

INTRODUCTION

Key Statistics:

- ☐ *120,000 people*
- ☐ *84,000 employees*
- ☐ *40 square miles*
- ☐ *13 miles waterfront*
- ☐ *1929 Stamford's first Master Plan*
- ☐ *1984 Stamford's prior Master Plan Update*

Stamford is considered the most successful urban center in Connecticut.

BACKGROUND:

This report presents *in full* the recommendations generated over two years in connection with a new Master Plan for the City of Stamford, Connecticut.

Stamford is a city of 40 square miles. In 1949, the original City of Stamford was consolidated with the Town of Stamford to assume its current boundaries. In so doing, the city embraced its suburbs, and the suburbs its city. This, combined with two new highways and proximity to New York City, has provided the municipality with solid value as a place to live, do business and work. The city now encompasses over 13 miles of waterfront on its southern edge, roughly 45,000 acres of wooded hills in its northern half, traditional suburban residential neighborhoods in most of its land area, and a high-density urban core centered on the State's most active train station.

Stamford is a major employment center, with 84,000 employees working in the city. Stamford ranks among the top corporate locations in the nation. It is a strong center of traditional industry, water-dependent shipping, and high-tech operations. Its downtown is vigorous, with a Special Services District, a shopping mall, an active arts and entertainment sector, and a resurgent housing market. Stamford is considered by many to be the State's economic powerhouse, and is certainly Connecticut's most prosperous urban center.

Stamford is home to close to 120,000 people, from diverse economic and social strata. With 62 per-cent of the population, whites are the majority, but 19 percent are black and 14 percent Hispanic. One-third (38 percent) of the households boast incomes over \$100,000, but 14 percent make less than \$25,000. These residents share the same public schools, same downtown, and, as revealed in surveys and workshops, much the same priorities on social diversity, the city's scenic qualities, neighborhood quality of life, and Downtown.

Stamford first commissioned a comprehensive Master Plan in 1929, by Herbert S. Swan. The vision and details of the "Swan Plan" still resonate. It emphasized the

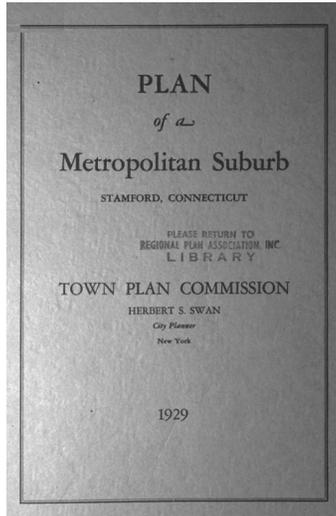
scenic and natural diversity of Stamford—ranging from harbors to hills. It called for protection of the city’s river corridors. It emphasized beautification of and orderly development along major arterial corridors. It even talked about creating a central park in the city.

Stamford last prepared a comprehensive Master Plan in 1977. In 1984, a major review and update to the plan was completed by the Planning Board, followed by a series of plan addendums and amendments for Downtown and other neighborhoods. These plans were in many ways visionary and represent today what is often referred to as "smart growth" policies. They noted that residential development would have to keep pace with employment, if housing were to stay affordable and traffic manageable. They chose a compact, pedestrian-friendly downtown and neighborhood shopping districts over outlying superstore and power center development. They emphasized protecting the natural and built assets of the city’s residential neighborhoods.

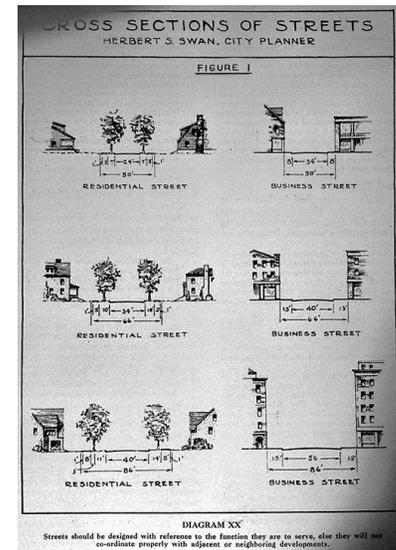
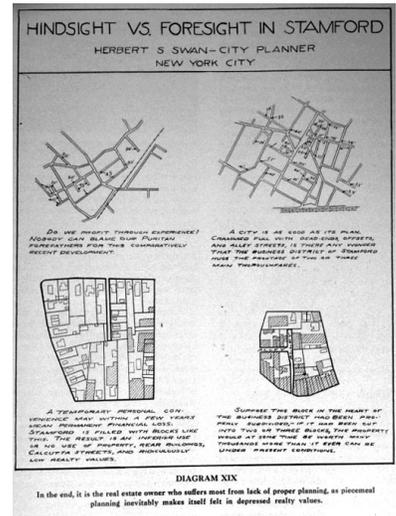
Yet, entering the new century, the Master Plan—the foundation for the City’s land use, zoning and capital budget policies—requires a comprehensive review and in some cases significant revisions. The 1984 Plan’s fears about affordable housing and traffic congestion have been vastly exceeded, on a regional not just a local basis. The city is grappling with the implications of the remaining development potential allowed under present zoning, let alone unbridled development enabled by prospective market forces. Residents continue to focus on quality of life issues, which are at once the same and yet ever-changing. Residents and leaders alike realize that the environment is fragile, and that open space is now a dwindling resource that needs protection. New types of development provide fresh opportunities and challenges for Downtown.

Most important, the passage of nearly twenty years has meant that a new body politic must be heard from. The Master Plan, to retain its meaning and weight, must reflect the priorities and passions of its contemporaries.

Thus, this Plan has been predicated on these three basic ingredients: (1) a review of and a good measure of continuity with the sound planning principals and guidelines put forward in past plans; (2) updated research, particularly with regard to growth management as a means of understanding the trade-offs associated with dif-



The 1929 Swan Plan’s emphasis on using the city’s radial roadway network as a framework for community design still resonates.





The 2002 Master Plan process emphasized neighborhood workshops, student outreach, and the input of a citywide task force.



ferent development and planning decisions; and (3) a vast effort to make this plan respond to the priorities of the resident, civic and business communities, and to build consensus between those communities.

CONSENSUS BUILDING:

In regard to the last factor, the Plan has *not* followed the traditional outreach model in which the recommendations and documents are prepared by the Planning Board with the help of staff or consultants, and then vetted in public hearings. Rather, the Plan began with and was monitored by citizen/ civic/business participants, and *then* reviewed and revised by the Planning Board and its staff. To be specific, to date:

- The Plan was initiated with one citywide and five public workshops, held in the neighborhoods, with a special invitation to all of the recognized civic associations.
- Draft recommendations were later reviewed and revised in six more brainstorming sessions, also held in the neighborhoods, with invitations to the public as well as prior participants.
- A random telephone survey of several hundred residents was conducted by Quinnipiac College, under the supervision of the Regional Plan Association.
- Students in several schools participated in design and planning charrettes, organized by the Regional Plan Association and Land Use Bureau staff.
- There was an extensive review and analysis of previous studies, including the *Plan for the Waterside and South End Neighborhoods* (1997) and the *West Side Plan* (2000).
- Additional workshops/meetings were held with the Mayor's Affordable Housing Task Force, the full civic and business community, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Special Services District's board and committee, the Glenbrook and Springdale communities, and others.
- All along, the Plan was reviewed by a Citizens Advisory Committee comprised of representatives of neighborhood, civic, citywide and business groups, in addition to representatives of the Planning, Zoning and other boards.
- A briefer version of this was placed on the City's web site, with an invitation for comment.
- The Master Plan, along with the half-dozen background reports on which it is based, was made available both at Government Center (in the Land Use Bureau) and in the Public Library.
- The Master Plan was summarized in a PowerPoint presentation, used in three more neighborhood workshops, and other meetings.

- The draft was reviewed by the Planning Board with input from the Zoning and other City Boards, in addition to members of the Board of Representatives.
- The Master Plan was subject to a public hearing.
- The Master Plan was then revised by the Planning Board.

AS TO THE FUTURE:

The Planning Board is, under the City Charter, the final decision maker with regard to the Master Plan. It will then be up to the Zoning Board to turn the Plan’s recommendations into zoning rules and regulations. The Board of Representatives and City agencies will be called upon to direct funds and carry out actions consistent with the Plan. Public, private and not-for-profit entities—the water company, Board of Education, etc.—can be encouraged to comply with the Plan. The Master Plan should be the subject of an Action Plan prepared under the direction of the Planning Board with agency and board input.

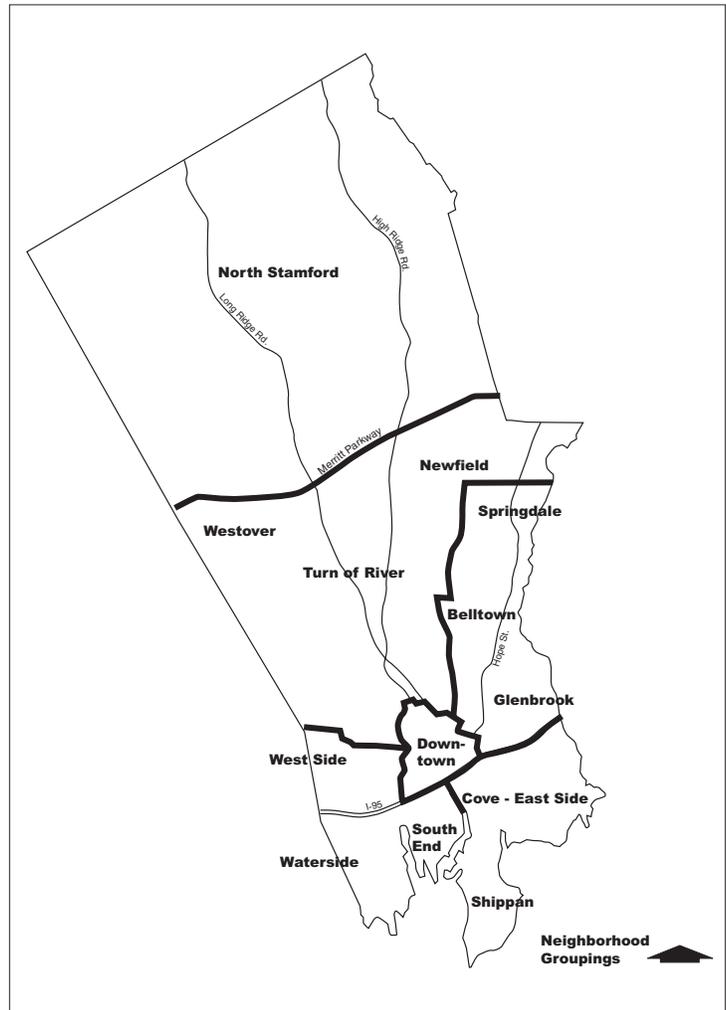
But ultimately, the Plan’s success is dependent on the enthusiastic response and abiding interest of the city’s residents, civic leaders and business leaders. In a city as large, complex and dynamic as Stamford, grassroots planning is a prerequisite to preparing a Master Plan that prevails.

ORGANIZATION OF THE MASTER PLAN:

This policy report starts with a summary of the growth management study. The final chapter provides a list and explanation of land use categories for use in Master Plan maps. The bulk of the report presents the Plan’s objectives and strategies in detail, organized around these four goals:

- Preserving the city’s social and economic diversity;
- Protecting the beauty of its natural and built environment;
- Enhancing the quality of life of Stamford’s varied neighborhoods;
- Promoting the vitality of the city’s downtown.

A companion report presents neighborhood-specific plans. Consistent with the problem solving conducted at the public workshops and Citizens Advisory Committee meetings, recommendations are often quite specific, illustrating or elaborating upon this report’s general recommendations. The City’s official



To assure that the plan focused on local priorities, the city was divided into five neighborhood groupings, plus Downtown.

Master Plan Map accompanies the Master Plan. This map provides the underpinning for the City's zoning maps, as they might be revised in the future. In the Plan as well as the workshops, the neighborhoods have been grouped as follows (in addition to Downtown):

- Cove, East Side, Shippan
- West Side, Waterside, South End
- Glenbrook, Springdale, Belltown
- Turn of River, Westover, Newfield
- North Stamford

The Master Plan is substantiated by five additional plans and reports, prepared by essentially the same team of consultants during the same time period. These additional plans and reports are as follows:

- Economic Development
- Urban Design
- Traffic and Transit
- Affordable Housing
- Community Input

This Citywide Policies report, Neighborhood Plans report and accompanying land use plan map will comprise the official Master Plan for the City. The remaining five reports noted above are incorporated by reference. In this manner, the City has a clear policy direction for the future, explained in full detail.

CONCLUSION:

The Master Plan represents a 20-year vision of the city. Yet it should be updated on a more frequent basis.

In general, this policy report—presenting basic goals, objectives and strategies—should be considered the core of the Master Plan, and should be updated every ten years. The separate neighborhood report—presenting the local applications of these citywide policies—is more of a snapshot, reflecting immediate community concerns and opportunities, and should be updated every five years, equivalent to one neighborhood grouping each year. The official Master Plan Maps should be updated, accordingly.

The Plan is, in other words, not cast in stone. It needs to be held in respect, but not awe. Its revision, like its original, should be orderly and based on sound research

Master Plan Documents:

- This policy report*
- Neighborhood plans*
- Land use maps*
- Five topical reports*
- Summary document*

and consensus building. The Plan must be solid and durable. Yet it must also be flexible enough to address emerging issues and opportunities.

Stamford is, as its slogan testifies, "the city that works." It is the intent of this Plan to keep it so, whatever the future may bring.