

HARTFORD

Downtown Opportunity Analysis

& STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN



ADOPTED: FEBRUARY 9, 2016



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Plan prepared by Vandewalle & Associates, Inc. through funding provided by the Hartford Area Development Corporation, Downtown Hartford Business Improvement District, Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce, and First National Bank. Direction for plan development was provided by a project steering committee comprised of:

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- Karin Buhle, Executive Director, Downtown Hartford Business Improvement District
- Justin Drew, Hartford City Planner & Director of Community Development Authority
- Scott Henke, Executive Director, Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce
- Tim Purman, President, First National Bank of Hartford
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This document was produced by Vandewalle & Associates

WHAT IS AN OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS?

Introduction

Vandewalle & Associates was hired in July 2015 by the Hartford Area Development Corporation in partnership with the Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Hartford Business Improvement District (BID), and the First National Bank of Hartford to build off past planning efforts and identify and prioritize economic development project opportunities in Downtown Hartford and portions of the Highway 60 corridor.

Development in Downtown Hartford should focus on stimulating economic growth, business development, and ongoing growth, improving connections in and to Downtown, and shining a light on Downtown Hartford as an attractive place for all generations to live, work, and play.

This Strategic Development Plan builds off the 2013 Downtown Hartford Revitalization Plan completed by Master of Urban Planning graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) and commissioned by the Downtown BID. The study cataloged a number of improvements and potential catalytic projects for the City to consider as future Downtown development is planned and suggested public improvements including wayfinding and streetscape enhancements.

The 2013 UWM Plan was an important impetus for business leaders, civic leaders, and community stakeholders to deepen discussions on how to accomplish and build on the findings from the study. Resulting from these dialogues, the Hartford Area Development Corporation made the decision to engage professional services from an established urban planning and economic development firm. The results of those services from Vandewalle & Associates are contained within this document.

Project Purpose

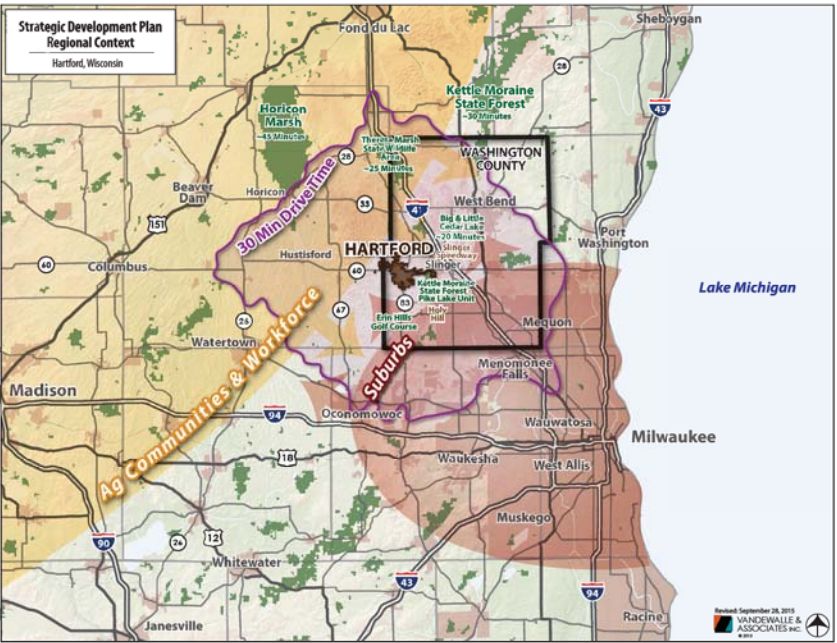
Despite geographic advantages such as proximity to Milwaukee and access to the agricultural labor force, Hartford has experienced challenges due to economic factors such as the Great Recession, labor market competition, aging housing stock, and business migration from the historic Downtown core. These factors all create instability and uncertainty in various segments of the economy. Over the last 8 to 10 years major employers in Hartford have identified increasing difficulty attracting and retaining the necessary labor force to continue their growth. Simultaneously, Downtown has experienced a reduction in the diversity of shopping options and difficulty filling vacant storefronts.

The goal of this project is to kick-start development in and around Downtown through the identification of key redevelopment and catalytic projects. From the beginning, the Steering Committee has emphasized the need to have something more than “just another plan”. As a result, this document is designed to serve as an action-oriented Strategic Development Plan focused on an overarching development vision as well as specific projects to advance Downtown Hartford development.

Specifically, the Strategic Development Plan seeks to:

- Develop an understanding of Downtown’s assets and opportunities
- Forge a path for redevelopment through specific priority projects
- Offer livability enhancement strategies, such as connections and streetscape improvements
- Guide the City and other project partners to move forward with key identified sites
- Identify potential resources to implement the Plan

COMMUNITY ASSETS, OPPORTUNITIES & POSITION



Located 45 minutes northwest of Milwaukee, WI and 30 minutes Southeast of Horicon, WI, the City of Hartford, WI is situated in a unique geographic location allowing the community to self-identify apart from the edge suburbs of Metropolitan Milwaukee. Hartford is able to capitalize on the immense labor resources and ingenuity of the agriculture communities to the Northwest, the pool of professional talent in the Milwaukee Metropolitan area, and executive leadership living in the Lake Country area

around Pewaukee, Delafield,

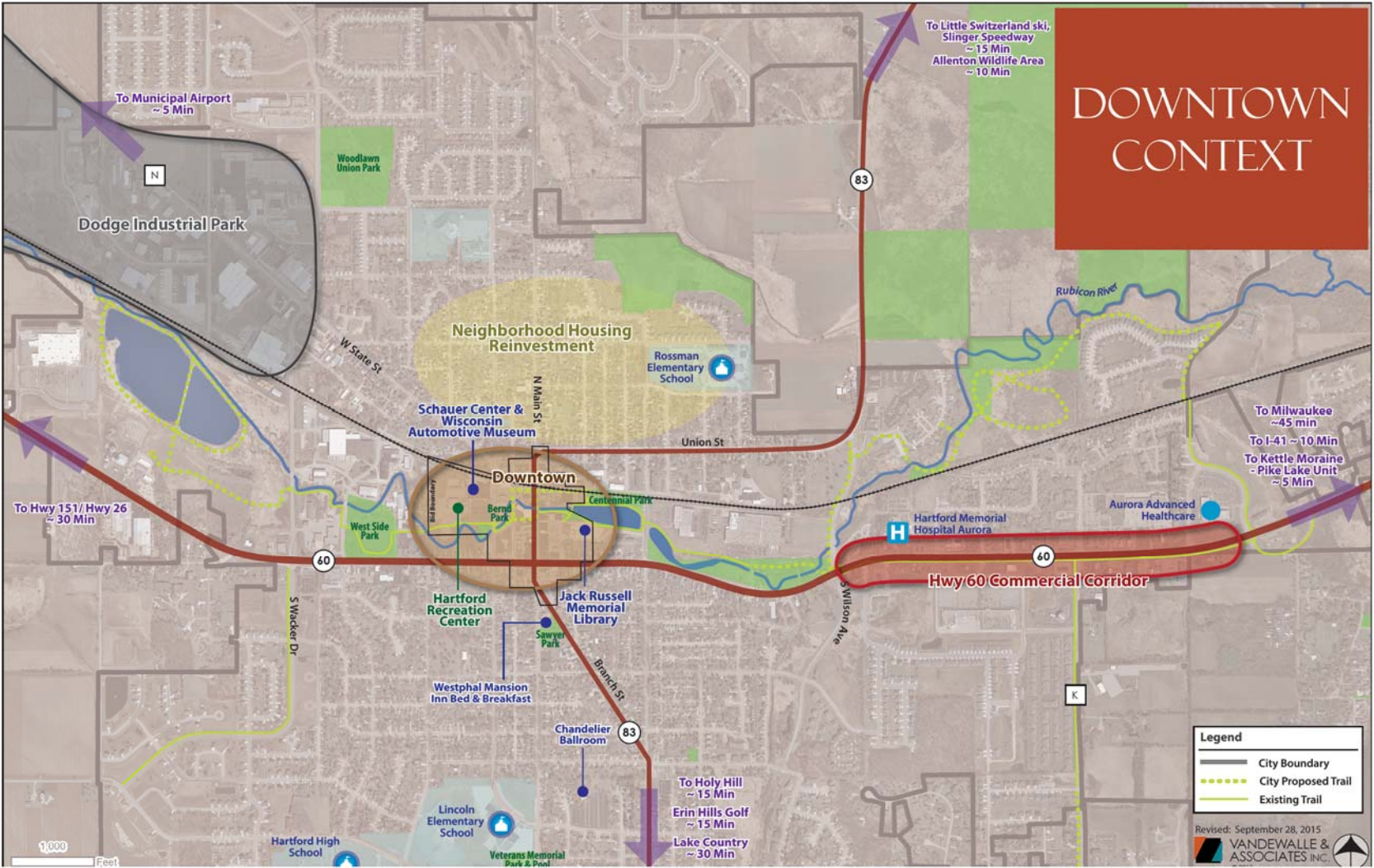
Hartland, and Dousman. The City maintains significant assets that can be capitalized upon as part of strategic redevelopment and investment activities, including:

- **Regional Position** between Metropolitan Milwaukee and the agriculture heartland
- **Major industrial employers**, with a commitment to long term growth in Hartford
- **Skilled workforce** with skilled labor to the north and west and professional talent to the south and east
- **High quality historic building stock, infrastructure, and industrial history** throughout Downtown and the immediate vicinity
- **Unique shops and regional destinations** at the core of Downtown

Hartford is more than just a bedroom community. The City is home to over 60 industrial employers and accounts for 14.5% (7,855 jobs) of the total employment base in Washington County despite a population of less than 15,000 residents. A significant number of the employment base in Hartford (22.3%) are industrial/manufacturing employment for companies ranging from secondary product suppliers such as Helgesen Industries and Steel Craft Corporation to end product manufacturers such as Broan Nu-Tone and Sno-Way International. According to wage data and interviews with major employers shift workers and salaried and commissioned employees make equivalent to or more than the regional and state averages for similar work.

Downtown Hartford as defined from State Highway 60 to the South to N Rural Road on the west to State Street on the North to 4th Street on the east is notable for its quality building stock and unique small businesses. In this area alone there are over 100 businesses ranging from restaurants, arts and entertainment venues, shopping destinations, professional services, and more. Overall, the Downtown building inventory is high quality and defined by a strong central corridor with a continuous fabric of building façades along Main Street. The vacancy rate of less than 15% indicates that rents are affordable and entrepreneurs are still interested in Downtown storefronts. This building stock and business mix provides a firm foundation to build a business recruitment strategy and identify catalytic projects to stimulate development and economic activity Downtown. Above Downtown storefronts there are a mix of affordable apartments and small offices. Many of these spaces are in need of renovation and updates to bring them in-line with the tastes and preferences of contemporary Downtown tenants.

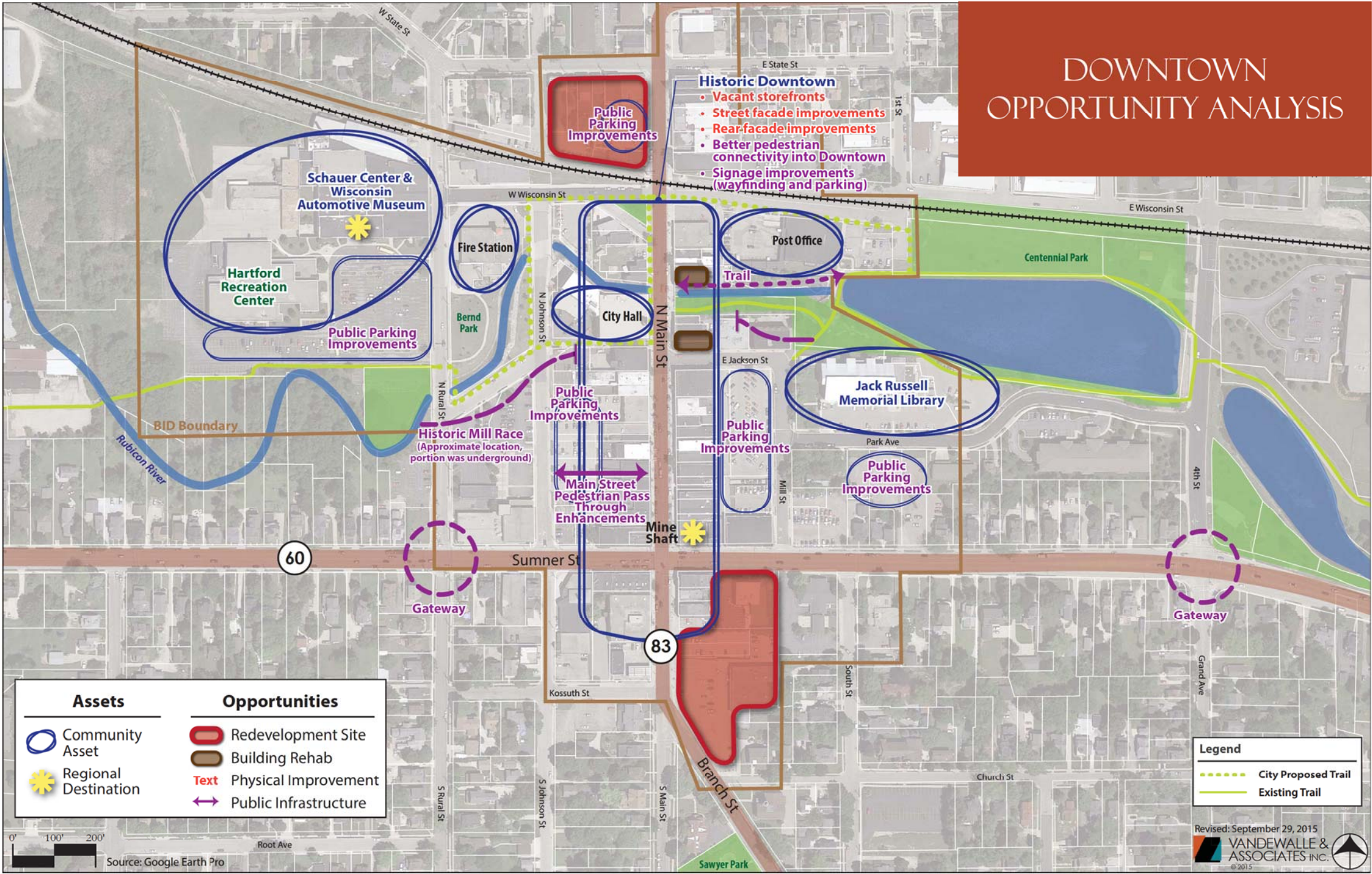
Complementary to the locally owned Downtown businesses are several larger regional destinations. Some of these include the Schauer Arts Center, The Wisconsin Automotive Museum, and the Mineshaft Restaurant. All of these destinations draw tens of thousands of visitors from outside Hartford to Downtown. Often, when these visitors come to Hartford they make their planned stop then promptly leave. There is significant potential to attract these



visitors and their dollars to Downtown by promoting all there is to offer when visiting Hartford. This means turning a single destination trip of a few hours into a day trip where visitors tour Downtown, stop into local restaurants and shops. As an example of the purchasing power from outside visitors, if 20% of the Mineshaft’s annual customer total were stimulated to spend 10% of their bill in Downtown this would result in an estimated annual net increase of \$1.1 million in economic activity Downtown.

There are many opportunities to build on the existing assets of Downtown as well as to improve other areas.

Improving pedestrian and automotive wayfinding signage, public parking orientation and options, Downtown connectivity, housing choices, and programmed activities are all ways to enhance the appeal of Downtown. Identifying sites for redevelopment and new investment will allow decision makers to better connect with the development community to clearly communicate the opportunities present in Downtown Hartford. These new opportunities will serve to bolster the important businesses that already call Downtown Hartford home. The adjacent map locates these assets and illustrates redevelopment and renovation opportunities.





THE DOWNTOWN PLAN

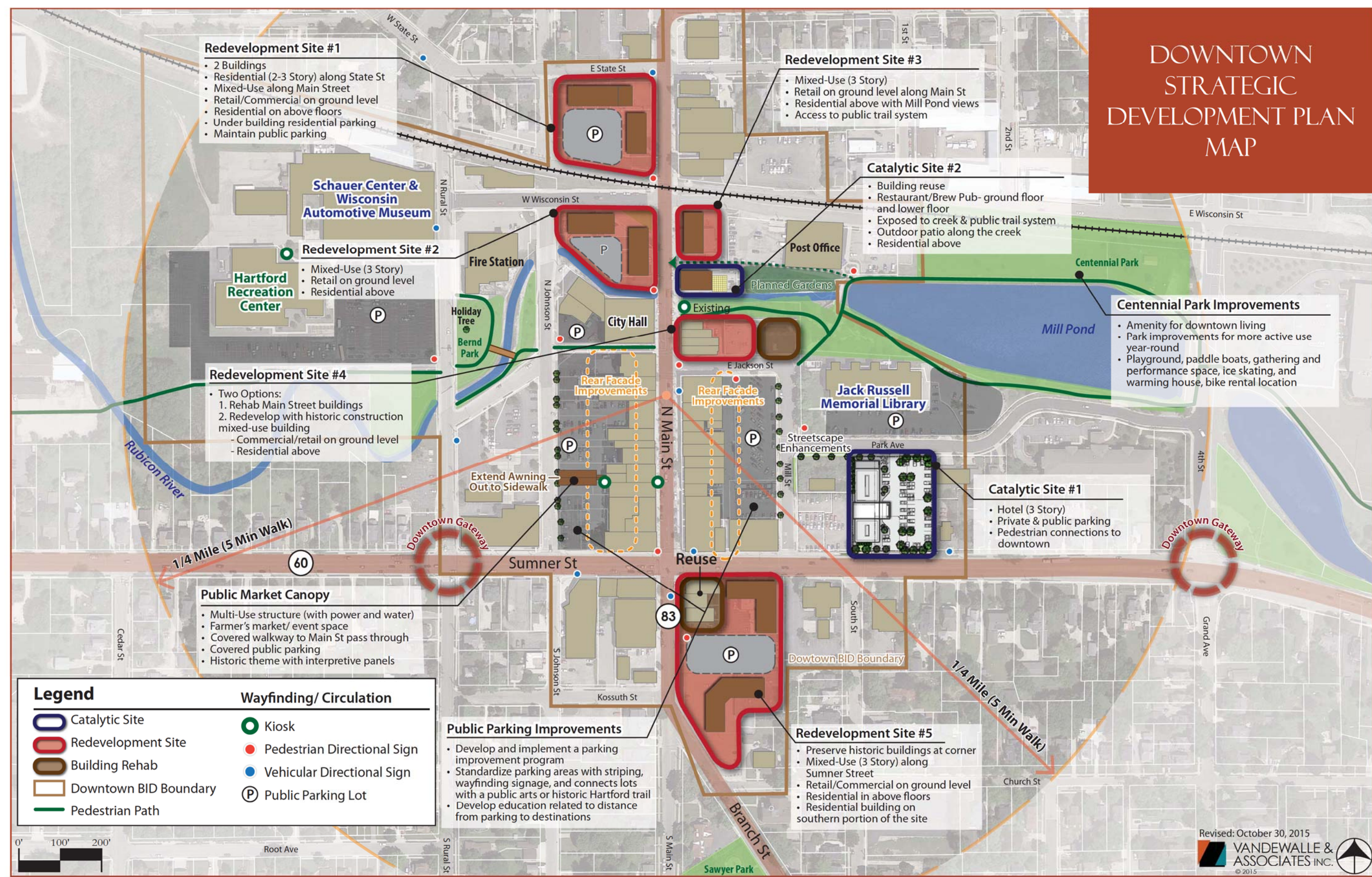


ADVANCING DOWNTOWN HARTFORD - THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Downtown Hartford is home to a number of thriving local businesses and several regional destinations.

The Downtown Strategic Development Plan Map provides a detailed framework for the spatial relationship between the identified assets and opportunities and lays the foundation for how each piece fits together. It emphasizes the key features and assets of Downtown Hartford and shows several catalytic development sites and multiple redevelopment opportunities. The Map displays existing assets—such as the strong core of locally owned businesses along Main Street and regional destinations—alongside opportunities to build on and strengthen those assets through improvements such as branding efforts, pedestrian and automotive connectivity and wayfinding, and business development efforts. This is a powerful tool to communicate important connections between different development pieces to civic leaders and decision makers.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN MAP





CATALYTIC SITE 1



Example of historic mill-type architecture



Example of mill-type architecture hospitality facility

REDEVELOPMENT AS CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Hotel, Catalytic Site #1

currently provides limited economic activity on high value land at the southeastern edge of Downtown. Development of a 3-story hotel with on-site public and private parking, conference facilities, optional north facing suites, and pedestrian connections to Downtown will meet an identified need for employee accommodations by local industrial employers and provide Downtown lodging options for visitors. Siting a hotel at Catalytic Site #1 puts guests within walking distance of dozens of local shops, restaurants, and arts and entertainment venues.

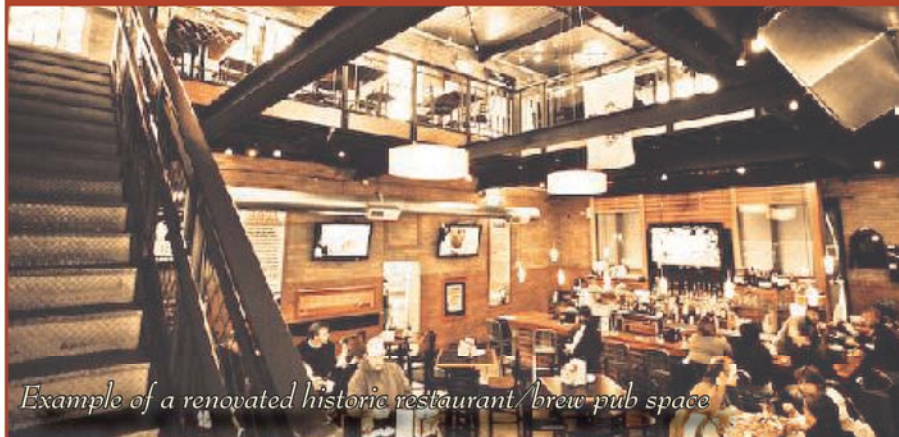


CATALYTIC SITE #1
DOWNTOWN HOTEL





CATALYTIC SITE 2

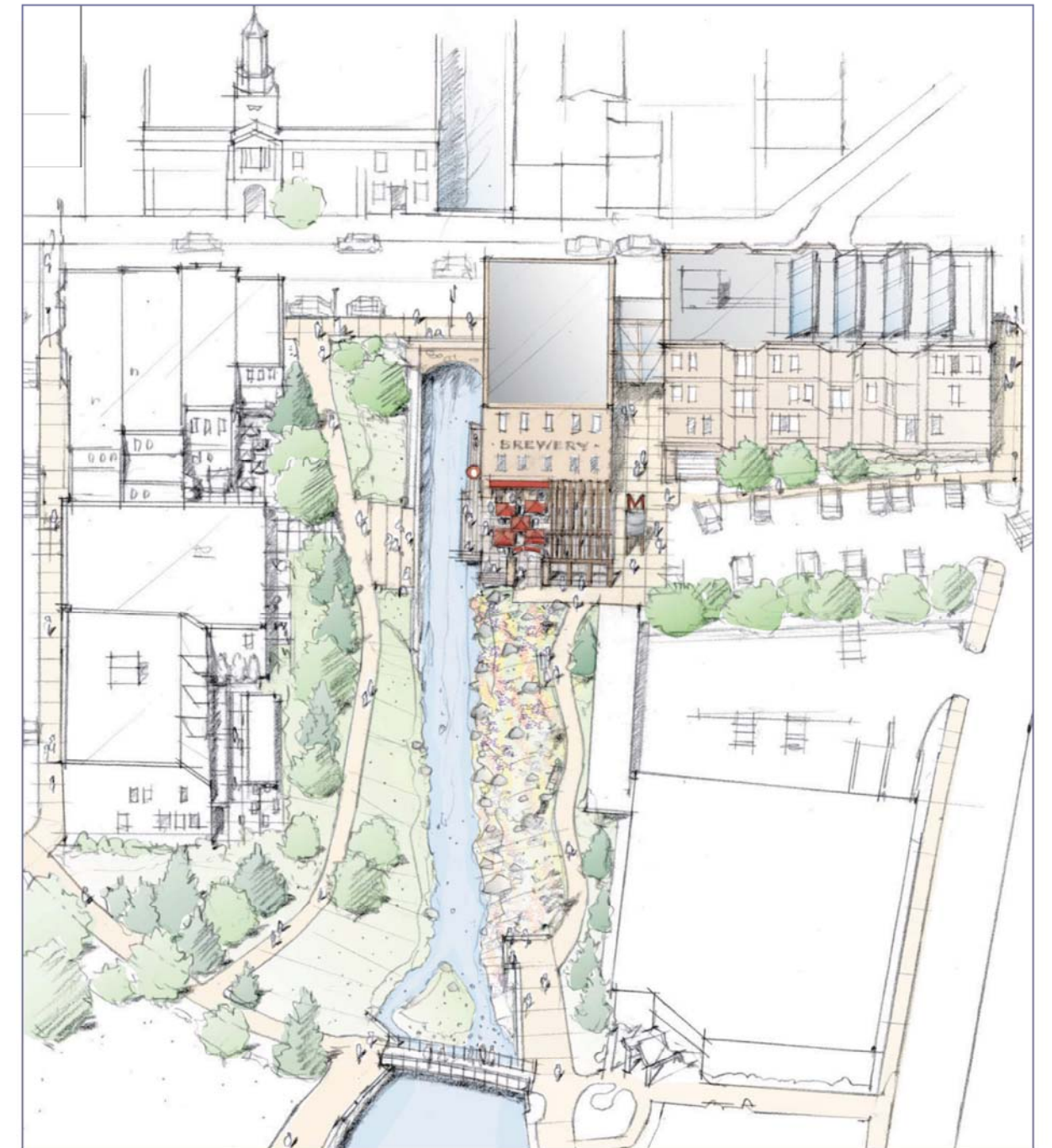


Example of a renovated historic restaurant/brew-pub space

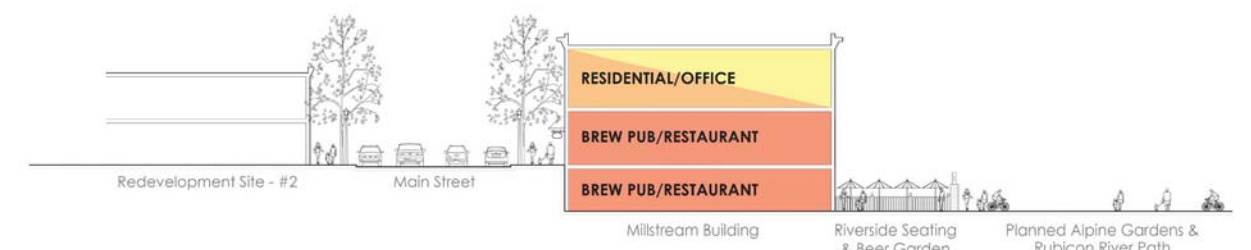


Millstream Building, Catalytic Site #2

is a historic building along the Rubicon River with strong potential to act as a catalyst for economic growth both on-site and at adjacent properties. The Millstream Building provides an opportunity to attract new commercial tenants and provide new housing options Downtown. Taking advantage of the proximity to the Rubicon River, the Millstream is an ideal setting to house a brew pub and restaurant as an anchor with a mix of commercial and residential uses on the other floors. Patrons visiting the brewpub will be given a genuine experience due to the building's historic architecture and significance. The City's industrial past and brewing history are significant historical capital to capture in future development. In addition to history, the natural grade creates a unique feature to put patrons at river level. With truly unique views of the historic mill arch and the planned alpine garden along the Rubicon to the east, the Millstream catalytic project is sure to pique interest in other adjacent redevelopment sites.



Catalytic Site - #2
Building South Elevation



REVISED: 10.30.11
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0 20 40 Feet

CATALYTIC SITE #2
RESTAURANT/ BREW PUB &
RESIDENTIAL



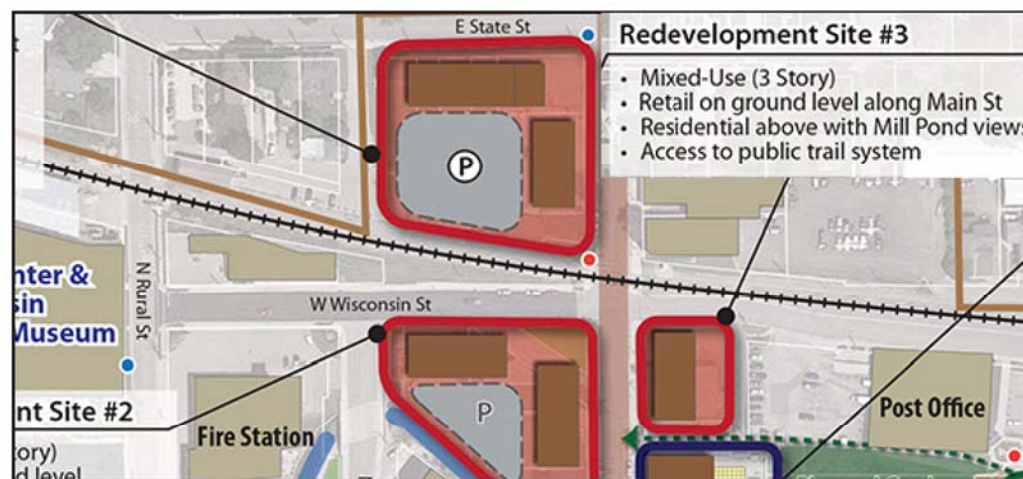
OTHER REDEVELOPMENT SITES



North Bookend, Redevelopment Site #1 provides the opportunity to work with a handful of property owners to assemble eight different parcels. Identified in the 2013 UWM Study, the North Bookend presents an opportunity to create mixed-use development with storefronts, townhomes, and apartments. The site presents some connectivity, utility, and right-of-way challenges that may require help from the City of Hartford in order to attract a private developer. Redevelopment of the North Bookend redevelopment may provide new workforce housing options and improve the quality of the street-level storefronts on the northern edge of Downtown.



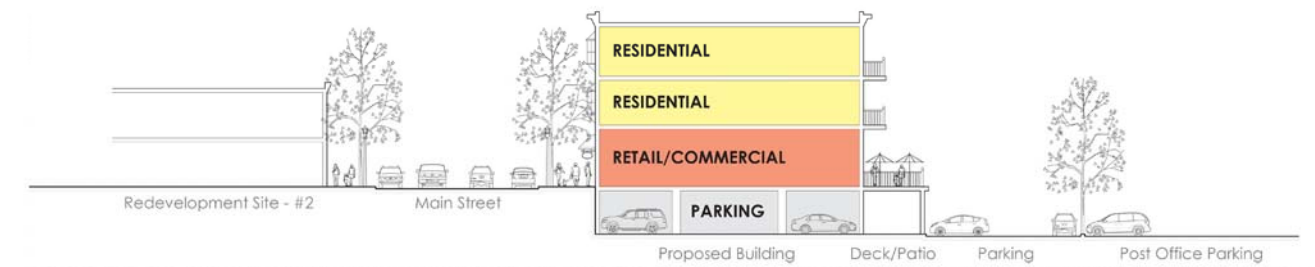
Redevelopment Site #2 at the intersection of Wisconsin and Main Streets presents an opportunity to revitalize an underutilized corner of Downtown. The site presents several challenges to the current use including the presence of a blighted structure, the grade change from east to west, and the configuration of the current intersection. Future development opportunities of a mixed-use building with commercial first floor and apartment housing above will require the site to be cleared and reconfigured to provide river views.



Redevelopment Site #3

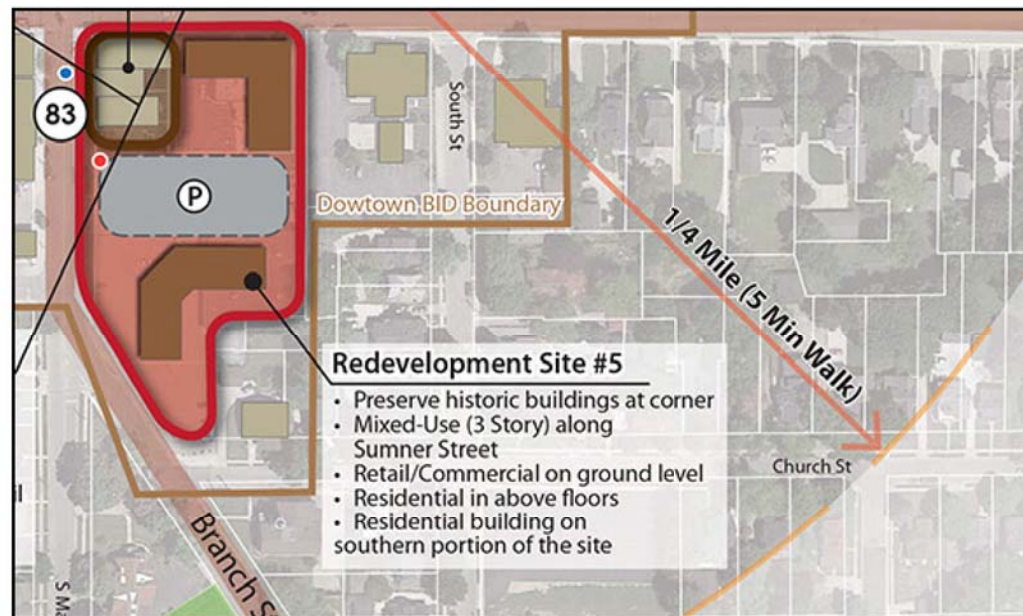
is suitable as a second phase of the Millstream catalytic project to provide Downtown housing options for young professionals and/or empty-nesters. First story retail is maintained while second and third story housing options are added with a unique view of the Mill Pond and alpine rock garden and an opportunity for new trail access. Redevelopment Site #3 creates continuity in the building fabric, mixing historically inspired new construction with the existing historic architecture of the Millstream Building. Any redevelopment plans for site #3 will require a detailed relocation strategy for current tenants and potentially an option for them to reoccupy newly developed first floor commercial space.

Redevelopment Site - #3
Building South Elevation





Redevelopment Site #4 presents an opportunity for rehabilitation or redevelopment with historic construction. Of the four buildings identified on the site, the Mole Hole and building to the north have historic significance. This presents the option to incorporate the historic façade into the construction of a new building—eliminating the current concerns with its structural integrity. The other buildings at this site all present considerable challenges for businesses due to their size, current state, and poor quality façades. Redevelopment as mixed-use commercial and residential makes the storefronts viable again and provides desirable Downtown housing options for working professionals.



South Bookend, Redevelopment Site #5 was identified in the UWM Downtown Hartford Revitalization Plan and defines the southern edge of Downtown. The site has the potential for a mix of redevelopment and historic building rehabilitation similar to Redevelopment Site #4. Future redevelopment efforts may include multifamily residential at the south end of the site with mixed commercial and residential along Highway 60 and Branch Street. The historic building at the corner of Highway 60 and Branch Street—while in rough structural and visual shape—presents the type of rehabilitation for mixed-use housing and commercial that many young entrepreneurs and working professionals are looking for. Further exploration of the costs of rehabilitation are recommended before action is taken on any future work to the building or site.

CONNECTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS & HIGHLIGHT AMENITIES



Build on Downtown Civic Core at the heart of Downtown. Over the last several decades Hartford has maintained many of the civic functions within Downtown stimulating trips as people visit civic buildings to pay tax bills, drop off mail, or request permits and licenses. Developing public seating and historic installations capturing Hartford's rich manufacturing past can provide increased significance and interest in Downtown's civic core. For example, providing information about the founding of Hartford in front of City Hall or putting a tribute to Hartford firefighters in front of the fire station will serve to emphasize the unique characteristics of Hartford for residents and visitors. Another opportunity is to identify and provide interpretive features depicting historic mills and factories in public spaces. These features will highlight the rich manufacturing history of the community throughout Downtown.

Install Public Market Canopy in the public parking lot adjacent to N Johnson Street on the west. A canopy can serve a dual purpose as an all-weather pathway that visually highlights the connection for patrons between the parking lot and the Link Building as well as a permanent feature to give the farmers market a sense of place. Solar panels could be installed on the roof to aid with power generation for public lighting and to meet some of the power needs of a farmers market. Finally, interpretive panels or images could be incorporated into the canopy celebrating Hartford's past.



Develop an Improvement Plan for Centennial Park that identifies programming, infrastructure, amenity, and public art additions. As a large park with a significant water feature adjacent to Downtown, Centennial Park has the potential to be a focal point of community activity. The north side of the park presents opportunity for some physical improvements and additions to stimulate community gathering and social activity. The south bank, although narrow, has programmable space along the bike path for pedestrians and bikers to stop to enjoy the Mill Pond or explore the rich history of Hartford through trailside embellishments, historical markers, and artwork. The Improvement Plan will tee up the park for year round use—considering winter activities such as ice skating as well as warm weather uses like canoeing, kayaking, and bike riding. Amenities for winter—such as a warming hut for ice skaters and an ice skate rental booth—can be flexible and incorporated into planned future facilities making them useful during the warm months as well.

Create a Rear Facade Improvement Program to help increase the attractiveness and functionality of the rear of Main Street buildings. With a host of back-of-building parking along Main Street rather than adjacent storefronts, it is critically important for the backs the buildings to be well maintained and functional. A rear façade improvement program should focus on developing methods to screen utility boxes and dumpsters from pedestrian view, improve rear entrance visibility through wayfinding signage and entry reconfiguration, and provide access to affordable resources to upkeep the backs of the buildings.





Develop Downtown Branding that provides a cohesive theme for Downtown as an entertainment, restaurant, and shopping district. A Downtown branding program will include coordination of signage, streetscaping, and a Downtown Hartford marketing campaign amongst all property owners and business tenants. The brand should capture Hartford's history, its regional context and natural amenities, and the unique offerings Downtown has for visitors and residents.

Improve Public Parking by making physical improvements such as reorientation of parking, resurfacing, re-striping and adding landscaping, canopy trees and designated pedestrian walkways. Another opportunity is to create a formal public parking program. Unlike many historic Downtown cores, Hartford has plentiful free public parking. The identified parking problems are associated with a lack of connectivity to back-of-building parking and little directional signage to mark routes between public parking and Downtown destinations. As an example, it takes roughly three minutes to walk from the public parking at the Jack Russell Memorial Library to Perc Place Restaurant and Coffee House on Main Street. However, the parking is not clearly identified as public and there is little signage to guide pedestrians to Main Street businesses.



Install Downtown Gateway Signage and Landscaping at the eastern and western edges of Highway 60 to provide identity and visibility to Downtown. These identifying features are essential to capture traffic along the busy Highway 60 corridor. Funding can be procured through a variety of public, private, or public-private sources—making this an achievable and impactful project in the immediate future. Themes for Downtown signage should blend the historic industrial themes of Hartford with landscaping that interprets the natural amenities of the surrounding landscape. One potential landscaping theme—with low maintenance costs—is an alpine garden feature similar to the planned garden along the Rubicon River.

Continue Streetscape Improvements on Mill Street and N. Johnson Street. Downtown Hartford has a very attractive and functional streetscape including historic street lights, street trees, benches and flowers. Installing street trees along Mill Street will provide a more enjoyable pedestrian connection between the library and potential future hotel to Downtown. Similarly, installing street trees along N. Johnson Street provides an enjoyable pedestrian connection between the Schauer Center/Hartford Recreation Center and Downtown and the potential future farmers market canopy.



IMPLEMENTATION NEXT STEPS

In order to build on the momentum of the Downtown Hartford Strategic Development Plan

a public-private partnership should be formed and a Project Management Team assembled with the necessary resources to begin immediate implementation of the proposed projects in the Implementation Framework. The Implementation Framework will serve as the guide and agenda for future Project Management Team meetings and the foundation for future project activities.

To maximize the effectiveness of the development strategy the following projects are identified as highest priority within the next five years. The first three are redevelopment projects while 4, 5, and 6 are broader programmatic and strategic plans. This blend of public enhancements and catalytic development provides the appropriate mix of projects with the potential for significant positive change in the short-term as well as offer a high return on investment for the City of Hartford. The highest priority projects for immediate action include the following:

1. **Hotel Catalytic Site #1** is positioned for immediate development. Current conceptual plans provide adequate public parking and the site plan configuration make land assembly and site control for prospective developers attainable in the near term. An existing hotel market demand study provides the empirical data while initial conceptual drawings provide the vision to capture the interest of prospective hotel developers.
2. **Millstream Catalytic Site #2** is easy to assemble and positioned for a relatively short redevelopment and adaptive reuse. Planning for redevelopment can begin immediately. Redevelopment can occur over a 12 to 18 month period beginning in 2016. Developer recruitment can begin during the winter months with construction and tenant recruitment beginning in 2016.
3. **North Bookend Redevelopment Site #1** is a priority site identified through the UWM Downtown Hartford Revitalization Plan and would provide new construction commercial and Downtown living options. Site assembly and control are relatively attainable with one property owner owning several sites and the City owning a public parking lot on the site. Proximity to Wisconsin-Southern Railroad tracks and historic uses may make this site eligible for brownfield assessment and/or planning grants.
4. **Parking Strategy** development is needed that organizes, improves, and consolidates parking to make it functional and intuitive for Downtown visitors and shoppers to quickly transition from parking lots to storefronts.
5. **Event and Public Space Programming** to enhance the use and value of public spaces in and around Downtown, providing visitors continued reasons to visit Downtown. Programming will focus on accommodating multiple uses and users and will take into account the impact seasonal uses have on public space.
6. **Wayfinding and Circulation Improvement Programming** that focuses on improving automotive and pedestrian circulation, wayfinding and connections in and around Downtown through agreed upon standards and best practices. The Project Management Team may provide recommendations and oversight on a program that can be incorporated into a Downtown wayfinding and signage master plan that the City can adopt.

