

CHAPTER 5.0: DOWNTOWN AND SOUTH END

GOALS

- Capitalize on the synergies between the Downtown and South End to maximize the potential of both neighborhoods
- Maintain and augment Downtown’s standing as a regional center
- Encourage revitalization of existing residential streets in the South End
- Enhance the Stamford Transportation Center as a gateway to the City of Stamford
- Improve connectivity among Downtown, the South End, the Stamford Transportation Center and adjacent neighborhoods
- Promote quality urban design and enhance streetscapes
- [Promote and enhance access to the Stamford Harbor Management Area in conformance with the Stamford Harbor Management Plan.](#)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A. Downtown

Downtown Stamford is the heart of the City. It is Stamford’s business and transit hub; a destination for arts, culture and entertainment; and home to many City residents. When Stamford’s last Master Plan was adopted in 2002, it emphasized Downtown redevelopment opportunities, the need for an enhanced pedestrian network, the need to capitalize on and connect open spaces, and urban design and landscaping as tools for supporting economic vitality and making Downtown “a people place.” The 2002 Plan stressed the importance of directing future growth to the Downtown near transit, focusing large-scale office and retail development in Stamford’s core. Since 2002, significant progress has been made toward these goals, and they continue to ring true today.

B. South End

In the South End, much has changed since 2002. In the last Master Plan, the South End was discussed in conjunction with the Waterside and West Side neighborhoods; the three neighborhoods were considered together as dense, mixed-use areas adjoining Downtown. However, the South End has emerged as unique from this group, due in large part to its relationship with the Stamford Transportation Center and its connections to the waterfront. The South End will continue to be a neighborhood in its own right, separate from the Downtown, with the character of the South End neighborhood continuing to evolve in response to demand for housing near transit and the waterfront.

In 2002, the Master Plan grappled with the issue of the boundaries of the Downtown and how it should expand over time. The Plan’s Future Land Use Map identified a core Downtown area generally bounded by Washington Boulevard to the west, Hoyt Street to the north, Grove Street to the east and properties just north of Tresser Boulevard to the south. Within the core, the primary goal was to promote mixed-use pedestrian-oriented infill development to complete the area’s urban fabric. Outside the core area, Stamford Master Plan – Chapter 5.0: DOWNTOWN AND SOUTH END 07/30/14

the plan identified “collar” areas that would allow for development of a stepped-down density and intensity from the core, providing a transition to adjacent neighborhoods. The Plan also identified a Downtown “corridor” north of the railroad tracks/I-95, intended primarily for office, residential and hotel uses with an emphasis on pedestrian-friendly design.

C. Unique Neighborhoods/Important Connections

This basic framework remains relevant today. Concentrating large-scale office and retail development in the Downtown area continues to be an important growth management policy and economic development strategy for the City. Now, more than ever, there is a strong focus on enhancing the vitality of Downtown Stamford as an attractive, walkable and bikeable city center for living, working and entertainment. At the same time, increased attention is being paid to the area in the vicinity of the Stamford Transportation Center (STC) and the South End, which has seen unprecedented growth over the past five years. Today, the Downtown and South End, linked by the STC, remain distinct neighborhoods with their own unique characters but have become more closely linked, taking advantage of new synergies brought about by new residential development in the South End and growth Downtown. In looking forward to the next 10 years, promoting connections between these two areas will be essential to realizing the full potential of each neighborhood.

5.2 REAL ESTATE MARKET AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Development trends in Downtown and the South End over the past decade have shown that the transportation center is an important hub linking these unique, but related neighborhoods (see Figure 17). Both Downtown and the South End have seen substantial housing growth since 2002 as well as new retail and office development. New housing units have been largely market-rate rentals, which have attracted an increasingly affluent population. Additional residential projects planned or under construction will bring thousands more units Downtown and in the South End, as well as 400 new units of student housing being considered by UCONN as part of its plan to expand its Downtown campus. These projects demonstrate a strong demand for housing, which benefits the vitality of the City’s core, increasing pedestrian activity that is essential for supporting retail, restaurant and entertainment uses.

A strong residential market Downtown and in the South End is important to the strength of Downtown retail, providing both local demand and pedestrian activity. Stamford's Downtown is a regional retail center serving neighborhood shoppers while also drawing visitors from the rest of the City and nearby areas. There is 768,000 square feet of retail space at Stamford Town Center, and an additional 986,900 square feet on retail streets throughout the Downtown. According to the Downtown Special Services District (DSSD), 95 percent of this retail space is occupied. In addition, new neighborhood-scale retail has been recently built in the South End, with 193,850 square feet of retail space at Harbor Point, Canal Street and Stamford Landing. Another 232,200 square feet of retail is planned for the neighborhood to serve its expanding residential population.

While there is a strong demand in both the residential and retail markets, the citywide office vacancy rate is high at 26 percent. Despite this trend, there is strong demand for Class A office space within walking distance of the Stamford Transportation Center; office vacancy within a quarter-mile of the STC is much lower than other parts of Downtown, with desirable office spaces such as MetroCenter fully occupied. As is clearly illustrated by the demand for office space near the STC, transit-oriented development (TOD) that allows for higher-density residential and office development and lower parking ratios is both marketable and environmentally sustainable. In response to this demand, the State is developing plans for TOD at the STC. The City of Stamford strongly encourages the State to ensure that the scale, character and design of its TOD plan is pedestrian-oriented and addresses the existing physical barriers that the STC, I-95 and the rail lines currently create between Downtown and the South End. Linking Downtown and the South End via the STC will benefit both neighborhoods by generating activity and critical mass supportive of vitality. Retail, restaurants and entertainment venues in the Downtown and planned residential development in both neighborhoods will benefit from increased pedestrian activity and vibrant urban streetscapes. Concentrating office development around the STC and in the Downtown, while emphasizing residential and neighborhood-scale retail in the South End, will allow these neighborhoods to support one another while maintaining their unique identities.

5.3 CONNECTIVITY

A multimodal approach to enhancing north-south and east-west linkages is essential to improving circulation between the Downtown and South End and better connecting the Downtown to adjacent neighborhoods east and west, including the West Side, Waterside, East Side, Cove and Shippan. In order to facilitate the movement of people and vehicles to, from and around Downtown, the South End and adjacent neighborhoods the City must improve the functionality of its roadway, pedestrian and transit networks to serve all users. At the same time, it must work to promote land development policies that encourage development near transit and create the right balance of parking for residents and visitors. Currently, both Downtown and the South End have many of the building blocks necessary to achieve this goal including a roadway and pedestrian network, transit (rail access, bus service and the new Harbor Point trolley), and ample parking (see Figure 18). However, the transportation system is unbalanced. The existing bus system routes and scheduling are problematic for attracting riders; the underpasses between the train station, Downtown and the South End below I-95 and the rail line are a source of traffic congestion and are unwelcoming to pedestrians; there are many gaps in the pedestrian network;

and bicycle routes are few. The challenge will be to improve the transportation system to provide people with a range of attractive travel options. This will require connecting missing pedestrian links, creating a bicycle circulation system, addressing traffic congestion at choke points, providing a reliable and attractive transit circulator within the Downtown and connecting to adjacent neighborhoods, and improving parking management and wayfinding/signage (see Figure 19).

Example of Coordinated Signage Program

This image shows an example of a coordinated informational signage program. This covers all municipal and public signage, including traffic, street and points of interest. Developing a coordinated signage program can improve sense of place and visual appearance.

Downtown has a strong pedestrian-friendly grid at Washington Boulevard and Broad, Atlantic and Main Streets, with a thriving restaurant scene along Bedford and Summer Streets. Filling in the missing links of Downtown's pedestrian network and making streetscapes greener and more attractive is key to making Stamford a more pedestrian-friendly city. Making walking easier, safer and more attractive will encourage people to park once and walk Downtown, which will help to both reduce traffic congestion and generate the foot traffic needed to support Downtown retail and restaurants. Stamford must also become more bicycle-friendly with a comprehensive bicycle circulation system Downtown, connecting to nearby neighborhoods with bicycle routes on shared roadways and/or within dedicated bicycle lanes.

Street Frontages in Downtown Stamford

These images show examples of street frontages observed in downtown Stamford. The image on the left, while having ground level retail, is less successful in providing a strong and enjoyable pedestrian experience. In contrast, the center and right images show successful street frontages that provide active retail and restaurant frontages along the sidewalk, street furniture and trees, which improve pedestrian scale and enclosure. These should be replicated throughout the downtown.

Pedestrian Enclosure

A strong sense of pedestrian enclosure along the sidewalk is an important sensory condition created through the use of physical elements such as street trees, street furniture, and building details such as cornices and awnings. Carefully placed, these elements serve to provide separation between the street's vehicular traffic and the sidewalk's pedestrian domain, and also reinforce a sense of human scale as provided by an overhead canopy. These graphics show how sidewalks, depending upon their width, can be successfully configured to provide a comfortable pedestrian environment.

Improving the capacity of the I-95 underpasses at Greenwich Avenue, Atlantic Street, Canal Street and Elm Street and East Main Street and making them safer and more attractive for pedestrians will substantially improve connectivity between Downtown and the South End. Further, the Harbor Point trolley connector should be improved with additional service and scheduling to provide frequent, reliable and attractive service between these two neighborhoods; additional east-west trolley routes should be considered linking Downtown to the West Side, Waterside, East Side, Cove and Shippan neighborhoods.

Better management of parking in both the Downtown and South End is essential to balancing the parking needs of residents, commuters and merchants. Adequate parking to meet parking needs is essential; at the same time, allowing for reduced parking ratios near transit stations, including the STC and a future transit node (bus or rail) at East Main Street, is central to encouraging transit-oriented development and discouraging oversupply of parking. In the South End, where residents of existing residential streets rely on on-street parking, it will be important to preserve or replace on-street parking spaces as new development occurs.

5.4 RECENT STUDIES

Several studies addressing the Downtown and train station area have been prepared since Stamford last updated its Master Plan in 2002. These studies all discuss ways to make Downtown more walkable, pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented, as summarized below.

A. Walkable Stamford, 2008

This study, prepared for the City of Stamford by Project for Public Spaces, examines Downtown Stamford's pedestrian environment and includes "place audits," which evaluate specific locations to determine how well they serve pedestrians in Downtown Stamford. The report provides recommendations for improving the convenience, safety and attractiveness of walking between the STC and Downtown for specific locations including:

- East Main Street
- Stamford Gateway (the area between the Stamford Transportation Center and the UBS building)
- Atlantic Street
- Tresser Boulevard
- Broad Street

Pedestrian Analyses from *Walkable Stamford Study (2008)* by Project for Public Spaces

These images show examples of suggested streetscape improvements to encourage and improve the pedestrian environment in downtown Stamford. The image on the left suggests improvement along Washington Boulevard just north of the Stamford Transit Center, including programming the space with a wayfinding and informational kiosk. The image on the right suggests improvements to Tresser Boulevard, including medians and improved pedestrian crosswalks.

B. Stamford Transportation Center Master Plan, 2010

The STC Master Plan, prepared by Stantec, outlines a capital improvement plan to upgrade and enhance the efficiency of the Stamford Transportation Center, as summarized in Section 4C.

C. Towards a Livable Neighborhood, 2010

This study, prepared for the Downtown Special Services District (DSSD) by the Regional Plan Association, provides recommendations for transforming Downtown into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood organized around sidewalks, transit and green public spaces. Consistent with the recommendations of this Master Plan, as discussed in Section 3, the study recommends that new residential development continue to be built Downtown and that new office and destination retail be limited outside of the Downtown. Specifically, the study calls for:

- Concentration of intense, high-rise residential and commercial uses, entertainment and destination retail Downtown
- Infrastructure investments that strengthen connections between Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods

- Improving the pedestrian experience in order to achieve a high-value and attractive Downtown
- Private investment in new and rehabilitated buildings

Towards a Livable Neighborhood (2010) –Prepared for the Downtown Special Services District (DSSD) by the Regional Plan Association

This comprehensive study of the downtown environment commissioned by the Downtown Special Services District suggested a variety of strategies to improve and continue the ongoing effort to ensure a healthy downtown in Stamford. The image on the right provides an analysis of the downtown’s greenery and open space, a particularly important facet of creating an attractive and livable downtown environment.

5.5 DOWNTOWN AND SOUTH END GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Introduction

Over the course of the next 10 years, the City should work to achieve the following goals in order to strengthen Downtown as a regional center, continue revitalizing the South End and maximize the benefits of both neighborhoods’ proximity to the Stamford Transportation Center. The vision for the future of the Downtown and the South End is to capitalize on the synergies between these separate, but related neighborhoods and maximize their potential to complement and support each other.

The City has set forth the following goals for Downtown, the South End and the Stamford Transportation Center area. Policies and implementation strategies for achieving these goals are outlined below.

- Take advantage of the synergies between the Downtown and South End to maximize the potential of both neighborhoods
- Maintain and augment Downtown’s standing as a regional center
- Encourage revitalization of existing residential neighborhoods in the South End
- Enhance the Stamford Transportation Center as a gateway to the City of Stamford
- Improve connectivity between Downtown, the South End, the Stamford Transportation Center and adjacent neighborhoods
- Promote quality urban design and enhance streetscapes
- [Promote and enhance access to the Stamford Harbor Management Area in conformance with the Stamford Harbor Management Plan.](#)

Policy Recommendations

Policy 5A: Support Downtown as a Regional Center

Downtown should remain the focal point for large-scale office and residential development as well as regional retail and cultural attractions. Office development outside of Downtown should be discouraged.

Implementation Strategies

5A.1: Concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development in the Downtown. See Strategy 3B.1.

5A.2: Identify opportunities to relocate office uses that are currently situated in other neighborhoods to the Downtown.

5A.3: Encourage redevelopment of vacant Downtown office space for housing. See Strategy 3B.3.

5A.4: Explore the feasibility of the development of a convention center in Downtown Stamford near the Stamford Transportation Center. See Strategy 3A.3.

5A.5: Promote a regional arts and entertainment district Downtown. The City should continue to work with the Downtown Special Services District and the Stamford Cultural Development Corporation to promote arts and entertainment Downtown. This collaborative effort should focus on 1) integrating arts into the physical landscape (murals, window displays, public art, etc.); 2) promoting more efficient use of existing arts and entertainment space; and 3) creating more affordable space for arts and entertainment.

5A.5-a: Encourage incentives for arts and entertainment Downtown. The City should carry out a “percent for art and amenities” program for major projects involving City, State or Federal funding.

5A.6: Promote infill development on vacant sites within Downtown. The City should continue to use a variety of density bonuses to enable development on hard-to-develop sites and should encourage shared parking to enhance the viability of infill development proposals.

5A.7: Initiate a planning study by a consultant analyzing and assessing the design, connectivity and build-out of current plans for the Downtown. This analysis should focus specifically on density and massing of potential development, site plan design standards, development of a parking management plan for Downtown, multimodal pedestrian/bicycle connectivity and potential updates to the zoning regulations. In addition, the analysis should consider vacant and underutilized parcels, parks, public facilities and conflicting land uses.

Policy 5B: Make Downtown a More Pedestrian-Friendly Neighborhood

Implementation Strategies

5B.1: Improve pedestrian connectivity within Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. See Strategy 4C.3-d.

5B.2: Implement streetscape and traffic calming improvements Downtown. See Strategy 4C.3-e(2).

5B.3: Encourage quality urban design that relates well to streets and people. Implement the urban design recommendations of the DSSD's *Towards a Livable Neighborhood* report, summarized in Section 5.C.

5B.4: Emphasize ground floor retail and pedestrian activity. The intent of this strategy is to enhance the vitality of the Downtown and South End by encouraging street activity. Key elements of this strategy include sidewalks lined with storefronts, trees and on-street parking. The majority of ground-floor space should be devoted to active uses, including stores and cultural uses, facing the sidewalk. These spaces should be transparent; inward looking retail centers should be prohibited. Multistory retail should be conditioned on sidewalk entries served with escalators or elevators. Outdoor dining should be encouraged.

5B.5: Promote contextual commercial and residential development along Summer and Bedford Streets. Along Summer Street between North Street and Second Street, buildings should be flush with sidewalks, with entries facing the street and landscaping to maintain the street wall where parking is provided. Along Summer Street and Bedford Street between Second and Sixth Streets, historic homes should be preserved and any new development should be consistent with the existing streetscape character.

Policy 5C: Encourage Public Access to the South End Waterfront

Implementation Strategies

5C.1: Protect, enhance and promote water-dependent uses, recreation and boating. Water-dependent uses include ferries; water taxis; boating; marinas; recreational and commercial fishing; port facilities; water-based recreational uses; industrial uses dependent on waterborne transportation; boat construction and repair; dry dock; uses which provide general public access to the waterfront; and other uses and facilities which require direct access to, or location in, marine or tidal waters and which therefore cannot be located inland. Additional marine-oriented recreational uses should be encouraged to develop along the harbor. All City-owned parkland should be periodically evaluated for its water-based recreational potential. Any uses or development that congests, restricts or otherwise limits the use of the harbor by commercial or recreational vessels should not be allowed. ~~Structures and filling on the waterfront must also be designed in a manner that will not conflict with development of water dependent uses and public safety.~~ Waterfront development must be in accordance with the Stamford Harbor Management Plan.

5C.2: Make non-water-dependent uses contingent upon providing public access and meeting other public objectives. Non-water-dependent uses of waterfront property should only be permitted where they 1) provide meaningful general public access to the waterfront; 2) do not displace an existing water-dependent use or the opportunity to establish a new water-dependent use for which there is reasonable demand; 3) complement adjacent development; 4) function within the capacity of available infrastructure; and 5) achieve a high design quality.

5C.3: Maintain and enhance harbor access. To encourage water-dependent uses, any uses or development which congests, restricts or otherwise limits the use of the harbor by commercial and recreational vehicles should not be allowed. Structures and filling on the waterfront must be designed in a manner that will not conflict with development of water-dependent uses and public safety. ~~The use of fill and structures should be designed so as and to will~~ minimize negative impacts on coastal resources. Finally, the maintenance and protection of federally developed and maintained navigation channels, along with the development of a plan for the efficient and timely dredging of these channels, ~~are priorities~~ under the purview of the Stamford Harbor Management Commission, are priorities.

5C.4: Manage and enhance the natural environment along the South End shoreline. Actions to be undertaken include 1) stabilizing the beach system and creating a comprehensive beach management program; 2) preserving and restoring the major intertidal habitats in the East and West Branches for their biological and aesthetic values; 3) maintaining tidal wetlands in their natural state and emphasizing the value of State-mapped wetlands; 4) protecting and minimizing danger to life and property from coastal flooding; 5) restoring shellfish concentrations; and 6) maintaining and improving coastal and embayment water quality.

Policy 5D: Improve Connections between Downtown, the South End and Adjacent Neighborhoods

5D.1: Roadways and Transit

Implementation Strategies

5D.1-a: Improve traffic circulation and reduce traffic bottlenecks. See Strategy 4C.1-a.

5D.1-b: Continue a trolley or priority bus service connecting Downtown, the Stamford Transportation Center and the South End. See Strategy 4C.2-b.

5D.1-c: Improve the function of the Stamford Transportation Center as a gateway to and connector between Downtown and the South End. See Strategy 4B.1.

5D.1-d: Implement new express bus service along the Urban Transitway from East Main Street to the Stamford Transportation Center. Work with CT Transit to provide express bus service from a new transit node at East Main Street and Myrtle Avenue to the Stamford Transportation Center.

5D.1-e: Promote bus connections between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Improve frequency and reliability of bus service between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods to both the north-south and east-west.

5D.2: Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections

Implementation Strategies

5D.2-a: Improve pedestrian connectivity between Downtown and the South End. See Strategy 4C.3-d.

5D.2-b: Establish a clearly delineated bicycle route(s) between Downtown and the South End. A clearly delineated bicycle route or routes should be established to connect Downtown and the South End. Such route(s) could be designated as shared roadways or could be demarcated with dedicated bicycle lanes, as appropriate.

5D.3: Open Space Connections

Implementation Strategies

5D.3-a: Continue to pursue the Mill River Plan and promote a continuous greenway from Scalzi Park to Kosciuszko Park. The Mill River Master Plan calls for a continuous greenway along the western boundary of Downtown from Broad Street to Pulaski Street in the South End

connecting Scalzi and Kosciuszko Parks. Portions of this greenway have been implemented and the City should continue to work with the Mill River Collaborative to complete the greenway.

5D.3-b: Upgrade Kosciuszko Park to make it more of a neighborhood and citywide asset.

5D.3-c: Maximize the potential of public plazas and open spaces Downtown and in the South End. Enhance the quality, visibility and use of public plazas and open spaces with both passive and active activity. Provide seating and shade to allow for quiet enjoyment and promote public events such as farmers' markets and outdoor concerts at these locations.

5D.3-d: Link open spaces and public plazas Downtown along Main Street to create an east-west greenway. Create a green streetscape with landscaping along Main Street that connects Columbus Park and Veterans Park to Mill River Park.

Policy 5E: Balance New Development and Neighborhood Preservation in the South End

Implementation Strategies

5E.1: Promote neighborhood revitalization. The City should work with the South End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) to revitalize existing residential streets in the neighborhood to ensure that South End redevelopment benefits existing as well as new residents. The City should establish a fee-in-lieu program for meeting affordable housing requirements for new development that would provide funding for the revitalization of existing residential streets in the South End.

5E.2: Promote affordable homeowner housing. The City should work to promote affordable homeownership as part of a strategy to stabilize existing residential streets and prevent displacement of existing residents as redevelopment occurs.

5E.3: Encourage relocation of industrial uses from residential areas. With the exception of water-dependent industrial uses, existing industrial uses adjacent to residential streets in the South End should ultimately be encouraged to relocate to away from residential areas, to existing industrial areas elsewhere in the City. In the interim, measures should be taken to reduce conflicts between residential and industrial uses, particularly uses that generate nuisances that disrupt neighborhood quality-of-life.

5E.4: Preserve neighborhood parking. Parking for existing residences on neighborhood streets should be preserved or replaced if on-street parking spaces are eliminated as a result of new development, as many older residences do not have driveways or garages.

5E.5: Calm neighborhood traffic. Heavier vehicular traffic in the South End should be directed mainly toward Canal Street and Washington Boulevard. Pacific and Atlantic Streets should continue to function as lower-volume neighborhood streets. Allowing on-street parking on Canal Street

during off-peak hours should be considered as a strategy to reduce vehicular speeds and provide additional neighborhood parking.

5E.6: Promote mixed-use development along the Urban Transitway. A mix of residential and commercial uses should be promoted along the transitway, stepping down in height and density away from the Downtown. Ground-floor retail should be promoted to create a pedestrian-friendly environment along the transitway.

5E.7: Analyze and assess the design, connectivity and build-out of current plans for the South End. This analysis should include assessment of the Harbor Point General Development Plan, planned transit-oriented development at the Stamford Transportation Center, the Gateway development proposal and existing and potential future zoning. In addition, the analysis should consider vacant and underutilized parcels, parks, public facilities and conflicting land uses. [The analysis should take into account the goals and objectives of the Stamford Harbor Management Plan.](#)

Policy 5F: Support retention of the arts community in the South End.

Implementation Strategies

5F.1: Promote artist live/work space. The City should support retention of arts space in the South End. Conversion of industrial space to artist live/work space should be encouraged. The City should work with the Stamford Cultural Development Corporation and the Loft Artists Association to promote this effort.

5F.2: Encourage connections between the South End arts community and Downtown arts and entertainment. The City should work with the Stamford Cultural Development Corporation and the Loft Artists Association to connect South End artists with Downtown exhibition and performance space.

5F.3: Retain niche antiques market in the South End. The South End has a significant number of antique dealers, particularly along Canal Street, which attract visitors to Stamford and contribute to the unique character of the South End.