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Regional Plan Association
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Transit-Centered Development:

The Connecticut & Westchester Institute

New Haven Museum and Historical Society
October 22-24, 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Regional Plan Association

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent, non-profit regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning and advocacy. Since 1922, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action.

The nation's most influential independent regional planning organization since 1922, RPA has a storied history but is more relevant than ever in the 21st century. RPA's First Plan in 1929 provided the blueprint for the transportation and open space networks that we take for granted today. The Second Plan, completed in 1968, was instrumental in restoring our deteriorated mass transit system, preserving threatened natural resources and revitalizing our urban centers including Stamford, White Plains, Downtown Brooklyn, Newark and Jersey City. Released in 1996, RPA's Third Regional Plan, "A Region at Risk," warned that new global trends had fundamentally altered New York's national and global position. The plan called for building a seamless 21st century mass transit system, creating a three-million acre Greensward network of protected natural resource systems, maintaining half the region's employment in urban centers, and assisting minority and immigrant communities to fully participate in the economic mainstream. RPA's current work is aimed largely at implementing the ideas put forth in the Third Regional Plan, with efforts focused in five project areas: community design, open space, transportation, workforce and the economy, and housing.

The Connecticut & Westchester Institute

The Connecticut & Westchester Institute is a program organized by RPA with the guidance and support of The One Region Funders' Group at the New York Community Trust, and its member foundations who contributed toward this project: the Fairfield County Community Foundation, Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, Long Island Community Foundation, New York Community Trust, Rauch Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Westchester Community Foundation.

The mission of the One Region Funders' Group is to help the Tri-State metropolitan region of Connecticut-New York-New Jersey achieve a more sustainable transportation system that enhances economic competitiveness, while it protects public health and safety, promotes environmental quality, and supports social equity, by increasing the influence and coordination of philanthropic contributions and leadership.

The October 2008 Connecticut Institute was made possible by the participation and support of a number of individuals. Special thanks go to the Resource Team members; Commissioner Joseph Marie, Connecticut Department of Transportation; Commissioner Astrid Glynn, New York State Department of Transportation; and Commissioner Joan McDonald, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development for their inspiring presentations at the keynote address.

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Special thanks to **Jeff Ferzoco**, Creative Director, **Tara Klein,** Intern, and **Karen Martin**, Intern, for their help in organizing the event and drafting this report.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Modeled on the national Mayors' Institute on City Design program, the Connecticut & Westchester Institute provides a multi-day retreat for a small group mayors and a resource team of planning and sustainability professionals. At the Institute, each elected official presents a challenge facing his or her community, and then participates in an in-depth discussion with the other mayors and the resource team members. Together, the group develops a tailored set of solutions to the mayor's problem statement.

The Institute offers public officials the rare opportunity to discuss at length a challenge facing their community with a group of peers and some of the most respected planning experts in the country. These institutes typically focus particular attention on the relationship between community planning, design, smart growth, local public policy and public health, and what strategies create more livable communities. Experts in urban design, real estate development, transportation, communications, finance and other complementary fields participate in the Institute discussions, providing presentations and analyses of how alternative development patterns and policy initiatives affect the future of our communities. RPA has conducted over a dozen Institutes, including ten in New Jersey, two in Connecticut, three in Long Island, a region-wide Institute focused on Climate Change, and one in the greater Northeast region.

October 2008 Mayoral Participants

Honorable Mary Foster, City of Peekskill
Honorable William R. Hanauer, Village of Ossining
Honorable Richard Moccia, City of Norwalk
Honorable John Picard, City of West Haven
Honorable Michael Rhode, City of Meriden
Honorable Clinton Young, City of Mt. Vernon

October 2008 Connecticut & Westchester Institute Resource Team

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Ryan Lynch, Senior Planner, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
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Alan J. Plattus, Professor, Yale School of Architecture
Kate Slevin, Executive Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Steven Soler, President, Georgetown Land Development Company
Jeffrey Zupan, Senior Fellow, Transportation, RPA
Robert D. Yaro, President, RPA

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The 2008 Institute focused on transit-centered development, also known as transit-oriented development (TOD), because of its potential to drive economic growth in the northeast, create equitable communities, and reduce the environmental impacts of development. Across the country, municipalities, developers, and individuals are realizing that TOD can lower personal transportation costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent climate change, protect undeveloped land from sprawl, and provide for our changing demographic which has demonstrated a renewed interest in living in urban, walkable neighborhoods. Despite the attraction of TOD, however, developing new neighborhoods around transit is not free from challenges. Existing (often low-scale industrial) development along rail lines complicates the assemblage of developable properties and presents potential land-use conflicts. Zoning crafted with an emphasis on accommodating automobiles raises regulatory hurdles for developers who seek TOD permits and updating these regulations requires time and public support. Significant public and private investments are needed to build the transit infrastructure and surrounding mixed-use neighborhoods to accommodate demand. Despite these challenges, success stories of developments such as Yonkers' Hudson Park and new residential projects in Stamford, as well as national examples from Portland, Boston, and Washington, D.C., show that pursuing TOD can be worthwhile as a means for building vibrant and sustainable new communities that compete in a twenty-first century economy. The Institute is a two-day workshop for chief elected officials to work through TOD case studies from their communities with a team of planning and design professionals and identify those strategies best suited to aid them in capitalizing on these sustainable development trends.

Keynote Address

The keynote address at the Institute is a highlight of the two-day program and is delivered by a distinguished figure in the field of planning, design, and implementation. The only portion of the Institute which is open to the public, it draws a wide audience of elected officials, business leaders, civic activists, experts, and the media, in addition to the Institute's participants and resource team. The 2008 Keynote was given by the New York State and Connecticut Commissioners of Transportation, Astrid Glynn and Joseph Marie, who both have strong backgrounds in transit planning. Connecticut's Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development, Joan McDonald, also spoke on behalf of the state's commitment to coordinating development and mobility goals. The keynote was held at Yale University's Sheffield Sterling Strathcona Hall and was attended by over one hundred people.

Commissioners Glynn, Marie, and McDonald emphasized the need to use transit and transit-oriented development to accommodate future growth in the metropolitan region.

Commissioner Glynn used Boston's original streetcar suburbs as examples of vibrant communities that show how investments in public transportation help communities to reach their goals related to community building, environmental protection, and energy security. The current highway system is expensive, needs constant maintenance, and doesn't satisfy the dynamic transportation needs of our region's residents or businesses. Recent reductions in vehicle-miles-traveled combined with increases in transit ridership suggest that there has been a shift in the mindset of travelers toward public transportation, and housing development trends are following. New York has witnessed accelerated development in transit-served communities along the Hudson River. TOD enables families to reduce car ownership and shift to transit with a profound positive effect on household budgets. The savings of a family owning one less car over the course of 18 years can pay for a child's education. But successful transit requires a greater upfront investment by society. The state and federal government will have to provide a significant financial support to new facilities and operating costs. Transit's enhanced place in transportation planning throughout New York is exemplified by the new bus-rapid-transit and rail system included in the Tappan Zee bridge reconstruction. This new transit corridor will relieve congestion and encourage further economic growth, but decisions need to be right on both the transit and development sides. Communities need to be proactive and move beyond the recent trends of traditional suburban development. In the words of playwright Wendy Wasserstein, "Don't live down to expectations. Go out there and do something remarkable."

Commissioner Marie emphasized his and his family's experience growing up in Boston and utilizing mass transit more than the private automobile and the positive impact that had on community and environment. His mission is to align the Department of Transportation to twenty-first century goals, which involve reducing car trips and increasing transit use, preserving existing infrastructure, and expanding it in a way that accommodates smart growth. Connecticut's current initiatives include purchasing 380 new train cars for Metro North's New Haven Line, upgrading the New Haven rail yard to house and service those new cars, building a mixed-use facility and parking garages at New Haven's Union Station, and building new stations in Fairfield, West Haven, and Georgetown. The New Britain-Hartford busway and the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield commuter rail provide significant opportunities over a longer time frame to improve transit options in central Connecticut and reduce automobile use. The department is working with communities to encourage smart growth around the stations of the system in walkable nodes and is working with Naugatuck and others on large-scale TODs. The state is in the process of examining applications for $5 million in TOD planning and implementation money to provide communities with the tools necessary to develop the state's development pattern to one that is more transit-oriented and sustainable.

Commissioner McDonald was appointed to her position at DECD in 2007. She was formerly the Senior Vice President for Transportation at the New York City Economic Development Corporation. She spoke of how living in New York City without a car personally transformed her, and made her recognize the value of an urban center. Her belief is that public policy decisions are all related and that macro-level policies must be reflected in micro-level projects. The State of Connecticut is dependent upon the economy of New York City for much of its economic growth and jobs, so communities need to think regionally, but economic development policy must also ensure that every individual project is designed with sustainability in mind.

Policy-makers cannot let this economic downturn lead to short-sighted disinvestment in transit as it did in New York City in the 1970s. The New York metropolitan region will add four million people over the next few decades and we have an opportunity to harness that growth to move the region towards a more sustainable development pattern. This is the time to make significant changes, to think globally and act globally, without losing our local roots. This is a challenge that we are all up to and closer coordination between transportation and economic development policy in Connecticut is a first step in that direction.

Resource Team Presentations

Alan Plattus, Professor, Yale School of Architecture
→ What Mayors Need to Know about Urban Design

Build it - or at least imagine it - and they (residents, workers, visitors, developers) will come. In this new era of telecommuting and home offices, place matters. Prioritize the creation of attractive, safe, and coherent public realms that form the framework for good development and result in places where people want to live and work. Plan for the future. Plan for transit-oriented, intermodal, and mixed-use development even if the transit component is not yet in place. Empower citizens and local professionals through broad outreach to become partners in articulating future plans for their communities. Explicit designs, not vague plans, clarify expectations and attract development.

David Kooris, Connecticut Director
Regional Plan Association
→ What is Transit Oriented Development?

TOD is how communities in Southern Connecticut and Westchester County developed originally and nodes of compact development still exist along former and existing transit routes. However, since the 1940s, development has spread into the countryside made accessible by highways. If this sprawling development pattern continues, we will run out of developable land within decades, further harm the environment, limit the region's potential for economic growth, and further separate lower- and higher-income communities. In the last few years, a combination of high gas prices, highway congestion, concerns about climate change, and new attitudes toward urban living have led to the first recorded drop in vehicle miles traveled since the 1970s oil crisis and an increase in transit ridership – where available - throughout the nation. In the northeast, there are plenty of opportunities for growth at existing and planned train stations. Increasing residential density has been demonstrated to reduce the number of car trips and increase transit use. When designing development associated with a train or rapid-transit system, consider three performance measures:

1) Create a place with identity. Train stations can function as the heart of a community, the site of community events and anchor community institutions such as farmers' markets, small grocery stores, drugstores and coffee shops.

2) Balance the needs of the automobile with the needs of other users. A well-designed community encourages transit and non-motorized travel such as walking and biking. Since visible parking lots deaden street life, parking should be minimized through shared parking agreements and traffic demand management strategies and hidden from view behind buildings or along side streets. While parking and provision for cars will be necessary near stations in the near term, it should never impede the use of streets and sidewalks by pedestrians and bicyclists.

3) Capture growth in compact, mixed-use environments. Because transit infrastructure enables development at a much higher density than automobile infrastructure, TOD districts have much smaller land use footprints per worker, resident, or consumer than do traditional suburban style developments accessed by car. Building homes and offices near transit helps communities to achieve economic growth while preserving undeveloped environmentally sensitive land in locations less accessible by transit.

Unfortunately, planning for TOD is sometimes politically difficult. People can be scared by density, both by the perception of its physical appearance on the landscape and its potential fiscal implications in terms of property and school taxes. In reality, dense communities can take many forms, and research has shown that apartments and townhouses may have a positive fiscal impact. Charrettes and workshops can help residents envision an area's future and make wise decisions about land use regulations. Finally, development plans should remain flexible while demanding quality results.

Jeff Zupan, Senior Fellow, Transportation
Regional Plan Association
→ Where Transit Works

The level of transit ridership, driving, and car ownership is directly related to the density of a neighborhood and the size of a downtown. Communities should match the type of transit provided and the frequency of service to the size of the downtown and residential density of neighborhoods in order to provide cost-effective service to their residents and workers. Larger downtowns can support more frequent service and the provision of express buses or commuter rail. The increased ridership that comes with denser development also reduces the cost of providing transit. Higher residential density also reduces the number of automobile trips by shifting trips to walking, biking, and transit, and reduces the need for car ownership, regardless of income level.

John Nolon, Esq., Professor of Law, Counsel
Jennie C. Nolon, Attorney
Land Use Law Center, Pace University
→ Land Use: The Community-Based Implementation of TOD

The Land Use Law Center at Pace University has been studying local ordinances across the country to see how they enable the development of transit-oriented districts. A database of abstracts of these ordinances is available at www.landuse.law.pace.edu. The center's research has demonstrated that the most effective ordinances use a

"carrot" approach of bonuses to developers who provide public amenities in their projects. These ordinances prohibit land uses which are solely car-dependent, and allow a mix of uses and reduced parking requirements. They require minimum densities and pedestrian streetscape design, and collect fees for projected traffic impacts. Bonuses are awarded for building features such as public parks, below-grade parking, and affordable housing. The research also shows that cities can enable the development of TOD by creating a vivid master plan for a TOD district and explicitly stating expectations for development. "Shovel-ready" projects are attractive to developers who want to minimize the risk and time associated with acquiring special permits and rezoning for a project.

Steven Soler, President
Georgetown Land Development Company
→ Transit Oriented Development: Process, Entitlement, and Financing

Georgetown, a new neighborhood being built on the site of the old Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill, will include a new stop and station on the Metro North Danbury line, commuter parking garages, restaurants, retail, office, and 416 residential units. The property was acquired in 2002 and its development into Georgetown has required the cooperation of a myriad of state, local, and federal agencies. Boards of Selectmen and planning and zoning commissions from four towns were involved in permitting the project, which was accomplished only after a lengthy public charrette process defined the development vision. Funding, permits, and cooperation were needed by federal agencies such as EPA (brownfields cleanup), Department of the Treasury (green building), Department of Energy (energy efficiency and renewable energy), and the Army Corps of Engineers. Numerous state agencies involved included the Departments of Transportation (encroachment and STC permits), Environmental Protection (remediation, site development permits), and Community and Economic Development (community development block grants, affordable housing). Site work and remediation is underway at Georgetown, and buildings will begin going up in 2009 with an expected completion date of 2013.

CASE STUDIES: Summary of Findings

The six participating communities provided case studies with a variety of challenges and opportunities. Several cities were attempting to connect residential and commercial activity in historic downtown cores with train stations located on the periphery (West Haven, Ossining, Peekskill, Norwalk). Communities also faced site constraints such as steep grades (Ossining and Peekskill), contaminated sites (Ossining), and flood prevention (Meriden). In other communities, residential and commercial development near the train station would transform a formerly industrial neighborhood into a mixed use district (West Haven, Mount Vernon).

Discussion among the resource team members, RPA staff, and the mayors involved a few recurring themes:

- the need to publicly define a vision, and implement that vision through rezoning and a TOD ordinance
- reducing requirements for parking and enabling shared parking
- recognizing the positive fiscal impact that should accompany a high-quality, mixed-use development that includes a significant residential component
- working creatively with site constraints, whether they be topography, contamination, or wetlands
- connecting new development with downtown by requiring a continuous pedestrian streetscape that encourage people to walk to the train from their homes and offices
- creating business improvement districts to ensure that amenities are of high quality and to provide funding for additional transit.

MERIDEN was challenged to attract private development at the site of a former downtown mall while accommodating significant stormwater retention on-site. The resource team recommended that Meriden consider residential development as a means to increase tax revenue and shore up existing downtown retail with an increased customer base. A new train station and commuter parking garage to be built as part of the proposed Springfield-New Haven commuter rail should accommodate both new development to the east and the existing "Main Street" corridor to the west along Colony Street. Commuter parking should be tucked into the existing downtown fabric and encourage use of local shops and restaurants.

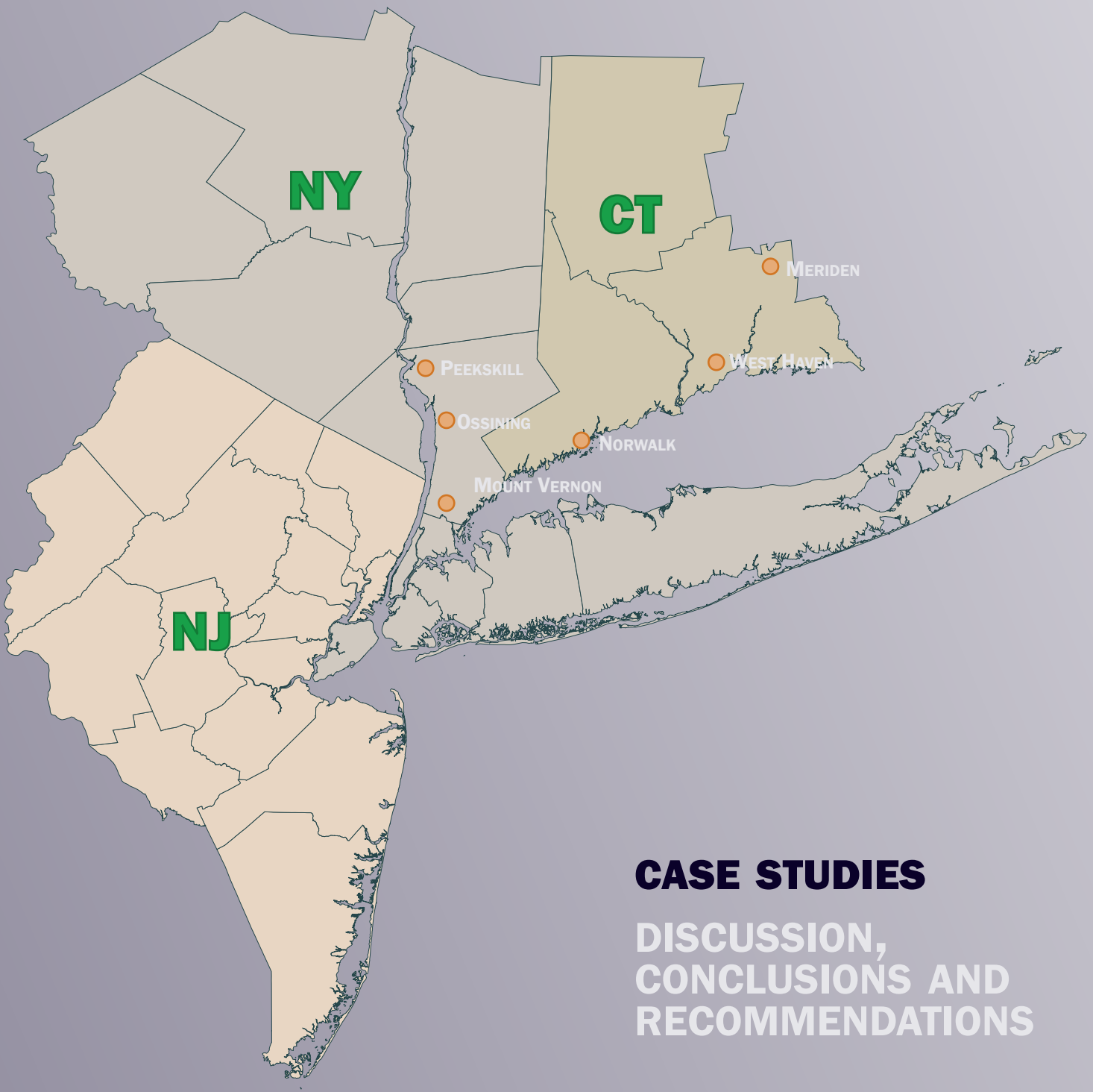
WEST HAVEN is anticipating the addition of train service at a new train station west of downtown. The resource team recommended that pedestrian connectivity be maintained on both sides of Saw Mill Road's approach to the station. An increase in traffic from highways to the west of the station should be managed through traffic calming practices such as "road diets", limited curb cuts, and continuous sidewalks. Overlay zones would allow higher-intensity uses in existing neighborhoods and allow for reduced parking requirements. Potential infill and adaptive reuse of industrial properties should respect the street frontage with pedestrian-accessible entrances and concealed parking. West Haven's major employers should also create employee shuttles to increase the station's "footprint" and reduce the need for single-occupant-vehicle commuting.

NORWALK's South Norwalk Train Station has already contributed to the revitalization of a residential and entertainment historic district. To capitalize on SoNo's success, major developments are planned along West Street, the two mile long route connecting to Norwalk's historic downtown core and bus transit center at Wall Street. In order to reduce the traffic and parking associated with the anticipated 1,700 housing units and 1.5 million square feet, the resource team recommended prioritizing a continuous pedestrian streetscape along West Street, reducing parking requirements, and pursuing additional transit such as a re-opened train station at Wall Street and water taxi service along the Norwalk River.

MOUNT VERNON is re-envisioning land use at Mount Vernon West, an industrial area that has not updated its zoning in decades. The current station lacks pedestrian amenities but significant market demand exists for residential development near train stations in this region. The resource team recommended that the city develop a new vision plan for the neighborhood through a public charrette and put revised zoning in place. A redeveloped train station would ideally contain community retail, structured parking, and multiple pedestrian entrances. A network of open spaces should connect with an expanded Bronx River Pathway and provide the framework for redevelopment of the entire study area.

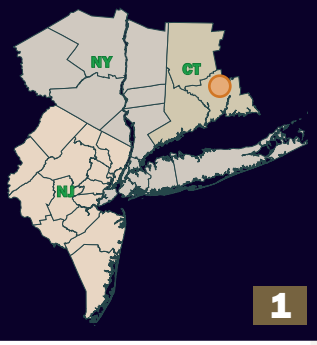
OSSINING's waterfront attracts private developers due to its stunning vistas and proximity to commuter rail. The city is challenged to connect new waterfront development along the river with its downtown core because of a steep elevation change along its connecting roads. The resource team recommended that Ossining create a Transit District near the station and along roads leading to the downtown. The Transit District would ensure pedestrian-friendly development by requiring a design review process, reducing parking requirements, and using form-based zoning. Development along Main Street and Central Avenue should include benches and small parks that provide places to rest, to make walking to the downtown easier and take advantage of the views. Market-rate development on prime waterfront sites should be required to provide affordable units or pay a fee in lieu that would support affordable housing elsewhere. The City should aggressively evaluate and remediate any contaminated sites. Finally, parking associated with new development can be located creatively, using contaminated sites, air rights over the tracks, or through shared parking arrangements.

PEEKSKILL is a beautiful hillside community that is primed and ready for growth. Additional residential development can be built without compromising the stunning views of the Hudson River. Other redevelopment opportunities include supporting the growth of an arts district and promoting tourism. Peekskill's development nodes must be connected to the train station with pedestrian connections and transit options. A challenge persists as many residents are hesitant to walk up a large hill from the station, and dangerous street crossings separate the train station and waterfront from the rest of town. Peekskill must address its traffic circulation problems in order to reduce congestion and aid pedestrian safety. A concurrent project must be to continue to revitalize the waterfront, which has the potential to be a thriving public space.



CASE STUDIES

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MERIDEN

Mayor Michael Rohde

Square Miles	23.7
Population	59,225
State	Connecticut

1

- All new development near the hub should be oriented towards the new amenity
- The City should promote dense residential development within walking distance of the HUB as a tax ratable in lieu of retail and office space in the short term
- Planning for future growth during the slack economy will best position Meriden to capitalize on the next economy
- Meriden should identify opportunities to agglomerate redevelopment parcels within one-half mile of the rail station and downtown core to achieve critical mass to attract developer interest

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The City would like to explore strategies that will enable them to attract future public and private investment in the downtown, particularly near the "HUB" and future commuter rail station.

BACKGROUND

The Meriden "HUB" is a vacant, 14.4-acre brownfields site located in the center of Meriden near the existing Amtrak station, which will be a stop for the proposed Springfield-New Haven Commuter Rail. The City holds title to the HUB and is in the process of designing and implementing a plan for reuse of the site in a manner that solves persistent flooding problems downtown and results in economic development for central Meriden. The City has demolished the mall formerly on the site, performed interim environmental remediation, and developed a flood control plan which calls for most of the site to be transformed into a city park that serves the dual purposes of providing public green space and flood storage. The remainder of the site is planned for 150,000 square feet of new office and retail space. Across the street, the development of a new intermodal transportation center downtown along with improved rail service along the New Haven to Springfield rail corridor could foster Transit Oriented Development (TOD) on the HUB site and throughout downtown Meriden.

North of the HUB, an occupied but obsolete public housing project also presents an opportunity for reuse as part of a larger downtown redevelopment plan that will attract private investment and support the use of expanded transit facilities.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Residential Development

The HUB site's major amenities will be its proximity to commuter rail service and ample parkland, both features that are more likely to attract residential developers rather than the office development called for in the current plan. While it is logical to target commercial development in the city's core due to its positive tax implications for Meriden, transit-oriented development precedents from throughout the metropolitan area and the northeast demonstrate that higher density mixed-use and residential development are often fiscally positive land uses. Downtown Meriden has the potential to become an attractive residential community, utilizing its pending rail, park, and "Main Street" assets to capitalize on current trends toward urban living.

Colony Street Revitalization

North Colony and West Main Streets (Meriden's walkable retail corridors) comprise a struggling retail district with some residential uses on upper floors. It is separated from the HUB area by a grade change of between ten and twenty feet. Restoring a residential community to downtown will support existing retail along Colony Street and West Main Street and increase the value of existing properties. In order to make sure that economic gains at the new train station and the HUB are shared by property owners along Colony Street, the City should consider designing the new intermodal center in a way that services both the State Street/HUB side of the tracks and the western side facing the traditional downtown, and should examine the access from Colony Street in any future public improvements to the area. Specifically, a direct connection can be created at the level of the track overpass to get station activity and pedestrian flow directly onto Colony Street via the old Post Office building at the northern end of the station platforms and via a pedestrian corridor aligned with Church Street at the southern end of the station. The Stamford Intermodal Center pedestrian corridor underneath Interstate 95 demonstrates how a similar linkage effectively extends the pedestrian walking shed of the station and bridges perceived and genuine barriers between the station and the ultimate destination. This investment would create a second gateway to the station in the heart of the downtown in contrast to a location "behind the stores."

Park Design

The HUB site's current design plan envisions a landscaped, day-lighted Harbor Brook surrounded by parkland with limited development opportunities at the sites periphery. While the current plan creates a public park and addresses the mandatory stormwater detention demands of the project, it does not take full advantage of the opportunity to re-create Harbor Brook as an amenity to the adjacent properties and the City. A creative landscape architect and engineering team could accomplish equally effective flood management while providing a more natural and value-creating landscape. Current best practices emphasize wetlands re-creation by constructing retention basins planted with native plants to create both aesthetically pleasing environments and indigenous habitat. While adding minimally to the initial capital investment, such natural landscape design can reduce long-term operating expenses and can have a dramatically enhanced impact on adjacent property values, quality of contiguous development, and resultant tax revenue to the city. Any development that does take place on the HUB site, therefore, should be oriented and designed in a way to maximize interaction with the park and capitalization of this core amenity of the downtown.

Parking

Successful suburban TOD projects achieve a delicate balance between providing commuter parking for residents living outside of the downtown and creating a neighborhood at the station that is not dominated by surface parking lots or garages. Within at least ¼ mile of the train station, the pedestrian environment should be of primary concern, ensuring that those within walking and biking distance of the station are able to keep cars off the road and additional traffic out of the downtown. As development pressure mounts in the vicinity of the train station, there will be increased demand for structured parking. The City should resist the impulse to build this structure as close to the train station as possible (as located in the current plan), and instead tuck it away within the existing downtown fabric. This will minimize the visual impact of the garage itself and encourage commuters to walk through the downtown and patronize shops on their way to the train.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a pedestrian link from the track overpass direcly onto Colony St.

Establish a high residential density within a quarter mile of the train station

Eliminate all parking in the park site relocating it to adjacent structures on secondary streets

Tuck any necessary structured parking within the community center so people who want to use the train have to walk through the downtown. The parking doubles as a downtown resource on weekends

Explore landscaping strategies that recreate local natural environments, reducing maintenance costs and greatly enhancing local properties

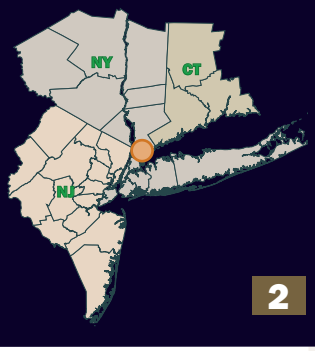
Capitalize on the new park artery to transform the street into a residential and mixed-use corridor

In addition to the facilities dedicated to commuter parking, the supportive parking for each redevelopment project must be designed in a way that minimizes impacts on the public realm and pedestrian environment of the station area and the downtown. Surface parking must not be located between buildings and the park or between buildings and any road on which pedestrian activity is desired. Any surface parking in the downtown will increase stormwater runoff, exacerbating flooding challenges. Garages, too, must be effectively designed by wrapping them with mixed-use structures or, where infeasible, placing retail on the ground floor. In all cases, parking ratios need to be examined in light of the pending transit improvements and further opportunities for minimization of parking and driving should be explored, such as shared parking between complementary land use, on-site zip cars, and subsidized transit passes by building managers.

Implementation of Plans

The City should set the stage now for this future growth around the train station. To speed up the implementation of commuter rail service, the City can encourage the development of high-density residential uses within a quarter mile of the train station, a distance widely accepted as a comfortable walking distance. Pedestrian amenities should be radiated out into the surrounding neighborhoods from the station area to capitalize on existing pockets of density and activity. The new and existing residents can then help the City advocate for commuter rail service.

To encourage density near the HUB site, the City should couch these development objectives within a broader strategy for the entire municipality that ties intensification of the HUB and the downtown to preservation of open space and the existing neighborhood character in other areas. Meriden could utilize Transfer of Development Rights which would directly link preservation to transit-supportive intensification, include density bonuses for developers in exchange for pedestrian-realm improvements or other amenities, or set a minimum number of stories for all new buildings in the vicinity. To further encourage infill development, the City can proactively identify soft sites within a half mile of the train station that could be redeveloped and aid in their agglomeration. This will help developers seeking to compile tracts of land for larger-scale developments in the city center and help create the critical mass necessary to change the image and urban environment of the downtown.



MOUNT VERNON

Mayor Clinton Young

Square Miles	4.4
Population	67,882
State	New York

2

- Develop a clear vision for the area (possibly via public workshops) and implement new corresponding zoning. Developers will be attracted to sites with clear requirements
- Focus on the core station area first, to catalyze further redevelopment throughout the industrial zone
- Build a critical mass of residential and retail uses near the station that is visible from the rail and the parkway and serves as a visual indication of the City's renaissance

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mt. Vernon would like to reexamine the land use and overall development pattern surrounding the Mt. Vernon West Train Station, which is currently industrial in nature but could develop into a transit-oriented neighborhood that includes residential and retail development.

BACKGROUND

The Mount Vernon West train station area is an industrial district located about one mile from downtown Mount Vernon. The station itself is privately owned and has no official commuter parking, although there is a privately-owned surface lot close by. The station is surrounded by low-scale industrial uses which have seen little change over the last few decades. A planned road project has introduced the potential for change to the Mount Vernon West station area. A new ramp from the Bronx River Parkway will enhance visibility of the station and bring new volumes of cars and people. The Mayor and planning staff realize that since the master plan and zoning for the area were put into place over forty years ago, current land regulations do not optimize the development potential of the area because they do not allow mixed use anywhere in Mount Vernon or housing near Mount Vernon West station.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing a Vision and Rezoning

The Resource Team felt that the redevelopment potential of Mount Vernon West was high due to its frequent train service, proximity to jobs and amenities, and development opportunities exemplified by a ½ acre vacant site currently slated for market-rate condominiums and larger-scale redevelopment in the industrial zone. With the proper zoning in place, developers would be interested in market-rate housing and retail in the area. Investors are looking to support TOD and other "green" projects that Mount Vernon West would be able to advertise.

Development at Mount Vernon West has the potential to mirror the high-density, vibrant neighborhoods across the parkway in Yonkers. Given the high potential desirability of this area, Mount Vernon could pursue a "green zone" designation for this area, in which current Industrial sites could be rezoned to encourage environmentally friendly manufacturing practices, minimize noxious effects and enable more residential development. Because the change in land use around the station could potentially be drastic, the resource team recommends that Mount Vernon pursue a charrette/public workshop process to develop a plan for the area that will lead to new zoning and design guidelines by generating broad public support.

The City should also create an inventory of vacant or underutilized sites so that it is known what magnitude of transition could be expected, cataloguing the area's susceptibility to change under alternative zoning scenarios. Also, the City should try to quantify the potential for development over the tracks using air rights, and work with the transit agency to capitalize on the value of public assets. Existing studies should be re-examined and updated, if needed, to reflect current best practices in transit-oriented development and sustainable design.

Creating a Station Area

Paramount to the repositioning of this industrial district into the core of a thriving mixed-use neighborhood is the evolution of the station into a focal point of the community. Presently, the passenger experience is below the level to which Metro North riders are accustomed, without a true station to speak of or any contiguous public spaces.

Private development at the train station could incorporate station improvements such as structured parking to free up space for transit-supportive uses and a station plaza or other open space, service retail for commuters, and a second pedestrian entrance to the station at the southern edge of the platform which would extend the ½ mile pedestrian walking radius further south into the adjacent residential areas. A small format supermarket (approximately 20,000 square feet) or other community anchor tenant would help to create a critical mass of retail near the train station that would encourage further residential or retail development.

Parking requirements should be minimized for all development to reflect the lowered necessity for automobile use in the transit-supportive environment and any parking that is provided should be designed in a way that minimizes its impact on the pedestrian realm. The design of this district must emphasize intensity, quality open spaces, and first-class pedestrian realm.

Promoting Open Space

Though Macquesten Parkway provides a linear park through the station area, more usable public spaces need to be incorporated into the station and any adjacent development. Directly adjacent to the northern station entrance, a plaza or other open space should be created that creates a visible and aesthetically pleasing gateway to the rail service and transitions the station from a place to "pass through" to a place to "go to." Site design guidelines should promote open space which can be incentivized or demanded through new zoning regulations to result in pocket parks and plazas throughout the new high-density neighborhood. The Bronx River Pathway should be extended south to the station area to enhance access to an existing open space amenity that is world-class and connects the station area to the surrounding municipalities. This network of linear and small open spaces should provide the framework for the redevelopment of the entire study area.

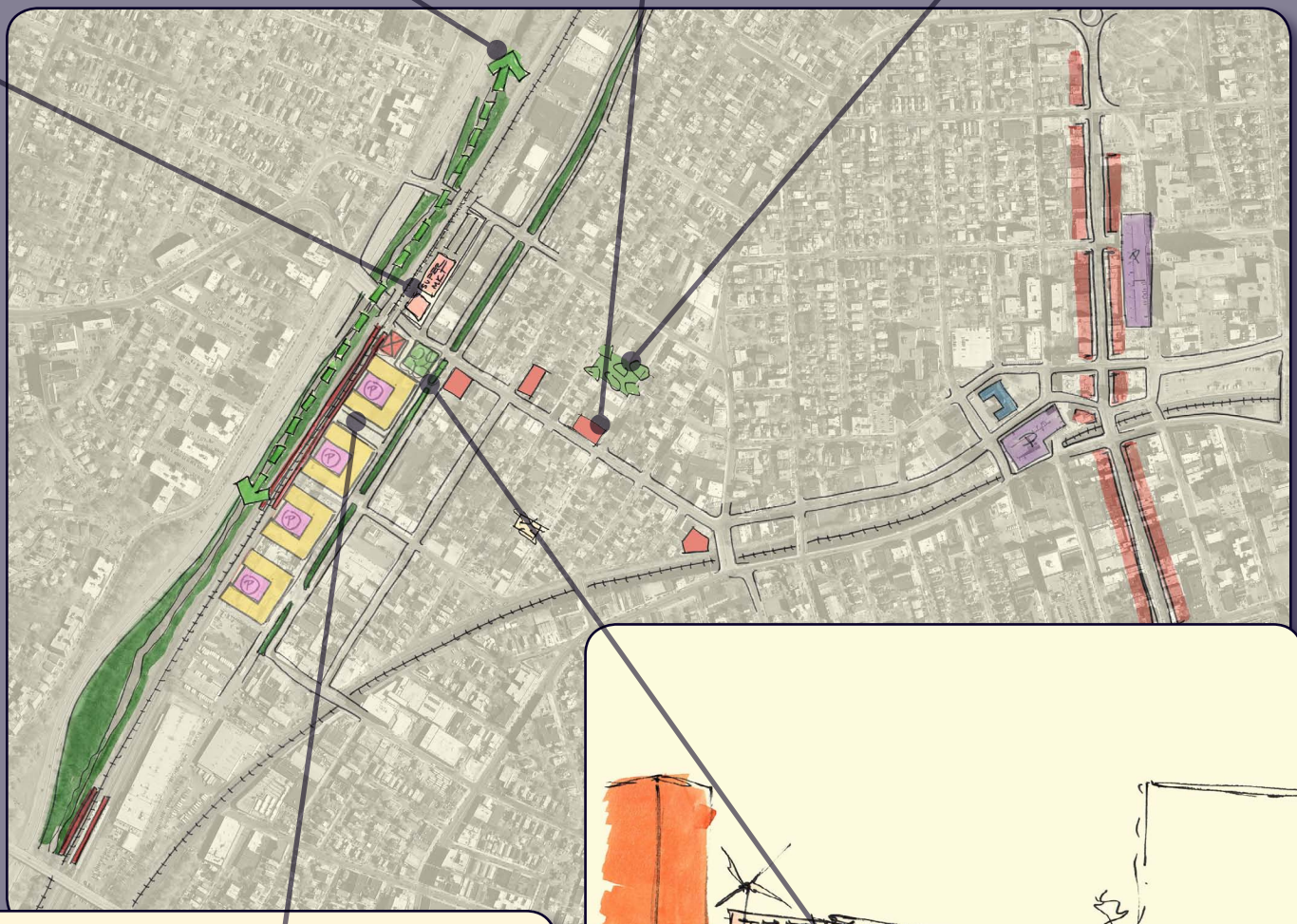
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

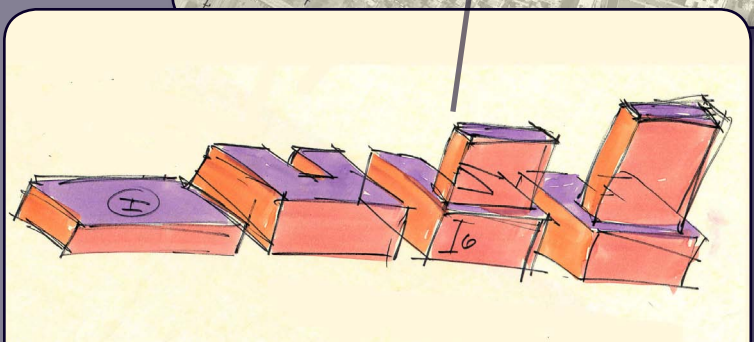
Extend Bronx River Trail to station

Promote infill along the corridor to create a seamless pedestrian environment linking Mount Vernon West with the city's downtown

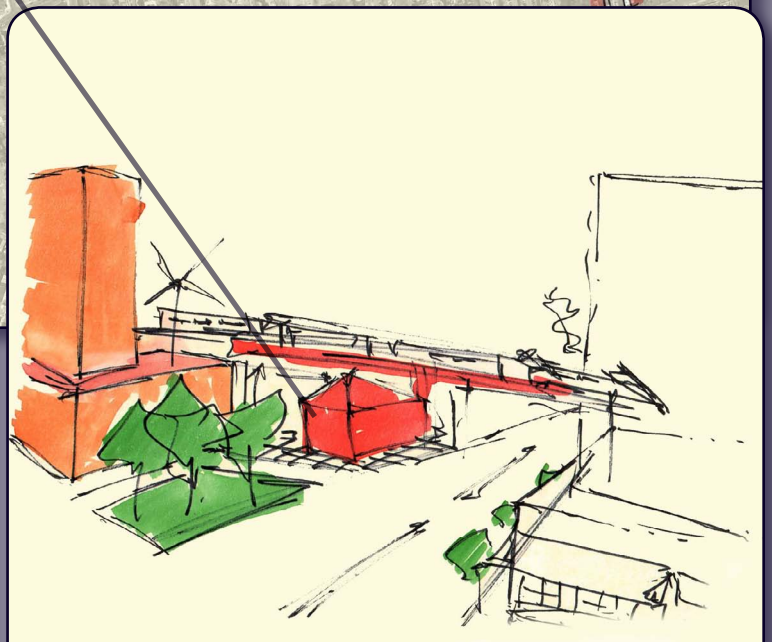
Enhance school open space to serve as off-peak pocket parks

A small anchor tenant is essential to provide critical mass in the neighborhood

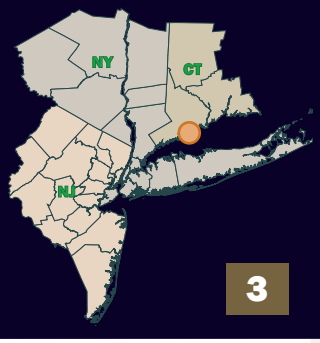




Allowing higher density and reducing parking requirements will enable to creation of a vibrant mixed-use district near the station. The highest densities should be closest to the station and visible from the parkway. Densities and heights should taper off into the adjacent residential and industrial neighborhoods



A new station building and public plaza create a civic identity and amenities in the heart of the district



NORWALK

Mayor Richard Moccia

3

Square Miles	22.8
Population	83,456
State	Connecticut

- Reducing vehicle use will require pedestrian streetscape improvements along West Street and throughout the neighborhoods between South Norwalk and Uptown
- Multiple transit options should be explored: a bus shuttle between Wall Street and the South Norwalk train station, water taxis, and shuttle service on the southern portion of the Danbury branch with restoration of rail service to Wall Street
- Create parking districts in which parking requirements are reduced and spaces are shared among property owners

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Norwalk is experiencing a surge of development along the two-mile West Avenue corridor between the South Norwalk train station and the bus transportation hub at Wall Street. How can this development be designed and serviced in a way that reduces automobile dependence?

BACKGROUND

4.5 million square feet of mixed-use development is planned or under construction along West Avenue, the main road which stretches for two miles between the train station and Wall Street and parallels the Norwalk River. The five major developments along this stretch will collectively add 1,700 housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space. Under conventional parking guidelines (and the current development proposals), the developments would also provide almost 8,000 parking spaces, at a cost to developers of over $190 million. Automobile-dependent development at this magnitude will also overwhelm Norwalk's narrow street network and add to congestion on Interstate 95. The city would like to find ways to reduce parking requirements along West Avenue and demonstrate to developers and their investors that the lower parking provisions will not harm marketability of the space.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuous Streetscape

While the entire corridor is nearly two miles long from the heart of South Norwalk (SoNo) to Uptown, new developments and existing assets are distributed along West Avenue at even intervals. All major origins and destinations, therefore, are located within a one mile walk to either the train station or Wheels bus hub. A short-term and less cost intensive mobility strategy to connect the activity centers along the corridor is walking. In order to encourage as much walking as possible, the city should ensure that a pedestrian streetscape is maintained along the entire route. Main pedestrian entrances along West Avenue should be visible from the street and inviting. Sidewalks should be generous and continuous on both sides of the street, with very limited dead spots such as parking lots or large curb cuts. In order to accommodate parking entrances and deliveries, the City could consider including Putnam Avenue, Crescent Street, and Harbor Avenue east and parallel to West Avenue as "B Streets" which would accommodate delivery entrances and parking for the developments. While walking is not a likely alternative for trips from one end of the corridor to the other, it can be a viable option for most trips between destinations within the corridor.

Expansion of Transit Options

For trips along the entire corridor and into the study area from elsewhere in the city, Norwalk must build on its rich transportation infrastructure that enabled it to become the urban center that it is today. Norwalk Harbor reached its prominence in the nineteenth century, and the Wall Street area grew into a busy commercial center connected to Norwalk's wharves. The harbor is still a center for recreational boating, which brings visitors into the community.

The Norwalk River presents an intriguing alternative or complementary opportunity for connectivity between the SoNo and Uptown. Water taxi service could connect Wall Street and the developments at the northern edge of the corridor with the SoNo riverfront, although substantial infrastructure improvements would need to be made in the form of updated piers and pedestrian crossings over railroad lines.

Though the City currently has four commuter rail stations, improvements are necessary to enable them to support intracity travel in Connecticut. Improvements to the Danbury branch commuter line will greatly improve conditions for riders traveling to SoNo from the Housatonic River Valley and for riders traveling to Merritt-7 from elsewhere along the coastal corridor. Even before these enhancements to the branch line are completed, shuttle service can be initiated between SoNo and Merritt-7 and timed to meet many New Haven Line trains thereby enabling greater commuting opportunities to each commercial node. Wall Street was once the site of an additional rail station on the Danbury branch, and its reopening coupled with shuttle service along the branch in Norwalk would effectively link all three major centers of the city with fast and efficient rail service. Reopening this station to passenger service would also connect Norwalk's existing bus network with regional rail.

Finally, bus shuttle service is a potential strategy to penetrate service deeper into the West Avenue corridor and create station opportunities between SoNo and Uptown. Existing traffic volume coupled with right-of-way constraints makes service that is independent of congestion constraints difficult along the West Avenue corridor. There is the potential for dedicated lanes at lights, signal prioritization, low-boarding and other mechanisms to speed travel, but it will be difficult to create service on the existing roadway that is competitive with the automobile. An alternative may exist along a parallel corridor to the east that has similar access to the redevelopment areas but less constraints and traffic. The Putnam Avenue/ Crescent Street/ Harbor Avenue/ Commerce Street corridor provides an opportunity for higher speed bus shuttle service with stops at each activity node without ever tackling the congestion of West Avenue to link SoNo with Uptown.

Progressive Parking Requirements

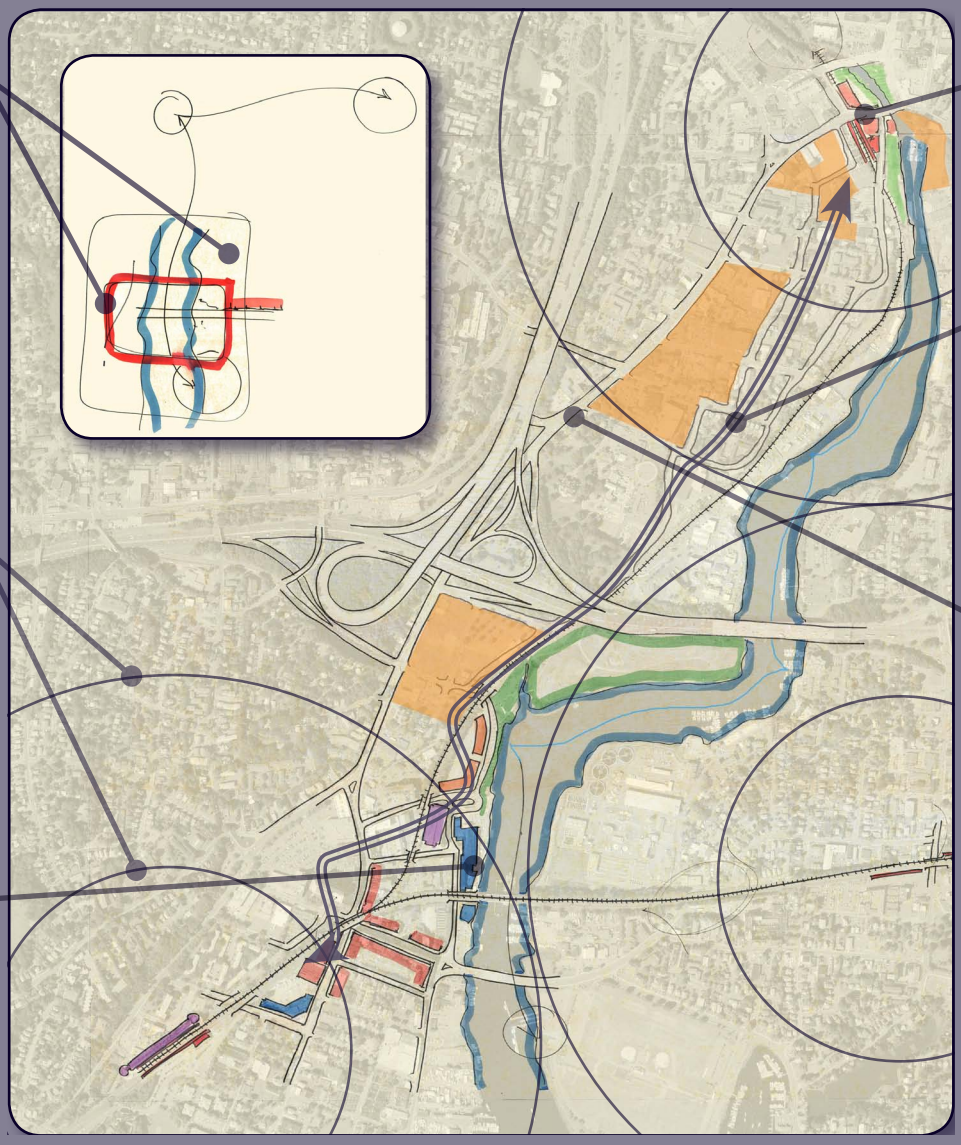
Integral to achieving effective transit-oriented development that minimizes traffic impacts on the local community is the progressive management of parking. A blunt reduction in parking requirements in transit-oriented developments may not result in an actual reduction of constructed spaces because of developers' perceptions of marketability and investors' pro formas being biased towards suburban development models. Shared parking in a transit district can be a mechanism

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Development on both sides of the river should treat the waterfront as the center of a shared neighborhood

Streetscape improvements will encourage people to walk within a quarter mile and a half mile of the train and bus stations. Reducing parking requirements and promoting shared parking in these areas will also create a more pedestrian friendly atmosphere

The river provides an alternative transit corridor to link waterfront destinations

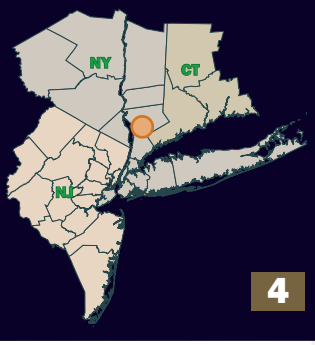


Restore service to Wall Street and enhance rail service between SoNo and Merritt-7 as a first step toward an improved Danbury branch

Bus shuttle service between stations on a route parallel to West Ave. can provide additional transit options for those more than a half mile from train or bus stations

While traffic and other constraints along West Ave makes shuttle service along that corridor difficult, intersection improvements and signal prioritization can improve bus service and enhanced streetscape could link destinations within the corridor

for an overall reduction in parking without a reduction in parking availability. Through a parking district with dedicated financing from existing parking lots, the City could build a central municipal parking facility or two along the corridor, require that private parking facilities be available for public use, or expand on garage shuttle service as is currently being tested between the SoNo station and the Maritime Garage. Additional development would not be required to provide as much additional parking on each site because shared parking would already be available. In Norwalk, a parking district would enable the City to consider the availability of nearby parking when considering applications for new development. For property owners, shared parking can more efficiently provide parking at different times of the day and reduce the cost of constructing parking facilities, making developments more profitable. In order to convince developers and their investors of the viability of shared parking, Norwalk can point to several local examples. The core of New Canaan, for example, allows development without requiring additional parking, and accommodates parking needs with on street spaces and municipal lots located on the perimeter of the shopping district. Investment continues to flow into New Canaan, because, as one resource team member put it, "bankers know New Canaan works because bankers live in New Canaan." Other examples of development with reduced parking requirements or shared parking are the Collins development in Yonkers, NY, and the new residential development by the Kuchma Corporation on Fairfield Avenue in Bridgeport.



OSSINING

Mayor William R. Hanauer

Square Miles	3.2
Population	23,920
State	New York

4

- Create a detailed vision plan for the waterfront and implement it through a TOD district that includes form-based zoning and requirements for design review and inclusionary housing
- Create a business improvement district to enhance provision of services and marketing in the downtown
- Determine the extent of environmental contamination and utilize the most affected sites for consolidated parking resources
- Create a corridor of development along Main and Central, and minimize parking requirements in this district to reflect its transit access
- Complete the Riverwalk for riverfront recreation and access to the station area

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ossining is on the verge of redeveloping its waterfront and train station area, but would like to do so in an environmentally sustainable way and by taking into consideration its desire for workforce housing and mixed income developments. What steps should it take to achieve its goals?

BACKGROUND

Ossining's location on the banks of the Hudson River provides a dramatic setting for transit-oriented development, but challenging topography and an industrial past complicate redevelopment of the riverfront and access to transit options. Historically, industrial uses located along the riverfront because of access to riverborne shipping and rail transportation; however, Ossining's waste-oil tanks, lumberyard, and metal carbon plant no longer utilize these transit amenities. In contrast, the potential for increased ridership at Ossining's Metro North train stop is great, with the Haverstraw-Ossining ferry bringing in commuters from west of the Hudson, a large residential population located within ½ mile, the pending development of a museum at Sing Sing Prison, and active development and developer interest already along the waterfront. A 130-foot elevation change separates Ossining's riverfront and train station from central Ossining. This grade change, along with unfriendly streetscapes, has limited the number of residents and workers who walk from Downtown Ossining to the train station.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Define a Transit-Oriented District

Ossining should explore the possibility of establishing a "transit-oriented district" which could provide the regulatory mechanism to accomplish multiple goals. The district could include design standards, guidelines for architectural review, and form-based codes that can allow for higher intensity development within the district that maximizes local benefit through strict definition of building mass, architectural design that complements local character, and pedestrian amenities. The transit-oriented district can also provide the framework for requirements governing the provision of affordable housing which targets a variety of income groups and capitalizes on the value of properties adjacent to the transit amenity to leverage local housing benefits. Finally, a transit-oriented district can serve as a business improvement district which allocates locally generated tax revenue to enhance the provision of services such as street cleaning and bus or shuttle service within the zone or between the station area and downtown.

Enable Affordable Housing

Ossining has been successful in using Community Development Block Grant funds to create affordable housing units in its downtown, but efforts to require waterfront developers to include affordable units in new mixed-income buildings have been met with resistance. Ossining should continue to pursue the goal of developing mixed-income communities. Transit access, waterfront, and Hudson River views combine to create enough value in Ossining's station area that the village can be assertive in its workforce housing demands on interested developers. If they refuse to include affordable units within their development site, the other alternative could be to pay an "in-lieu-of" fee, but this fee must be equivalent to the cost of constructing an equivalent unit within the transit district to the one that would have been provided on site.

Evaluate and remediate contaminated properties

Any development plans for the community must acknowledge the presence of continuing industrial uses and deal with the potential presence of contamination.

The Con Edison site on Market Street is known to be contaminated and is suspected as the source of other contamination on sites downhill and near the riverfront. Ossining should aggressively pursue cleanup of the Con Edison site and assessment of nearby properties. The potential for contamination spreading into the river is particularly troublesome. Filing a natural resource damage claim against Con Edison would prompt it to prioritize cleanup and prevent further contamination of nearby sites which would not only harm the environment but also limit the area's development capacity. Waste-oil tanks located on the riverfront once utilized water transit but are unsightly and no longer use waterfront transportation. The long-term redevelopment potential of this site should be assessed in an effort to transform the waterfront into the backbone of the mixed-use transit district.

It is inevitable that contamination will limit the redevelopment potential of some properties within the study area. Cleanup standards vary depending on a property's future intended use. The cost of remediation can determine whether a site is redeveloped for residential, commercial, or industrial uses. Severely contaminated sites are often sealed under an impervious layer such as an asphalt parking lot. Depending on their location in Ossining, contaminated properties could be strategically utilized for parking, minimizing the amount of land devoted to parking on uncontaminated lots that may be used for residences or recreation.

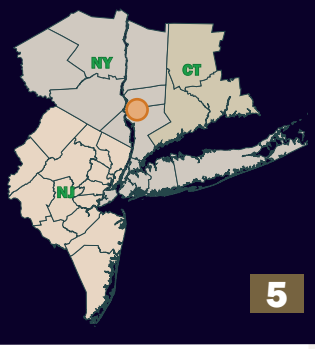
Get creative about parking

While enhancing pedestrian and transit access to the train, parking throughout the station area should be minimized in accordance with current transit district best practices. Near the train station, opportunities for additional parking that minimize the need to use developable land should be identified including the air rights over the train tracks, though caution must be paid to ensure that any consolidated parking resources do not cut off views or pedestrian access to the waterfront. Where possible, parking structures for local land uses should be included as a component of the overall structure. Opportunities for sharing commuter parking should be identified such as with the future Sing Sing Prison museum, which will require more parking during weekends.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Turn topography into a strength, not a weakness

Although the topography between lower Ossining and the downtown is steep, it offers stunning vistas and its pedestrianization will be essential to linking the station area and the existing village core. The walk from the train station to downtown via Main Street or Central Avenue should include pocket parks and frequent benches as locations to rest and enjoy the view. Depot Square has potential as a park that would provide a welcoming landmark for pedestrians descending the hill to the riverfront and for those arriving at the station. The possibility of creating a one-way loop around this block should be examined in conjunction with an overall traffic calming and pedestrianization strategy for the station area that could include sidewalk widening, tree planting, and a roundabout at the base of the Secor Road bridge.



PEEKSKILL

Mayor Mary Foster

5

Square Miles	4.3
Population	24,556
State	New York

- Stitch together Peekskill's downtown and waterfront districts to create a seamless corridor with unique identity and activity
- Capitalize on elevation changes on either side of Central Avenue to enable higher density, tiered development without compromising views or local character
- Enhance pedestrian environments and public transit options throughout the city, focusing on improving non-auto connections to the train station and along the Main Street corridor
- Improve both traffic circulation and pedestrian accessibility by rerouting trucks and calming traffic where Route 9 meets Main Street

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Peekskill hopes to create a vibrant urban environment that will enable it to become the premier business and entertainment destination for the Lower Hudson Valley. The city must develop a unifying plan for its fragmented Main Street corridor in order to support distinct and sustainable development for each of its individual development nodes.

BACKGROUND

Peekskill is a city of approximately 25,000 residents located on the Hudson River in Westchester County. Peekskill's Main Street, a 2.2 mile stretch also known as Route 6 links Peekskill's bustling mixed-use and walkable downtown with the waterfront and train station. Essentially, Peekskill has four sections of development stretching from West to East along Route 6—an underutilized waterfront, a re-emerging downtown, older residential, and standard suburban homes—all of which rest along a large hill. The city is very supportive of its live/work artists' studios. Peekskill is currently home to the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art and the Paramount Center for the Arts, along with several other museums and art centers. As a strategically located city, Peekskill hopes to attract more density and grow its community.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Create two distinct "districts" seamlessly linked by Central Avenue

Walking and biking in Peekskill is often hindered by its steep elevation change from the waterfront to downtown. One way to inspire more localized walking could be to develop an upper and lower Peekskill with distinct identities and linked by a mixed-use corridor of development. Upper Peekskill would be located at the top of the hill, with Lower Peekskill at the base of the hill on the waterfront. Each district could use specific names that give the area a sense of place, such as "Uptown Peekskill" or "Arts District." Different uses could be targeted for each node in order for the two neighborhoods to complement one another. For example, the lower district could enhance its burgeoning arts district with more live/work artist studio spaces, while the upper district could concentrate on more mixed-use commercial and residential.

Peekskill would still be a unified community if connections between the two districts are fostered. This could include a trolley or jitney service around town. This service could provide access to the waterfront, which should continue its revitalization efforts, and the train station for residents throughout the city without the need for an automobile. It may also provide an easy link to local museums and theaters for individuals arriving to the train station from elsewhere in the Hudson Valley.

To further enhance the success of a jitney, Peekskill should increase the density around its chosen nodes in upper and lower Peekskill. Concentrating development around jitney stops will encourage people to use the service and make it a more viable form of transportation for residents.

Use the hill to accommodate development

While Peekskill's Central Avenue corridor topography presents physical hurdles for construction, there are many models for hillside development that Peekskill could adapt to suit local conditions. By tucking higher density residential development into the hillside, Peekskill can meet its goals to increase its residential building stock without blocking views of the Hudson River and maintaining city aesthetics as well as property values of the existing stock.

By terracing the buildings – much like the organic hillside development of the Mediterranean coast - density can be achieved with lower building heights and less perceived building mass. The roofs of lower homes become the terraced patios of the next unit above providing for more landscaping opportunities and outdoor space than typically found in residential development of this density. The result is a hillside stabilized by homes that follow the contours of the landscape. Residence entrances could be located at both the upper and lower levels of the tiered housing, activating greater portions of the street than would be achieved by a typical residential condominium complex. Similarly, cars could access the interior parking from either Central Avenue, Main Street, or South Street depending on each home's location within the development, though access points should be minimized to maintain a high quality pedestrian realm, and parking ratios should be reduced since these residences will be within walking distance of both the train station and the downtown amenities.

Rethink roadways and traffic circulation

Peekskill has considered rerouting all of its truck traffic to Bear Mountain Parkway, a bypass route parallel to Main Street. Although there is some resistance from surrounding communities to this plan, Peekskill should continue to pursue it since most of the current truck traffic is not servicing Peekskill, and it will need to be managed to allow for greater pedestrian activity in the downtown. Route 9, a major North-South highway, should also be evaluated, since it presents a visual and physical obstacle for pedestrians between the city core and the waterfront.

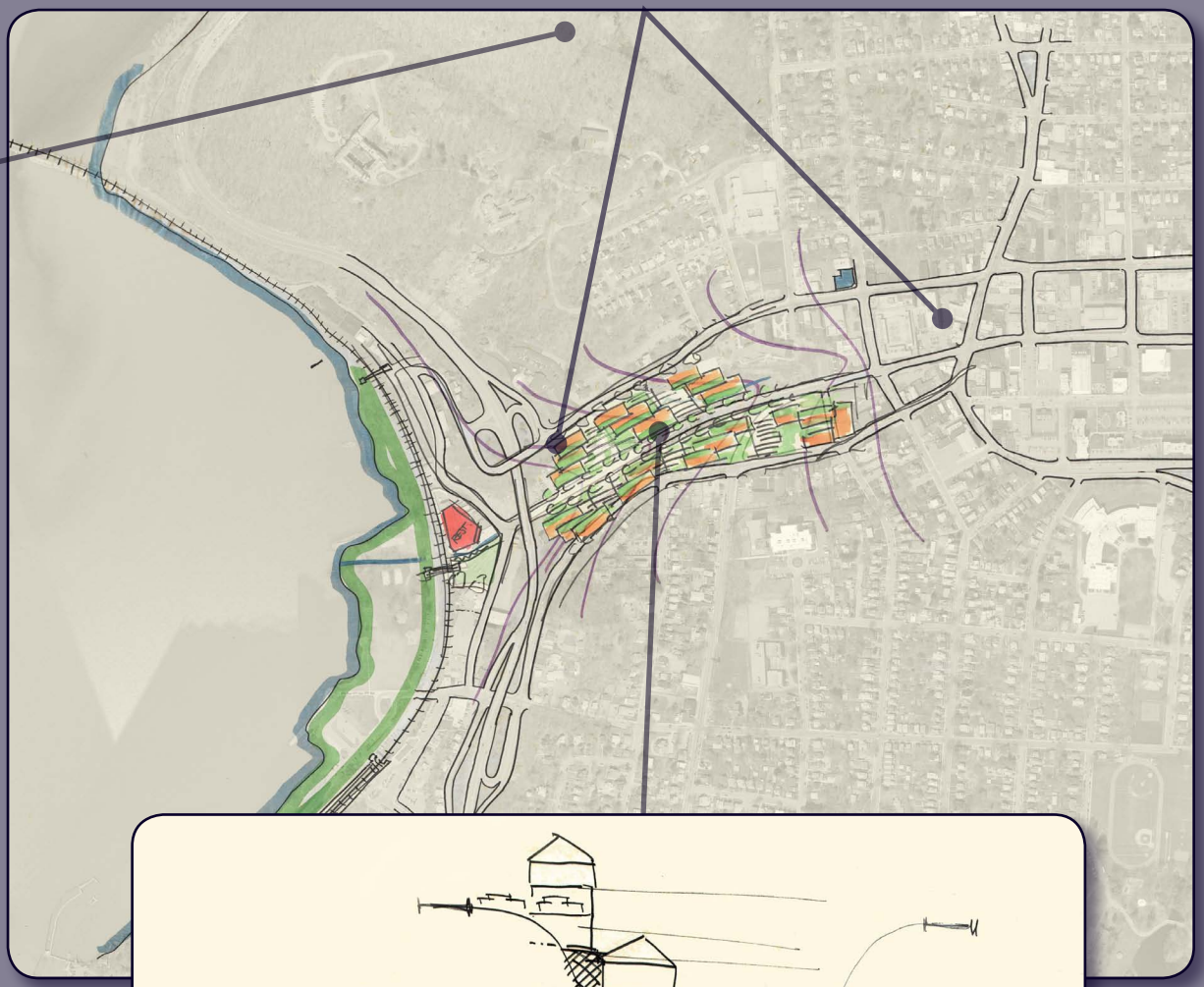
The City should plan for pedestrians whenever possible. To that end, the New York State Department of Transportation has a new traffic calming initiative for upstate roads which could aid Peekskill in improving pedestrian connections. The resource team suggested that Peekskill hire a traffic engineer to handle traffic circulation issues.

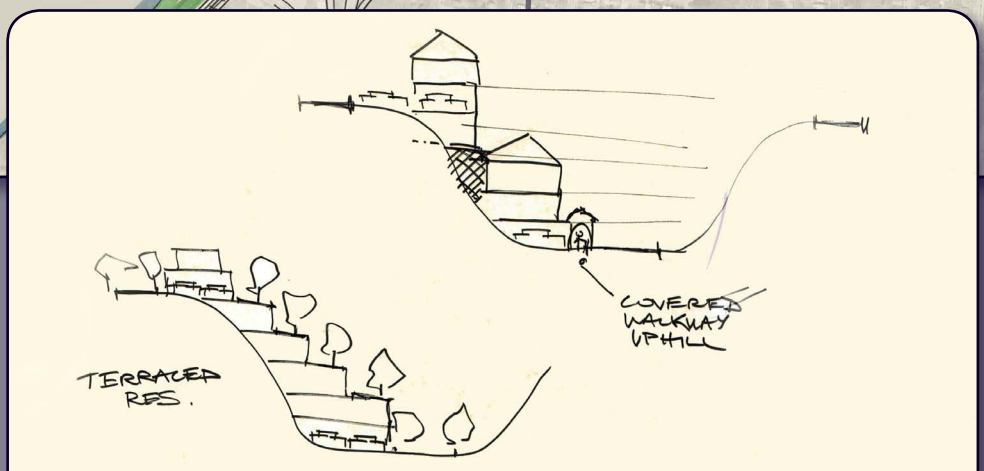
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To insipire more walking, develop an upper and lower Peekskill with distinct identities connected by a mixed use corridor

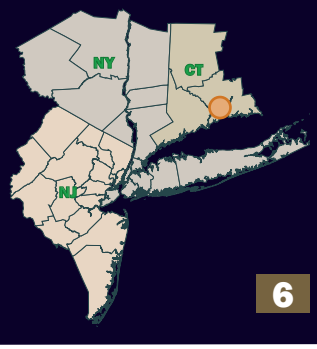
Redirecting truck traffic to Bear Mountain Parkway will allow Peekskill to improve the pedestrian environment along Main Street and Central Ave.

Peekskill could further unify these districts and increase access to the waterfront and train station through inclusion of jitney or trolley service around town





Leverage the sharp elevation changes on both sides of Central Ave. to create a dense residential corridor that hugs the hillside, provides for ample green terrace space through innovative design, and activates the corridor with targeted ground floor uses and pedestrian amenities. To further encourage pedestrians to walk between upper and lower Peekskill, create a covered walkway between the two.



WEST HAVEN

Mayor John Picard

Square Miles	10.8
Population	52,676
State	Connecticut

6

- Ensure highest quality pedestrian access and streetscape design within at least ½ mile of the station in all directions
- Create an overlay zone which allows for multifamily housing and higher-intensity land uses with densities and parking standards calibrated for transit-oriented development
- Connect the station with downtown and citywide employment centers and amenities to expand the economic impact of infrastructure investment beyond the immediate surroundings

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A brand new train station will soon begin operating ½ mile from the center of town. How can the station connect with the existing downtown and enhance economic opportunities? What is the appropriate land use around the station?

BACKGROUND

West Haven is small city of 52,000 residents. Its town green is surrounded by municipal buildings, churches, and 'main street' businesses. West Haven's major employers are scattered in auto-centric locations and include a VA hospital, the University of New Haven, and a new Yale annex. In 2011, a new Metro North station is slated to open a half mile west of the green in a pocket of industrial properties, and will include parking for just over 1,000 cars in both surface parking lots and a structured garage. Adjacent to the train station are several manufacturing/warehouse properties that could be renovated or rebuilt into transit-oriented residential, retail, or office uses. Recent developments in the area include a large Stop & Shop and a new police station within walking distance of the station, and federal funds have been approved for streetscape improvements along a portion of Saw Mill Road, the main corridor linking the new station area with Main Street and the downtown.

RESOURCE TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Balancing cars and people

Saw Mill Road will become a critical access point to the train station as it connects Interstate 95 to the train station site, the Stop & Shop grocery located just to the east, and the downtown. This corridor will be heavily traveled by vehicles and will likely require widening as a result of increased traffic to the station. Increased speed need not accompany increased volume, however, so traffic calming methods should be employed to preserve walkability despite the high traffic flow. A combination of "road diets" (lane narrowing), bump-outs, roundabouts, and other mechanisms can slow automobiles without compromising throughput.

It is most important to create a walkable route to the station on the section of Saw Mill Road which leads from the station to central West Haven. This stretch should include bike lanes and sidewalks which permeate into the residential neighborhoods. Streetscape improvements already planned for Saw Mill Road will also encourage residents to get out of their cars and walk in the downtown.

Creating Transit-Oriented Development; The Appropriate Land-Use Mix

With this increased traffic along Saw Mill Road the tendency will be to capitalize on the opportunity to develop retail that will be supported by passing vehicle traffic. While a retail anchor can help to create a critical mass of activity in the new station neighborhood, it must be designed in a way that is fully accessible and welcoming to pedestrians, with open parking lots hidden from street view and located behind retail structures. Retail, office, and institutional uses may allow for the adaptive reuse of the industrial properties to the east of the station. While the University of New Haven has expressed interest in locating a law school in the station area and this land use would be a sound anchor in central West Haven, more studies need to be completed to determine how many students would take advantage of the nearby train station and the use should not be counted on to provide the framework for this district.

The combination of a quality grocery store and a train station will attract residents to existing homes and new buildings within walking distance of these amenities and that short-term demand should be capitalized on. Existing demand for student apartments, as well as the expected influx of highly-educated workers to Yale's satellite campus in West Haven will bolster high demand for residential properties near transit. Experience in the region demonstrates that condo and townhouse residential development make the greatest use of commuter rail and are fiscally positive land use minimizing impact on the surrounding community.

Gradual Growth through Zoning Overlays

Although West Haven is a mature community of single family homes and small office and commercial properties, construction of the train station will result in heightened property values in nearby neighborhoods and increased demand for development. One method to allow for intensification on existing properties that maximize benefits to the community and minimize impacts is to craft overlay zones which would allow the appropriate redevelopment to occur on each property in the station area. While multifamily and mixed-use development is appropriate on larger parcels adjacent to the station and along the Saw Mill Road/ Main Street and Railroad Avenue corridors, accessory units and duplex/triplex development in single family zones would allow for gradually intensification while maintaining neighborhood character as property owners seek to maximize the value of their investments. A public outreach campaign may be necessary to understand any hesitations residents might have about density and demonstrate what well designed transit-oriented development can look like.

Connect Rail Service with Area Employers and Amenities

Infrastructure investments in the station area will have a direct impact on property values within walking distance of the station as has been demonstrated throughout the region's commuter rail system. Some communities have leveraged bus and shuttle service at the municipal level and in partnership with regional employers to expand the zone of positive fiscal impact throughout the community. Strong transit links between the station, the downtown, and the waterfront will further raise values in the station area and will ensure that existing uses along Main Street and Campbell Avenue reap some benefit from this state and municipal investment. Additionally, linkages to regional destinations just beyond walking distance to the station such as the VA Hospital and the University of New Haven expand the economic impact of the station and balloon the footprint of the TOD.

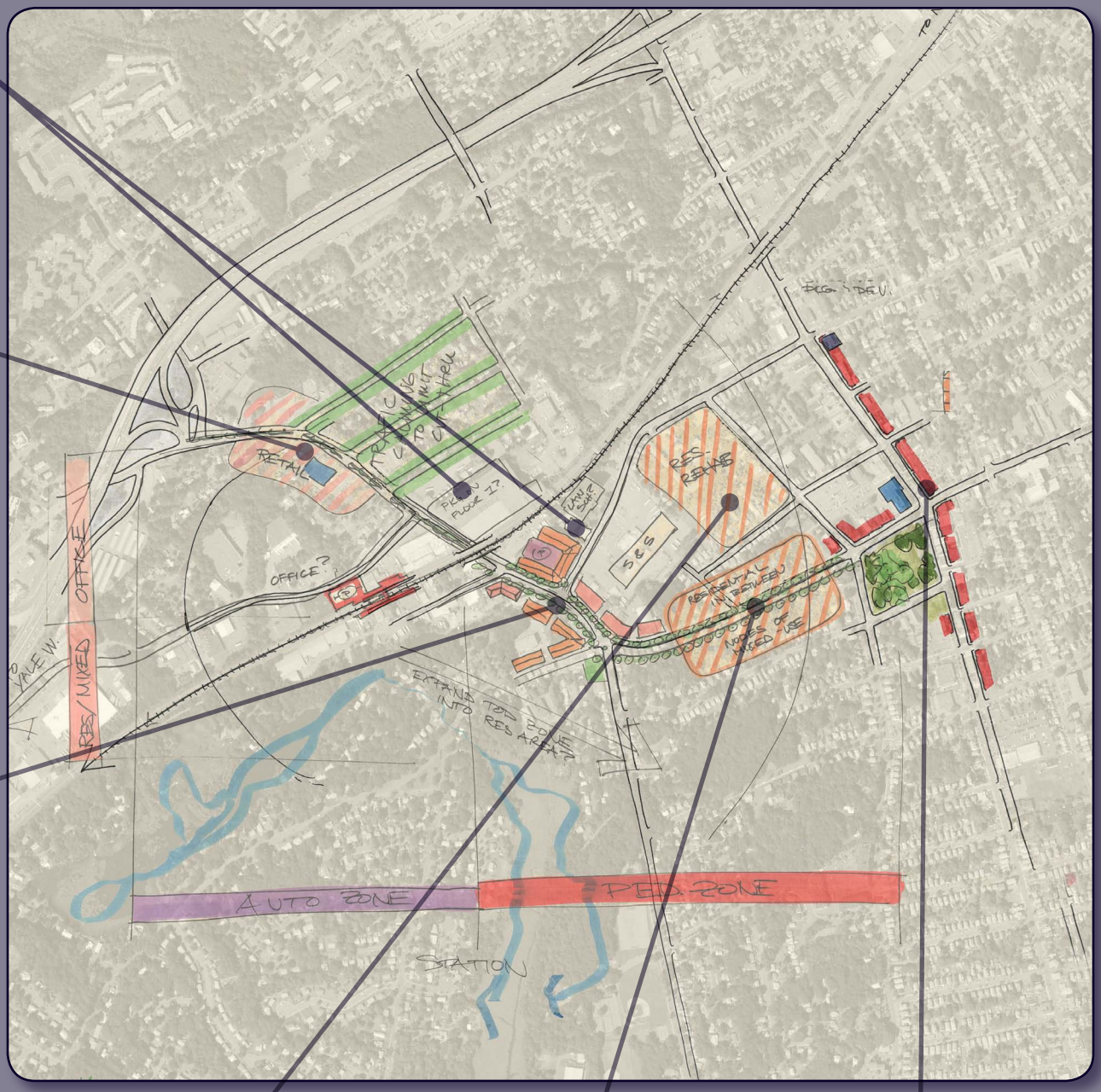
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Parking should be concealed in buildings or located in the rear of lots

Create an “auto zone” along Saw Mill Rd. west of the station which capitalizes on highway access and traffic volume but is balanced by traffic-calming and pedestrian-friendly retail uses

Bus shuttles to beach, center and major employers

Create a “walk zone” linking the station with the downtown with wide sidewalks and bike lanes connected to neighborhoods



Overlay zones which allow accessory units and 2-3 family homes could enable the incremental rehabilitation of existing housing stock

The combination of train/grocery will attract condos and town houses with positive fiscal impact to the district

Continue to support retail infill in the downtown

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Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county, New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. Since 1922, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action.

RPA's current work is aimed largely at implementing the ideas put forth in the Third Regional Plan, with efforts focused in five project areas: community design, open space, transportation, workforce and the economy, and housing. For more information about Regional Plan Association, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

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