited to the first floor because of sensitive market constraints.
- The Broad Park Corporation proposal meets these objectives, but if their proposal does not go forward, any additional parking lots should be behind the building façades.

2. South Green Park:

The South Green NRZ and *the* City have initiated a redevelopment of the Park (see Figure 9). The first phase along the southern end of the Park has been completed. Phases 2 and 3 are expected in 2001.

- This is the defining feature of this neighborhood and as such proper landscaping, including trees, fencing, pathways, benches and lighting, should be maintained.
- The City's planned phase-in of South Green Park improvements will formalize pedestrian areas. Crosswalks, either as highly visible paint or textured pavement, should be included as part of the improvements to better link the bus waiting area with pedestrian connections.
- Any future development on properties surrounding the Park should retain building façades that retain a face to the green.

3. Northwest Corner of Park and Main:

Park & Main, LLC has proposed the construction of a new retail and office complex at this location (see Figure 10). This development is appropriate, but should include:

A design linking to the heritage of the neighborhood, resembling the 3 to 4 story brick facades that have traditionally lined streets in the area. (see Figure 10)

Figure 8: development criteria – park & main

Figure 9: southe green park development plan

Figure 10: northwest corner, park & main development plan

IV. C-Town Area

Existing Land Use

This area of the South Green NRZ has primarily residential and social service uses with the C-Town Supermarket offering one of the few neighborhood shopping opportunities (see Figures 11 and 12). Alden Street is lined with multi-family buildings, most of which are two and three stories in height. Annawan Street contains single family dwellings, but a number have been renovated to multifamily units. The west side of Wethersfield Avenue has a number of larger four-story apartment buildings.



C-Town market

The east side of Wethersfield has a mix of residential and office properties. This side of the street once had stately houses that backed onto Colt Park. Today, few actual residences remain, giving way to offices and ethnic cultural clubs. Three former multi-family buildings have been demolished and the lots remain vacant.

The zoning in the area is mixed between high (R-1) and medium (R-3) density residential and neighborhood commercial (B-4) (see Figure 13).

High-density residential lines Wethersfield and allows for density up to 150 people per acre within four-story structures.

The R-3 zone allows 75 people per acre within 3.5-story buildings. The minimum lot size within the zone is 6,000 square feet, making many of the existing properties eligible for multi-family if conversion has not already taken place.

The B-4 zone is intended to provide the neighborhood with shopping within close proximity to housing. It also allows residential uses, which may be contained with mixed-use buildings. The maximum floor area ratio is 2.0 with a height limit of four stories.



Alden Street

Figure 11: aerial – c-town

Figure 12: land use – c-town

Figure 13: zoning – c-town

Building Conditions

The housing stock in this area is in relatively good condition (see Figure 14). The two-story, single-family houses, mainly of wood and shingle, date back to the 1920s. Several of the single-family homes along Wethersfield have been converted to office spaces have maintained the area's charm and beauty. The three-story, multi-family houses that line Alden Street are mostly of brick and are also in good condition. Some of them have been recently renovated.



C-Town side parking

Market Conditions

The owner of the market is preparing to add 6,500 square feet to the building and expand his existing operations. He has indicated that parking will be provided on the south side of the site to meet requirements of the zoning code. Truck access to the rear loading areas has not been fully resolved and may require additional land. A vacant parcel of land to the rear has been the subject of neighborhood discussion to determine its best use. Residential, commercial, and open space uses have been promoted.

Given the residential character of this parcel's surroundings, only residential and open space are compatible. However, a portion of the parcel at the eastern end could be designated, sold, or used by the C-Town market for improved truck access and loading if necessary. Adequate screening could buffer this section from the predominant residential or open space use of the remainder, allowing the neighborhood to accomplish two objectives.

In return for their assistance in securing this additional land for the market, the neighborhood should receive from C-Town a commitment for the best possible treatment of the streetscape elements, including: building facade, signage, landscaping, lighting, and fencing.



Property Ownership

C-Town market and parking lot

Figure 15 depicts ownership of properties on Wethersfield Avenue in the C-Town area. Ownership appears largely stable from principally corporate landholders. The C-Town supermarket, owned by 165 Wethersfield Ave. Ltd., has an associated lot for parking purposes. The large vacant parcel behind C-Town, owned by La Iglesia de Dios Inc., may provide a number of development opportunities.

The parcels on the east side of Wethersfield Avenue, while not in the South Green neighborhood, are largely in corporate ownership. The City, however, owns three parcels where homes once stood.

Figure 14: building conditions – c-town

Figure 15: property ownership – c-town

Development Criteria

The criteria are offered as guidelines for any development or redevelopment near C-Town. They are intended as measures to improve the areas, rather than detailed design prescriptions that might or might not fit within the City's or property owner's desires. The criteria should be used as guidelines for site planning of individual properties or groups of lots.

The C-Town area is largely residential with the supermarket providing a neighborhood shopping destination. The design philosophy for the area is to strengthen the appearance and function of C-Town property while minimally improving the vacant lots that are in close proximity. Figure 16 depicts the criteria that should guide future development. Listed below are the details of the criteria.

1. C-Town:

Expansion plans for the supermarket have been discussed for some time. The most recent plans are depicted in Figure 17. An alternative plan is also presented in Figure 18. The owner projects a 4,500-square-foot expansion to the existing building and reconfigured parking areas. This plan is appropriate for the property and the neighborhood.

Additional land to the rear of the property should be acquired, however, to accommodate a larger area for delivery trucks to freely access the rear of the building.

Landscaping should buffer the neighboring apartment building from the parking area.

No pedestrian access to the vacant parcel to the west.

2. Alden Street Lot

As discussed above, the eastern part of this lot could be given to the C-Town market, as shown in Figure 16. The rest of the lot is most likely to be used for open space. There are several other development alternatives, depicted in Figure 19. In all three, a driveway serving the two existing garages to adjacent properties could be extended to link up to the parking lot on Dean Street. In doing so, the vacant land becomes accessible and potentially developable. This driveway extension would not be an assumed municipal road.

In Alternative A, additional parking (shown in gray) is created, as well as a vest-pocket park.

In Alternative B, the parking area for the apartment complex on Dean Street could be expanded, a small park could be provided and one single family building lot could be accommodated.

In Alternative C, two houses could be created.

3. Vacant lots on Wethersfield

Figure 15 shows the three vacant lots owned by the City (162, 166 and 172 Wethersfield Avenue). These lots could be developed individually or perhaps merged into two more substantial and desirable lots. This report discourages retail use because the east side of the Avenue has a residential context. There are basically two alternatives:

Build new residential structures that could be used as either homes or offices. This will maintain a character consistent with the adjacent housing/office buildings along that edge of Colt Park.

A second alternative is to landscape the front of the parcel and land-bank it for future use. This option could include easements to adjacent property owners for access to parking in the rear of their lots.

4. Property Lines on Wethersfield Avenue

At present there is a vacant parcel on the east side of Wethersfield Avenue just south of the Polish Army Association and north of Wawarme Avenue (see both Figures 15 and 16) two lots.

The property lines of the adjacent lots should be redrawn to include this land. This would create more ample lots for both adjacent owners because there is a weak housing and office market make development of this lot problematic.

Figure16: development criteria – c-town

Figure 17: c-town proposed site plan

Figure 18: c-town alternative site plans

Figure 19: alden street vacant lot alternative plans

V. Neighborhood Revitalization and Eminent Domain

The 1998 NRZ plan calls for numerous improvements to South Green Park itself, including: Upgrading public transportation facilities at the park; repairing the decorative fencing; installing decorative lighting, banners, bollards, and signage; providing benches, drinking fountains, and other amenities; organizing regular maintenance and cleaning, and maintain “eyes on the park” to prevent vagrancy, drug dealing, etc. These changes are now underway.

The NRZ plan also suggests a number of things in the vicinity of the park. One is the rehabilitation of the buildings that face the park on Main Street, and the inclusion of ground-level commercial uses, with residential above. The Plan also calls for the creation of a drug store on Wethersfield Avenue and the establishment of clothing stores, hardware stores, restaurants, and a laundromat in the vicinity of Wethersfield, Park, and Franklin, and around South Green Park.

This study also recommends rehabilitating many of these properties and foresees the possibility of ground-floor retail, especially in the Main and Park area. The profitability of commercial enterprises may be in doubt in many of these locations, however, and this study recommends against being prescriptive about specific commercial uses or locations. Whether such properties will be used for commercial or not-for-profit use is largely a function of how profitable the location is.

In addition, this report does not recommend further commercial development in the Wethersfield/ C-Town area, except for the expansion of C-Town and infill development on vacant lots. If such development were to involve demolition, it should have a compelling purpose and a clear market feasibility. Infill development, as recommended earlier in this report, must carefully respect the context of the surrounding neighborhood, both in land use and in building style. Construction and rehabilitation efforts in the C-Town area would be more effectively aimed at housing.

As to residential uses in the Park and Main area, it is unlikely that current market conditions would produce profitable development here. Therefore, the use of subsidy would almost certainly be required to decrease a developer’s financial risk. Such subsidy might come in the form of public land acquisition and resale at significantly reduced prices, public infrastructure and/or streetscape improvements, or financing through the Connecticut Housing Finance Agency or similar agencies.

A final suggestion of the NRZ plan is to develop a hotel on the northwest corner of Main and Park. This study finds that such an effort is not currently marketable. This area has not demonstrated a clear market for such development. Hotel development would be better concentrated further north on Main, near Asylum. The recent Marriott Residence Inn is one indicator of the stronger locational qualities of Downtown.

An additional issue that has been raised by the NRZ is that of eminent domain. Although the Neighborhood Revitalization Act allows NRZ’s to request the City to use eminent domain, there is no legal guidance or precedent for NRZs deploying such powers. There are sweeping public policy implications and liabilities involved. A better strategy might be for the NRZ to petition the City of Hartford through its Redevelopment Agency, which has the legal authority and the experience with eminent domain, to undertake urban renewal and necessary land acquisition in the Park and Main area. They might also assist in obtaining government assistance for bonding and funding mechanisms required to undertake such a project.