

FARMINGTON AVENUE: A BUSINESS DESTINATION



Farmington Avenue has a number of advantages as a retail location. It is a major arterial carrying traffic from the Class A office center in downtown Hartford to the affluent suburb of West Hartford, with multiple access points to the I-84 highway and the rest of the metropolitan region. The “E” bus line, the city’s most heavily used route, offers frequent transit service. There are some 20,000 daytime workers on Farmington Avenue, which has also demonstrated the ability to attract a lunch and after-work crowd from downtown office buildings. In addition, there is a concentration of educational institutions located nearby, creating a stream of undergraduate and graduate students who frequent the avenue’s bars and, in many cases, live in its residential units. Finally, the surrounding residential areas include some of the wealthiest enclaves in the city as well as densely populated sections that offer tremendously high levels of disposable income per square mile.



Yet Farmington Avenue as a shopping street is vulnerable. At the moment, the avenue appears relatively healthy: most of the store spaces are occupied, and shelves are generally well-stocked.¹ Furthermore, during past economic slowdowns, the avenue has shown the ability to remain relatively stable. Yet traffic volumes have declined by as much as 41% at certain points along Farmington Avenue since the late 1980’s, and purchasing power in the trade area, adjusted for inflation, decreased by roughly 10% between 1990 and 2000. Many merchants sense that the neighborhood is deteriorating, and 31% of surveyed businesses have considered relocating in the last three years.

Findings

Farmington Avenue spans two distinct neighborhood business districts: Asylum Hill and the West End, and this study has focused on the problems and potential of each. In addition, this study provides insight into the potential of the vacant parcel on the southeast corner of Farmington Avenue and Broad Street, a site offering excellent highway access as well as proximity to downtown. As with most successful business districts, design of the streets and public spaces is only part of the equation. The management of commercial districts is an essential component to attracting and sustaining successful businesses. Currently, this entire burden falls on the Avenue’s only organized group: the

¹ The amount of merchandise on a given store’s shelves is usually a rough indicator of its sales volumes.

Farmington Avenue Business District Association (FABD). The city has recently reorganized the system citywide, however, and the new system will make the coordinator position a city position, which will also cover downtown. This will probably result in a decrease in services for Farmington Avenue. In the future, the management of the street will have to expand to better meet its challenges and opportunities.

Surveys of business owners and residents in the immediate surroundings reveal the following about the corridor:

- One-sixth (17%) of the businesses consider themselves chains/franchises, while 62% are owner-operated. Four-fifths (80%) of businesses lease their space (compared to the 50% standard in older shopping corridors), making a major contribution to the revitalization effort on the part of landlords less certain.
- According to business owners, the corridor is serving a number of different markets, with no single demand source reigning supreme in importance. A median of 25% of the primary clientele comes from nearby residents, 25% from office workers, 20% from other Hartford residents, 10% from West Hartford residents, and 10% from students. As further evidence of this variety, businesses varied in what they described as their business times, with 62% highlighting weekday daytime (i.e., local residents and workers), 42% Saturday daytime (local residents), 37% weekday evening rush hour, and 27% weekday morning rush hour (local workers and downtown commuters).
- The businesses most regularly patronized by residents are all convenience-oriented: pharmacies (80%), gas stations (67%), banks (61%), copy shops (47%) and convenience stores (47%).
- According to merchant surveys, the corridor's strongest competition is actually itself, followed by West Hartford and downtown Hartford. Interestingly, Park Street, the Boulevard Shops shopping center (at West Boulevard, Capitol Avenue, and Prospect Avenue) and West Farms Mall were barely mentioned.
- Three quarters (77%) of businesses reported that sales have either gone up or remained the same, while 23% experienced a downturn. Yet 31% have considered relocating in the last three years, with lack of parking and the deterioration of the neighborhood given most often as the reasons. The majority of these businesses say that West Hartford is the favored destination.



- Business owners overwhelmingly selected restaurants as the new kind of business that they would most like to see, with sit-down family restaurants the most desired format, followed by diner/coffee shops and upscale restaurants. Also scoring high as preferences were grocery stores and bakery/doughnut/bagel shops. Residents cite as the businesses they are most likely to patronize a grocery store, farmers market, post office, ice cream shop and bakery. Family restaurants and late-night restaurants/bars were not ranked as highly, with the lack of relative interest in the former not particularly surprising given that 76% of residents surveyed do not have children.

The Asylum Hill Business District



The Asylum Hill business district is bounded roughly by Sigourney Street and Forest Street but is concentrated largely between Imlay and Forest. It consists mainly of multi-story mixed-use structures with ground-floor retail and multi-story multifamily residential buildings, interspersed with freestanding chain/franchise prototypes. Almost all of the commercial spaces are occupied, mostly by merchants selling convenience goods and services, i.e., bodegas, package stores, hair salons, laundromats, fast food restaurants, etc. The only magnet is the Mark Twain Branch of the Hartford Public Library, which occupies a relatively tiny in-line storefront and yet is reportedly one of the busiest branches in the city. The significant number of chains/franchises in the business district include a number of fast food purveyors (i.e., Taco Bell / Pizza Hut, Dunkin' Donuts) and rent-to-own chains (i.e., Rent-A-Center, Rent Rite), as well as Family Dollar which is replacing Arthur's Drug.

There are a number of Asylum Hill residents who are very unhappy with their business district. The Asylum Hill Problem-Solving Revitalization Association (AHPsRA), in its [Asylum Hill Neighborhood Strategic Plan for Revitalization](#), writes the following. "Our commercial strip does not serve its population correctly. The main commercial corridor, while busy, is characterized by aesthetically unpleasant facades, a lack of products and services useful to neighborhood residents, and heavy rush hour traffic."

Neighborhood residents say that they want to get rid of the "blighted establishments" and replace the convenience stores and pizza shops with shoe stores, bakeries and other retail. However, the retail mix appears consistent with its market, as are the ground-floor rents, which range from \$6 to \$10 per square foot. Furthermore, the vacancy rate is relatively low. To be specific, the orientation and mix of the retail offerings is largely the result of the following:

- The population of Asylum Hill, which numbered approximately 10,300 in 2000, dropped by 13% from 1990 to 2000, with a further decrease of 5% projected by 2005. Moreover, median household income did not keep pace with inflation during the 1990s, during which time it only increased by 10%. The decrease in spending power explains why retail activity has declined somewhat.
- The median household income in Asylum Hill, as of 2000, was roughly \$21,000. The extremely low income levels can to some extent be explained by the high percentage of efficiency and one-bedroom apartments, as the households most likely to fill such units are younger (e.g., students) and/or smaller (e.g., singles and single-parent households), and therefore less well-off.
- Asylum Hill's population scores well below the national index in all product categories. Its demand is greatest in the following categories: personal care products (81% of the national average); alcoholic beverages at home (73%); infants' apparel (69%); nonprescription drugs (68%); and personal care services (66%). This explains the low interest of most national chains and franchises.²
- Most of the ground-floor commercial spaces in the business district are small, ranging from 800 to 1,200 square feet in size. In addition, they offer little to no off-street parking. Such spaces are usually leased only by convenience retailers/service providers and fast food purveyors. Comparison goods retailers, such as infants' apparel stores, are not likely to locate here because they generally need larger spaces as well as enough off-street parking to be able to draw on a sufficiently large trade area.
- Continuity and synergy between retail uses are difficult to achieve because the retail frontage is interrupted in a number of places by residential and other uses. For instance, Family Dollar Store, with over 4,200 stores in 39 states, is the sort of large-format discount store that could play a major anchoring role. However, due to its Sigourney Street location, there is little spillover potential for merchants in the heart of the business district at Laurel Street. Its orientation toward low-income shoppers, as opposed to Arthur Drug's wider-ranging appeal, also lessens the chances that signifi-



² The percentages are based on Claritas index in which 100 represents the nationwide average for spending on such items. The 100 is based on the National Consumer Expenditures Survey, undertaken every two years by the U.S. Department of Commerce, in which a random selection of individuals are asked to keep a diary of their purchases during a given time period. The percentages for the study area are based on income and other demographic data.

cant numbers of Aetna workers would be willing to venture out to Farmington Avenue to do errands.

- Local merchants lack access to capital (a common problem among independent retailers in urban commercial corridors such as Farmington Avenue) and yet have to contend with the substantial costs of doing business in Hartford, where taxes and insurance costs are relatively higher.

The need to supplement neighborhood residents as the source of support for local economic development has already been recognized. As described in the ASPSRA Strategic Plan:

“We must look to attract, maintain and be permanently self-sustaining continually rejuvenated by the social-economic success factors represented within a successful academic/corporate/working class community that is largely recession-proof by design. To do so, we will refocus our efforts toward harnessing the spending patterns of a large commuter population that lives in our neighborhood campus daily as well as better meet the residential needs of students, smaller family units, professionals, young and old.”



In this vision, students, commuters and daytime workers would contribute significantly to the demand for goods and services in the Farmington Avenue business district. Due to its large percentage of efficiency and one-bedroom apartments, the neighborhood does house a significant number of students. Furthermore, due to the lack of westbound I-84 access at Sigourney Street and Broad Street³, many westbound commuters will stay on Farmington Avenue until they reach Sisson Avenue, meaning that they have to drive through the Asylum Hill business district. Finally, the bulk of the 20,000 daytime workers on Farmington Avenue work in Asylum Hill; the neighborhood is very close to the huge downtown worker population; and the precedent is there: in the 80's, employees would regularly patronize Arthur's Drug, Spiro's and the now-defunct Comet Diner. While these factors all work to the district's advantage, the challenges remains formidable:

- An inadequate supply of safe and attractive parking hampers the business district's ability to attract commuters.

³ Westbound access is instead at the Capitol Avenue/Oak Street intersection.

- Half of daytime worker expenditures typically go toward dining out, during which time they make many other shopping forays. Although the largest local employer – Aetna – provides its own on-site cafeteria, many employees do venture out on the street and were surveyed informally as part of this study. In general, employees surveyed want much the same thing as residents in terms of improving the attractiveness and safety of the street. They use Farmington at lunch for some errands and occasionally eating at a restaurant. Many use the street for jogging. Types of business they would like to see include a farmers market, family restaurant, ice cream shop, bakery, coffee bar, bookstore, and a post office.
- A large number of the commuters and daytime workers are white, and some might feel uncomfortable in a neighborhood which is 55% black and 28% Hispanic. The racial makeup of the neighborhood is reinforced in the afternoon when Hartford High School lets out and minority teenagers fill the sidewalks and streets.
- The neighborhood suffers from a high crime rate. Asylum Hill has the most complaints of larcenies, burglaries, assaults and other serious crimes of any neighborhood in the city, and after a period of dramatic improvement, serious crimes were up by 33% in the year 2000.
- Over half (59%) of Asylum Hill households, as well as most students, have access to a car, and, given current retail offerings, they are likely to bypass the Asylum Hill business district for higher-quality, more automobile-friendly stores and services elsewhere.

Without support from commuters, daytime workers, car-owning residents and students, many businesses fall back only on the 41% of Asylum Hill households that do not have an automobile. These households are most likely the poorest of what is already a very poor neighborhood, and the result is a low-end business district that caters to their basic needs. These shoppers represent to some extent a captive market, as the closest shopping center, at Park Street and Laurel Street, is separated from the study area by various psychological barriers (e.g., highway underpass), and not directly accessible by mass transit. Merchants therefore face little incentive to improve the offerings in their stores, and landlords the appearance of their buildings. Neighborhood residents complain about high prices at Carlos Supermarket, poor stocking and inconvenient hours at the now-closing Arthur's Drug and the absence of a convenience store selling sundries. (The new Family Dollar, which is replacing Arthur's Drug, has a discount which should help this issue of high prices, however.)

However, there are a number of reasons to be at least somewhat optimistic about the possibility in the future of attracting more non-residents. To highlight a few:

- Daytime workers in Asylum Hill already make some use of the neighborhood: they jog, run errands, or, occasionally, eat at a restaurant. Furthermore, there are indications that they, like residents, would spend more dollars on the Avenue if perceptions of safety were enhanced and the general appearance improved. Interestingly, those surveyed say that they are more concerned about safety in the evening and at night, rather than during the day, when, during lunch, most of their shopping / dining trips take place.
- Reportedly, Starbucks Coffee was sufficiently impressed with Asylum Hill that, if sufficient parking had been possible in front, it would have been willing to open a branch in the Hastings Conference Center that would front on Farmington Avenue. Employee surveys indicated that 40% of respondents would like to see a coffee shop in the area.
- The Mark Twain House is planning an extension that could double its current annual visitor count of 50,000. Visitors to the Mark Twain House tend not to be locals – 64% are from outside Greater Hartford – and are therefore less likely to perceive the Asylum Hill neighborhood in a negative light.
- The Greater Hartford Transit District's "downtown circulator" will include the Aetna campus and bring riders to Sigourney Street.

Finally, there is a model for renewal: the revitalization of the Park Street corridor in Frog Hollow / Parkville. Park Street suffered from deterioration and high vacancy in the late 70's and 80's and started the 90's with median income levels similar to Asylum Hill's. It too is close to downtown Hartford and West Hartford, offers access to I-84, and is disadvantaged by an inadequate parking supply and small commercial spaces. Today, Park Street is a thriving Latino retail corridor, the result of active merchant associations, a number of public/private business loan programs, and a City-sponsored commercial revitalization effort that included demolition, rehabilitation, new parking lots, facade and streetscape improvements, and funding assistance for merchant coordinators.

The West End Business District

The West End business district lies between Tremont Street and Sisson Avenue and, unlike its neighbor to the east, remains largely commercial throughout. It consists of a rather motley assortment of one-story strip malls, converted homes and freestanding chain/franchise prototypes. Most of the commercial spaces are occupied, with only a few prominent vacancies: the former Cheese & Stuff space, and the Colonial Theater. Existing tenants include convenience retailers/service providers, gas stations, fast food restaurants, and independent restaurants and bars. There are a number of anchors, including CVS, Discount Outfitters, The Stereo Shop, and Ichiban. Chains/franchises also abound, including gas stations (i.e., Shell, Mobil, Gibbs), fast food (i.e., Burger King, KFC) and drug stores (i.e., CVS, Arrow Prescription Center), as well as a Fleet Bank and a Kinko's.

The West End's demographic profile is very different from Asylum Hill's:

- Population, which in 2000 was roughly 12,500, also decreased between 1990 and 2000, but by a far less dramatic 4%. The number of neighborhood residents is likely to remain stable until at least 2005.
- The median household income, as of 2000, was almost \$38,400, representing a 27% increase during the 90's. The West End is generally considered the most affluent neighborhood in the city.
- West End residents are extremely well-educated and have reached high positions in their respective fields, even when compared to the population within a three-mile ring. As of 1990, 21% of residents aged 25 or over have a bachelor's degree, and another 18% have a graduate or professional degree. Furthermore, as of 1990, a very high 42% of residents aged 16 or over are employed in managerial/professional specialty occupations.
- The West End population is more mobile, with 77% of the households owning at least one automobile as of 1990. 26% of households, in fact, have two cars, which is very important in well-educated, high-powered dual-income households.

These aggregates, however, reflect only part of the reality. In actuality, the West End includes two separate neighborhoods: NOFA, or North Of Farmington Avenue, and SOFA,



or South Of Farmington Avenue, have different income profiles. This dichotomy is reflected in the fact that the two largest income concentrations are in the \$35,000-\$74,999 bracket (36%) and the \$0-\$19,999 range (24%), corresponding, respectively, to the NOFA and SOFA neighborhoods.

To its credit, the West End Civic Association (WECA), despite this geographic, socioeconomic and racial divide, has called on residents, in its draft version of the WECA Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, "to address all of the major issues in the entire West End and work together as a unified neighborhood."

These issues include the following:

- Comparison retailing is not a particularly promising niche because trade area shoppers can so easily access I-84 and, in a matter of minutes, arrive at the West Farms Mall.
- The business district must cater to a very diverse set of sub-populations, i.e., NOFA's affluent whites and SOFA's poorer minorities; students at bar/entertainment venues and local residents who do not put a high priority on attracting students (29%) or improving nightlife (28%); residents who do not want chains and transients far from home who long for something familiar, etc.
- As mentioned earlier, a number of commuters already forgo Farmington Avenue in favor of I-84 or other nearby arterials. Efforts to transform the corridor into a more pedestrian-friendly "Main Street" setting must therefore also reduce conflicts and congestion points, so that vehicle volumes and business visibility do not decrease further.



Yet even with these shortcomings, the West End business district does give more cause for optimism:

- The Colonial Theater Renaissance Corporation (CTRC), with generous financing from the State of Connecticut, has found a restaurant tenant for the old Colonial Theater space, which has long been a blight on the avenue, and it is also contemplating other redevelopment possibilities in the business district. There are, indeed, three buildings that, if properly leased, could serve as potential anchors for the district: the Colonial Theater, the Wall Building across the street and the vacant Cheese & Stuff space at Kenyon Street.

- The business district includes a number of regional retail destinations, such as Discount Outfitters and The Stereo Shop, thus providing other merchants with increased visibility and a potentially larger trade area.
- Rents, at \$15 to \$20 per square foot in the West End, are strong, but not so strong that they are not able to attract spillover from West Hartford Center, which currently has a very low vacancy rate. Proof of this lies in the presence of the above regional destinations in the West End business district, as they would probably locate in West Hartford Center if there was more space and the rent structure there was more reasonable.
- A hip restaurant/bar/entertainment scene is emerging. Mo's Midtown has long been a cult favorite, the Ichiban restaurant has been enormously successful thus far, Tisane Tea and Coffee Bar has opened to rave reviews and more dining establishments are likely to open in the near future. The Roo Bar and The Half Door are very popular in their respective target demographics. Monte Album, a new Mexican restaurant, has opened. Finally, The Alley has revived a longtime neighborhood icon and provides a more family-oriented entertainment venue.
- The trade area includes a number of niche populations that could be tapped. Students make up a substantial percentage of the residents at Clemens Place and in other multifamily buildings, and contribute to the night life on the avenue. The West End neighborhood also boasts the city's largest gay population. Finally, the 1990's saw the influx of at least 1,000 Russian Jews to the residential community immediately west of the Hartford-West Hartford border.

Finally, the West End includes a very vocal and activist sub-population that is trying to "make a difference" and is extremely protective of its neighborhood, as evidenced by the passionate protest in the closing of Cheese & Stuff.

East Gateway

Part of the reason why this district is referred to as "no man's land" is because of the large vacant city-owned parcel, on the South side of Farmington/Asylum just west of the railroad tracks. Created after the exit and entry ramps to I-84 were configured a number of years ago, this parcel has since remained vacant. Unlike the other commercial districts on Farmington Avenue, the potential of this site is very closely tied to the future of



downtown, and it is important from a public policy perspective not to encourage development here that would detract from the revitalization efforts in the Central Business District.



The “no man’s land” site at the far eastern end of the Farmington Avenue corridor presents significant planning and development opportunities. It is likely, however, that optimal development is only possible upon (1) the reversal of the present national and regional economic recession, and (2) advanced planning and design work with the community and others as the City’s partners.

The site has these significant advantages for redevelopment:

- It is located directly opposite the Amtrak railroad and regional bus station.
- It is located along what will be the region’s prime bus corridor.
- It is located in the vicinity of entrances to and exits from I-84.
- A tall structure on the site would be visible from the highway, with panoramic views of the state capital building.
- It is proximate to the Aetna corporate headquarters and other high-image uses.
- It is slightly over one acre in size.
- The City already owns the site, clear and simple.
- The site is “ready to go” – or almost so.



Few sites in the city, region or state offer the “no man’s land” site’s combination of a large assemblage, extraordinary regional access and visibility, and City-owned status.

Should the site be made available for development immediately, its optimal development would most likely be squandered. It is unlikely during the current recession that any bidder would pay as much for the site now as either in the recent past or the medium-term future. Thus, a development program would emphasize what could be built in the short-term, i.e., (1) moderate-scale mixed-use development involving housing and some offices, with limited retail; or (2) low-scale large-format retail and entertainment uses that might compete with Adriaen’s Landing, the proposed major new development in downtown. Either option would likely involve sale to a local or regional developer who would condition the purchase price and/or redevelopment program on the pre-identification of anchor tenants. With certain exceptions, such tenants are unlikely to be forthcoming until the economy improves.

Alternatively, the site could be set aside for major development once the economy recovers and Adriaen's Landing is resolved. It would logically emphasize large-scale office and/or hotel development, with lower-floor retail uses, including large-format retailers that could not otherwise find sites in the downtown but would be essential to marketing downtown housing. Large-scale housing is another option, although it might absorb demand better directed to other nearby areas and take up space better set aside for commercial development. The development program could also include uses that are presently earmarked for Adriaen's Landing should that project falter.

Although the overall program would be mixed-use, the development would likely feature a large corporation seeking a prime downtown site. The model would be the move of MBNA to downtown Wilmington from nearby suburbs – a multi-site development roughly on the same scale as that which could be accommodated entirely on this site. The current economic downturn may even make this option more viable several years hence, as recessions often involve major readjustments in business structures, leading to all sorts of corporate shifts.

Recommendations

The Asylum Hill Business District

Altering the retail mix on Farmington Avenue will be a delicate task. Of course, properties owned by public or public / private entities (e.g., the city-owned site in the East Gateway area, the Colonial Theater building, etc.) are directly controlled. With the remainder, however, landlords might be reluctant to jeopardize their relationships with professional brokers. In such cases, efforts should be made to work with the local brokers to implement the recommendations made in this study. Brokers, however, are not as common in the lower-rent sections of the corridor, where commissions might be too high for property owners and too low for brokers. **In these sections, there is a need to provide tenant recruitment services.**

As to positioning, **current and future vacancies in Asylum Hill should be targeted for convenience retailers and service providers catering to local residents and, potentially, office workers and students.** It must be understood that low-income households lacking automobile access are and will continue to be, at least in the short term, the primary market

for goods and services in Asylum Hill. Demand for commercial space will therefore come primarily from bodegas, small specialty food stores (e.g., meat and fish markets), nail salons, hair salons and braiders, self-service laundromats, fast food establishments, liquor stores, check cashing agencies, rent-to-own stores, dollar stores, beauty supply stores, and with the recent closure of the Bradlees on Park Street, any other convenience retail categories that are found in discount department stores.

Rather than fighting these market forces, efforts should emphasize improvements to the operations and cosmetics of merchants that currently operate in Asylum Hill. Such efforts involve increasing access to business capital and technical assistance by creating a clearinghouse for available sources of loans and expertise. As for tenant recruitment, rather than repositioning, the emphasis should be on high-quality operators in the above retail categories, to be found, perhaps, by searching other similar commercial corridor in the city, such as Park Street and Albany Avenue. A fine example is Scott's Bakery, a successful Jamaican bakery chain in the Hartford area.



In addition, to the extent possible, Asylum Hill should endeavor to capitalize on the potential for augmented sources of patronage, i.e., daytime workers from Aetna and others, students who reside in the neighborhood, etc. Such a strategy would definitely include a campaign to attract Starbucks Coffee, which has expressed an interest in a storefront in the Hastings Conference Center storefront and which would provide an enormous image boost and compel Aetna employees to set foot on Farmington Avenue. It should also, however, target those convenience-oriented businesses that cater to the needs of workers and students as well as local low-income households, e.g. a new diner operator in the former Comet Diner space. Finally, the Mark Twain branch of the public library should consider relocating to the large, more visible corner of Laurel Street (in the same building.)

The West End Business District

The West End is a more complicated matter. Convenience retailers and service providers, many of which serve a similarly low-income population, play a significant role in this neighborhood's tenant mix. However, a destination restaurant / bar / entertainment scene, oriented largely to students and recent graduates, also seems to be emerging, and wealthier West End residents are most interested in stores and institutions that reflect their needs. These tensions will play out in the debates over the future of key anchors

such as the Colonial Theater, the Wall Building and the old Cheese & Stuff space, although the latter two are privately held.⁴

Active pursuit of restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, and specialty retail is recommended for the West End. In one sense, this refers to the “college town” theme that is already emerging in the West End. Possibilities for the second floor of the Wall Building, for example, include a billiards hall / sports bar or an off-campus “student union,” perhaps including a seasonal university book store and/or offices for community-oriented student organizations. Other college-oriented offerings, such as used CD stores, candle shops, and/or a restaurant serving large portions at reasonable prices, could be considered for this or other locations as well. In addition, the operator of the Roo Bar might be persuaded to maintain at least some of that popular watering hole’s student orientation.

More hip and upscale offerings should appeal not just to the future “yuppies” of the local educational institutions but also to the somewhat wealthier West End, and, possibly even West Hartford. Certain businesses, such as Ichiban and Tisane, already accord with this theme. Other possibilities include: a smaller-format, value-oriented gourmet / natural food store such as Trader Joe’s, for the ground floor of the Wall Building; and a casual dining venue with a bar, for the Colonial Theater space. Finally, brokers familiar with the West Hartford Center market should be contacted in an effort to locate possible “spill-over” retailers and restaurateurs who are unable to afford the rents there.

East Gateway

Rather than proceed with short term development that would not realize the full potential of the site, the city should take advantage of the present hiatus in forms of development to undertake the basic planning and promotional work that will be important to marketing the site to a major tenant or developer later on. This should involve:

- Due diligence on the site’s environmental and subsurface conditions, to identify the likelihood of any unusual site preparation costs;
- Flexible zoning on the site, allowing for a wide range of uses at very high densities;
- Restrictive guidelines, prescribing on- and off-site improvements. These could be accomplished through the Request for Bids and Proposals for the site, incentive zoning, or both;
- Traffic studies, indicating the optimal location(s) for site entry, as well as the off-site



Street corner before and after. New Haven, CT.

⁴ It should be noted, however, that Wild Oats Market has been in financial turmoil, so its position vis-a-vis the Cheese & Stuff space lease should be watched carefully.



Office building with retail. Los Angeles, CA.

mitigation measures to accommodate intense development. These can be conceptual at this time;

- Promotional material on the site, summarizing its key features, and stating the minimum as well as the maximum development to be tolerated;
- Partnerships with the business community, Growth Council, State and others, to assist with marketing the site on a regional if not national basis;
- Exploration of development by nearby corporations- The Hartford, ING, MassMutual, Morgan Reed, Aetna, etc. Partnership with the Farmington Avenue Joint Committee and other neighborhood groups, to assure that the project's ultimate development serves community as well as the city-wide and business interests.

As might be inferred from the above, the city's long-term interests hinge on maximizing the site's commercial and corporate value, with concomitant benefits in terms of the number of jobs and tax revenues generated.

To address long-term community interests, the city should work with the above partners to define the land use and urban design parameters for the site. These parameters should include:

- The ground floor of the development facing Farmington Avenue should be developed for small shops that help to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment and thus shrink the psychological distance between the Central Business District and the Farmington Avenue corridor, and serve the future busway passengers.
- Farmington Avenue frontage should be upgraded with shade trees, pedestrian-scaled lighting, benches and other pedestrian amenities.
- A portion of the profits (i.e., the sales price for the land) should be diverted towards community amenities. These might include cultural space, indoor recreation, meeting rooms, etc.
- The development should be designed to relate to the street and neighborhood, rather than an internalized Constitution Plaza-like structure.
- Consistent with this view, its retail uses should not be solely for the benefit of its workers and residents; i.e., corporate cafeterias and the like should be prohibited.
- The project's design should keep in mind its potential traffic, shadow, wind and other impacts, with appropriate off-site mitigation measures.
- The project should also encompass significant improvements to nearby crosswalks and pedestrian corridors, especially those connecting the site to the Union Station trans-

portation center, the Central Business District and the rest of the Farmington Avenue corridor. Such improvements would not only connect the project to its neighborhoods, but are necessary to address the additional pedestrian traffic generated by the project.

In the short-term, the city should pursue interim strategies so that it is not just “a hole in the ground.” These should be aimed at improving the appearance of the site, and possibly to generating income during what is likely to be a multi-year holding period. Several actions could be undertaken:

- The most logical interim use is parking, with shuttle service to downtown included in the pricing, although perhaps other interim uses are possible and should certainly be explored. For example, parking use during weekdays means that it would be available on weekends for alternative uses. This might include a flea market, taking advantage of the site's terrific visibility and transit / vehicular accessibility while bringing more visitors to downtown and Farmington Avenue on weekends.
- The Farmington Avenue frontage should be made as pedestrian-friendly as possible under the circumstances. At the very least, an attractively designed fence would be in order. Either way there should be pedestrian-scaled lighting and shade trees placed along the sidewalk.

In short, the “no man's land” site is not likely to be developed any time soon with anything close to the density and value that it ultimately offers. Keeping focused on this long-term opportunity will require consensus to assure that once the right developer and program arise, that the needed state, city and community backing will be immediately forthcoming. The future busway station offers the potential to begin to think about the short- and long-term development potential of the site, and how the rest of “no man's land” can be made more pedestrian friendly. This plan should be pursued now or in the near future, and form the framework for zoning and other long-term actions.