

Recommendations for Other Corridors

PARK STREET CORRIDOR

Parking



The perennial issue of all business districts is parking and Parkville is no different. A recent study undertaken by *Picture It Better Together* identifies numerous options along Park Street for expanding parking. A review of these options suggests only a few good strategies exist for expanding customer base parking and/or parking for businesses that are now using on-street parking. These options need to be further evaluated, including exploring opportunities for controlling targeted property. The most obvious area of need is in the blocks between Newton and Amity Streets. It is understood that several vacant side street parcels on Amity Street are being initially targeted for use for parking. It is recommended that the linkage of these parcels to Park Street via the Thrift Store at 1850 Park Street (now vacant) be evaluated.

It should also be noted that support and cooperation of all businesses in the district will be required in order to have an effective parking program. Based on past practices where cities have assisted with parking creation, this will likely include a commitment to management and up-keep of parking areas by the business community benefiting from the public parking.

Gateway Improvements

It is very beneficial to establish pleasant, memorable and positive gateways into business districts because of the impact they have on shaping customer perception. Ideally these gateways are also associated with a common marketing theme linked to the balance of the district (logos, color, texture, etc.). This effort also provides

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an opportunity to promote or reinforce a chosen identity for the district.

There are efforts now underway to address the unsightly overpass at the eastern gateway on Park Street in Parkville, including, signage, landscaping and other physical improvements. Further efforts should be made to encourage improvement of the unsightly, and in one case abandoned, multi-family homes located just west of this gateway. Unless these properties are addressed, efforts to improve the gateway at the overpass will be muted.

A "Welcome to Hartford" sign is slated for installation at the western gateway. Additional modest upgrades of this entrance to Park Street should also be explored, including additional landscaping elements and possibly spot lighting. The Parkville community should continue to provide input into design of improvements in the corridor as in the case where it was instrumental in obtaining design changes on a 7-11/Citgo station at the western end of Park Street that were more in keeping with the architectural styles of the area. This property owner has offered to display the "Welcome to Hartford" sign.

A third critical gateway in Parkville is located at the intersection of Park Street with Sisson/New Park Avenues. It is understood that plans are in place for visually enhancing the corner of Park and New Park Avenue with landscaping improvements funded by the City. It will be important to monitor the progress of this funding to ensure implementation.

Proposed Public Improvements

Parkville's *Picture It Better Together* plan, funded by a grant from the Federal Highway Administration, outlines a comprehensive plan to physically upgrade Park Street, as well as other key corridors in the community. These improvements include options

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for parking, sidewalk and curb improvements, improved crosswalks, period lighting, furnishings, and landscaping. Of some interest is the recommendation to reflect the industrial past of Parkville in the period lighting and furnishings. Hard costs for the entire plan (inclusive of other corridors) are estimated at close to \$5 million.

The plan appears to be very complete and offers the ideal, if not rare, opportunity for gaining funds for implementation in a time of public austerity. This is due in part to the collaborative nature of the planning process involving federal, state, regional, city and local involvement and the fact that the federal planning initiative provides access to implementation funds, although most likely a combination of public funding sources will be required. Given the obvious boost such improvements will have on enhancing the physical character of the business district, it will be critically important to assign high priority to monitoring the progress of funding and actively advocate when appropriate. An aggressive marketing plan, particularly involving activities such as the creation of special events, should be coordinated with the phasing of public improvements.

Benefits From The Busway

Park Street will be the beneficiary of a new mass transit concept that establishes a dedicated busway along the railroad right of way stretching 9.4 miles between New Britain and Hartford. It is anticipated that 12 stations will be provided on this route including two in Parkville: one at the corner of Park and Francis and the second off New Park Avenue next to Stop & Shop. Although it is not known at this time what the Park Street-Francis Avenue location will generate in the way of redevelopment, the busway is expected to bring economic benefits to the neighborhood.

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Moreover, both stations in Parkville provide a unique opportunity to market dining and shopping options in Parkville and to develop a positive awareness of the community.

A Restaurant and Shopping Guide listing describing merchants and establishments in Parkville should be created and distributed at the stations as well as other high traffic venues such as the Crown Theatres and Stop & Shop. Other promotional activities such as designing a Parkville poster that can be visibly hung in Parkville Stations, and other locations in the community or providing a “Free Coffee on Parkville” day at both stations with cups listing Parkville businesses can also be developed.

NEW PARK AVENUE CORRIDOR

School Parking Problem

One of the more significant traffic bottlenecks on New Park Avenue arises with double-parking that occurs along New Park Avenue (and to some extent on Park Street) with the pick-up of elementary school children in the afternoon. Unfortunately, this coincides with traffic build-up on Sisson Avenue, Park Street and New Park Avenue resulting from afternoon out-commuting from Hartford and area businesses. The double-parking is also close to the intersection of New Park and Park Street, further exacerbating traffic flow at a critical interchange.

It is strongly recommended that plans move forward on a proposal for a bus/car drop-off and pick-up area on Grace Street for the Parkville Community School. This area would also double as a proposed stop for a bus or trolley serving the area. Other improvements would include streetscape upgrades, benches and trash receptacles. Strict enforcement of no double-parking on New Park Avenue should coincide with completion of the drop-off area.

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Upgrade Program Needed for Portions of New Park Avenue

The structures along New Park stretching from Park Street to Francis Court are average to marginal in condition. None of these commercial structures, in contrast to businesses on Park Street, appear to have taken advantage of the City's façade improvement program. The general impression is of a somewhat run-down area, establishing a negative image for an important gateway into Parkville.

A marketing program directed at owners of properties in the area should be undertaken to provide them with information on resources and funding programs to upgrade properties. The merchant coordinator can undertake follow-up visits with specific businesses and owners.

Blight at Francis Court Corner

An area of blight on New Park Avenue is associated with the three vacant buildings at 126-128 and 130-132 New Park and 8-10 Francis Court at the corner of New Park and Francis Court. Instead of contributing to a smooth transition from large new commercial development to older smaller-scale retail and multifamily uses, the condition of these buildings accentuates the physical differences. These properties are multi-storied mixed-use residential brick buildings now being marketed for office or commercial use. Ample parking is located to the east of the structures.

While the buildings could conceivably be converted to office/commercial use, particularly in light of the availability of parking, the cost of conversion is likely to require market rents that will far exceed local rental thresholds anytime in the near future. The more sensible scenario would be to identify resources for upgrading and improving the buildings for residential use,

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thereby anchoring the southern end of the Grace to Francis Court block. The location immediately adjacent to Stop & Shop and the proposed bus station, and within walking distance of the Parkville business center, make the buildings highly marketable for residential use. In addition, the rental housing market has become much tighter in the last three years in Parkville providing a better financial base for undertaking improvements. Finally, there are numerous funding sources for housing improvements that could be explored for such a project.

Visually Enhance Upper New Park Avenue

Upper New Park Avenue is characterized by a combination of residential and mixed-use structures on one side and institutional uses on the other. This area is compact and contained, and in sharp contrast to large-scale/strip commercial on lower New Park Avenue as exemplified by Stop & Shop and the Crown Theatres. The area also offers an appropriate transition into the Parkville business center. While improvements should be considered for all of New Park Avenue, it is particularly important to undertake upgrades that help to visually and physically define upper New Park Avenue as more pedestrian in character and representing an important gateway into the community.

It is recommended that streetscape improvements that include lighting, trees and street furniture, bump outs and improved crosswalks be targeted for the two-block area between Francis Court and Park Street. Such improvements would be particularly beneficial in visually defining this area as more pedestrian oriented. It would also provide an appropriate transition to the large-scale commercial development that begins south of Francis Court.

CAPITOL AVENUE CORRIDOR

Address Blight

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Blight along Capitol Avenue within Parkville is damaging the image of the neighborhood. Aside from image improvement, the upgrading of such properties has an obvious beneficial impact on neighborhood stability and reinvestment. Two properties in need of improvement that stand out include 1076 Capitol Avenue and 1080 Capitol Avenue (at end of Rowe Avenue).

1076 Capitol Avenue is a multi-family building slowly being rehabilitated but still in need of major improvements. Efforts should be made to link the owner of the building with available housing programs that would accelerate renovation, including access to City HOME funds.

1080 Capitol Avenue is a boarded-up multi-family building owned by the property owners of the next-door bar. The owners have approached the City regarding assistance to demolish the building so they can use the parcel for off-site parking for the bar use. The City has not supported this action. The NRZ should approach the City to discuss gaining control of the property through its blight ordinance in order to sell the building to a non-profit developer or interested private party for rental housing. The unit configuration and the presence of a bar next door make the homeownership option less likely.

Blight also exists at the intersection of Capitol and South Whitney. Both southern parcels may be in violation of zoning. The PRA should work with City officials to ensure compliance. Improvements to these properties will increase the attractiveness of the vacant parcel across the street.