

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Objective of Outreach

In order to obtain input from stakeholders in the community in the study process for the above plan, personal interviews were conducted among a select number of businesses and stakeholders located or associated with the Project Area. In total, 19 local stakeholders were interviewed over a six-week period in November to December 2001. In general, efforts were made to obtain a fair representation of the stakeholders in the neighborhoods.

The purpose of the outreach program was as follows:

- To involve stakeholders in the community in a process of determining economic opportunities for the Parkville community.
- To identify major issues and concerns which affect doing business or investing in the community.
- To identify specific needs of the stakeholder which could be addressed in the Study.

List of Interviewees

- Will Wilkens
- Dolores Sullivan
- Dan Felatico
- Mike Altott
- Phil Fisher
- Ray Casavant
- Jim Schumacker, Rory Poole
- Virgil Guzulescu, Ruth Schaefer
- Bill Howard
- David Morin
- Jay Cramer
- Gerry Maine
- Paul Sciarra
- Jack Santos
- Felix Del Greco
- Miquel Otero
- Joseph & John Ramondetta
- Mike Sussman
- Joseph Langlais
- Real Artways
- Lena's Pizzeria
- Budget Printers
- Trout Brook Brewhouse
- R.L. Fisher
- Royal Welding Company
- Champlin Company
- Schaefer Belmont Group
- Batholomew Ave. Associates
- Park Street NRZ
- New Park Office & Conference Center
- City of Hartford
- Arbor Contractors
- Lisbon Furniture
- Del Greco Agencies
- Westside Property Management (Associate of Carlos Mouta)
- Futuramik Industries, Bartholomew Hamilton Assoc.
- Danny Corporation (Bartholomew Ave. Property owners)
- Parkville Community Association

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II. Identification of Issues

The following issues were identified as the most significant among the stakeholders interviewed.

Assets

Stakeholders indicated that considerable dialogue has focused on the assets of the community due most recently to the NRZ process. These include a relatively stable residential neighborhood anchored by a healthy and ethnically-diverse retail/business district, excellent access that includes I-84, presence of significant employment centers in established industrial/business areas, evidence of reinvestment in the community, moderating crime and improved quality of life, and strong neighborhood organization and cooperation. The presence of the Real Artways theatre and school was also mentioned as very positive. Based on the above, the present priority noted by many interviewees is promoting assets in a manner that better defines and markets the neighborhood and improves reinvestment opportunities and quality of life.

Business Environment

Most businesses interviewed acknowledged that Parkville serves as a good location for business compared to other areas of Hartford. Good access, well traveled corridors, stabilizing neighborhoods, significant reinvestments in the community, available labor pool were all noted as some of the positives. Tax burden vis-à-vis other neighborhoods was cited most often as a negative. Moreover, it appears to be an environment that is improving with the city responding much better to issues affecting the neighborhood and businesses.

Image

On the whole, most stakeholders interviewed spoke positively of Parkville's image particularly in the context of its business corridor on Park Street and recent developments that include Stop & Shop and Crown Theatres. Parkville's multi-ethnic business character including excellent dining and food opportunities was often cited as its most unique quality. Many people noted that the city's façade program and efforts to address blight in the area was having a positive effect on perception of area.

Nevertheless, interviewees did indicate that lingering problems with image, or lack of clear identity, still represented a modest handicap at times. Some felt this was due in part to the backlash of some of the negative press on crime that has focused periodically on Frog Hollow section of Park Street. Others noted that in the early 1990s Parkville experienced crime problems, since moderated, which negatively impacted numerous businesses and peoples perception of the neighborhood. Still others felt that more of an

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effort was needed to publicize and market the business district and its attributes through events and merchandising. The hanging of lighted Christmas trees on light poles on Park Street was cited as a recent example of positive efforts in this area.

Universally, everybody has high hopes that image would be enhanced with physical upgrades planned for the business district along Park Street that include new lighting, sidewalks, improved gateways and landscaping. Notably major employers in the area indicated no negative issue with respect to neighborhood image in hiring personnel. In fact many cited its convenience to major corridors and I-84 as very positive. Several interviewees also indicated that the community is committed to addressing issues of urban design in any new developments as witnessed by required changes to design of 7-11 market and gas station located at corner of Prospect and Park that is more in keeping with neighborhood.

Customer Base

Interviews with businesses and stakeholders in the retail/business corridor noted that much of their market is pulled from other communities of Hartford (specifically West End) and neighboring towns. This was particular the case with many of the dining and food establishments on the corridor. Service-related businesses and business-to-business firms interviewed for the survey also confirmed customer base relied less on local neighborhood and more on region.

Security/Neighborhood Stabilization

There is general consensus that crime in the Parkville area has dropped significantly in the past five years, although there is an occasional hot spot needing action. Interviewees also note that the police have improved in recent years both in terms of response time and presence. Notably, most interviewees indicate personal safety issues and incidence of crime against property are important issues in the community but do not rank high as an overriding major concern. Vandalism, stolen cars and other personal property, and undue loitering appear to be the most common complaints. In comparison to previous years, incidences of violent crime and open drug dealing have declined. Neighborhood stabilization appears to be on the rise and several people noted favorably the efforts of Habitat for Humanity to develop home ownership in the community, specifically on Buckley and Carpenter Street. A need for greater emphasis on promotion of homeownership was cited.

Parking

Most interviewees who have businesses indicated that there most pressing problem was lack of parking. This was the case for both businesses on Park Street and Bartholomew Avenue. On Park Street, merchants complained that many spaces are being taken by the

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owners and workers of the businesses on the street. The lack of parking is further exacerbated by the fact much of the business in Parkville comes from outside the area as opposed to walk-up or public transit oriented business. On Bartholomew Avenue, the lack of parking has aggravated opportunities for marketing several of the buildings and made traffic flow, particularly for trucks, at times problematic due to on-street parking.

Organization Effort

Most people interviewed indicated that a major Parkville strength is the strong organizational effort now underway in the community. This effort is well networked and comprised of numerous neighborhood organizations (Parkville Community Association, Parkville Merchant Association, Parkville NRZ (and its various committees), Problem Solving Committee) that are inclusive of both businesses and residents. In fact, stakeholders were proud of the efforts of organizations to date in implementing programs and securing planning and design funds that will lead to various improvements in the community. One area of concern was noted with respect to diminished staff support for merchants group as a result of recent re-organization of city-funded merchant coordinators. Many Parkville businesses noted that they need someone who can be more accountable to serving their issues and needs. There was also cited need by organizations to distinguish and prioritize the needs of the Park Street business district from that of Bartholomew Industrial Corridor.

Local Labor Force & Mode of Transportation

Most of the businesses interviewed cited their satisfaction with the local labor force although some indicated lack of basic skills was a re-occurring issue. Many of the production-oriented firms interviewed indicated that a large percentage of their workers are found in the local neighborhood with many workers walking to their jobs or coming by Bus. It was noted by one employer that a bus route along Bartholomew and Hamilton would be highly desirable given the concentration of employment in the area and the lack of parking. Meanwhile, Bridgeport Hospital noted that 488 Bridgeport residents work at their facility. With respect to neighborhood employment, employers have indicated the need for more daycare and transportation that can accommodate 24-hour shifts.

Traffic Flow

A number of interviewees have cited the need for better traffic controls around the elementary school at the time children are discharged. Significant traffic congestion occurs at this time putting the children at risk and creating traffic and parking problems. It was noted that there is a plan to improve Grace Street in order to accommodate such traffic.

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Buffers between Industrial and Residential

Some firms interviewed believed that where possible there ought to be a physical buffer between industrial and residential uses. Of immediate concern are plans to renovate existing but vacant housing or reuse industrial buildings for housing along Bartholomew Street adjacent to industrial areas.

Public Investments

Many interviewees were excited by the numerous planned public investments in the Parkville area although cautious about funding and ultimate implementation of such plans. Conceptual Plans and recommendations for Parkville are complete for streetscape and parking under a federally funded “Picture It Better Together” program. Both city and federal funding will be sought to implement plan. In addition, the community will be the recipient of two Bus depots for the rapid transit New Britain-Hartford Busway that will follow railway right of ways. One of the busways is planned for the corner of Park Street and Francis Avenue, the second at Stop & Shop. Interviewees also indicated that a design for repainting the railroad overpass has been selected and will be soon be undertaken with city funding. A few interviewees also were hopeful that plans for Bartholomew Avenue might improve the business opportunity of that area. Finally, several noted plans for roadway improvements to I-84 specific to access ways to Flatbush and Sisson Avenue. With respect to the latter, however, it appeared many were dubious of potential for ultimate funding.

Defined Needs

The following specific needs were identified as being critical to stakeholders interviewed. Where need is identified with a specific stakeholder it is so noted.

- Parkville Street Streetscape Improvement (curbs, sidewalks, landscaping); follow up to “Picture It Better”.
- Establish more parking for both Park Street and Bartholomew.
- Support redevelopment of Bartholomew Avenue for commercial/industrial reuse and expansion.
- Establish stronger and better identity for Parkville and the business corridor.
- Improve gateways into Parkville.
- Strengthen involvement and marketing/merchandising efforts of Merchants Association.

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- Increase Public Transportation options and hours to better serve businesses at along Bartholomew and Hamilton.
- Improve traffic congestion around Elementary school to alleviate problems when children are discharged.
- Blight removal or re-use of abandoned or deteriorated buildings.
- Promotion of home-ownership in the neighborhood in order to support neighborhood stabilization.
- Strengthen dialogue and communication with city and other neighborhood organizations as a means of securing resources for on-going development.