

BRIDGEPORT, CT

SDAT





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INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, officials in Bridgeport, Connecticut submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the city and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues included urban design, connectivity, mobility, governance and civic engagement, green infrastructure and urban revitalization. The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in May 2010, recruited a multi-disciplinary team of volunteers to serve on the SDAT Team. In September 2010, the SDAT Team members returned to Bridgeport for an intensive community charrette process. They worked closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts and citizens to study the community and its concerns. The team used its expertise to frame a wide range of recommendations, which were presented to the community in a public meeting at the conclusion of the 3-day process. This report provides a narrative summary of the team's findings and recommendations.

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Program

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program focuses on the importance of developing sustainable communities through design. The mission of the SDAT program is to provide technical assistance and process expertise to help communities develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. The SDAT program brings together multidisciplinary teams of professionals to work with community stakeholders and decision-makers in an intensive planning process. Teams are composed of volunteer professionals representing a range of disciplines, including architects, urban design professionals, economic development experts, land use attorneys, and others.

Today, communities face a host of challenges to long-term planning for sustainability, including limited resources and technical capacity, ineffective public processes and poor participation. The SDAT approach is designed to address many of the common challenges communities face by producing long-term sustainability plans that are realistic and reflect each community's unique context. Key features of the SDAT approach include the following:

- Customized Design Assistance. The SDAT is designed as a customized approach to community assistance which incorporates local realities and the unique challenges and assets of each community.
- A Systems Approach to Sustainability. The SDAT applies a systems approach to community sustainability, examining cross-cutting issues and relationships between issues. In order to accomplish this task, the SDAT forms multi-disciplinary teams that combine a range of disciplines and professions in an integrated assessment and design process.

- **Inclusive and Participatory Processes.** Public participation is the foundation of good community design. The SDAT involves a wide range of stakeholder viewpoints and utilizes short feedback loops, resulting in sustainable decision-making that has broad public support and ownership.
- **Objective Technical Expertise.** The SDAT Team is assembled to include a range of technical experts (planners, architects, economists and others) from across the country. Team Members do not accept payment for services in an SDAT. They serve in a volunteer capacity on behalf of the AIA and the partner community. As a result, the SDAT Team has enhanced credibility with local stakeholders and can provide unencumbered technical advice.
- **Cost Effectiveness.** By employing the SDAT approach, communities are able to take advantage of leveraged resources for their planning efforts. The AIA contributes up to \$15,000 in financial assistance for each project. The SDAT team members volunteer their labor and expertise, allowing communities to gain immediate access to the combined technical knowledge of top-notch professionals from varied fields. Finally, the SDAT process employs a compressed schedule and the application of innovative public participation techniques to leverage resources effectively and produce timely results.
- **Results.** Many communities want to become more sustainable but are immobilized by conflicting agendas, politics, personalities, or even the overabundance of opportunity. Further, many communities have not yet taken stock of their current practices and policies within a sustainability framework; others have identified issues of concern but desire assistance in laying out a plan of action to enhance community sustainability. The intense SDAT process and compressed schedule allows a community to capitalize on SDAT information quickly and build momentum for implementation of its plan.





What is the SDAT Program?

Communities that have participated in the SDAT program include the following:

Alexandria Township, NJ	Syracuse, NY	Windsor, CA	Virginia Beach, VA
Oklahoma City, OK	Northeast Michigan	Tampa, FL	SE TN Valley, TN
Northampton, MA	Lawrence, KS	Detroit, MI	Port Angeles, WA
Pittsfield, MA	Hagerstown, MD	Fort Worth, TX	Los Angeles, CA
Forest City, NC	Tucson, AZ	Leon Valley, TX	Orange, MA
Cache Valley, UT	Englishtown, NJ	Morristown, NJ	Indianapolis, IN
Reno-Tahoe-Carson Region, NV	Dubuque, IA	Parma, OH	Hilo, HI
New Orleans, LA	Culver City, CA	Kauai, Hawaii	Eagle River Valley, CO
Longview, WA	Central City, LA	Fellsmere, FL	Beatrice, NE
Guemes Island, WA	Albany, NY		

The SDAT program is modeled on the Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program, one of AIA's longest-running success stories. While the R/UDAT program was developed to provide communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and help communities plan the first steps of implementation. Through the Design Assistance Team (DAT) program, over 500 professionals from 30 disciplines have provided millions of dollars in professional pro bono services to more than 180 communities across the country. The SDAT program leverages the pivotal role of the architectural community in the creation and support of sustainable livable communities.

The following report includes a narrative account of the Bridgeport SDAT project recommendations, with summary information concerning several principle areas of investigation. The recommendations are made within the broad framework of sustainability, and are designed to form an integrated approach to future sustainability efforts in the city.





TEAM SUMMARY

The following report captures the SDAT Team's key recommendations across several important issues facing the city of Bridgeport:

- The Bridgeport Market
- Urban Design and Revitalization
- Connectivity and Green Infrastructure
- Access and Mobility
- Governance and Collaboration

While each team member authored a specific section of the report, there are clear themes evident across the entirety of our findings. The following summary captures the cross-cutting issues that Bridgeport faces, and the team's assessment and core recommendations regarding them.

The Local Context

Bridgeport is an evolving city that has undergone dramatic changes over the last century. Early in the 20th century, it featured a thriving port and was labeled the "Park City," for its abundant resources of green space, including several parks designed by eminent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead. During World War II, Bridgeport transformed itself and became the "Arsenal of Democracy," serving as a munitions manufacturing hub for the war effort. The city's manufacturing core thrived for decades. Today, the SDAT team finds Bridgeport to be a classic post-industrial city, but one that is struggling to reinvent itself and recapture its past glory. The legacy of the industrial era, and its manufacturing core, has left environmental scars, including over 400 brownfields and 2 Superfund sites. By one estimate, 12 percent of Bridgeport's 17 square miles of land is occupied by vacant factories with environmental issues. Local officials have compiled a list of 45 mostly city-owned properties on which they have confirmed there is significant contamination. Therefore, Bridgeport could be easily characterized by these dramatic scenes of environmental degradation, large vacant parcels, homemade signs in neighborhoods warning of toxic fumes, and other sites that contribute to a lasting image of decline. Carol Mayer-Reed notes that, "The industrial coal plant smoke stack remains the most iconic structure in the city. Elevated freeways dwarf the surrounding buildings of the downtown." These conditions have impacted the civic mindset of residents and stakeholders in a dramatic way. As Paul Fontaine observes, "In less than 50 years, Bridgeport has gone from a thriving port community to a place most regional residents and visitors avoid. Entire downtown blocks have been vacant for more than 20 years, neighborhoods have been cut off from each other by regional infrastructure, and poverty is on the rise. Fifty years ago, no one would have imagined that Bridgeport would find itself in this condition." The city's application to the American Institute of Architects describes local conditions in even more stark terms:

"Bridgeport, over the years, has had a very strong sense of place, which has changed several times over as the city has evolved. Unfortunately, it currently has a sense of place which is less than ideal. In the last 50 years, through the growing obsolescence of its industrial base, Bridgeport began to exhibit much of the bipolarity of other similar cities that once were great. There exists now a North and South divide, an urban/suburban demarcation as well as by State Route 8, along with an East West evisceration of the city from the coastline by Interstate 95 and a stagnation from its waterfront by abandonment of its many waterfront brownfield sites. The abandonment of industry and underdevelopment of sites has created in many locations a visual sense of hopelessness."

The overriding context for Bridgeport is one of an underperforming city – some local stakeholders referred to it as a "poor city in a rich region." However, the SDAT team believes the city is poised to reinvent itself for the 21st century and write a new narrative concerning post-industrial renaissance; one that is built on collaboration, sustainable planning and a renewed relationship with its natural setting.

A City of Opportunity

"We are all faced with a series of historic opportunities, brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems."-John W. Gardner

As Mayor Bill Finch observed, "Bridgeport sits at the nexus of opportunity and possibility." The team concurs with this assessment. Without a doubt, Bridgeport is a 'city of opportunity', featuring a host of assets. For instance, Alan Steinbeck found that,

"The City of Bridgeport was in large part designed and laid out with walking in mind. Unlike most mid-sized cities in the United States, Bridgeport has a wealth of compact urban neighborhoods, neighborhood commercial areas and buildings and districts of historical and architectural interest. The street network is dense, well connected and well equipped for walking and driving."

Carol Mayer-Reed notes that, "On the ground, Bridgeport has an authenticity that is genuine and refreshing to experience. It has interesting, engaged, diverse neighborhoods and impressive historic buildings. It has some wonderful parks. The city's history is remarkable and its waterfronts are extensive." Mayer-Reed also noted the rare position Bridgeport has as a waterfront city, writing "Bridgeport's 20 miles of waterfront is its greatest asset. A system of greenways can be developed as urban infrastructure that offers multiple benefits."

While the city's many brownfields pose severe challenges to current development, viewing them as potential assets for future partnership and development can unlock new possibilities. The condition of its housing market provides a significant edge in affordability, and its location provides natural advantages for economic growth and livability.





The Centrality of Downtown

The team was unanimous in its finding that unlocking the potential of downtown Bridgeport is the key to the city's future. As Alan Steinbeck states, "A significant portion of the perception of city comes from the state of downtown and proximate places." Paul Fontaine identifies a key opportunity to leverage downtown for the city's renaissance, writing:

"Currently, downtown Bridgeport is surrounded by a 'noose' of elevated rail lines and the elevated highways of Interstate 95 and CT 8/25. The combined result of these transportation corridors is to not only cut off downtown from its many neighborhoods, but also from its reason for being, the Connecticut sound. If the city can 'loosen the noose,' Bridgeport has a chance to be a great community once again."

Ken Bowers states that "Making downtown Bridgeport more attractive for office users is critical to the overall success of the City," and identifies the potential residential market in clear terms:

"The logic for downtown rental housing is simple and compelling. There is a severe shortage of such housing in Fairfield County affordable to young professionals. As a residential location, housing in downtown Bridgeport is a short walk to the Metro North service providing access to the largest job market in North America. The pre-war fabric of downtown provides the bones for the type of walkable urban place that is increasingly in demand. The only other city with these attributes—Stamford—is already priced beyond the reach of most households. Simply put, Bridgeport has no nearby competition for this niche."

There are tremendous assets and opportunities the city can leverage for reinvention that are tied to the future of the downtown.

Big Challenges Require Big Vision

The SDAT Team acknowledges that the current environment for change is extraordinarily difficult. Municipalities across the country are facing significant budget crises and have extremely limited resources to pursue major development. Transformative change will require significant, broad-based partnership and time. As Alan Steinbeck states, “Making these goals a reality is a significant challenge. The challenge will only be met by making a full commitment within each relevant department in the city and creating effective partnerships.” However, one of the most positive signs of change the team identified was the development of excellent city leadership and commitment to change. The city has made great strides toward positioning itself for success by engaging in a number of deliberative planning processes that are already producing positive results. As Ken Bowers writes, “Bridgeport is fortunate that three of the key reforms necessary to pursue the vision above all are already in place in the form of the City’s Downtown Vision plan, new Plan of Conservation and Development, and substantially rewritten development code.” Furthermore, the city’s efforts to create a CitiStat data system and engage neighborhoods directly in envisioning their future are positive signs that the civic capacity exists for Bridgeport to realize bold achievements. In summary, the team believes the city is moving in the right direction.

The SDAT Team believes that civic leaders need to think big about the future of their city. Paul Fontaine captures the main challenge facing the city. “In order to achieve a revitalized city, planning and partnerships need to form now. It requires civic leaders to think big, and be bold in their vision for the future city.”

As Paul Fontaine writes, “In order to realize a different condition, the city must set its horizon on the next 50 years. The only way for Bridgeport to once again be a thriving and resilient community is to think big, plan for 50 years into the future and continue to make progress on small projects while waiting for the right opportunities to present themselves. Incremental change will not be enough to reverse 50 years of decline and will not prepare the community for transformative opportunities in the future.”

Fontaine’s call to action is linked to what is inarguably the boldest and most ambitious suggestion the SDAT team offers for the city’s consideration – the coupling of its existing transit infrastructure and removal of the interstate barrier:

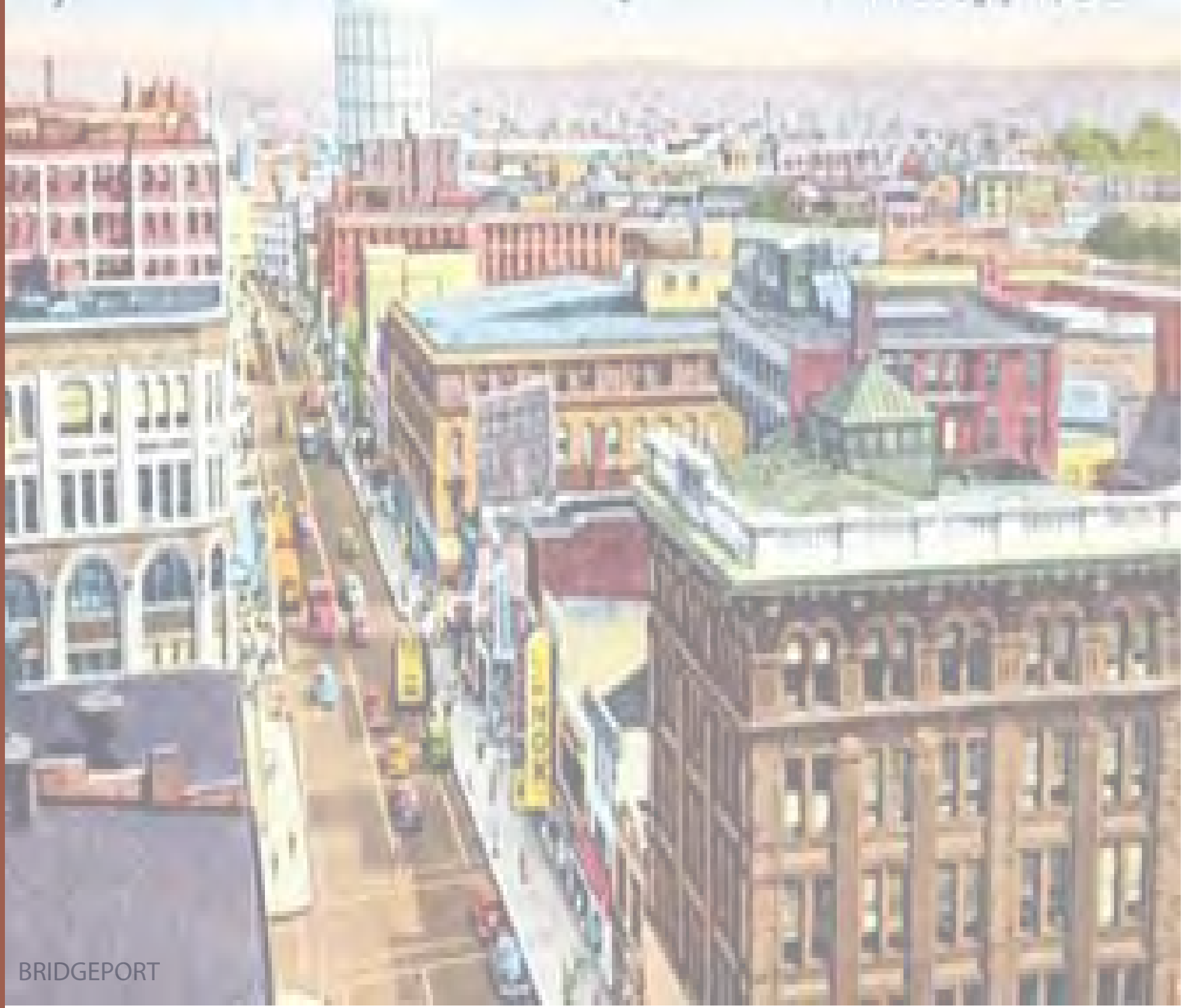
“If Bridgeport can implement the coupling of its transportation infrastructure, it will have achieved a momentous victory for the future of its downtown. Coupling the existing infrastructure provides the opportunity for downtown Bridgeport to expand dramatically and re-establish a relationship with the harbor by redeveloping its waterfront. The city’s population could conceivably grow from its present 140,000 residents to over 300,000 through such an investment. This achievement would allow the city to position itself for a host of new opportunities, including the ability to implement a comprehensive green infrastructure plan that includes bioenergy production, expanded greenways and parks, and a cleaner ecosystem with the health of its waterways dramatically improved.”

As the team suggests, reinvention may require some new notions and strategies that seem unfamiliar compared to historic patterns of development. For instance, regarding downtown residential strategies, Ken Bowers writes, “Note that this vision is the polar opposite of Bridgeport’s historic development, where factories were established, followed by worker and manager housing, and then commercial space to serve the new population. Instead, it more closely follows the development path of the modern suburbs, which started as bedroom communities before leveraging their increased population base to attract a diverse array of retail and commercial businesses.”

Transforming the Civic Landscape

As Matt Leighninger observes, "Like every other American city, Bridgeport is facing a new civic landscape." Carol Mayer-Reed notes that "Among Bridgeport's most important assets are its neighborhoods; and through the NRZ designations, more positive community engagement is taking place." This notion was confirmed by one local stakeholder, who observed that, "We used to have a politically illiterate citizenry - now we have a politically active citizenry." Leighninger pinpoints two central assets in the city's civic infrastructure. "There are undoubtedly other civic assets to be uncovered in Bridgeport, but these two – the presence of skilled participation practitioners, and the existence of an officially recognized structure for neighborhood involvement – already give the city a leg up on what other communities have in place." The team found that the City has an enormously important opportunity to engage the entire community in reinventing itself for the 21st century. By expanding the dialogue about sustainability, and integrating discussions about economic development strategies, environmental remediation, downtown revitalization and community building, the City can leverage far greater investment in its future.





THE BRIDGEPORT MARKET

Bridgeport has significant economic potential that is not being realized due to a suite of issues common to many of New England's once great manufacturing cities. On the one hand it sits within the wealthiest county in the US, with direct rail and highway connections to the largest and most productive job market in North America. On the other hand, it is beset by an archaic and fractured approach to local governance, high taxes, concentrated poverty, a legacy of environmental contamination, and a collection of white elephant sites and buildings. These liabilities have severely hampered the city's prospects, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Overcoming these structural liabilities will require the City to focus efforts directly on market niches that cannot be readily satisfied in other locations in the region. Building on the early successes thus created, the city can start diversifying its appeal to new industries and new residents.

Economic Assessment

Bridgeport's economy has been extensively studied by experts in urban economics and downtown revitalization, including Urbanomics and Phillips Preiss Shapriro Associates, both based in New York City. The economic assessment presented here is consistent with the prior work and focuses on a few big picture points gained from the review of past studies, some original data collection and analysis, and conversations with people knowledgeable about the market for real estate in Bridgeport.

Residential Development

Downtown rental housing has been one of the bright spots in Bridgeport's recent development history. Both rehabilitation and new construction projects have been well received in the marketplace, achieving high occupancy rates at a time when little downtown floor space is moving. The City's recent downtown strategy called for housing to be the primary focus of downtown revitalization efforts. This report concurs with that assessment.

The logic for downtown rental housing is simple and compelling. There is a severe shortage of such housing in Fairfield County affordable to young professionals. As a residential location, housing in downtown Bridgeport is a short walk to the Metro North service providing access to the largest job market in North America. The pre-war fabric of downtown provides the bones for the type of walkable urban place that is increasingly in demand. The only other city with these attributes—Stamford—is already priced beyond the reach of most households. Simply put, Bridgeport has no nearby competition for this niche.

Because of the lack of reasonably priced housing, the Bridgeport MSA is underrepresented in the key 25 to 34 year old demographic, which includes recent graduates embarking on careers. This age segment is 13.3 percent of the US population, but only 10.2 percent of the population in the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk MSA. Bringing this age group to parity with the national norm would require an in-migration of some 32,000 individuals, suggesting that the potential market is deep.

However, success with this niche is not assured. While rental housing has more potential than any competing use for downtown floor space, rents are on the low side of what can support new construction, or even substantial rehab. The Downtown element of the Plan of Conservation and Development pegs affordable rent ranges for downtown housing at \$750 to \$1,200, and an informal survey of apartment listings suggests that \$1,200 is about the top of the market for downtown rentals.

A simple, back-of-the envelope pro forma estimates that any rental development that averages \$1,000 in monthly rents per unit has to be delivered to the market for \$71,000 per unit—not possible for new construction in Bridgeport, and likely a tricky proposition for rehab. One major problem is Bridgeport’s high tax rate—in this example, real estate taxes represent over half of all expenses in the development, cutting severely into net operating income. The same apartments, located across the border in the Town of Fairfield, would have a value of about \$98,000—a difference of \$27,000 per unit due solely to the lower tax rate

		% of base rent	Amount
	Monthly Rent		\$1,000
X12	Annual Rent		\$12,000
-	Vacancy & Collection	5%	(\$600)
-	Operating Expenses	20%	(\$2,400)
-	Real Property Taxes		(\$3,700)
=	Net Operating Income		\$5,300
+	Cap Rate		7.5%
=	Value per unit (rounded)		\$71,000

Downtown Commercial Space

The market for both retail and office space is moribund, with little leasing activity and sub-par rents. The main bright spot has been the arrival of several lifestyle tenants at the ground floor, suggesting a willingness of adventurous entrepreneurs to take a second look at Bridgeport and it’s potential. As examples:

- Two Boots, an established New York City pizza restaurant with locations in Park Slope and the East Village, has opened their first Connecticut outpost in downtown Bridgeport.
- New bars with a “hipster” branding, such as the Las Vetus Lounge, have opened nearby.
- An established restaurateur from Norwalk has opened a new Mexican restaurant in the arcade, featuring affordably-priced fare in a sleek and modernist setting.

Another bright spot has been the renovation of the downtown Holiday Inn, complete with a new lounge and restaurant. The new lounge features a level of décor that is far beyond what would be found in a mid-range hotel in years past.

What each of these openings has in common is a direct appeal to the youth market, combining reasonable price points with hipster cache. This market has few districts to serve it regionally—only South Norwalk offers a coordinated assemblage of similar uses—and therefore Bridgeport can tap into an underserved source of discretionary spending that is essential to supplementing the daytime-focused office worker market, and the still small residential market.

While these uses may seem small compared to the City's significant economic needs, they are key to the eventual turn-around of the downtown office market. Ultimately, Bridgeport will remain a high-cost office location. To compete with the suburbs, it needs to offer something different, and what it can offer is amenities within a short walk of the office. The same venues that cater to the nighttime youth market can also serve the downtown lunch and business meeting market. An example of such a use, which was an early catalyst in the revival of downtown Raleigh, NC, is the Raleigh Times Bar. Open and serving food from lunchtime to 2 AM, the Raleigh Times patronage includes business and political leaders from noon through the dinner hour, and a youthful hipster market during the dinner hours through late night. The restaurant has become an essential "third place" for people from wildly different walks of life.

Making downtown Bridgeport more attractive for office users is critical to the overall success of the City. Of the five major industry growth targets in Bridgeport's Plan of Conservation and Development—Health Care, Finance & Insurance, Professional & Technical Services, Information Services, Arts & Entertainment—all but healthcare find their most natural home in downtown office buildings or art centers.

Amenity-rich downtowns also command a rent premium wherever they are found. The same is true of downtowns with superior transit access, which Bridgeport has with its rail and ferry connections (Sources: CoStar group, APTA, Moody's Economy.com as compiled by CEOs for Cities). In a building the size of the People's United Bank building, each dollar in rent premium capitalizes to \$4.2 million in increased real estate value. Transit can also help make downtown more cost competitive. Typical suburban offices require three parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor space—when structured parking is required, this adds \$60 per square foot to the construction costs. In transit-rich downtowns, often half as much parking is needed, resulting in a savings of \$30 per square foot.

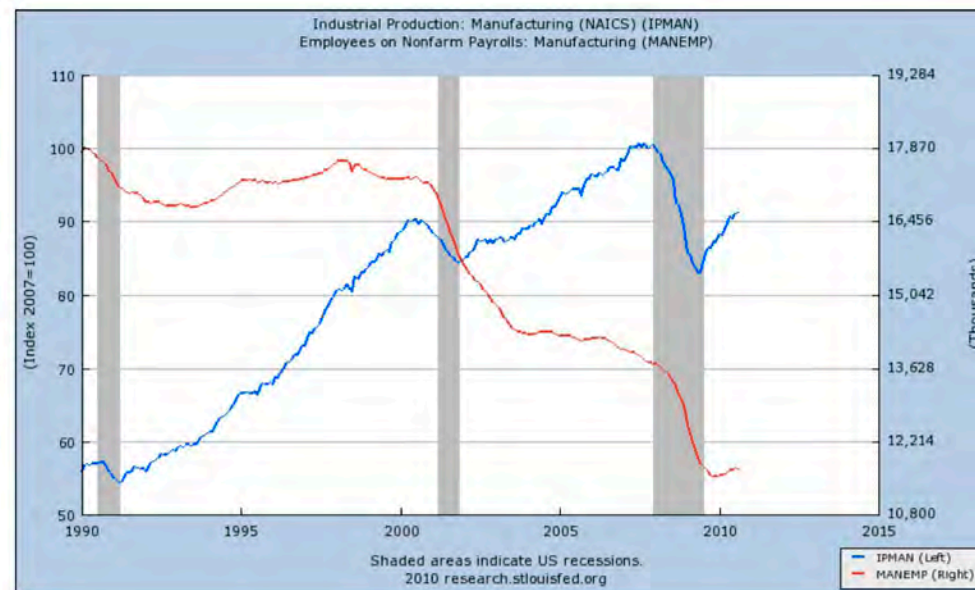
Industrial Development

Bridgeport is home to a large collection of industrial sites and buildings, the legacy of its manufacturing past. In fact, manufacturing continues to be a significant source of employment in Bridgeport, accounting for about 16 percent of local jobs, compared with 9 percent nationally. While the popular perception of American manufacturing is that it is in irreversible decline, in fact the value of manufactured goods produced in the US was rising up until the onset of recession in 2008, and the US still leads the world in manufactured output, although China is catching up quickly.





Even so, productivity growth from automation has meant that manufacturing employment has continued to decline even as output grew. Both output and employment have been heavily hit by the most recent recession. The national trends are illustrated below.



Recent industrial developments, summarized on the following page from a presentation provided by Bridgeport Economic Development, suggest that while Bridgeport continues to be a viable location for specialized production and distribution activities, these opportunities result more from the happy marriage of opportunity, location and available space, and less from a local sector-specific industrial policy. The jobs created, totaling about 800, are significant but still represent a small portion of the local labor force. Bridgeport needs to continue to pursue these types of opportunities and deals, as they generate quality jobs and keep industrial properties on the tax rolls. However, it is unlikely that they will be the major driver of growth going forward.

Business	Industry	Employees
Derecktor Shipyards	Shipbuilding	400
Columbia Elevators	Elevators	100
West End Industrial	Incubator	
DRS Fermont	Electrical	95
Lecoq Cuisine	Food Products	86
B&E Juices	Distribution	
Bridgeport Commerce Park	Indubator	85

The Market Vision

The market vision for Bridgeport has four principal components:

1. Lead with downtown housing to expand the local market, change perceptions, and create a track record of success.
2. Building on the new market thus created, reinvigorate the ground floor economy. In the short term, this means restaurants, bars and nightlife. In the longer term, retail can follow.
3. Leverage the enhanced amenity base to make downtown once again a competitive market for office space, targeting the industries identified in the City's Plan of Conservation and Development.
4. Spread the success of downtown to the waterfront.
5. Lastly, continue efforts to repurpose the City's inventory of industrial sites and buildings for new uses. Such deals will be opportunistic rather than strategic, but that is a benefit, as it leads to diversification over time.

Note that this vision is the polar opposite of Bridgeport's historic development, where factories were established, followed by worker and manager housing, and then commercial space to serve the new population. Instead, it more closely follows the development path of the modern suburbs, which started as bedroom communities before leveraging their increased population base to attract a diverse array of retail and commercial businesses.

This vision is also consistent with the City's B Green strategy. Bridgeport living is green living—public transit is available, commutes can be shorter, and the necessary infrastructure to accommodate growth is already in place. The young population likely to be attracted to downtown Bridgeport is more likely to base its lifestyle choices on environmental impacts. Finally, the pedestrian, bicycle and green infrastructure called for in B Green all function as amenities for residential development, with a particular appeal to young creative professionals.

Recommendations

Short-Term Actions

Bridgeport is fortunate that three of the key reforms necessary to pursue the vision above all are already in place in the form of the City's Downtown Vision plan, new Plan of Conservation and Development, and substantially rewritten development code. In order to control costs and reduce risk, development in downtown Bridgeport needs to utilize a predictable as-of-right process with review and approvals handled at the staff level, which is how the new code works.

Building on these efforts, the following short-term action items are recommended to carry the vision forward:

- 1. Downtown parking reform:** Downtown Bridgeport is well supplied with private parking decks. High occupancy rates during the day suggest that the existing rate structure is appropriate. Bridgeport is already metering downtown curb parking to promote turnover and vacancy. The major problem with parking is for the downtown dining and nightlife industry. With occupancy in the parking decks low, the appropriate price to charge after business hours is nothing. However, the decks do not offer free after-hours parking, and they should. Over the long term, major property owners such as People's United Bank stand to gain much more real estate value from a revitalized downtown than they will ever realize from after-hours parking fees. The rates charged on evenings and weekends, if not free, should be no more than is necessary to offset the cost of staffing the decks. Security for the decks should be covered by the downtown business improvement district.
- 2. Car sharing:** Bridgeport should explore the opportunity to bring car sharing to downtown as an amenity for the new downtown residents. Car sharing provides a cheaper option than ownership for households that rely on transit for commuting, and also helps reduce overall parking demand.
- 3. Incentive programs:** As shown in the prior analysis, Bridgeport's high tax rates significantly impact the viability of new income-producing developments such as rental housing, where taxes can comprise the majority of operating expenses. While tax abatement for housing will on its face look like poor public policy, some sort of initiative to reduce the cost side of residential pro formas for at least the first five to ten years of occupancy will likely be necessary to facilitate significant new construction. Bridgeport needs to investigate this question in a more detailed manner than can be done here and to devise an appropriate response.

Medium to Long-Term Actions

The following recommendations are essentially similar to those contained elsewhere in this report, but are included here to provide a market perspective:

- 1. Avoid developments that would privatize the waterfront:** Connecticut has no shortage of waterfront, but it has a severe shortage of publicly accessible waterfront. The amount of public waterfront in Bridgeport is a unique and irreplaceable asset, and the inventory of public waterfront should be expanded at every opportunity. This makes both policy and market sense—where waterfront is privately owned, the value is captured only on the waterfront property, but where it is public, the value spreads inland to capture the second, third, and fourth blocks in. It is no coincidence that Bridgeport's most valuable residences are found where a public street defines a linear, public waterfront in the Black Rock neighborhood. This principle extends to wherever waterfront sites are found, such as Steel Point.
- 2. Serve as master planner for major sites, such as Steel Point:** While it may seem expedient to turn over large redevelopment opportunities to a master developer, such deals have to be structured so that the City is not held hostage to the economic fortunes of a single development company. Parceling out these large sites to a number of developers for development in conformance with an overall master plan may provide a less risky path to phased implementation.
- 3. Continue emphasis on improving transit:** As noted above, transit both helps Bridgeport's competitive position, as well as lowers development cost by reducing parking needs which must be satisfied in parking structures at \$20,000 per space.
- 4. Use green infrastructure to connect the downtown and neighborhoods to the waterfront:** The City's green infrastructure initiatives, which are focused on the waterways leading the Long Island Sound, will have the beneficial side benefit of providing critical bicycle and pedestrian pathways between residential areas and the growing inventory of public waterfront amenities. As discussed elsewhere, complimentary opportunities to increase connectivity between neighborhoods and the waterfront should be given high priority.



URBAN DESIGN AND REVITALIZATION

The Need to Think BIG

During the course of the 20th century, Bridgeport has undergone profound changes that have impacted its built environment and community identity. Bridgeport achieved great things as a city during the first half of the century. It earned the moniker “Park City” for having over 1,375 acres of urban parkland, including several Olmstead-designed parks that served as important gathering places. Bridgeport became “The Arsenal of Democracy” by providing the engine for production of armaments during World War II. As the SDAT application states, “at one time, Bridgeport was the industrial and financial capital of Connecticut. However, since the post-war era, the city has experienced a steady decline. In less than 50 years, Bridgeport has gone from a thriving port community to a place most regional residents and visitors avoid. Entire downtown blocks have been vacant for more than 20 years, neighborhoods have been cut off from each other by regional infrastructure, and poverty is on the rise. Fifty years ago, no one would have imagined that Bridgeport would find itself in this condition. In order to realize a different condition, the city must set its horizon on the next 50 years. The only way for Bridgeport to once again be a thriving and resilient community is to think big, plan for 50 years into the future and continue to make progress on small projects while waiting for the right opportunities to present themselves. Incremental change will not be enough to reverse 50 years of decline and will not prepare the community for transformative opportunities in the future.

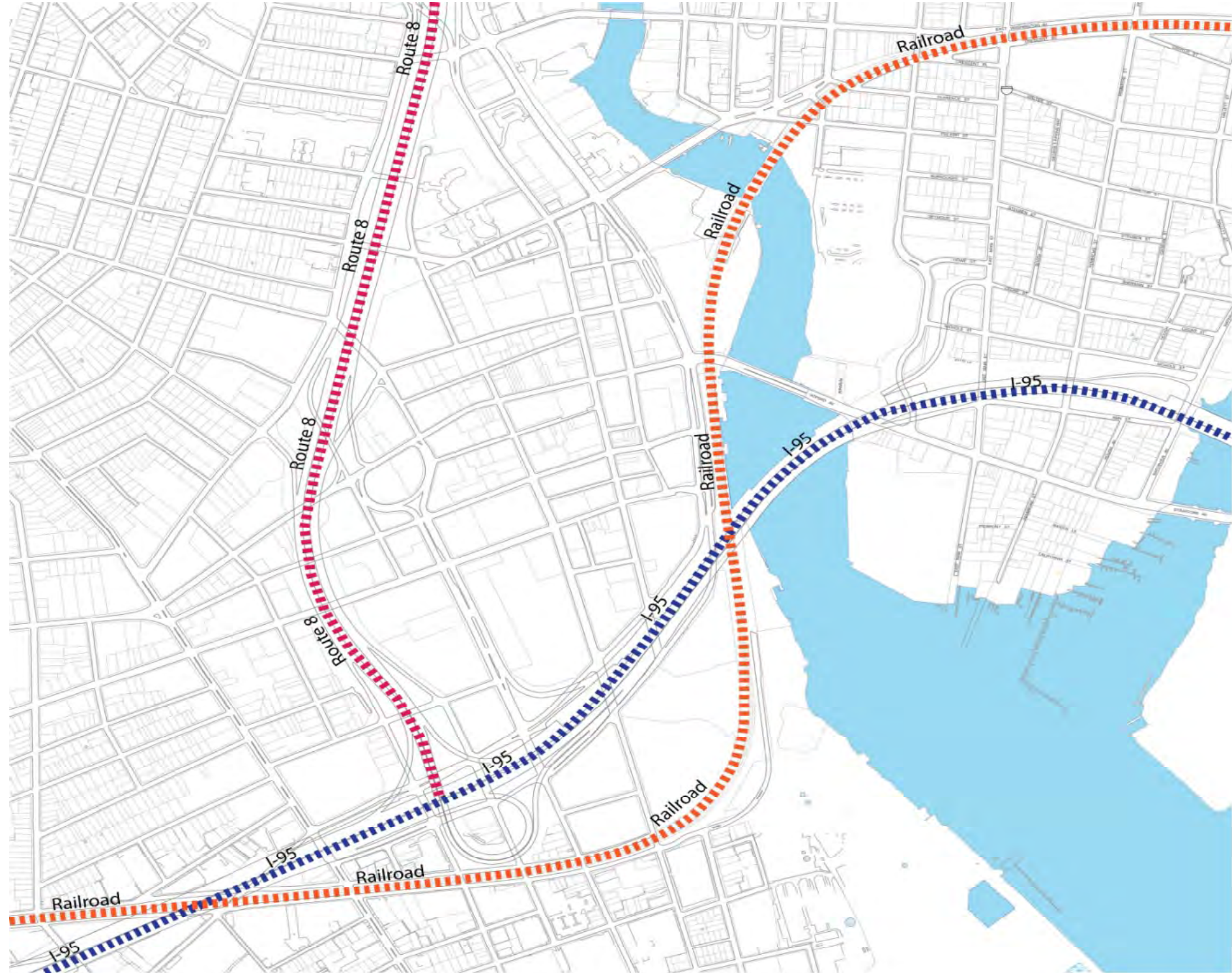


Panoramic Views of Downtown Bridgeport and the Waterfront from the early 20th century show a vibrant and bustling city

Such an opportunity presented itself recently. In October 2010, Amtrak announced that it was researching 3 different corridors to consider for its proposed high speed route connecting Boston and NYC. Communities located on the chosen high speed rail corridor will see a profound change in real estate patterns. What was once a 90-minute train ride will now take less than 45 minutes. In other words, Bridgeport and New Haven will now be within half of their former commuting distance to New York. Back offices for banks and large corporations will be eager stay connected to New York without paying for premium real estate. Workers will now be able to live in more communities in Connecticut and still have a manageable commute.

Major infrastructure changes do not happen often. Chance favors the prepared community. For Bridgeport to continue to offer outstanding access to regional transit, it needs to plan for infrastructure that aligns with local goals. Currently, downtown Bridgeport is surrounded by a “noose” of elevated rail lines and the elevated highways of Interstate 95 and CT 8/25. The combined result of these transportation corridors is to not only cut off downtown from its many neighborhoods, but also from its reason for being, the Connecticut sound. If the city can “loosen the noose,” Bridgeport has a chance to be a great community once again. The team recommends 2 transformative strategies to explore in more detail that reconnect downtown to the rest of the community and its natural surroundings.





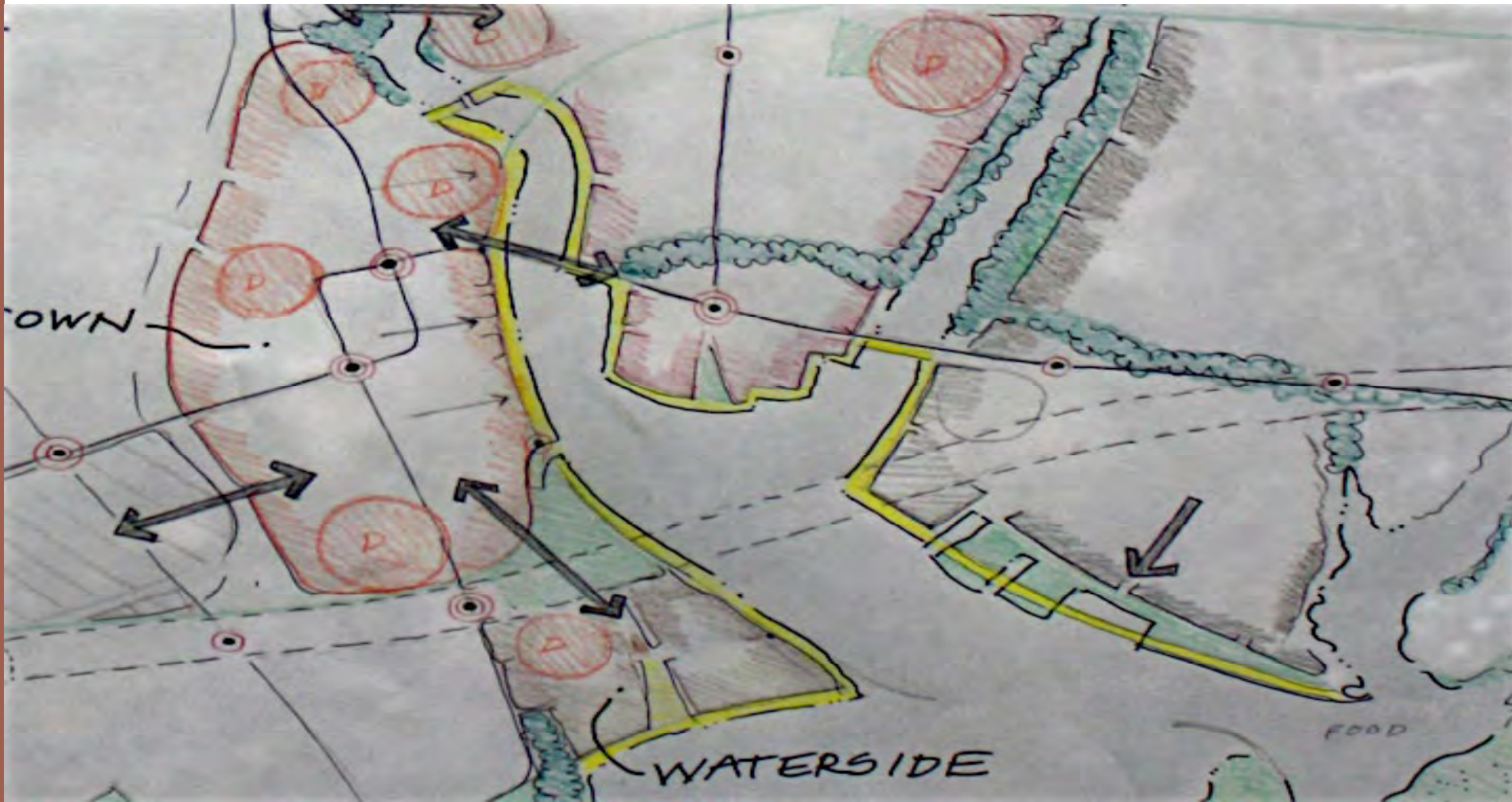
Bridgeport is surrounded by a “noose” of elevated rail lines and the elevated highways of Interstate 95 and CT 8/25.

Coupling the Interstate and Rail Transit

Working with State and Federal authorities, the City of Bridgeport should identify a corridor that meets both rail and interstate dimensional requirements. Instead of 2 unique corridors cutting through the downtown, there may only be one, and possibly none. While the strategy may not yield any physical changes for decades, it will have short term benefits. Identifying a coupled corridor will reveal potential additional disruptions that come with infrastructure improvements and also announce Bridgeport's intentions of reconnecting to its waterfront on a human scale.

Future Energy Production and the Waterfront

Massive changes are predicted to occur over the next generation in how energy is produced, stored and moved. A great deal of Bridgeport's waterfront land uses are energy related. A separate study that identifies and categorizes energy related parcels will give the City a snapshot of an opportunity that will reveal itself over the next 20 years. The city should create a comprehensive waterfront vision that can help rezone parcels and facilitate an efficient and effective redevelopment of existing land as it becomes available for new uses.



• CONTINUE

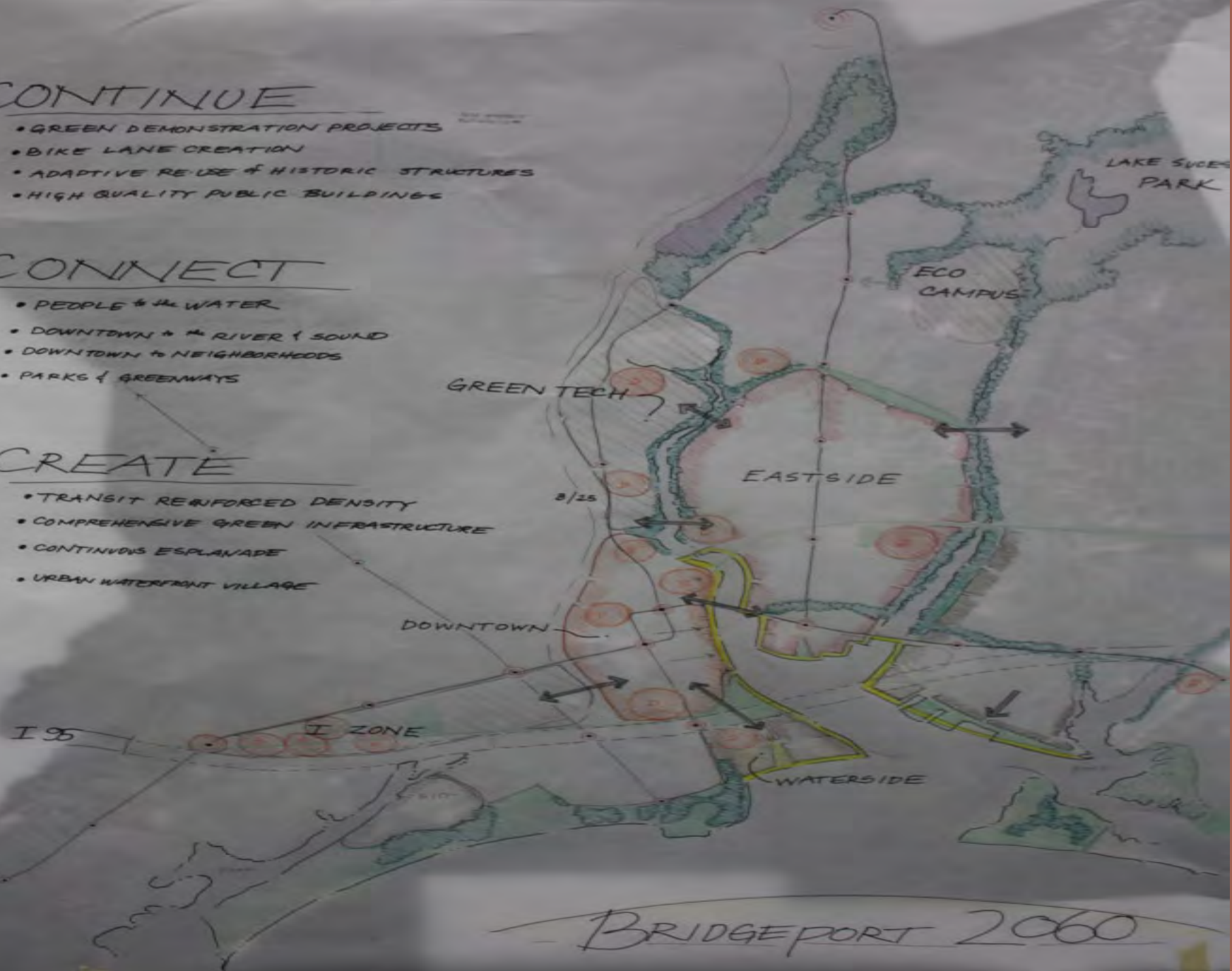
- GREEN DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS
- BIKE LANE CREATION
- ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES
- HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC BUILDINGS

• CONNECT

- PEOPLE & THE WATER
- DOWNTOWN & THE RIVER & SOUND
- DOWNTOWN TO NEIGHBORHOODS
- PARKS & GREENWAYS

• CREATE

- TRANSIT REINFORCED DENSITY
- COMPREHENSIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
- CONTINUOUS ESPLANADE
- URBAN WATERFRONT VILLAGE

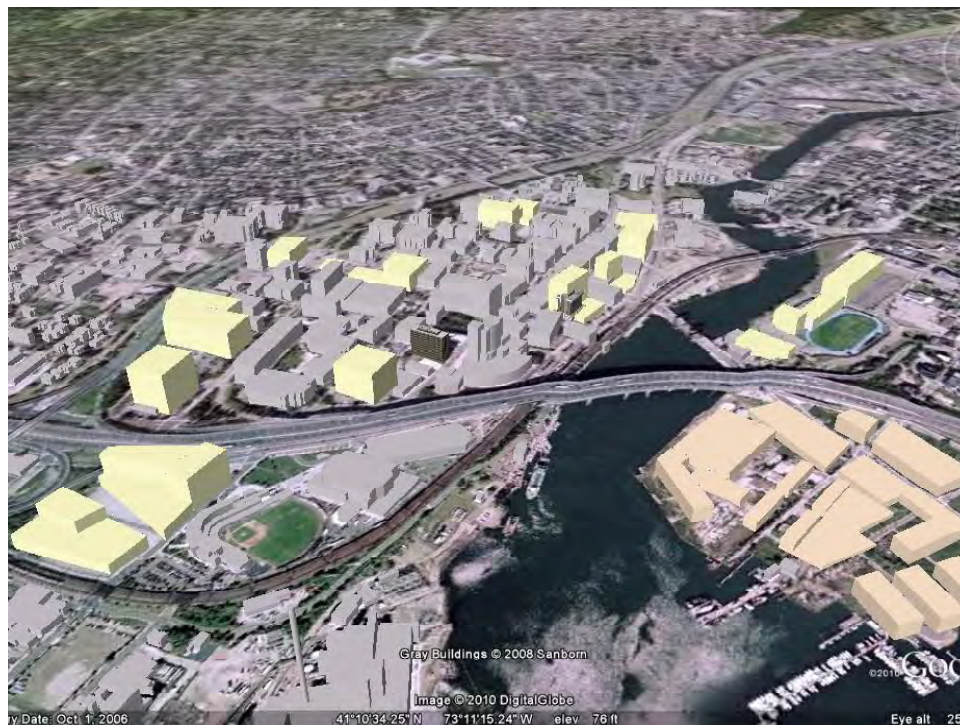




Downtown Bridgeport Currently



Downtown Bridgeport with the Seaside development



Downtown Bridgeport with additional infill and waterfront redevelopment



Downtown Bridgeport with infrastructure barriers addressed, expanding across the highway and along the waterfront, creating new amenities and a relationship with the harbor

The Power of Transformative Strategies

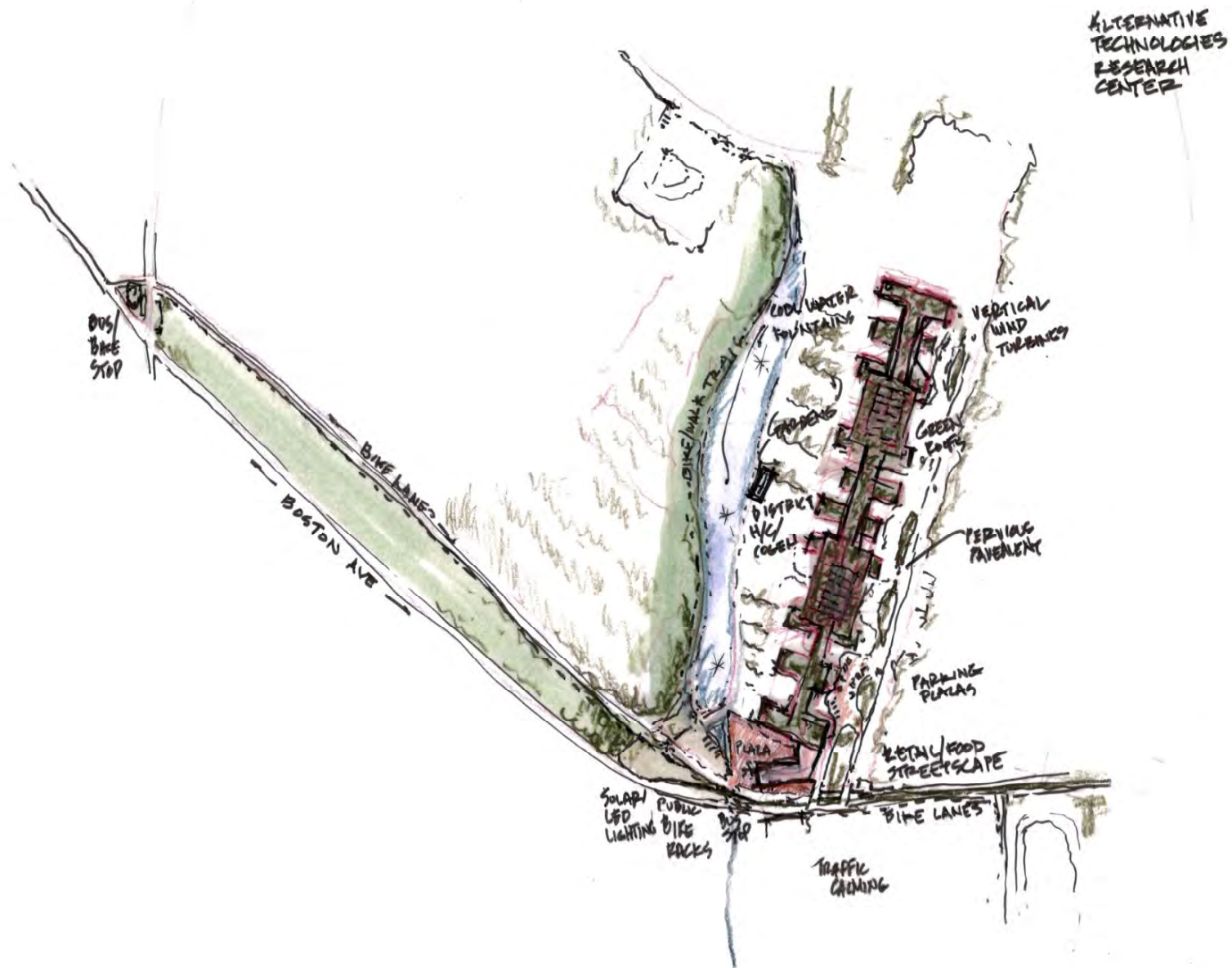
“Make no little plans” - Daniel Burnham

If Bridgeport can implement the coupling of its transportation infrastructure, it will have achieved a momentous victory for the future of its downtown. Coupling the existing infrastructure provides the opportunity for downtown Bridgeport to expand dramatically and re-establish a relationship with the harbor by redeveloping its waterfront. The city's population could conceivably grow from its present 140,000 residents to over 300,000 through such an investment. This achievement would allow the city to position itself for a host of new opportunities, including the ability to implement a comprehensive green infrastructure plan that includes bioenergy production, expanded greenways and parks, and a cleaner ecosystem with the health of its waterways dramatically improved. Under such a plan, new investments in brownfield remediation and redevelopment would become more feasible. The following pages contain one such illustration, for the General Electric property. Under this concept, it would be re-envisioned as a mixed-use center with a focus on alternative energy production. While the site has several prominent environmental challenges, in the long-term future a strategy that allows for adaptive reuse and remediation could provide the surrounding community with significant new vibrancy. The growth and vitality of downtown would feed neighborhood strength and overall community health as well. In 50 years, Bridgeport could be entering a new renaissance. These investments will take significant partnership. They will require significant time to make possible. However, the return on investment will have a transformational impact on the future of the city.

In order to achieve a revitalized city, planning and partnerships need to form now. It requires civic leaders to think big, and be bold in their vision for the future city. The team recommends that Bridgeport could begin this process with the formation of a “Think Big Team,” to lead a community visioning process. The Team could include members of local foundations, businesses, City hall staff, civic leaders, and residents. Their purpose would be to engage the community and challenge residents with the task of envisioning the fifty 50 years out. The Think Big Team can bring in speakers to talk about specific challenges and opportunities, create design competitions, and sponsor volunteer efforts for little to no cost. Their role should be to stimulate dialogue towards a shared vision of the city, and serve as a neutral convener for the process. By documenting the results of the process, and putting in place a robust system to measure progress toward that vision, civic leaders can move the community toward lasting positive change. Think Big!







Changing Habits with the Existing Infrastructure

The transformational strategies suggested above will require significant time – in some cases decades – to realize. It will take a sustained process built on innovative, long-term partnerships, to make these investments work. In the meantime, Bridgeport should also pursue more limited actions to re-establish the city's relationship with the waterfront, and enhance its urban qualities for a human scale. Bridgeport isn't the only community with a major highway soaring above it. It isn't the only city with a rail line circling through it. There are many communities throughout the nation and abroad that have learned to live with these infrastructure elements. What have they done that could work for Bridgeport? How do these communities encourage residents to get around, under, over these obstacles, even make them an enjoyable experience. Small projects like artistic lighting of an overpass can encourage residents to overcome the barriers presented by regional infrastructure.

Enough small projects, effectively timed and placed can begin to change people's behavior. Residents will use their bikes to get to town, use basketball courts and playgrounds that are shelter from rain and snow by highways, and create controlled graffiti galleries if you give them the chance.



The Vancouver Water Taxi



A Mural Project on an underpass in Silver Spring, MD

The City is Moving in the Right Direction

The team found that the city is moving in the right direction on a number of fronts, including the following:

- It is in the process of rehabilitating key properties in its downtown, which is an important first step in building a vibrant core;
- It is moving forward with LEED-certified schools, which will provide important green-building demonstration projects as public facilities;
- It is engaging in critical planning exercises that can produce long-term strategies for revitalization, such as the Urban Land Institute's study, the SDAT process, and most importantly the city's BGreen 2020 document;
- The city's new zoning ordinance and master plan represent significant steps forward in revitalizing the downtown and putting in place the land use tools to realize the community's aspirations in future development.

The SDAT Team recommends that civic leaders leverage this work and make bold plans for the city's future moving forward.



BGreen 2020
A Sustainability Plan
for Bridgeport, Connecticut





CONNECTIVITY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Background and Assessment

This section of the report explores the opportunities and constraints facing some of the city's physical connective systems. It also discusses opportunities for community connectivity with regard to increased social sustainability and aesthetics.

While Bridgeport has a good urban framework of local streets and development blocks, two freeways and a railroad corridor fragment the city fabric at its core. Like a number of eastern cities, Bridgeport draws benefits from being a transportation hub, yet the regional transportation network that rings the downtown poses particular challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists in terms of on-the ground connectivity.

Bridgeport has excellent potential to increase connectivity in the following ways:

- enhance alternative transportation systems for bicycles and pedestrians to reduce reliance on automobiles as the primary mode;
- broaden recreation opportunities by offering more trails, parks and open space;
- increase access to the waterways and shorelines of rivers, creeks, Pleasure Beach and Long Island Sound;
- promote social sustainability through active, vibrant public spaces and streets in the downtown and neighborhoods; and
- improve the visual quality of the city through redevelopment and a number of green initiatives.

A Particular Concern for Visual Quality

On the ground, Bridgeport has an authenticity that is genuine and refreshing to experience. It has interesting, engaged, diverse neighborhoods and impressive historic buildings. It has some wonderful parks. The city's history is remarkable and its waterfronts are extensive. National retail chains have not homogenized the city and its downtown to the point of looking just like everywhere else.

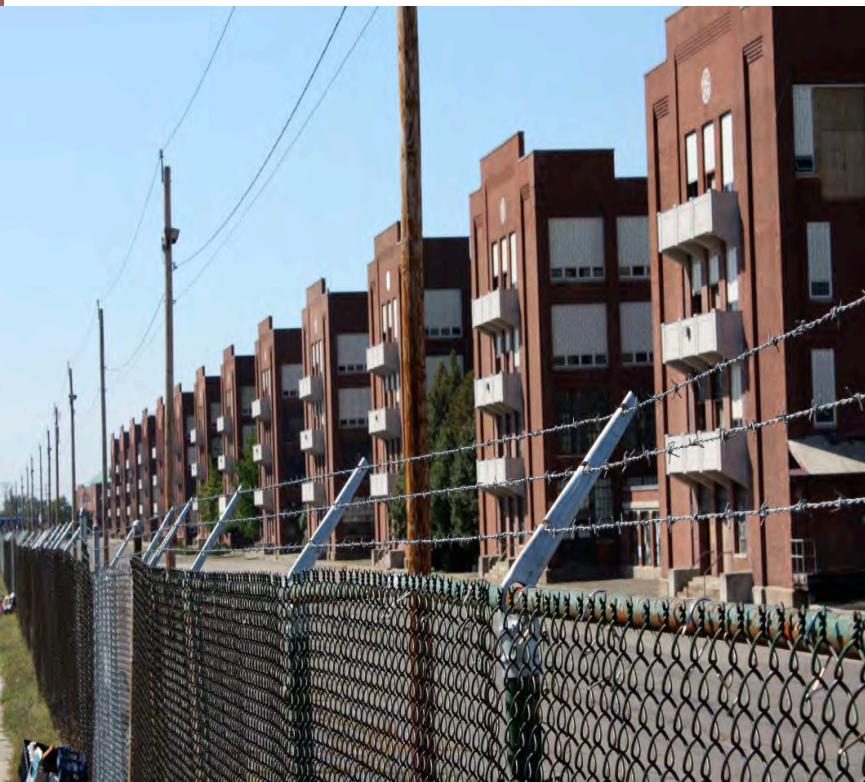
However, the city, business leaders and residents all need to be aware of how the image and visual quality of Bridgeport need to be considered at the city-wide, downtown and neighborhood scales. Visual quality affects perceptions from the outside as well as how residents feel about their city. It is likely a large factor in the difficulty of attracting new business to the area.





From a political and city planning perspective, Bridgeport needs to consider the overall impressions of the city as viewed from I-95 and the passenger rail corridor. Here are some frank observations:

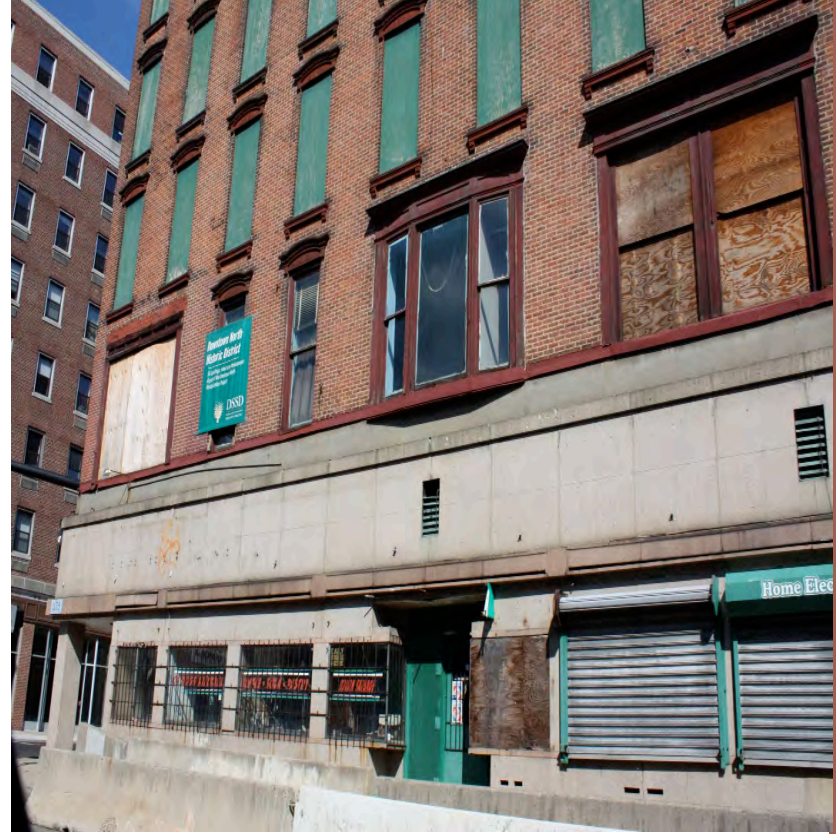
- Vast acres of vacant post-industrial land reveal a city that has not been successful in cleaning up post-industrial sites and attracting development to brown fields and particularly its waterfront.
- Overall, the city appears grey, underused and neglected, even in the summer season. Indicators of a healthy community are not readily evident.
- The industrial coal plant smoke stack remains the most iconic structure in the city. Elevated freeways dwarf the surrounding buildings of the downtown.
- Streets of the downtown and neighborhoods do not have many active sidewalks populated with people and interesting storefronts. Bicycles and walkers appear to be few.
- While the city envisions and wants to market itself “green,” there is a lack of green vegetation in the visual environment and particularly on streets and along waterways. Many parking lots and storage sites are not screened with landscape plantings.
- Numerous storefronts have bars over windows and doors. Wrought iron and chain link fences seem to proliferate everywhere in the city. Even City Hall Annex and many parks have six-foot high perimeter fences.



New trends of enhanced livability and increased stewardship for the environment are now taking place in many other American cities. Improved urban aesthetics are part of the outcome. From the local government and the private side, political leaders, city staff, business owners and community organizers of Bridgeport all need to press for partnerships, actions and initiatives at many scales that affect urban aesthetics and visual quality. In many cases, awareness programs for turning “grey into green” can be very successful.

On a site scale, public and private property owners should consider ways to attain security without adding to the “city of bars and fences.” While certain fences play an important role for security in given circumstances, this “hardening” of the city does not send a message of openness and welcome, but more a message of potential crime and fear.

The city should invest in its streets and public open spaces through a program to green the city, streets and riverbanks with trees. Landscape ordinances for parking and storage sites need to be addressed. Tree planting and vegetation programs can be accomplished through volunteer and community groups, along with community gardens, urban agriculture and other green initiatives as outlined in the BGreen 2020 report.



Vision for Greenways and Waterfronts

Bridgeport's 20 miles of waterfront is its greatest asset. A system of greenways can be developed as urban infrastructure that offers multiple benefits. In terms of connectivity, Pequonnock River and Yellow Mill Pond are two waterways that run north-south through the city to Long Island Sound. In addition to new connecting multi-use trails, greenways can:

- form a spine for alternative modes of transportation and recreation;
- link urban parks and open space;
- enhance water quality;
- allow for greater human interface with nature; and
- support vegetation that attracts urban wildlife.

Multi-use independent trails through greenways have excellent potential to connect neighborhoods to the downtown and the waterfront. Trails can vary in character from rustic to urban esplanades. In key locations, viewpoints or nodes of commercial development are desirable to help activate the trail.

The city should have requirements to build trail segments in the greenways and establish a set back from top of bank for all new adjacent development. Where existing development precludes the trail, connecting routes for bikes and pedestrians can follow street alignments or utility easements. In certain locations the trail may be located at the riverside on pilings or a floating walkway. Maps and frequent access points to the trail will enable more users to enter from surrounding neighborhoods. It generally follows that with more use of trails, public safety and community policing will be supported. The main strategy is to create the overall framework for trails and implement them in phases as funding and redevelopment opportunities allow.

In many places, the river and creek banks have steep fill slopes severely impacted by former or existing industrial development. If remediation of pollutants is required, this must be funded and incorporated as part of the redevelopment. Oversteep banks containing riprap, construction debris or loose unstable materials need to be re-graded and re-vegetated.





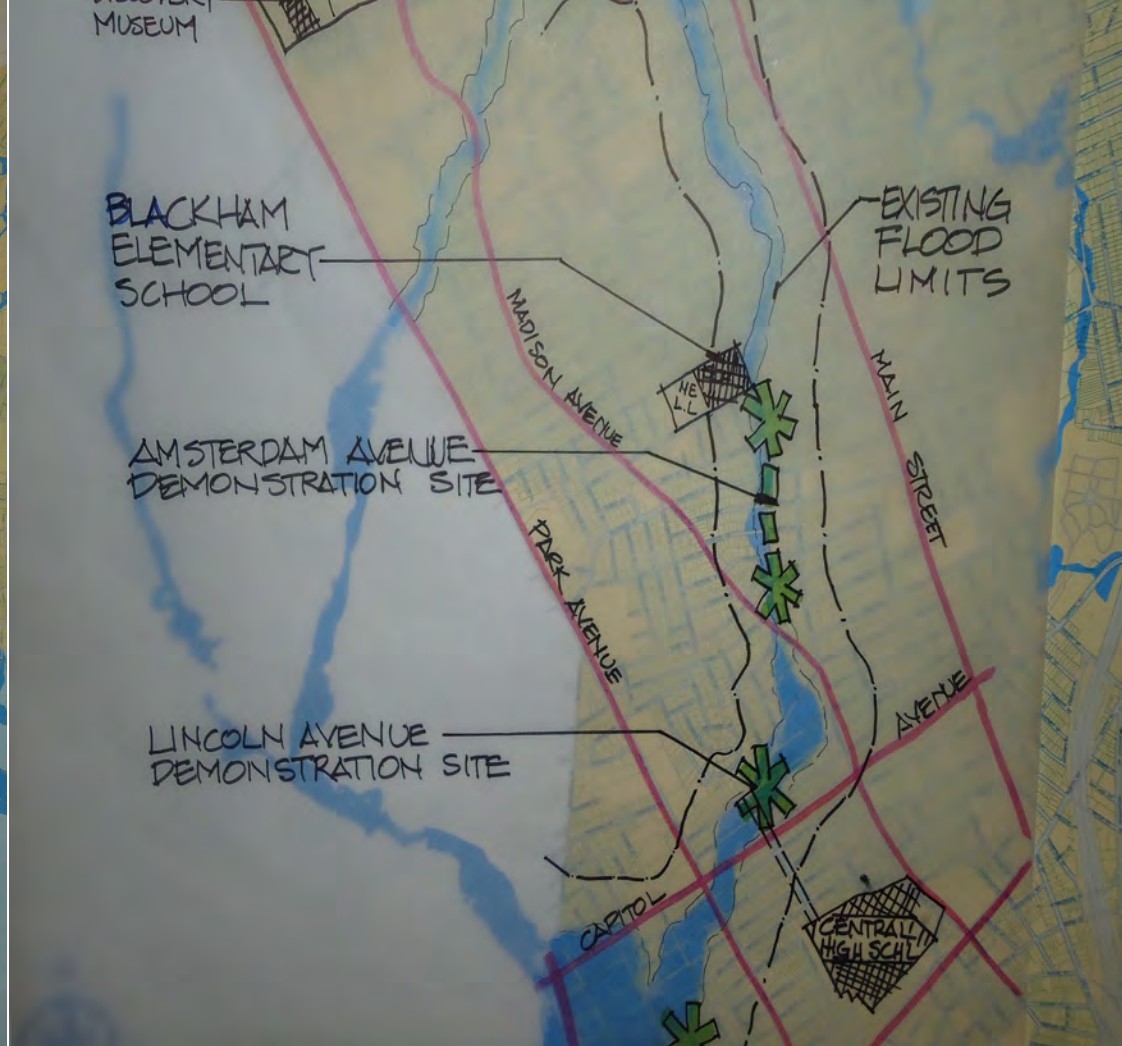
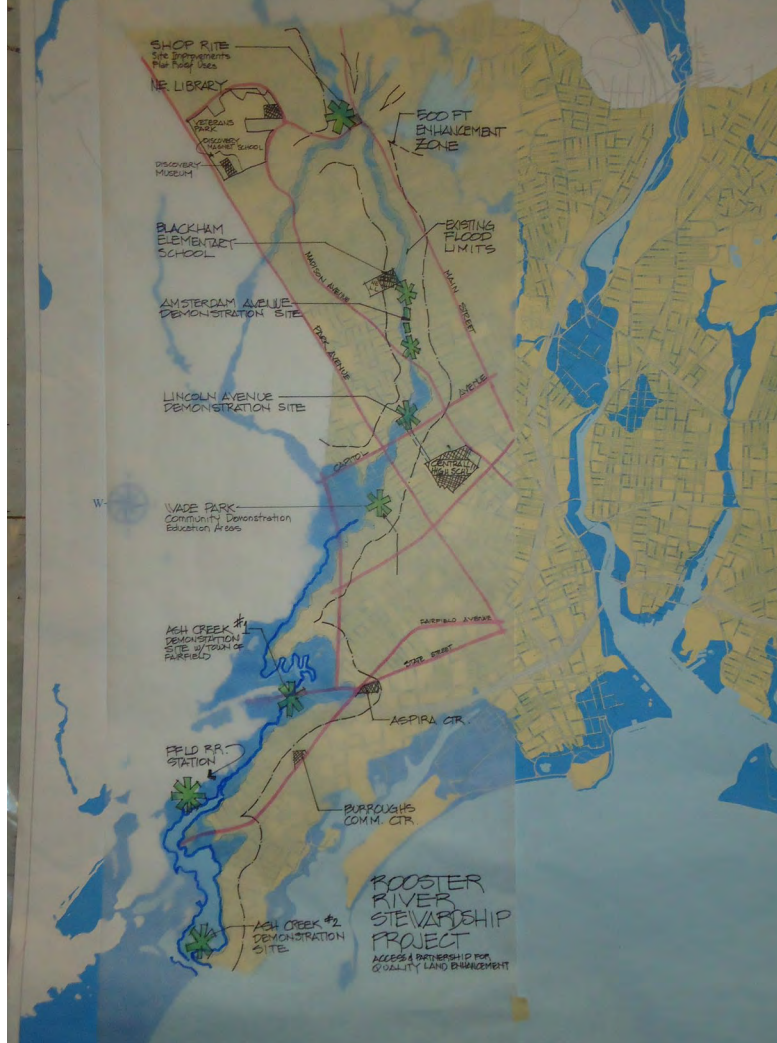
Greenways with re-vegetated creeks and riverbanks will have positive effects on both water quality and management of water quantity. Stormwater runoff from impermeable surfaces such as surface parking lots, roadways, building roofs and paved storage yards overwhelm the capacity of the underground systems. The city can use sites for storage of floodwater along with additional practices that will reduce overall amounts run-off from storm events.

Since the city has combined sewer outfalls that occasionally dispense untreated sanitary sewage into the waterways in high storm events, it is imperative that the city proceeds to plan for upland floodwater storage. Areas adjacent to the greenways may be acquired by the city for multi-use municipal open space that accommodates periodic inundation. As part of its overall green infrastructure, these sites, if designed for multi-purpose use and not just engineered for the single purpose of flood control, can be open for public recreation when not needed for a flood event and can also provide valuable wildlife habitat.

There are other proactive practices to reduce accumulation of stormwater runoff rather than allowing floodwater to accumulate in large volumes. These methods can be achieved through city-wide programs that collect or absorb smaller increments of water closer to the source where precipitation falls. These practices include rain gardens, disconnected downspouts that disperse water into landscape areas that infiltrate into the ground where possible, green roofs, and rain barrels. As part of a stormwater policy and approval process, the city can require new private developments to hold and treat stormwater on sites. The city can provide incentives for private stormwater management through reduction of storm sewer fees. These practices all contribute toward private holding of rainwater until the peak storm event has passed.

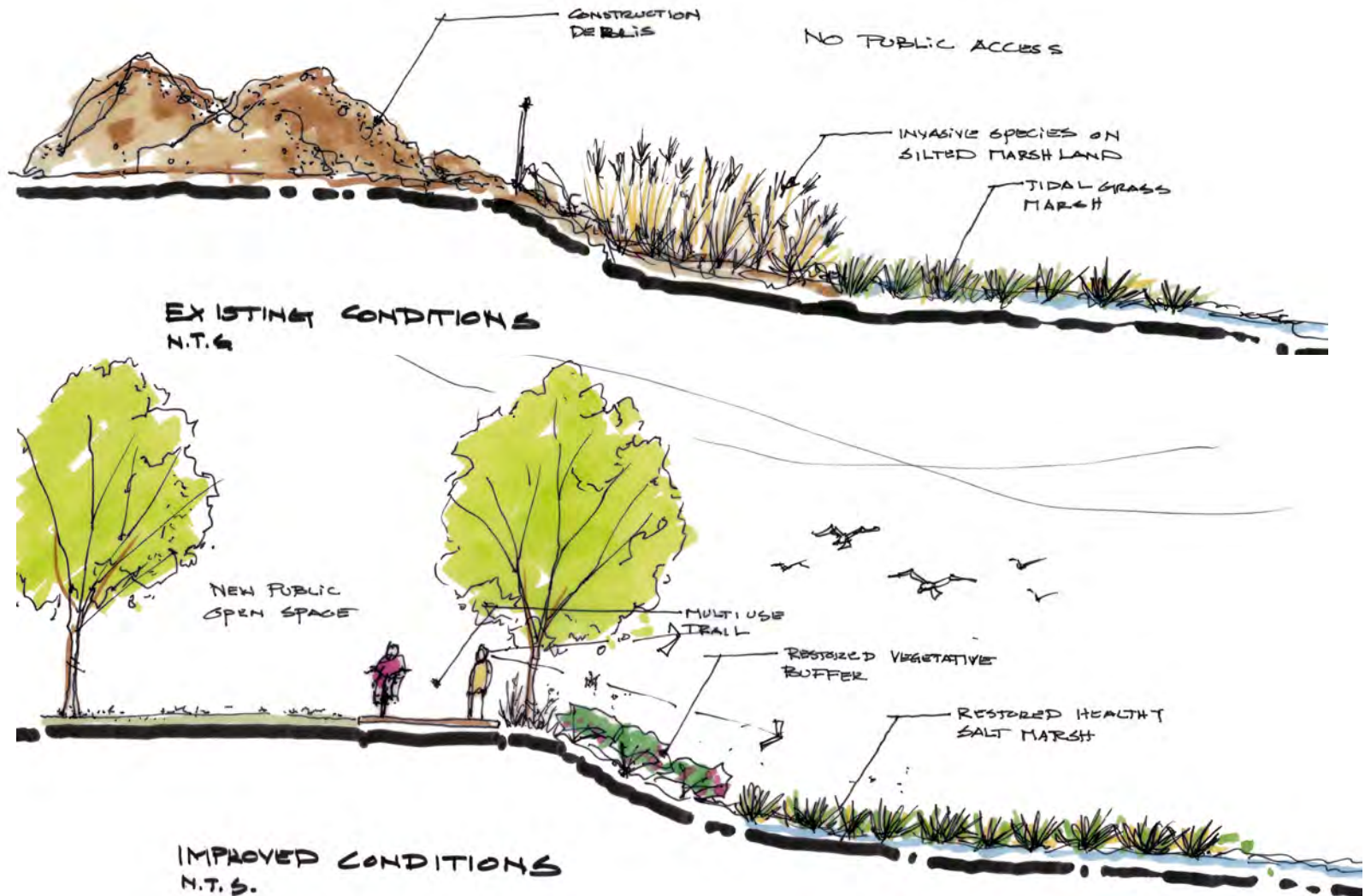
Opportunities to treat stormwater non-point sources (non-industrial) of pollution run-off are key to improving water quality within and outside of the greenways. Through reductions of sewer fees and other incentives, the city can encourage or require new development to build rain gardens. The city can also build bioswales and rain gardens on public streets and open spaces. The city can institute landscape standards and bioswales for all new parking lots. It can also provide incentives for green roofs since they filter and effectively treat airborne pollutants that collect in stormwater runoff. Existing businesses and homeowners may voluntarily participate in these efforts as well be part of a city-wide watershed and clean water awareness program. Many of these practices are proposed in the BGreen 2020 report.

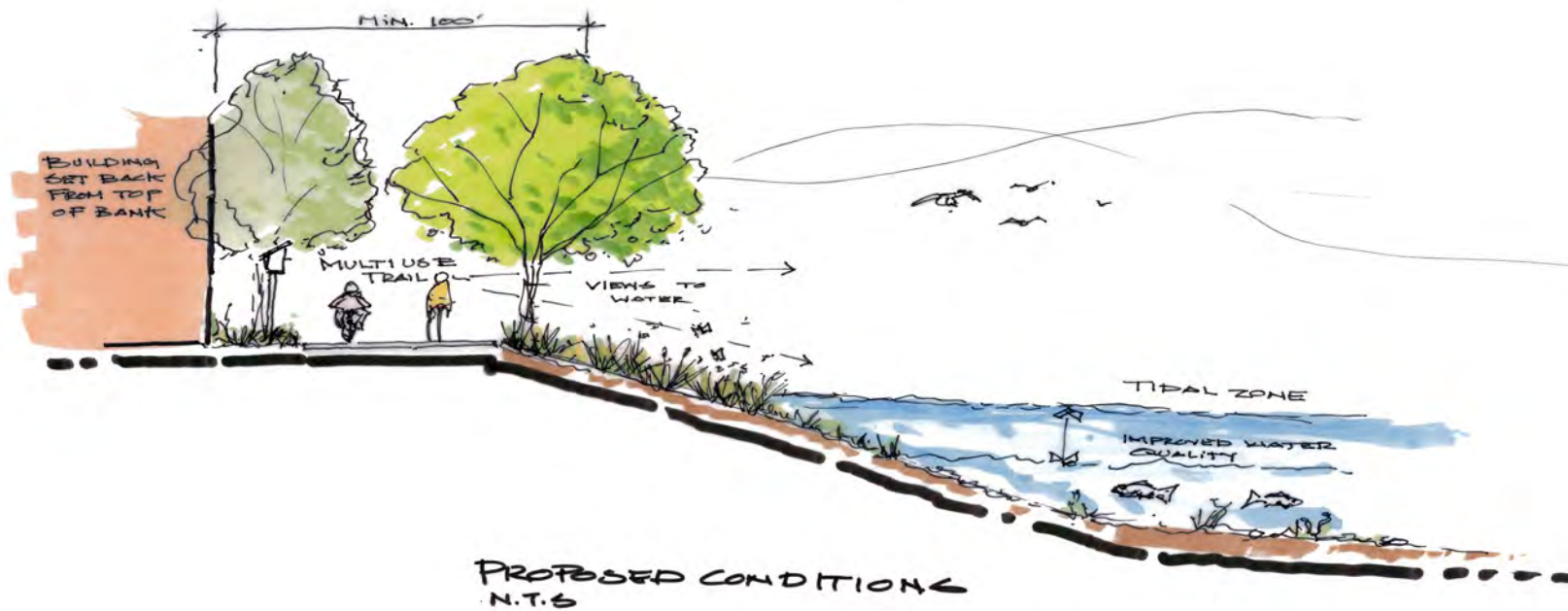
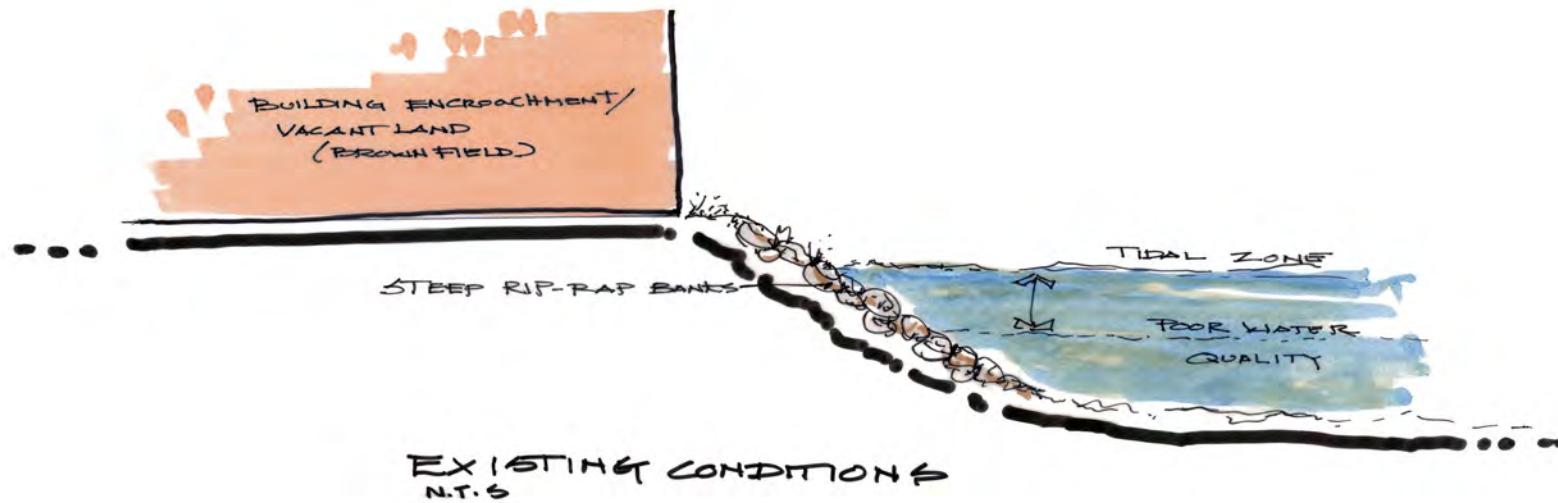


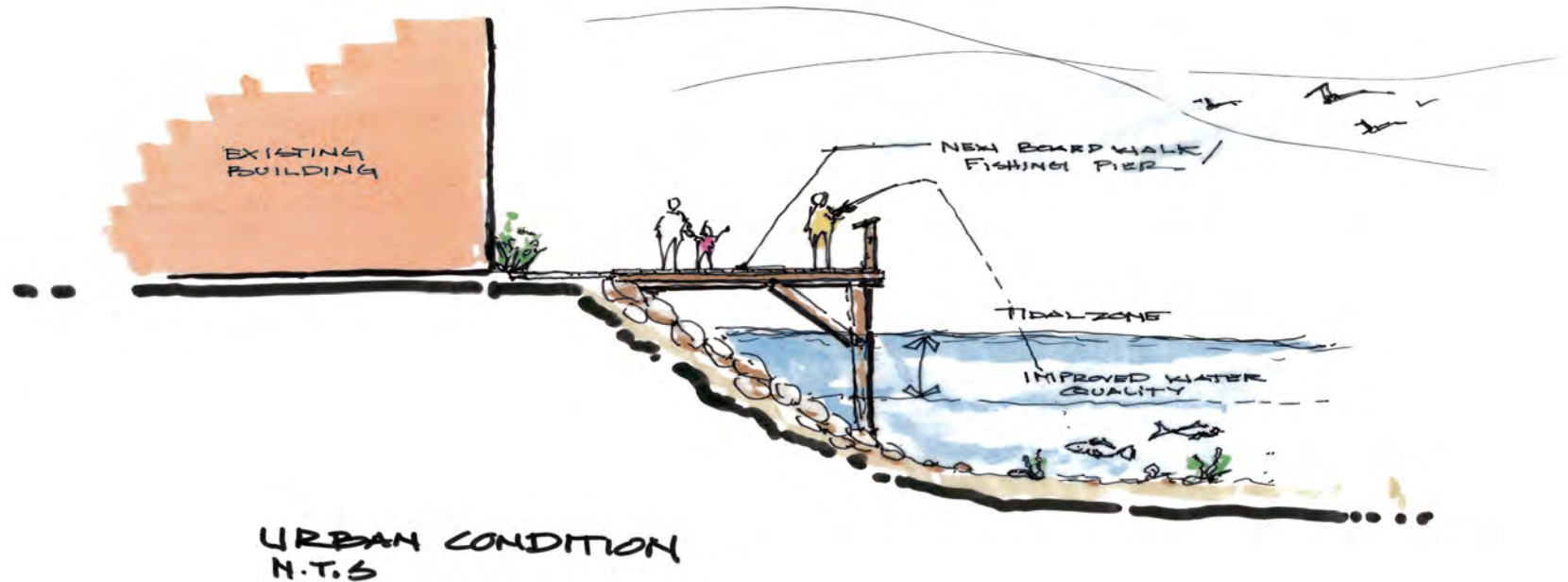
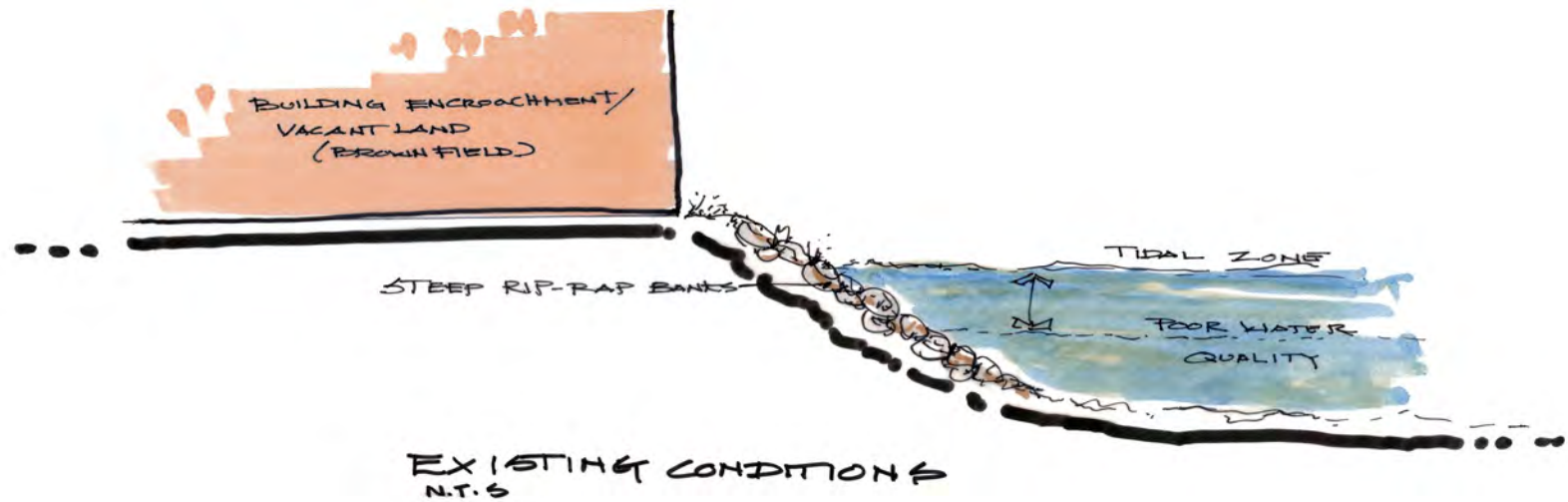


The Rooster River presents interesting opportunities for a different kind of greenway. The river runs in the north-south direction and ties into Ash Creek on the west side of town. Many residents of Bridgeport are unaware that there IS a Rooster River because it is largely contained in an underground pipe rather than a natural waterway. Much of Rooster River crosses through private properties. In places the street grid passes over it, showing little or no evidence of its existence. Several small bridges cross the river where it runs free and is visible.

Efforts are now underway to re-imagine Rooster River as a viable greenway corridor. It is probably not realistic to envision a multi-use trail along its length due to the predominance of private properties, but other related projects can certainly be explored. Community-led initiatives and voluntary efforts by residents and businesses can be part of an awareness and public information campaign. In the corridor, native vegetation, rain gardens, greenroofs and rain barrels can work to retain or detain stormwater runoff to prevent downstream flooding. Daylighting portions may be possible. Bridge crossings can be developed with viewpoints, watershed maps and/or interpretive art. Walking paths on adjacent public streets can become an amenity for neighborhoods. In any case, Rooster River's value as an urban watershed and connecting wildlife corridor can be enhanced.



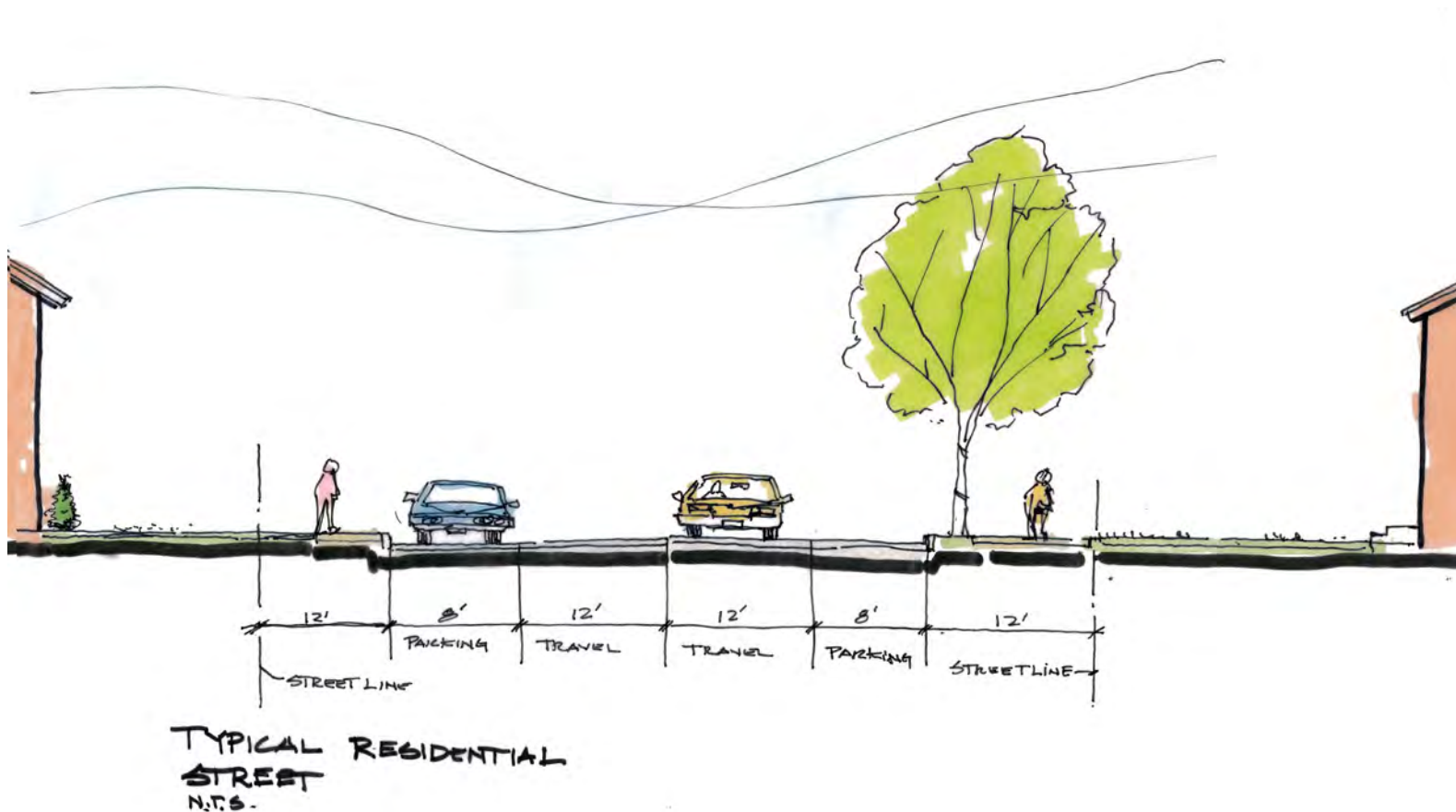


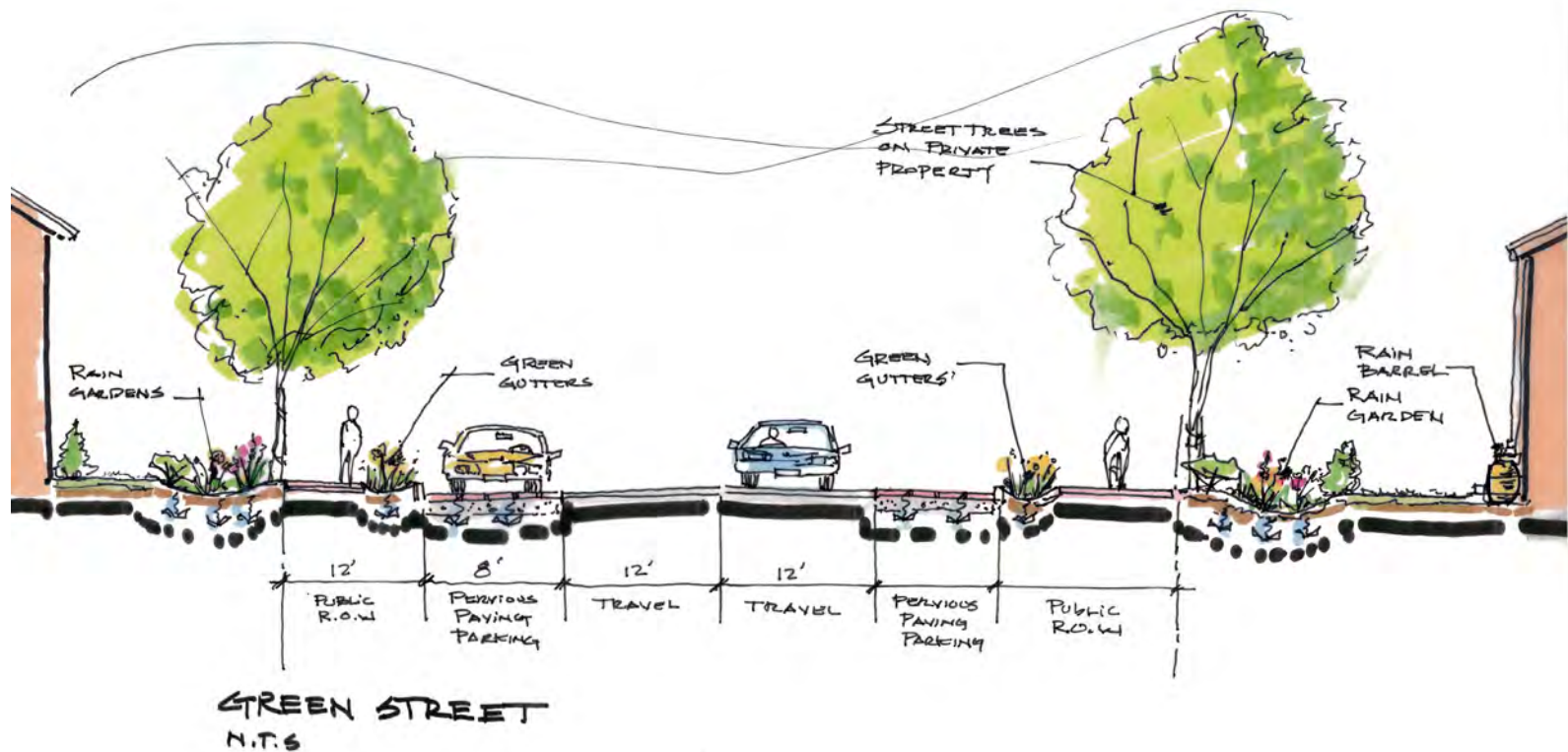


Vision for Shared Streets & Improved Streetscapes

In other cities, bikes are a growing industry. They provide a new culture and attraction for the young generation and importantly, new jobs in the local economy. Bridgeport appears to be a community where bike use can be increased for commuter, errand and recreational use. The gradients of the city are not a barrier and the speed of most of local traffic streets is not excessive. Some streets' rights-of-way are too narrow for bike lanes to be added; yet some shared street opportunities may exist.

In addition to greater connectivity that can be achieved in greenways and streets that run north-south, new multi-modal bike and pedestrian connections can be established on streets in the east-west direction. These streets can connect neighborhoods to the greenways and downtown. From initial impressions, there are several streets that can easily accommodate bike lanes and walkway improvements in their width of right-of-way. Railroad Avenue appears to be an easy example. The city should commission a pedestrian and bicycle master plan to study increased bike and pedestrian opportunities in greater detail.





"Complete streets" are those that accommodate vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, and stormwater facilities and promote an active and vital community. They often have special non-standard materials, furnishings and lighting that add character and identity to the street. The city has begun to develop certain streets such as Park Avenue in this manner and should continue its program to make more attractive street corridors, give neighborhoods an identity and create public places and pocket parks for people to enjoy.



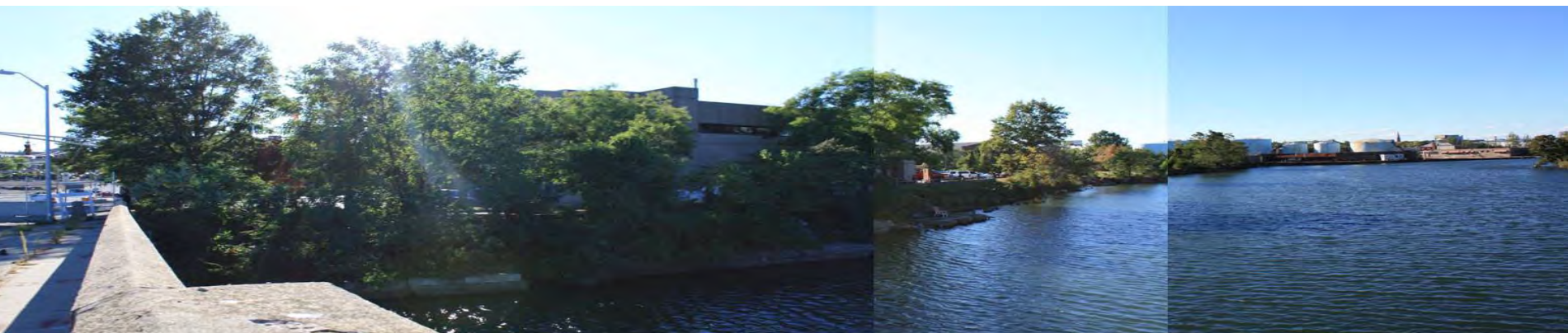
A Panoramic View Southeast from Congress St. Bridge toward the Bridgeport waterfront

Vision for Downtown Walking Loops

A system of walking loops in the downtown offers great potential to connect with the Pequonnock Riverfront and Seaside Park. The intent is to offer people who live and work downtown increased access to the waterfronts. The length of walking loops can be from one to three miles or more. The walking routes can have distinctive paving, lighting and/or signage with maps showing the route options.

Completing the riverwalk from Congress to the ferry terminal is key to a system of interconnecting loops. Streets that appear to have good potential during this brief study include Water, Main, Broad and Lafayette in the north-south direction and Congress, State and Golden Hill in the east-west direction. The I-95 underpasses need enhanced urban treatments, special lighting and art in order to make the pedestrian environment more pleasant, interesting and even playful.

Currently the Congress Bridge is closed due to mechanical problems with the lift. If vehicular traffic can be permanently routed as it is now, ideally the bridge could include a bicycle and pedestrian connection across the river if navigation clearances can be achieved. Or if the mechanical lift can be repaired or replaced, the city might consider just two lanes of vehicular traffic on the bridge while affording bike lanes, wider pedestrian spaces, fishing nodes and overlooks. Even if the bridge is not re-opened, the existing bridge segments remain excellent opportunities for improved public space as fishing piers and overlooks on both sides of the river. In any case, the existing bridge design is interesting and can become a wonderful focal point of the community rather than a vacant dead-end space.



A Panoramic View Northeast from Congress St. Bridge toward the Bridgeport waterfront

Vision for Enhanced Neighborhoods as Social Sustainability

Among Bridgeport's most important assets are its neighborhoods; and through the NRZ designations, more positive community engagement is taking place. Each opportunity should be explored to link the neighborhoods both internally and externally with the larger connective systems of transportation modes and natural corridors and greenways. In other words, the NRZs should always be mindful of ways to support and connect with each other in order to make a successful city.

Vibrant plazas can be identified as nodes and focal points in the distinctive neighborhoods. They should express a signature and unique character reflecting cultural diversity through urban design and works of art. Plazas can feature small festivals, farmers markets or music. To be most successful, the nodes should be located where neighborhood coffee shops or cafes and housing are directly adjacent.

Each neighborhood may choose to express its unique history and contributions to the industrial past. The city has a tradition of rich, historic architecture that ranges from single-family homes and brick row houses to former industrial warehouses. There is wonderful potential for renovation or re-purposing these buildings with mixed-use commercial/retail, lofts, pubs, cafes, day-care centers, athletic clubs, art schools or offices for creative services. Neighborhood-scaled retail can support small local businesses and have a "messy vitality" that is expressive of culture and engaging for residents and visitors alike.

A former factory in Portland, Oregon has been adapted to a mixed use development with a tavern and retail on the ground level.



Short-Term Recommendations

Visual Quality

- Plant more trees in public streets, parks and open spaces.
- Develop existing parks to a higher quality with trails and restrooms.
- Re-green the city through voluntary community gardens and urban agriculture programs.
- Remove fences from public facilities where possible; encourage businesses and residents to remove fencing and bars where possible.

Greenways

- Improve water quality education and awareness.
- Commence an overall planning and feasibility study for a system of greenways and trails in the city.
- Imagine a Rooster River greenway and initiate steps to explore its feasibility.





Streets and Streetscapes

- Commission a bikeway master plan for the city.
- Continue and expand city programs to develop special “complete” streetscapes that increase neighborhood identity.
- Develop green infrastructure projects such as bioswales, rain gardens.

Downtown Walking Loops

- Commence a study to examine how walking loops can connect the downtown and the waterfront; identify the barriers to connectivity.
- Improve freeway underpasses for pedestrians with urban treatments, lighting and art.
- Consider how Congress Street Bridge will be used in the future and explore its potential to become a wonderful focal point of the community.

Enhanced Neighborhoods for Social Sustainability

- Identify where vibrant public plazas and nodes can be located.
- Support local retailers and businesses; encourage “messy vitality” in neighborhood commercial districts.
- Concentrate on issues that connect, not divide neighborhoods.
- Work on neighborhood history interpretive projects on a city-wide basis.
- Encourage citizen-led education programs for personal fitness, community gardens and urban agriculture.



Mid-Term Recommendations

Visual Quality

- Appoint a citizen Design Commission to review new projects for downtown.
- Establish development guidelines that take urban aesthetics into account at many scales; ranging from architectural massing and skyline to landscape screening of parking and storage sites.
- Plan for and establish green buffers between industrial and neighborhoods.
- Continue to develop programs and incentives to re-vegetate the city, in both public and private realms.
- Develop and/or update sign codes.

Greenways

- Focus on programs to improve rivers and creeks; and create visibility and access where possible.
- Plan for and develop greenways and bike/pedestrian trail network on waterways with upland connections and trailheads; implement in phases as funding and redevelopment opportunities allow.
- Establish a set back from top of bank for all new adjacent development and require new development to build trail segments in the greenways.
- Re-vegetate river and creek banks using bioengineering methods.
- Acquire and develop multi-use municipal open spaces that can accommodate periodic flood inundation.
- Provide incentives for green roofs, bioswales and rain gardens.



Streets and Streetscapes

- Study opportunities east-west connecting bikeways within the city.
- Develop overall stormwater management plan of green infrastructure that includes bioswales and rain gardens on public streets and rights-of-way.

Downtown Walking Loops

- Establish a program for walking loops in the downtown with wayfinding maps, interpretive information and other identifying route markers.

Enhanced Neighborhoods for Social Sustainability

- Create engaging public plazas and pocket parks in neighborhoods as focal points.
- Identify regional goals & opportunities for connections to adjacent cities.
- Repurpose historic buildings for housing, offices, lofts, etc.



Long-Term Recommendations

Visual Quality

- Redevelop key brownfields in ways that support the intended character of Bridgeport rather than just national retailers.
- Attract private developments that will result in high quality buildings and pedestrian-oriented mixed-use projects.
- Continue to implement long-range re-vegetation programs such as street trees and industrial buffers.

Greenways

- Plan for and continue to develop phased bike and pedestrian trail network, trail heads, etc. as funding allows.

Streets and Streetscapes

- Continue to plan and implement connecting on-street bikeways within the city.
- Continue to plan and implement streetscape improvements.

Downtown Walking Loops

- Eliminate or improve barriers to downtown walking loops and extend waterfront trail.

Enhanced Neighborhoods for Social Sustainability

- Continue programs and actions as outlined above.





ACCESS AND MOBILITY

Background

The City of Bridgeport was in large part designed and laid out with walking in mind. Unlike most mid-sized cities in the United States, Bridgeport has a wealth of compact urban neighborhoods, neighborhood commercial areas and buildings and districts of historical and architectural interest. The street network is dense, well connected and well equipped for walking and driving. While pavement widths and on-street parking provide some challenges on certain streets, bicycling is also quite viable given the configuration and proximity of neighborhoods to key destinations. The density of the city's neighborhoods and commercial areas begs for transit to take on a more significant role in local mobility. In short, from a design perspective the city is set up for success in creating a sustainable and multimodal transportation system that provides a high level of mobility and accessibility for workers, residents and visitors.

Transportation Vision

Bridgeport's transportation network will supply a high quality and level of service for all modes of transportation. Complete Streets will be created through retrofit and improvement, providing safe, comfortable, convenient and secure facilities for pedestrians, transit users, cyclists and motorists. Bridgeport will seek every opportunity to design streets and shape the urban environment to promote walkability in every part of the city. Access to transit and effective transit operations will be highly valued in the design, operation and maintenance of the roadway network.



Assessment

The Importance Of Downtown

The City of Bridgeport is within and enjoys access to a very vibrant and large metropolitan area. Interstate 95, the Metro-North Railroad and Shore Line East commuter rail service connect the city to jobs and activities that most other cities can only dream of. Although there is this location advantage within the region, the future economic success of Bridgeport will depend mostly on its ability to attract and retain jobs and create and sustain the quality of life in its neighborhoods. The downtown and areas surrounding it are very important to both of these ends.

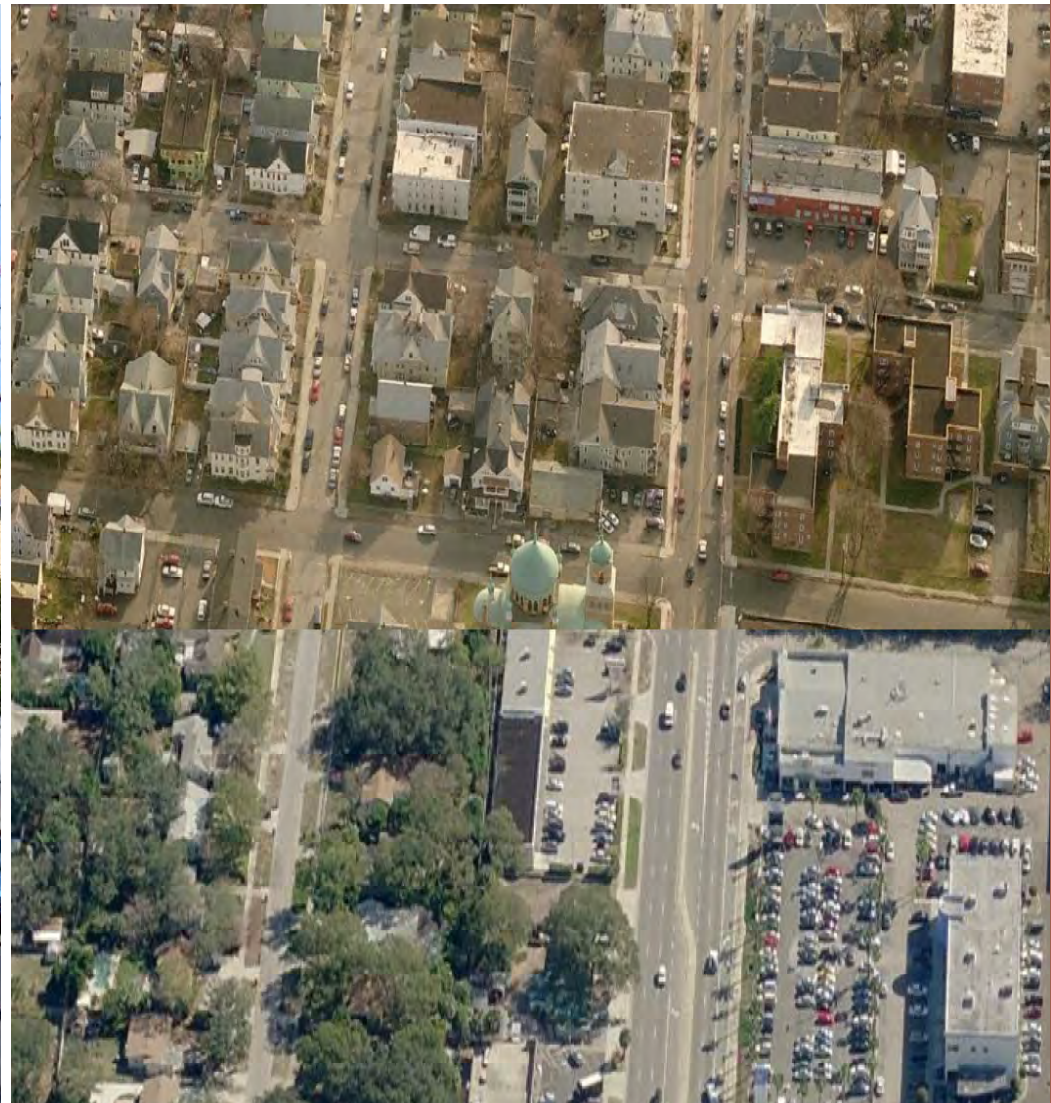
The local transportation system and connections to regional transportation infrastructure are arguably the most important public assets for downtown and the city as a whole. Regional location and access is what puts Bridgeport on the map. Local streets, and the neighborhoods and commercial centers they serve, are where the real story of the city plays out. A significant portion of the current perception of the city comes from the state of downtown and proximate places. The maintenance and function of the transportation system are an important part of that perception. Although there are some exceptions, the good news is that the streets downtown are well maintained, secure and clean, and they reflect a sense of pride in the city.

All of the city's neighborhoods and commercial areas are affected by the health of downtown as a commercial center and neighborhood. Because Bridgeport is relatively compact, city residents are close enough to the city center to take advantages of the assets there on a regular basis. Those include assets that exist today and those that are planned, such as Steele Pointe and the retail and entertainment opportunities that will exist there.



Neighborhood Design and Accessibility

Many of Bridgeport's neighborhoods and commercial areas are structured very differently from the post-war constructs so prevalent in most U.S. cities. Compare Bridgeport's East Main Street looking south in the area of Pearl Street to Kennedy Boulevard in Tampa, Florida. There are significant differences in the use of on-street versus off-street parking. In Bridgeport, commercial buildings are a neighborhood scale and are in close proximity to the street. Residential densities are very different. Bridgeport's neighborhood businesses are in close proximity to a much greater number and type of households than the typical automobile environment. All of these factors give Bridgeport's neighborhoods an advantage in supporting different modes of transportation.



Transit First and Complete Streets

The BGreen 2020 transportation recommendations emphasize adopting and Transit First policy and implementing Complete Streets. In order to achieve a more sustainable transportation system (i.e. greatly reducing vehicle miles of travel and greenhouse gas emissions), the city must move in this direction. Making these goals a reality is a significant challenge. The challenge will only be met by making a full commitment within each relevant department in the city and creating effective partnerships with the Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority (GBTA), the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Greater Bridgeport/Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization.

If the City of Bridgeport is to succeed in creating Complete Streets, the desired outcomes must be clearly identified and presented relative to the limitations and flexibility that exist in adopted engineering standards. This process has to take place prior to and outside the context of individual projects in order for it to produce effective results. The rules of the game have to be agreed to up front and codified in a set of guidelines for designing Complete Streets. While some off the shelf examples exist, they will not be able to capture the unique conditions and needs that exist in Bridgeport. In order for Complete Streets to be effectively conceived and funded, the thought process must be built into the roadway design culture (i.e. the standards from which engineers get guidance on how to design roadways).

The transit system operated by the GBTA is comparable to other systems for mid-sized cities. Headways are for the most part thirty minutes and the system is operated out of a hub, which fortunately is right in the heart of downtown and immediately adjacent to the rail station. The long term prospects for transit to serve greater numbers and types of users and trips will rely on improving headways and expanding service into different parts of the city. The long term success of transit will also rely on the city's ability to foster economic growth in central areas and continue to improve the walkability of neighborhoods and commercial districts.



Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Other than dealing with New England winters, pedestrians have good prospects for getting around Bridgeport. Most city streets feature appropriate widths to produce low street speeds, and include sidewalks and pedestrian facilities. However, there are plenty of opportunities for small-scale maintenance and gap-fill projects throughout the city. This can be done throughout the city and will be appreciated more by city residents than high-dollar streetscape projects where a lot of money gets spent in one place. As is the case in most U.S. cities, it is assumed that funds are limited and only a handful of large-scale sidewalk projects are able to be achieved in the foreseeable future.

With respect to the facilities provided for bicycles, Bridgeport's typical street design presents challenges. Many collectors and some arterials have narrow lane widths, a limited number of lanes (precluding certain road diet concepts) or have on-street parking. While it is not possible (nor desirable) to have bicycle lanes on all streets, there are ways to create a bicycle network that works for the different types of users in the city.



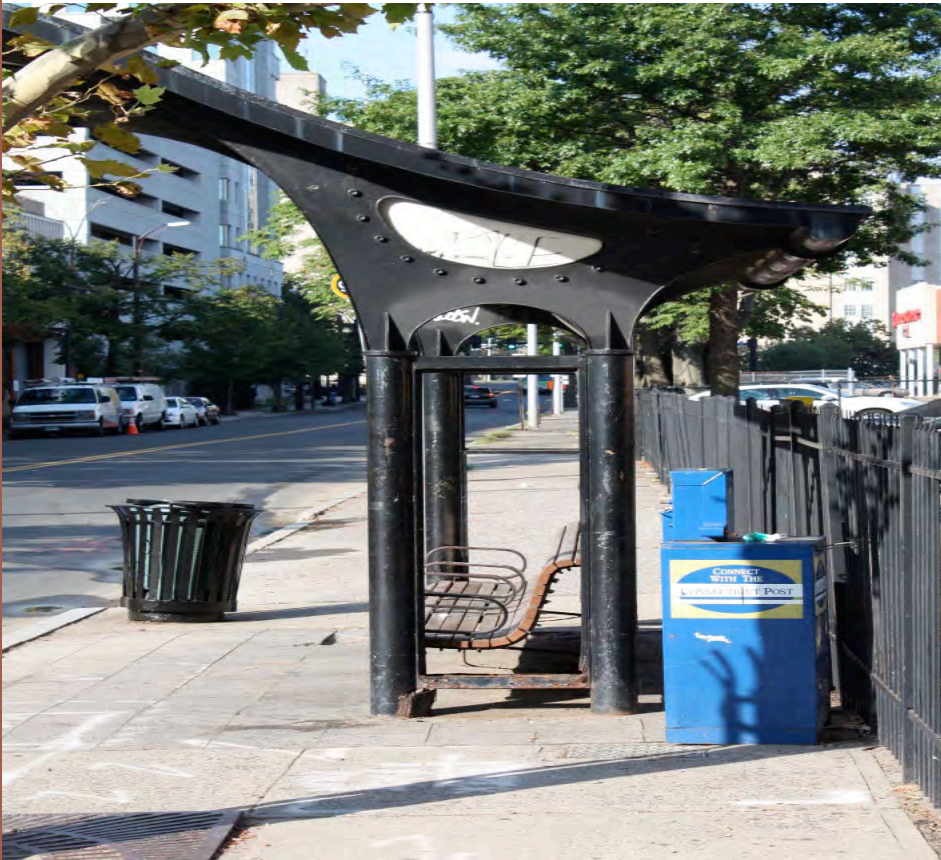
Short-Term Recommendations

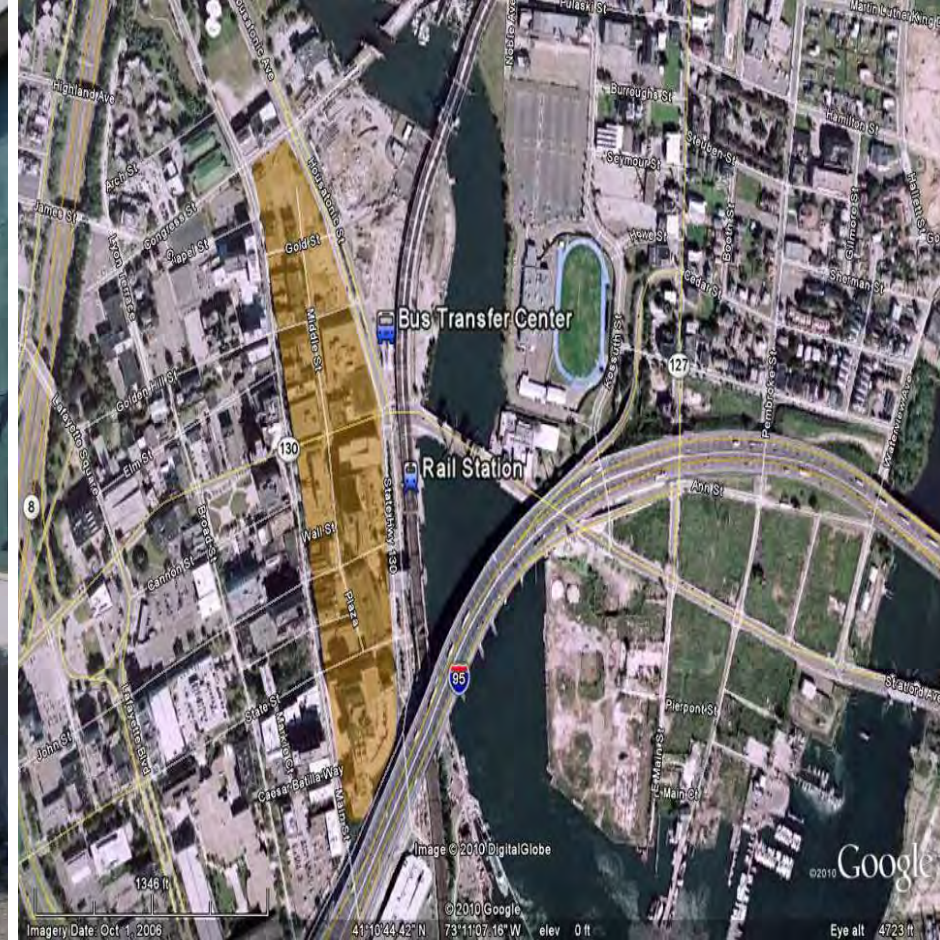
Livable Roadways Design Guidelines

The City of Bridgeport should develop a set of guidelines to serve as a basis for designing roadways that support all modes of transportation and add integrity, value and beauty to the neighborhoods they serve. Guidelines will ensure that projects implemented in the city meet the goals and expectations of Bridgeport, irrespective of who is designing and implementing them. The guidelines should take advantage of the design flexibility that exists in current engineering standards. The City might choose to partner with the MPO, GBTA and CDOT on this project. This is a low cost item that would have lasting impact as transportation projects of all kinds are implemented in the city.

Multi-use Trail System Plan and Housatonic Railroad Trail

The Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency has put together a vision for a regional trail working with local jurisdictions. The section of the Housatonic Railroad Trail in the City of Bridgeport runs through suburban and urban areas, both of which present design and right of way challenges. In conjunction with preparing a Green Space Master Plan (as called for in BGreen 2020), the City of Bridgeport should include a greenways and trails element to address the specific alignment of the Housatonic Railroad Trail, new trail facilities that are needed to connect parks, neighborhoods and business districts and a systemwide plan to be implemented over the long term. Specific concepts exist, such as a new trail along Railroad Avenue, but they do not have official standing within a coordinated plan framework and need to be further refined in order to move them toward implementation. A multi-use trail framework plan will help get sections of the trail system implemented as opportunities arise.





Improvements to Transit Station Area

One of the most important tasks for downtown is ensuring the area around the rail station and bus transfer station is in top condition. This area of downtown Bridgeport, bounded by Congress Street to the north, Main Street to the west and State Street to the south, is Bridgeport's front door for all who come by way of transit! Imagine a young single or couple, intent on taking advantage of transit to get to work, visiting Bridgeport for the first time and assessing whether downtown is a viable neighborhood for them to live in or not. What perception do they have? The streets need to be clean, safe, interesting and full of activity for them to be sold on the place. The good news is that for downtown as a whole, it is very attractive and inviting in general. In the area of the transit station, however, there are some particularly rough spots that need immediate attention. The sidewalks on the section of Hill Street between Main Street and Middle Street need to be repaired and reopened. The conditions that exist there now send a message that the pedestrian is not valued or welcome and the City of Bridgeport does not have the means, the interest or the wherewithal to maintain its streets. The sidewalk of Middle Street just north of Hill Street was covered in litter and broken glass during the SDAT team visit – all within the transit front door area for downtown. In order to put Bridgeport's best foot forward, this area needs improvements and maintenance attention on an ongoing basis.

Pedestrian signals and crosswalks

The City of Bridgeport should embark on a pedestrian signal modernization program that gets implemented throughout the city over time. Downtown would be a good place to start given the density of pedestrian traffic there. The existing pedestrian signals in downtown are largely ignored and pedestrians cross on the traffic signal or during gaps. Many of the signals do not work and the walk signal only comes up when the pedestrian pushes the button. Bridgeport should change its approach to pedestrian signals by having the walk signal come up automatically during the appropriate phase of the signal. This transition should be made throughout the city. Where signal heads need replacing and in high pedestrian traffic areas, install countdown signals, which indicate how much time is left on the walk phase.



Mid-Range Recommendations

Improve Bus Headways on Existing Routes

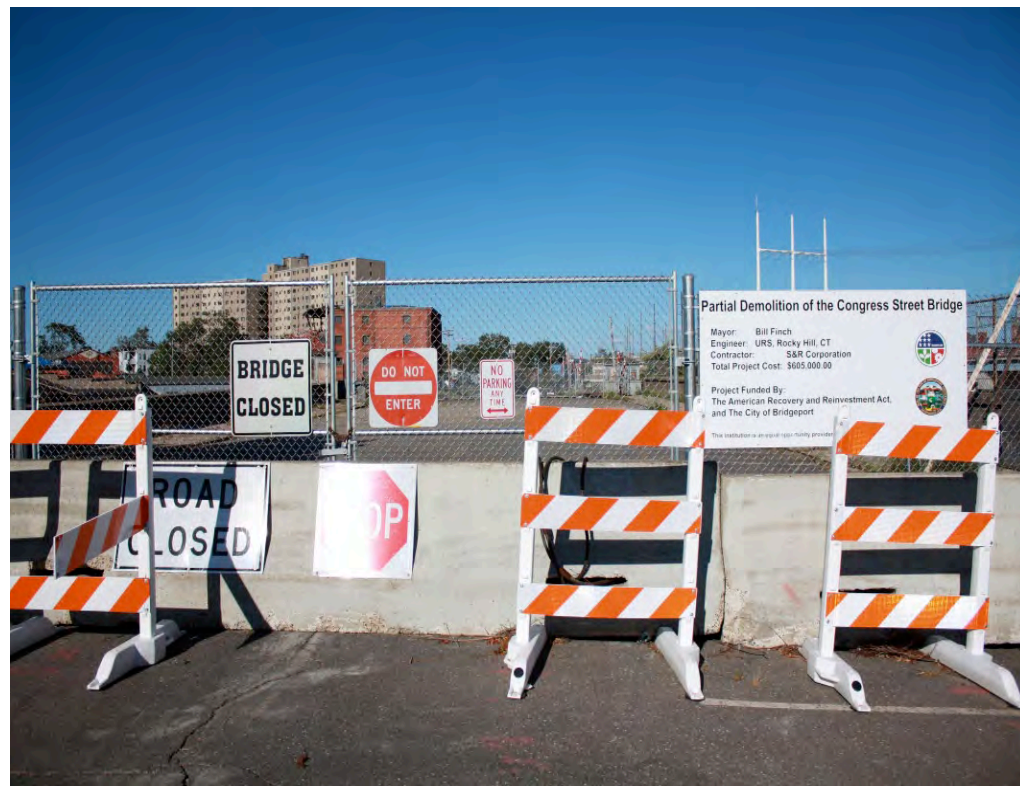
Most of the routes in the GBTA system have thirty minute headways. This level of service is not enough to live up to the aspirations for transit as expressed in the BGreen 2020 plan for sustainability. Existing routes need to be improved to twenty minutes as soon as funds can be made to do so. On the most productive routes, headways need to be set at ten minutes during peak hours. This change in headways significantly alters the user experience, moving from schedule dependence to a situation where users are able to rely on the system to meet their schedule. They will use the system knowing that a bus will be by shortly, irrespective of when they show up at the stop.

Congress Street Bridge

The Congress Street Bridge needs to be reopened as soon as it can be. Of the bridges that have been closed, this should be the highest priority. If possible and perhaps on a temporary basis, the bridge should be used for bicycle and pedestrian traffic only. There are many obvious benefits to having this bridge reopened. In addition to improving vehicle access in and out of downtown, the bridge's proximity to the transit hub, downtown and potential waterfront park will make it vitally important in the future.

Pleasure Island Ferry

Bridgeport should institute seasonal ferry service to Pleasure Island. Irrespective of what the future holds for this forgotten island, there are numerous reasons to go. The ferry service could be used by city residents and visitors. With some preparation on the island, the trip could be for beach access or paired with a recreational tour that focuses on the history of the island and its environmental assets.



Long-Range Recommendations

Seaside Park

The virtues of Seaside Park need no explanation here, but there are a few potential ways to improve on it over the long term. The trail along the waterfront and Soundview Drive and Barnum Boulevard provides a great opportunity for cyclists and pedestrians. The facility was surprisingly quiet on what was an extremely beautiful day during the SDAT, however. The trail seems a little precarious adjacent to the water, given the bicycle traffic. A monumental wall might provide some separation and protect against users leaving the pathway (see Bayshore Boulevard, Tampa, Florida). The trail is also not quite wide enough to support shared bicycle and pedestrian traffic. There should be a long term vision of widening the trail to at least fifteen feet (if such a plan does not already exist). Seaside Park and the waterfront trail as a bicycle facility should be connected to downtown via Broad Street (or Main Street as an alternative connection south of I-95) and clearly marked and advertised as an integrated trail facility.



Bridgeport Waterfront



Tampa Waterfront



Bridgeport Waterfront



Tampa Waterfront

Open Up the Waterfront to Downtown

Bridgeport should set a goal of completing a “Riverwalk” trail in downtown from the Washington Avenue Bridge to the arena and baseball stadium. This type of project will provide numerous benefits for the city and bring the water to the people in a number of places. Planning for the facility should be built into the Green Spaces Master Plan called for in BGreen 2020. The City of Tampa, Florida has a long standing Riverwalk project that is nearing completion. The Riverwalk has engendered private development and created numerous opportunities for public spaces and facilities, such as museums. The jewel in the crown is the Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park, which is home to the Tampa Museum of Art and the recently opened Glazer Children’s Museum. It has brought local and regional visitors of all ages into the city.



GOVERNANCE & COLLABORATION

Background

Like every other American city, Bridgeport is facing a new civic landscape. Over the last two decades, we have witnessed some fundamental changes in what ordinary Americans want and can do. Citizens are more vocal, diverse, skilled, and skeptical than their predecessors of twenty, fifty, or 100 years ago. They have less time for public life, but they bring more knowledge and talent to the table. They feel more entitled to the services and protection of government, and yet have less faith that government will be able to deliver on those promises. They are less connected to community affairs, and yet they seem better able to find (often through the Internet) the information, allies, and resources they need to affect an issue or decision they care about. These new attitudes and capacities are becoming more evident in national elections and policymaking processes, but at the local level, it has been clear for some time that citizens are better at governing, and less willing to be governed, than ever before.

This shift was captured by one of the participants in the meeting held on our first evening in Bridgeport. “We used to have a politically illiterate citizenry,” he said. “Now we have a politically active citizenry.”

For local leaders, the new state of citizenship is a two-edged sword. People are more willing to contribute productively to public decision-making – and also more willing and able to disrupt it. Local officials in particular will often speak of the “usual suspects” who speak out at meetings of the city council, school board, and planning commission; citizens respond by criticizing the “decide and defend” tactics of public officials. No matter whose side you are on in these debates, the most obvious conclusion to draw is that policymaking processes have degenerated and that no one is satisfied.

To deal with these new pressures, and to tap the considerable potential of citizens to help solve public problems and devise smarter public policies, local leaders in many cities have experimented with new forms of public engagement. The most successful of these efforts have four central principles:

1. They assemble a large and diverse “critical mass” of citizens (or in relatively rare cases, a smaller, demographically representative set of people, intended to serve as a proxy for the larger population). To achieve this kind of mass participation, organizers map out and connect with a wide variety of organizations and networks, weaving together the strands of a large web of existing relationships, so that potential participants are recruited by people they already know and trust.
2. They involve those citizens in structured, facilitated small-group discussions, interspersed with large forums for amplifying shared conclusions and moving from talk to action. These have traditionally been face-to-face meetings, but increasingly they are being held online, and other online tools are being used to inform and complement them.
3. They give the participants in these meetings the opportunity to compare values and experiences, and to consider a range of views and policy options. This is the “deliberative” heart of participation work: allowing people of different opinions to decide together what they think should be done about a public issue.
4. They are intended to produce tangible actions and outcomes. There is some variation here: some efforts focus on applying citizen input to policy and planning decisions, while others also seek to effect change other levels, including changes within organizations and institutions, actions driven by small groups of people, individual volunteerism, and changes in attitude and behavior.

Participation initiatives with these characteristics have already taken place in Bridgeport. Starting in 1997 and continuing through at least 2007, the Bridgeport Public Education Fund (BPEF) held a series of at least 40 large-scale “Community Conversations” on school issues. Some of those efforts engaged as many as 500 Bridgeport residents in discussion and action on education priorities. The Community Conversations featured all four of the core principles named above. Each one has been led by a coalition of community organizations; at one time or another, the City of Bridgeport, the Board of Education, the United Way, RYASAP, the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, and the Regional Business Council have also helped to sponsor and organize a Community Conversation.

The Community Conversations have had a number of tangible impacts, ranging from volunteer activities to school policy decisions. After one forum, 800 individuals volunteered to go to schools to read to children. Fifty-one college mentors worked with over 200 high school students. The school system reinstituted school leadership teams, adopted an anti-bullying policy, lowered class sizes, improved transparency in school budgeting processes, and created a new strategic plan.

In *Transforming Public Life: A Decade of Citizen Engagement in Bridgeport, CT*, Will Friedman, Alison Kadlec, and Lara Birnback argue that the Community Conversations in Bridgeport have had an indelible impact on the city’s political culture. The report quotes many local leaders:

“When an organization or group thinks they want to find out about something, or come up with a plan, they really automatically go to a large, broad-based practice, rather than saying, ‘Let’s get the five or six best experts on this issue into a room to figure it out.’”

– *Adrienne Houel, Action for Bridgeport Community Development, Inc.*

“Our business community has learned to be very patient with change here, because they know that community involvement is one of our cultural traits now and we’ve got to have it.

“There’s a very significant number of individuals [in the business community] that buy into the engagement process. I buy into it and I support it because I think it gets us to where we want to go.”

– *Paul Timpanelli, Bridgeport Regional Business Council*

“We’ve got a much better tendency here to share leadership on things...When this community gets left out of stuff, there can be uprising. It makes bad political sense to ‘top-down’ stuff in Bridgeport.”

– *Robert Francis, Executive Director, RYASAP*

“Democracy is hard. It’s easier to be autocratic, but I just don’t believe that you get the same kind of commitment...If you’re talking about the work that has to be long-term and deep-seated I believe that this approach is most effective.”

– *John Ramos, Superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools*

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CASE STUDIES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT / NO.1 / 2007

Transforming Public Life:

A DECADE OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN BRIDGEPORT, CT

by Will Friedman, Alison Kadlec, and Lara Birnback

PUBLIC AGENDA

However, the fervor for productive public engagement that shines through in the Transforming Public Life report was not evident in the meetings held by the Sustainable Design Assessment Team in Bridgeport. In fact, none of the city staffers we met with seem to have heard of the Community Conversations. The recent transition from one mayoral administration to another may be a factor here; another may be that the Community Conversations have focused mainly on school issues, and participants have not seen the applicability of the process to other local concerns.

In any case, regardless of whether and how the Community Conversations have impacted Bridgeport's public life, their legacy presents some valuable assets. Chief among these is the presence of what the Transforming Public Life report calls "deliberative mavens:" people with the skills and experience to help recruit citizens and facilitate productive meetings. "There [are] minimally twenty-five people who have been trained as moderators and recorders, who would be ready to serve, virtually at a moment's notice," says Sonja Ahuja of the League of Women Voters. "It does involve a pretty diverse group of people from many parts of the community."



Another asset is the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) process, which has been used in Bridgeport since the mid 1990s. Like most municipal neighborhood council systems, the NRZs have some important weaknesses, but they do provide an established conduit between neighborhood residents and the local policymaking process.

The typical limitations of neighborhood council systems are:

- They were 'formed in the image of government,' and tend to emphasize bylaw discussions, the use of Robert's Rules, and other overly formalized procedures
- Older people, higher-income people, and white people are usually over-represented
- Meetings are often poorly run (they lack facilitation, small-group discussion, background materials, groundrules set by participants, and other good group process techniques)
- There is usually no online dimension (neighborhood online forum or listserv)
- Teenagers and young adults aren't given specific roles or the encouragement to take on leadership positions
- "Lots of politics, not enough fun"
- As a result of all these factors, participation usually wanes over time

There are undoubtedly other civic assets to be uncovered in Bridgeport, but these two – the presence of skilled participation practitioners, and the existence of an officially recognized structure for neighborhood involvement – already give the city a leg up on what other communities have in place.





Seven suggestions for vitalizing public life in Bridgeport

1. Convene the “mavens”

- Bring together the people named in the Transforming Public Life report, along with NRZ and other leaders, in a city-wide committee to promote/guide/advise public engagement on all issues
- This body could replace the cross-NRZ committee that is currently in place
- Include teenagers, college students in this group

Example to consider: Portsmouth Listens, an all-volunteer cadre of organizers, recruiters, and facilitators, supported by a broad array of community organizations and institutions, has mobilized citizens time after time, over a ten-year span, to take on virtually every major decision facing the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. From school bullying to school construction, from land use planning to budget planning, the most controversial issues in Portsmouth have been dealt with in a reasonable way by a broad cross-section of citizens.

2. Transform the Neighborhood Revitalization Zones

- Reconstitute the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone committees as independent groups with an official role in policymaking and a central role in community-building
- Give them a more appealing name: “neighborhood roundtables,” or “front porch forums,” etc.
- The NRZs should contribute on a number of issues, including land use but also schools, race, economic development, youth issues, and others
- In each neighborhood, convene representatives of the school system, faith community, nonprofits, businesses to help support and ‘own’ the NRZs

Example to consider: The Strong Neighborhoods Initiative in San Jose, California. Several years ago, the City of San José allocated \$120 million of redevelopment money into the city’s neighborhoods. This created a unique opportunity to organize coalitions of neighborhoods in 19 underserved areas of the city. Staff organizers worked with existing neighborhood leaders, identified and developed new leaders, and in some cases, developed new neighborhood organizations. The funding was the catalyst to get people to the table, but the ultimate goal was strong organizations with capable and confident leaders. The neighborhood plans developed through the SNI process guide all City resource allocations in those areas.



3. Equip neighborhood leaders and City Hall to work with the public

- Provide training in participation skills such as recruitment, facilitation, meeting design, issue framing, action planning, etc.
- Neighborhood leaders and city employees should go through the training together, forming connections and partnerships in the process
- Appeal to national nonprofits like Public Agenda (NYC), Everyday Democracy (Hartford) for free assistance

Example to consider: Training was a key element of the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods (NBN) initiative in Rochester, New York. NBN was a citizen-based planning and community action process, in which city staff worked with teams of residents – one for each sector of the city – to map assets, create community vision statements, and develop priorities for community action. The city trained neighborhood leaders in group dynamics and group process, and hired several organizational development consultants to work directly with the sectors. Some public employees, particularly those in the planning department, also went through the training. “We retrained and retooled the entire planning staff,” says Tom Argust, the former planning director, “and asked them to serve as facilitators, enablers, resource people... This was a tough transition for some of them, because they were champing at the bit to do the planning themselves.” They also established a series of training workshops called the NBN Institute. The workshop topics, which have changed and proliferated over the years, include things like meeting management, working with volunteers, budgeting, the zoning process, and database design. Broad-based recruitment was a key theme in all of the advice and assistance, and neighborhoods were asked to develop detailed recruitment strategies to think through how they would involve diverse groups of citizens in the planning itself.



4. Establish local and neighborhood online forums

- Create simple online exchanges (can be email listservs)
- Not a replacement for face-to-face meetings
- Work best when they operate by a basic set of ground rules, including a registration process which requires people to use their real names and verify their location
- Models and examples can be found at www.e-democracy.org

Example to consider: The Front Porch Forum in Burlington, Vermont, is one of the oldest and largest local online networks. It provides a venue for residents to discuss both public problems and decisions, such as zoning changes, but it also allows for other kinds of socializing and information-sharing. Residents ask each other questions like “Who can refer me to a good plumber?,” “When is the block party?,” and “Who has a canoe I can borrow?”

5. Incorporate engagement measures into Bridgeport’s CitiStat system

- Break all neighborhood plans down into measurable benchmarks
- Start to gather process information (including the number of people at meetings or online forums, the basic demographic information about those participants, the structure or format used for a meeting, results of any satisfaction surveys, etc.), and establish benchmarks
- As part of the data-gathering, allow citizens to send in or post the information online
- Make all the data publicly available online
- Outcome data should be disaggregated by race and other demographics

6. Create a neighborhood micro-grant program

- Offer small grants for neighborhood improvement projects
- Grants should require matching contributions of sweat equity, materials, and other donations from residents and neighborhood organizations
- Could be funded by a community foundation, by local government, by business coalitions, or by a range of local institutions/organizations all pitching in

Example to consider: Seattle, Washington, has one of the most established and accomplished micro-grant programs in the world. Micro-grants there have been used to create community gardens, traffic calming measures, and even a sculpture of a troll under a bridge in the Fremont neighborhood that has become a popular tourist attraction.



Seattle's Famous Troll Sculpture - A Neighborhood project

7. Create a Bridgeport youth council system

- Give young people an official, advisory role in local policymaking
- Link with schools, clubs – youth councilmembers should think of themselves as engagement leaders who get their peers involved, not just representatives of other young people

Example to consider: Hampton, Virginia, was an early pioneer in the work of supporting youth leadership. The city's planning efforts are aided by a youth commission, and a cadre of Youth Planners, who help to mobilize hundreds of people for neighborhood planning efforts. This is not simply a civic education opportunity for young people: Cindy Carlson, who directs the Hampton Coalition for Youth, argues that "the true value of youth engagement lies in its impact on the overall quality of life of the community," not simply its effect on youth as future leaders.

Conclusion

These are only initial ideas for Bridgeport leaders and residents to consider. The most important step would be for a diverse group of people to begin thinking about the long-term civic infrastructure of their city. This planning process could use the following sequence:

1. Map some of the civic assets of Bridgeport
2. Consider different engagement goals
3. Assemble an initial civic infrastructure plan
4. Gather feedback and commitments on the plan from a larger number of people, using good deliberative process techniques
5. Refine the plan
6. Call leaders and organizations to commit to implement different elements of the plan

For organizing suggestions and sample agendas for engagement planning meetings, see the recent National League of Cities publication, *Civic Engagement and Recent Immigrant Communities* (www.nlc.org).

Notes

Matt Leighninger (2006), *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance – And Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, TN.

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Matt Leighninger (2009), *The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy: Lessons from the Intersection of Government and Community*, Grassroots Grantmakers, Austin, TX.

Portsmouth Listens was recently named as one of seven finalists worldwide for the Mohn Prize in Vitalizing Democracy – see www.vitalizing-democracy.org.

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CONCLUSION

Recently, the City of Bridgeport was recognized with the Audrey Nelson Community Development Achievement Award. The award is given to recognize cities that make innovative use of Community Development Block Grant funds to address low-income families and neighborhood issues. The award recognized the fruition of the Bijou Square development at 323 Fairfield Avenue. It marks the first new construction project in downtown Bridgeport in nearly 20 years, a signal achievement which could usher in additional private investment in downtown's renaissance.

Work on the building had begun in 2007, but the economic recession impacted the project's financing and it stalled. Two city agencies worked hand-in-hand with the developer to structure a financing package that made the project possible. A combination of three different public funding sources helped put the project back into construction. In the midst of the worst recession since the 1930s, downtown Bridgeport is building, a sure sign of not only what is possible, but how it will be possible.

This development represents a fantastic example of the manner in which the City of Bridgeport will succeed in the future – innovative public-private partnerships, vision, and perseverance. As Mayor Bill Finch said, "Phil never lost sight of what he wanted to do, and we wouldn't allow the project to flounder." As a result, the city has its first new project in downtown in decades, a mixed-use development that includes a boutique, wine shop, hair salon, and other vendors. Only two retail spaces remain vacant so far. Forty percent of the units are already rented, and expectations are that the building will be full by early spring. Developer Phil Kuchma underscores the collective hope that this development represents for the downtown's future – "Downtown Bridgeport is an interesting place to live, work, and enjoy restaurants and entertainment, and is improving every month. We plan to continue to grow our investments here and definitely see a bright future."

The SDAT Team believes Bridgeport is poised for great things. By expanding community engagement, and leveraging success like the Bijou Square development, the city can build an infrastructure to become a future model. It will require a lot of vision, innovative thinking, and even more partnership, but it is possible for the city to thrive once again. Our team looks forward to your continuing success.





THE SDAT TEAM



Sanford Garner, AIA, NOMA, LEED ND, NCARB - Team Leader

Through his role as founding partner at A2SO4, Sanford Garner has focused on historic preservation, master planning, project assessment, and urban design. His experiences and interests in these areas were developed through his studies in Helsinki, Finland and at University of California, Los Angeles, and through his work with DC Preservation League and HABS/HAER (Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Survey). His work has received such notable recognitions as “Best in American Living for Best Smart Growth Community” by the National Association of Home Builders and Professional Builders Magazine, “Awards for Excellence” from the Urban Land Institute, and the American Planning Association’s “Implementing Smart Growth” Award, as well as numerous awards and citations for community development and design. In addition to his professional practice, Sanford has maintained a strong commitment to community service and development through his involvement with local and regional advisory councils and boards.

Matt Leighninger - Governance and Community Building

Matt Leighninger is the executive director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, an umbrella group that includes the major organizations in the field of deliberation and citizen involvement. Over the last twelve years, Matt has worked with citizen involvement efforts in over 100 communities, in 40 states and two Canadian provinces; roughly 25,000 people have taken part in those projects. Most of this work was supported by Everyday Democracy, of which he is a senior associate. Leighninger has also been a consultant to the National League of Cities, Centers for Disease Control, and the League of Women Voters. His first book, *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance – and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*, was released in 2006 by Vanderbilt University Press.



Carol Mayer-Reed, FASLA - Connectivity

Carol Mayer-Reed, FASLA, is partner in charge of Mayer/Reed's landscape architecture and urban design group that is recognized regionally and nationally for design excellence and sustainability leadership. Her 33 years of experience encompass a wide range of project types in both public and private sectors, including waterfronts, site master planning, transportation corridors, urban renewal, plazas, parks and recreation, and corporate and university campuses.

Carol is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and has served as Chair of its National Awards program. She is appointed to the national General Services Administration Peer Review panel. She recently served on the boards of the Architecture Foundation of Oregon and the School of Architecture & Allied Arts at the University of Oregon. Carol holds registration as a landscape architect in the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California and Ohio. She earned a BFA from The Ohio State University and a Master of Landscape Architecture & Planning from Utah State University.

Alan Steinbeck, AICP - Transportation

Alan Steinbeck, AICP is a Project Manager with Renaissance Planning Group in Tampa, Florida. His focus as a planning and design professional has been on overseeing projects integrating issues of transportation, land use and design. He has worked extensively with local governments and transportation agencies to develop transportation systems plans, land use and development policies and multimodal plans and policies for roadway design. He has successfully managed several downtown and community plans and programs relating to roadway network design, streetscapes, capital projects planning, development rights planning, and transit. He is currently managing the City of Clearwater Greenprint for Sustainability, TOD development regulations for the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, the Selmon Greenway Feasibility Study for the Hillsborough County MPO and the transit element of the Polk County Long Range Transportation Plan. Alan has a Bachelor of Science in Architecture and a Master of Science in City and Regional Planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology.



Paul Fontaine, AICP – Urban Design and Revitalization

Paul Fontaine head's Fontaine Urban Design, an urban design firm that specializes in civic revitalization, brownfield redevelopment and grant writing assistance. Paul started working as an urban designer and planner 20 years ago after obtaining a MS in Urban and Regional Planning from Columbia University. He has worked in both the private and public sectors of planning, including stints as a county and township planner, an urban design professor and owner of a small urban design firm, and as a planner for JJR's Ann Arbor office. Paul lives in Ann Arbor with his amazing wife and the all important cat. In his off time, he is either looking for a great story, whether it's from a book, movie, play, opera or good friends, or getting schooled at the YMCA's basketball courts by Generation Next.



Ken Bowers, AICP – Economics and Housing

Ken Bowers returned from New York City to Raleigh, his home town, in July of 2006 to take a position as the City's Deputy Planning Director. He led the rewrite of the City's 18-year old Comprehensive Plan, which was unanimously adopted in October 2009. Prior to joining Raleigh, Bowers worked as a planning consultant and Principal with the firm of Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates in Manhattan, where he specialized in land use planning; downtown, neighborhood, city and regional economic development strategies; and market feasibility studies throughout the Tri-State region of New York/New Jersey/Connecticut and beyond. Mr. Bowers has a Bachelors of Science in Physics from North Carolina State University and a Masters in Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He holds a certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners and is also a licensed Professional Planner in the State of New Jersey.

Erin Simmons

Erin Simmons is the Director of Design Assistance at the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects in Washington, DC. Her primary role at the AIA is to provide process expertise, facilitation and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, she works with AIA components, members, partner organizations and community members to provide technical design assistance to communities across the country. To date, Erin has served as staff lead on over 30 design assistance teams. Prior to joining the AIA, Erin worked as senior historic preservationist and architectural historian for an environmental and engineering firm in Georgia, where she practiced preservation planning, created historic district design guidelines and zoning ordinances, conducted historic resource surveys, and wrote property nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia.

Joel Mills

Joel Mills serves as Director of the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects. He provides process expertise, facilitation and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, he works with AIA components, members and partner organizations to provide technical assistance to communities across the country on sustainability and urban design. His expertise is in civic health and governance, and includes community-based technical assistance, process design, facilitation and training across a number of fields including juvenile justice reform, local government, education, family strengthening, civic media and emergency management. During the 1990s, Mr. Mills spent several years supporting international democratization initiatives by providing technical assistance to parliaments, political parties, local governments, civic and international organizations. His scope of work included constitutional design and governing systems, voter and civic education, election monitoring and administration, political party training and campaign strategy, collaborative governance, human rights and civil society capacity building. He maintains active memberships in the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD). His work has been featured on ABC World News Tonight, Nightline, CNN, The Next American City, Smart City Radio, The Washington Post, and other major media sources.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SDAT Team would like to thank the many public officials, civic leaders, and community members who participated in the 3-day process. Their insights, contributions and advice were an integral part of the team's deliberations and formed the basis for the recommendations contained within this report. We are grateful to the local design professionals who contributed generous time to our studio efforts with imagery and graphics. The team would also like to thank the community for its tremendous hospitality. In particular, the team would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their leadership of the process and tireless efforts to ensure its success.

Mayor Bill Finch, City of Bridgeport

Ross Spiegel, FAIA, LEED-AP, Fletcher Thompson Inc., Architects & Engineers

Stuart Sachs, ASLA, PREview Landscape Architects

Ted Grabarz, AIA, ASLA, City of Bridgeport, Office of Sustainability

Diane Harp Jones, AIA Connecticut





