

# South Downtown

## Neighborhood Strategic Plan



Hartford, CT  
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# C. NEIGHBORHOOD VISION

## *Ideas generated in Neighborhood Planning Workshop*

On Saturday, October 21, 2000, about 30 neighborhood residents and building owners from the neighborhood gathered together with planning professionals at South Congregational Church on Main Street to talk about neighborhood problems and ideas to solve them.

### *Workshop Questions*

After an overview of neighborhood issues, assets, and principles of good urban design presented by the consultant, they gathered in small groups asked themselves the following questions, and then began drawing their ideas on paper. *What problems need to be solved? What new things would you like to see? What kind of housing? Where are the neighborhood centers? Where can we put new streets? What will each street look like? (existing and new)*

### *Issues*

Neighborhood residents complained about the vast area on Capitol Ave. and Buckingham Street now occupied by surface parking. They recognized the need for parking but felt that it should have less visibility, as auto break-ins are the most frequent crime in this downtown neighborhood.

Residents felt that there could be better and higher uses for this land, were the parking relocated. This centrally located land is prime for development, with its adjacency to the Capitol and The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, not to mention downtown Hartford. New development may possibly be connected to the Bushnell, or contain amenities which State employees can enjoy, or provide more housing.

### *Workshop Ideas*

Ideas generated in the workshop were presented to all assembled. One by one, group representatives described their vision for South Downtown. Residents envisioned a neighborhood that looked a lot like their favorite parts of South Downtown today: more rowhouses, nice tree-lined streets with an intimate scale and attractive lighting, and more urban spaces where people could gather.

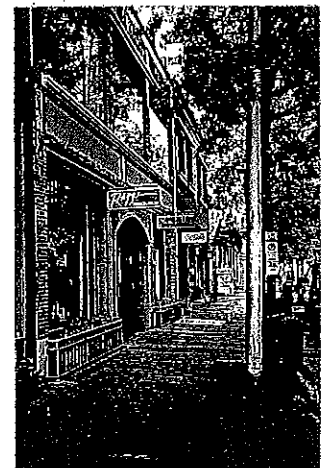
They thought it would make sense to build upon existing amenities in the neighborhood like the cultural asset of The Bushnell, access to jobs and downtown, and the historic fabric. They spoke often about the need to create uses that enliven streets for more than the hours of the workday: places to shop, dine, and find entertainment after 5 p.m. and on weekends.

In discussing retail, residents spoke often about how they would like a small- to medium-sized grocery store, a place where you could get fresh vegetables as well as some carryout prepared foods. They saw Capitol Avenue as a link between The Bushnell and Main Street: were there some shops along Capitol Avenue, merchants could move some of their wares out onto the sidewalk, and people could browse as they walked by. Residents described the importance of widening the sidewalk space to make this kind of interactive space possible. They did note, however, that the focus for retail should be on Main Street, at least initially.

Neighborhood residents recognized that, though Park Street was technically outside the NRZ boundary for South



*Vision for South Downtown:  
elegant streets*



*Vision: new shops*

Downtown, they believed anything that was suggested for the neighborhood area adjacent to Park Street should aid to supporting businesses there. Many admitted they'd like to shop on Park Street but few found stores that drew them there. Many also thought the street should promote itself by emphasizing its unique character as an ethnic shopping street.

In terms of new development, residents said that they felt that there were plenty of jobs but not enough housing. Outside of some development close to The Bushnell, they thought housing should be the focus of this plan. Housing would include a range of types and sizes, in attractive buildings, with many options for rental or ownership. Residents recognized how low-rise buildings (4-6 stories) reinforce security, and would encourage a lot of new development that would follow that form. Speculation was made about what the market would bear regarding other uses such as a hotel office buildings. But all agreed that a concentration of housing was lacking in downtown Hartford, and that this might be an opportunity to fill that need. (*Ideas from the five groups are summarized on the next page, but can be read in detail in the Appendix.*)



*Vision: upscale market*

#### *What it's like to live in South Downtown*

The workshop gave residents an opportunity to share their perspective on what living in the neighborhood is like. One resident's opinion was echoed by others: "I moved here because I got a great job (health care) in Hartford. What especially attracted me to this neighborhood was the architecture. When I walked into this brownstone, I just knew this was the apartment for me: 2 marble fireplaces, tall ceilings, built-in bookcases! If this was Manhattan, I could never afford a place like this. You don't find brownstones in the suburbs. I consider it a privilege to live here. I even have a balcony facing a private back yard. And on Saturday, it's so quiet; you can hear the birds chirping. And it's convenient to everything. What could be sweeter?"

#### *Visual Preference Survey*

Residents at the workshop were invited to choose from 50 images of buildings and streets, and were asked to decide which of them would be most appropriate for new development in South Downtown.

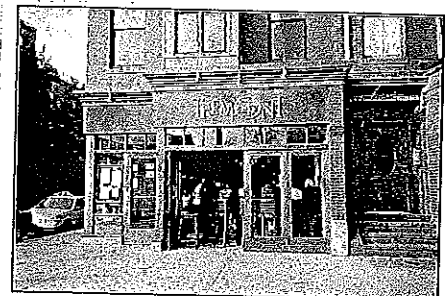
Buildings chosen as LEAST APPROPRIATE had the following characteristics: single story; blank facades; set back from the street; franchise architecture; drive-thrus; non-descript or inharmonious facades; unrecognizable building types.

Buildings chosen as BEST models had the following characteristics: wide variety of building types; two stories or taller; windows in front facades; larger on the first floor for retail; close to street; parking on-street or behind building; distinctive design with architectural detailing; made of natural materials; front facade faces the street; familiar building types.

These building models and their characteristics will be the basis for the design requirements, an *Urban & Architectural Code*, that will be created to guide new development and rehabilitation of existing buildings in South Downtown.



*Rowhouses*



*New businesses would open on the neighborhood like this corner restaurant*

# NEIGHBORHOOD VISION

Summary of Workshop Ideas

Make neighborhood more attractive = more liveable

Turn stores next to MDC around to face Main Street

Connect the Bushnell to Main: attract theatre goes to the retail street

Buildings get higher closer to Bushnell Park  
Tall buildings would frame the park

Widen Capitol Avenue sidewalks to increase street life

New architecture should be consistent with existing

More stores  
Shops like Dean DeLuca

Need a third place: a gathering place

The historic fabric is valuable

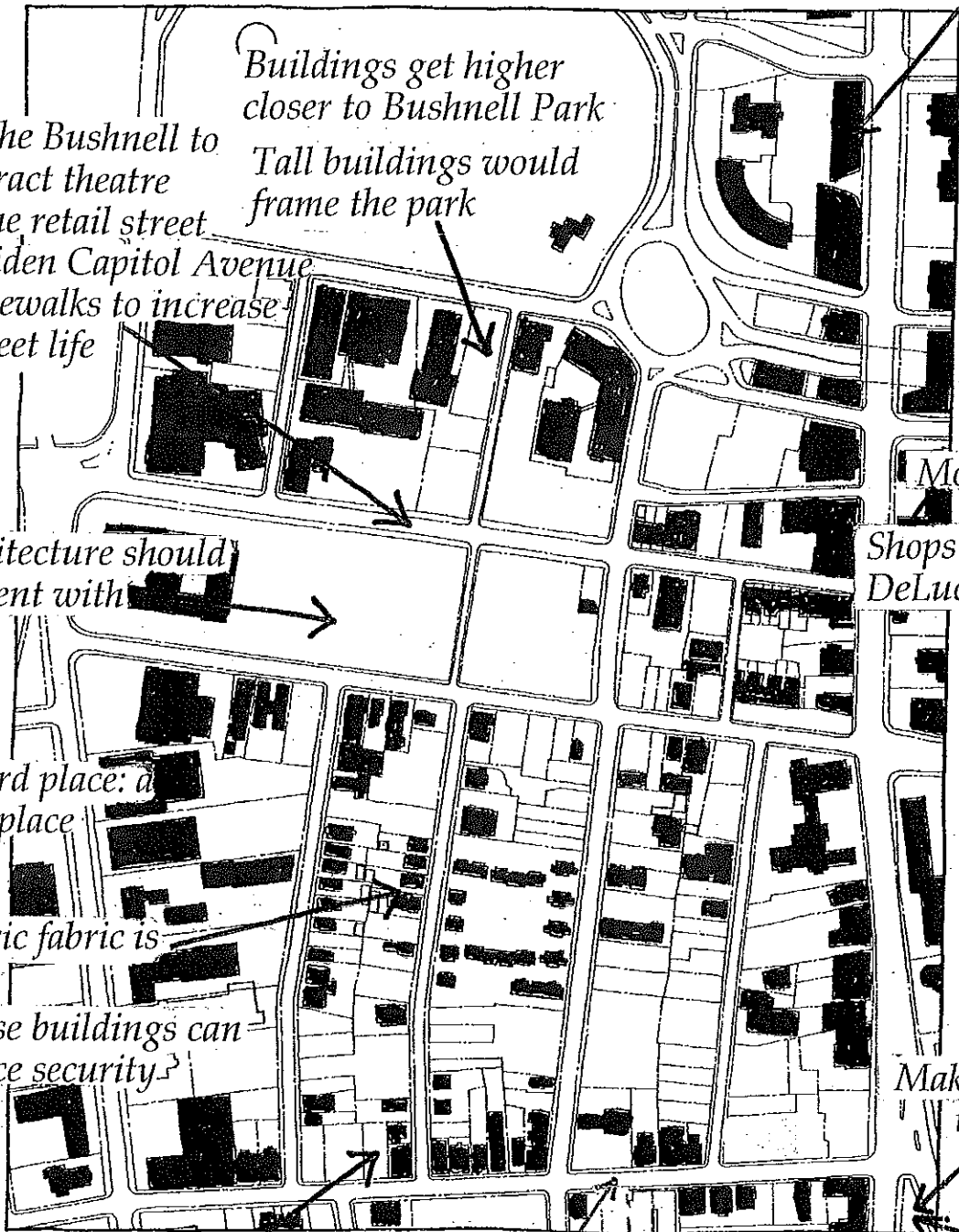
Low-rise buildings can reinforce security

Make it a major transit stop

Encourage lots of small scale development

Define Park street as a vibrant retail street

Create a neighborhood center at South Gree with appealing stores



# D. PROPOSAL FOR REDEVELOPMENT

## South Downtown Neighborhood Strategic Plan

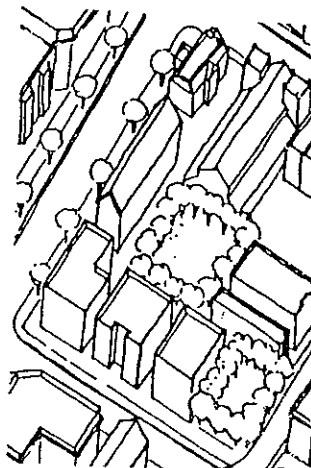
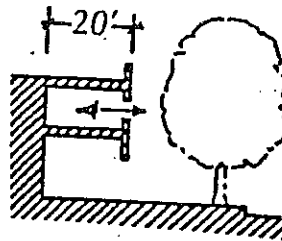
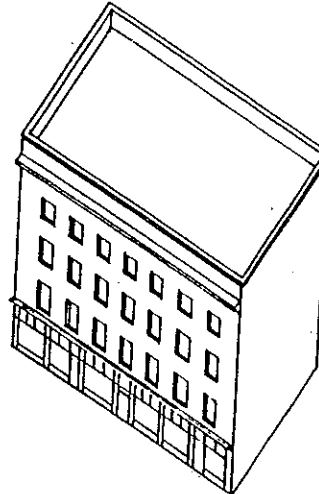
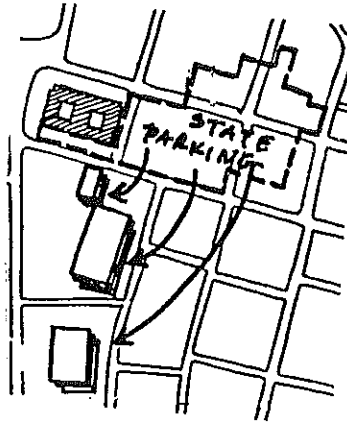
1. *Small incremental development will be encouraged instead of mammoth projects.* Many modest-sized efforts can add up to something significant over the course of a couple of decades. This approach spreads the benefits of revitalization to more people, and creates greater diversity.

2. *The neighborhood will become better balanced with more housing choices, a mix of retail and places to work.* By encouraging a mix of uses, South Downtown can become an interesting place for than just the hours of the workday. The variety would include a mix of household types and sizes to attract and encourage all age residents to settle here. A total of 1331 housing units, 47,000 sf retail and 102,000 sf commercial space will be created.

3. *Parking will be relocated, freeing up precious real estate for redevelopment.* Current parking will be shifted to other locations so it is less visible and better accommodated. Parking will be maximized where it is needed most. Shared parking will be encouraged wherever possible, especially where businesses abut residential areas.

4. *New development will build upon neighborhood assets.* Retail streets Park Street and Main Street will be reinforced as neighborhood centers. The State offices, a major employment center, can support new businesses. The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts may expand to include community education facilities, rehearsal space, or entertainment.

5. *Flexibility will be the cornerstone principle for guiding new development in South Downtown.* New development will be based on building types which allow for many different uses over a building's lifetime. Because of this flexibility, these buildings may be used for residential or commercial use, depending on their location and what the market will bear.



6. *New development will fit in with existing neighborhood fabric.* Not only will the existing historic buildings be retained and enhanced, new dev't will match the massing, front setback, and other characteristics of their classic, well-designed, appealing neighbors. A design code will clearly illustrate what is expected for new development on each site. By clarifying requirements early on, the code potentially will reduce the time required to review and approve projects, making it easier for developers and property owners to build in South Downtown.

7. *Affordable housing and affordable commercial space will be created.* Historically, neighborhoods have always contained a variety of household types, housing residents with a variety of household incomes. This tradition will be continued enabling affordable housing to be built in the form of apartments over stores, small houses and some live/work space.

8. *Good urban design will not only improve the quality of the street, security will be improved.* Sidewalk visibility will be increased by requiring that main entrances, windows, and spaces whose use involves human presence are located on the street side of the building. More "eyes on the street" will assure pedestrians their presence is known.

9. *Local circulation will be improved by introducing new streets through long blocks.* Smaller blocks offer greater permeability, greater visibility, and improve people's choices. A neighborhood with small blocks gives more choice of routes than one with large blocks.

10. *More green will be introduced into the neighborhood, in a variety of forms.* Tree-lined streets, small parks, and more private back yards will be created, making the neighborhood greener and more inviting to new residents and visitors.



# PROPOSAL

South Downtown Neighborhood Strategic Plan

# DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

*By area, from north to south*

## I. Capitol to Buckingham

*Strategy: Build on assets: the Bushnell, State Office Bldg. (major job center)*

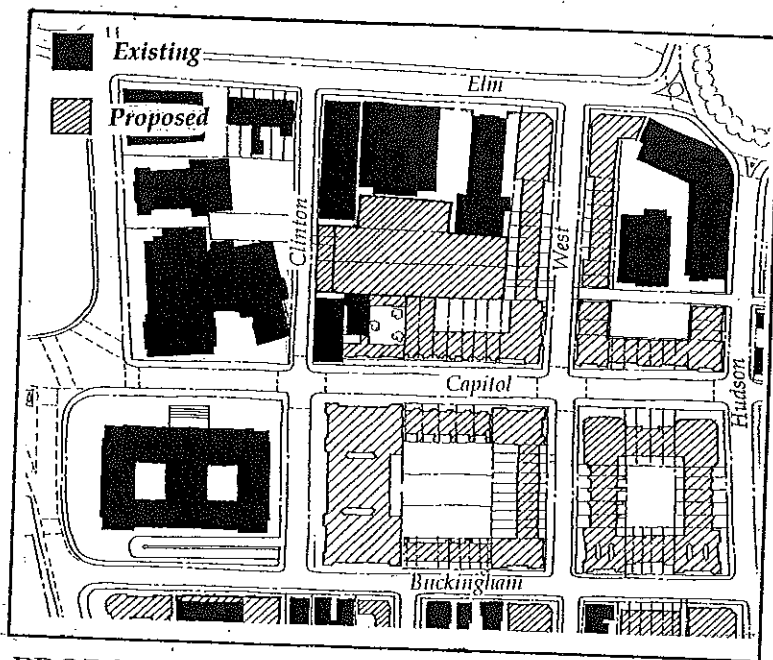
In order to free up the 6 acres of valuable real estate now occupied by parked cars, State parking will be consolidated into a couple of parking garages south of Buckingham Street. Future relocation of State uses at 10 Clinton Street can provide an ideal location for another parking garage. (See *Parking Strategy* for more detailed information.) Underneath what is now the major State parking lot, the block between Capitol/West/Buckingham, two levels of parking may be built (below grade), whereby permitting new development to be constructed above.

Buildings down Capitol Avenue would match the scale of the building at 165 Capitol Avenue (the State Office Building). The height of these buildings between Capitol and Buckingham would be 6-8 stories. 55 Elm would be the model for all buildings on Elm. The corner sites at West Street are key sites, suitable for another commercial/residential mix.

On the site now occupied by parking lots, closest to 165 Capitol Avenue, a major building could be built, with potential tenants related to the Bushnell Performing Arts Center: arts complex, rehearsal space for the ballet, symphony and opera; a community center, with round the clock events and classes; an entertainment complex. In any case, it would likely be able to accommodate shops on ground floor (or half below grade). Rowhouses, and grand apartment buildings, with a mix of offices and residential units, may fill out the rest of the block.

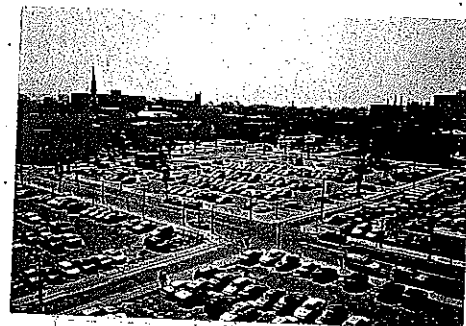


*Vision for a New Capitol Ave.*

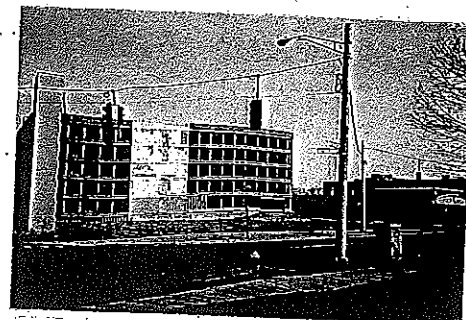


PROPOSAL

### KEY SITES



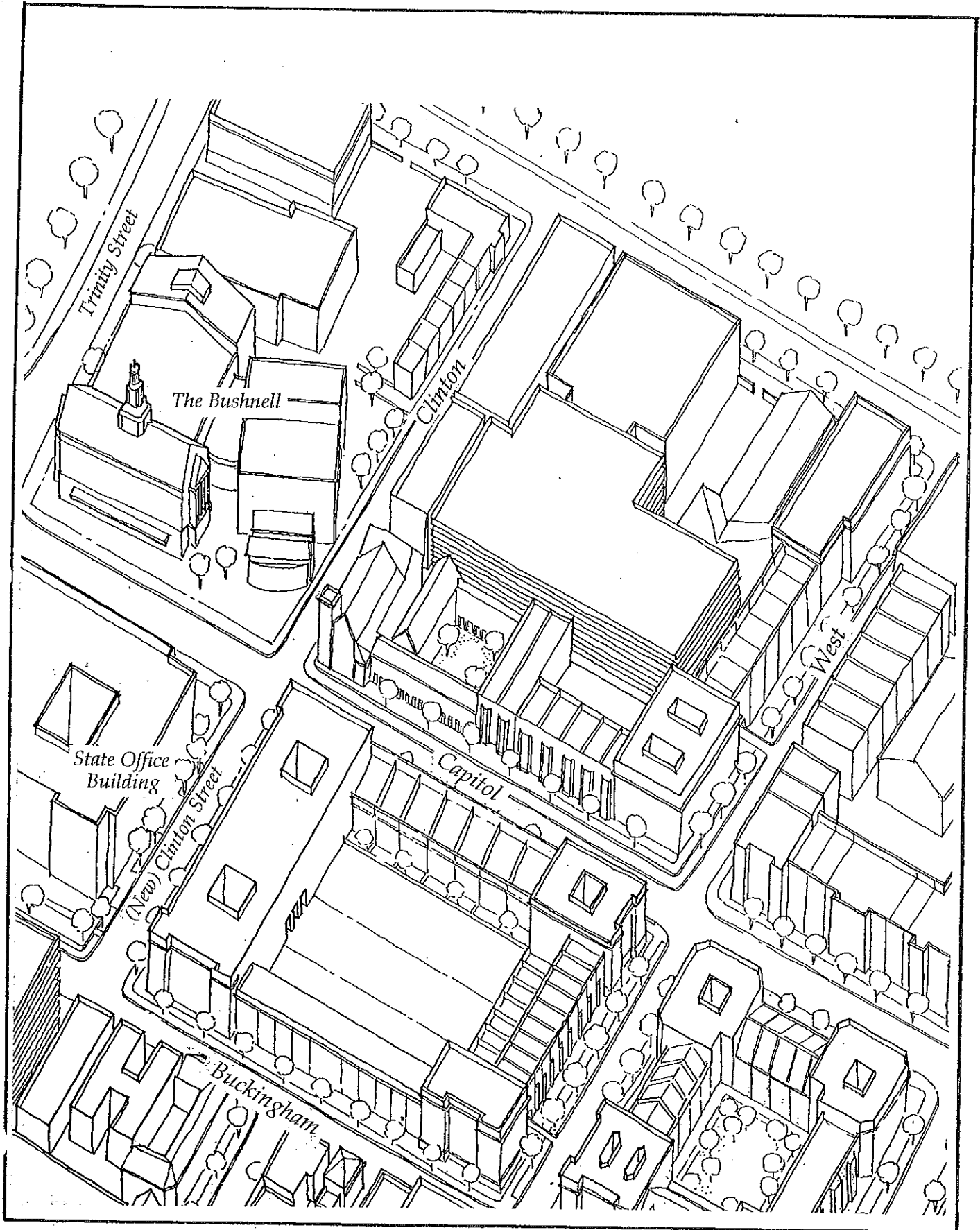
*West Street to Hudson Street*



*160 Washington Street (state property)*

# PROPOSAL FOR CAPITOL AVENUE

*South Downtown Neighborhood Strategic Plan*





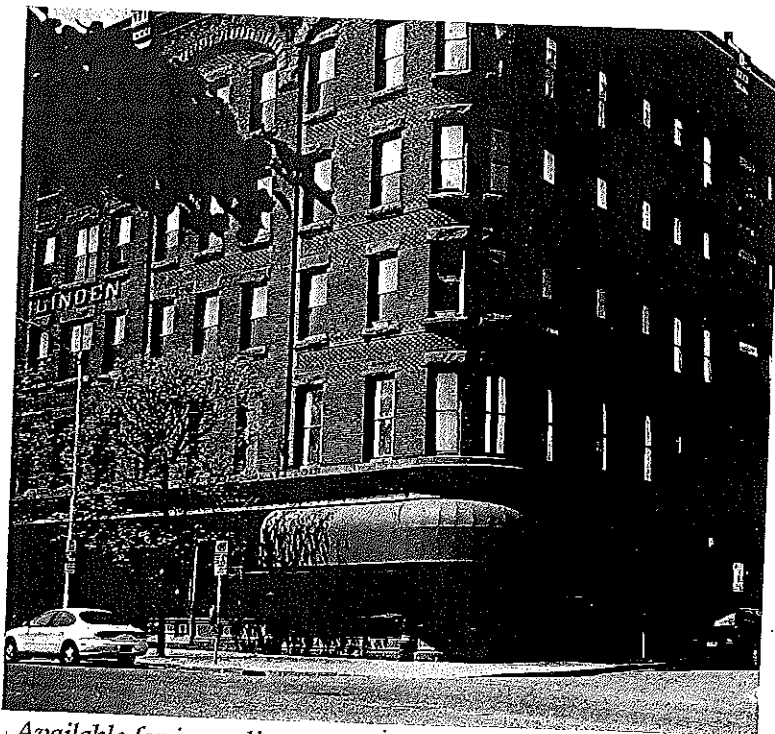
**II. Hudson to Main: prime real estate**  
*Strategy: infill and retention*

A key site is located at the corner of Elm and Hudson, facing Pulaski Circle. A major building the size of 55 Elm could be constructed here. Use could be mixed: retail on ground story, offices above, and residential above that. Its location facing Bushnell Park could lure potential residents in the market for luxury housing (3000-4000 sf condos or apartments). (Note: "sf" = square feet.) A three level parking garage from Linden Street to Elm Street could be built, enabling long-term, secure parking where it currently does not exist. If building use has predominantly commercial use (weekday only use such as offices), a shared use would accommodate parking for the area for buildings on Elm Street (west of Hudson), the Linden Building and buildings on Capitol Avenue.

The shops currently facing the Towers' parking lot (north of the Metropolitan District Commission building) on Main Street could be rebuilt (3-6 story building) so that they face Main. This single gesture could go far in reconnecting downtown to this neighborhood. The MDC could potentially add 3-5 more stories onto its building.

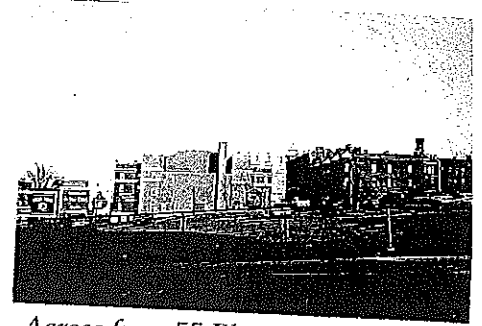
The vacant commercial space on the ground floor of the Linden (14,000 sf) is a key site for retail. Residents of the neighborhood repeatedly express a desire for this space to be filled, and suggest an upscale food market as an ideal use.

Ideas about how Whitman Court could be extended north, and new development built in this area can be seen in *Future Possibilities*.

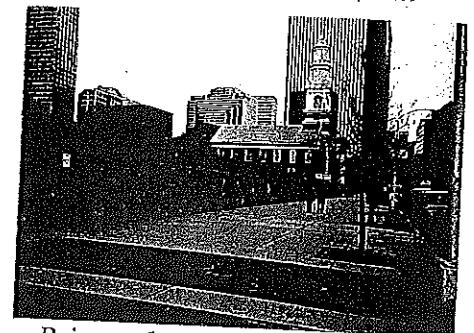


*Available for immediate occupancy: 14,000 sf retail on Main.*

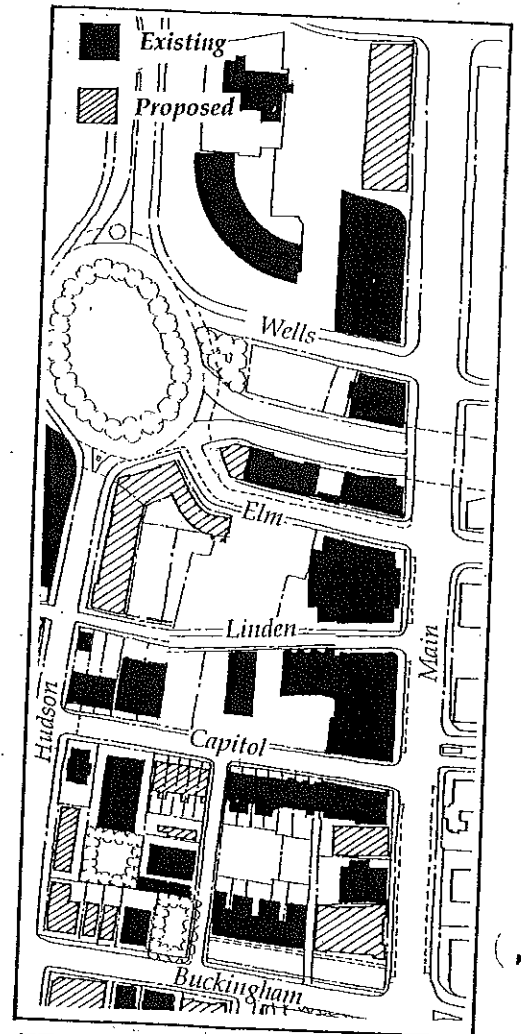
**KEY SITES**



*Across from 55 Elm:  
Hudson/Linden/Elm*



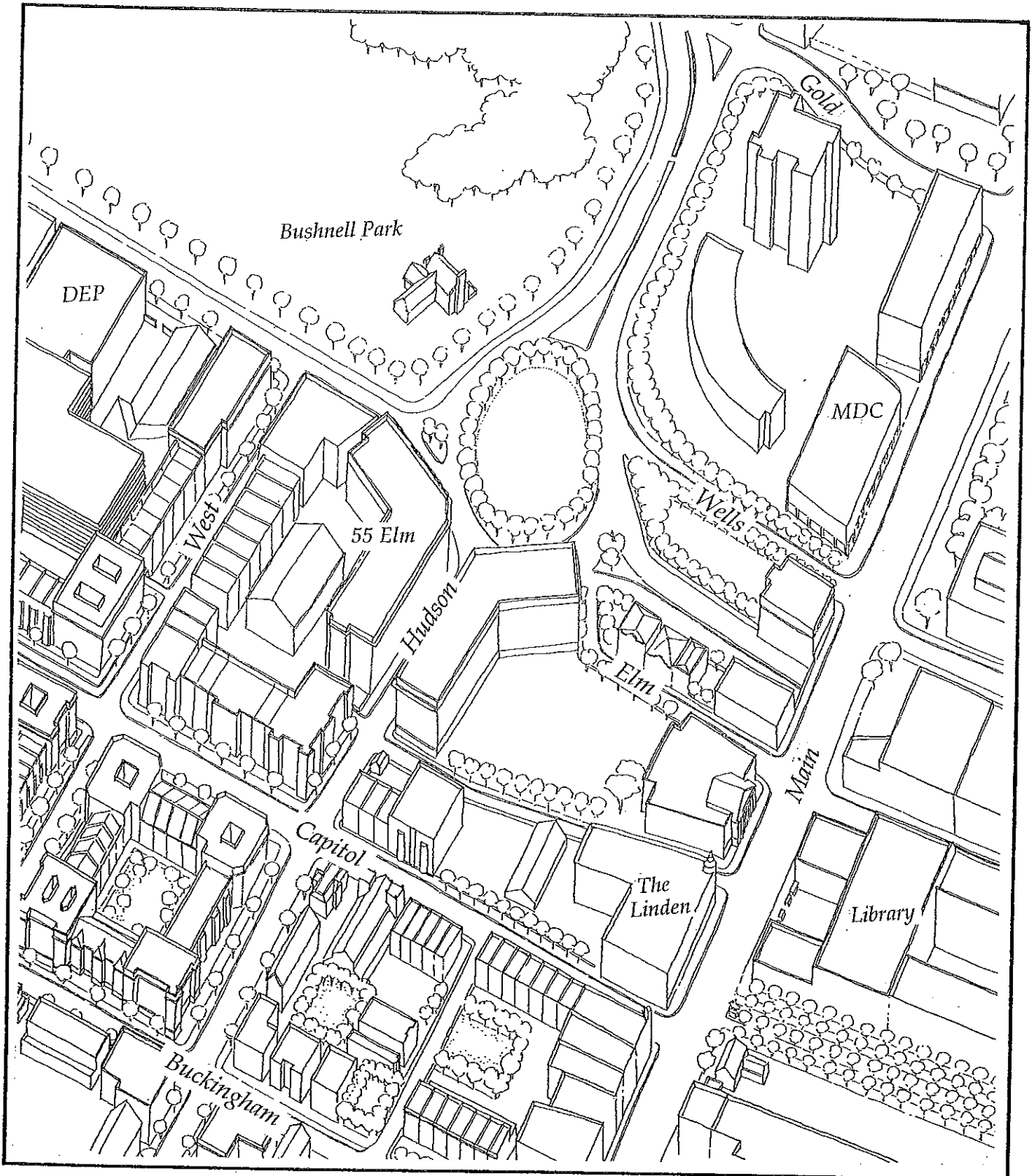
*Prime redev't site: Main at Gold*



**PROPOSAL**

# PROPOSAL FOR HUDSON TO MAIN STREET

*South Downtown Neighborhood Strategic Plan*



## 7. PARKING

*Strategy: Maximize parking, and make it less visible*

### *Proposal*

Parking will be relocated to the interior of blocks, where it will be well-identified but less visible from the street. Parking will be maximized in the outer blocks of the neighborhood where the large employment centers and retail areas are located. Alleys will permit access to these parking areas, and link them to one another.

Wherever possible, shared parking will be encouraged for areas where existing businesses abut residential areas. The lot behind Buckingham between Wadsworth and Hudson could potentially become a 2-level parking garage, thereby doubling capacity. Some streets will be widened (West and John) to provide more on-street parking. Lots will not abut a street in any case, without being screened by an enclosure wall.

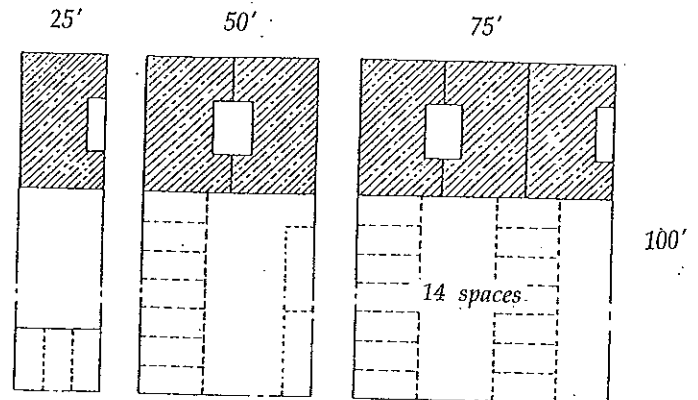
At the scale of individual lots, as new lots are laid out, they should be platted to accommodate the modern parking space as a standard module (rather than the American convention of 25'-0" increments). 60' to 66' wide lots accommodate two-sided head-in parking

### *Parking for State Employees*

The challenge is to create a strategy that maximizes parking spaces at a minimum cost and permits new parking structures to be built while maintaining existing parking. The strategy is to relocate this surface parking to three general areas, using (primarily) existing state properties, and to create the highest number of spaces in each location. The other objective is to create these new parking facilities as economically as possible.

Parking for State employees will be relocated from the large lots on Capitol Avenue to garages behind Washington and Clinton Streets. In a later phase, a major underground parking facility will be built between Capitol Avenue and Buckingham. Some State land may be sold or leased to ignite private development. A detailed description of the state parking strategy can be found in the *Appendix*.

*Platting in 25'-0" increments does not yield the most efficient parking layout possible. Double-sided head-in parking requires a width of 60'-0". Efficiency is not possible in most lots.*



*Platting with a rod system of 16' (or 16'-6") avails greater flexibility and accommodates parking at every increment.*

