



Navigator

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONNECTICUT

MAIN STREET CENTER

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Mixed-Use Development Deserves More Respect

A Letter from the Executive Director

Mixed-use development projects tend to be the Rodney Dangerfields of the economic and community development fields – they “don’t get no respect.” Securing financing for a mixed-use development is very difficult, local zoning regulations and building and fire safety codes act more as confusing and costly impediments rather than supportive guidelines for mixed-use projects, and local and state economic incentives typically go toward single-use developments in suburban locations with no existing infrastructure.

One of the hallmarks of smart growth, mixed-use downtown development provides a range and density of uses utilizing existing infrastructure, encourages less reliance on the car, returns historic downtown buildings to their original intent (retail or restaurant on the ground floor and residential or live/work space above), and it is the key component in any downtown revitalization strategy. **Retail will not lead the revitalization process. Retail will follow people. Therefore, the more people you can bring back to downtown to live and work, the better the market for current and new businesses to prosper.**

Downtown is an excellent location for mixed-income residential development. Three segments of the market that are particularly vulnerable to the affordability factor happen to also be strong target markets for downtown living – young adults, seniors on fixed incomes and artists. In many Connecticut downtowns

property values are depressed - or have not appreciated as quickly as in other areas. With the right array of community and economic development tools in place a range of housing options can be offered that make economic sense for investors.

In order for downtowns and surrounding neighborhoods to thrive, mixed-income residential development should include some portion of the units being labeled as “affordable.” **Unfortunately the term affordable is often met with an immediate and negative emotional response as people somehow erroneously assume that those in need of housing they can afford would not make good neighbors.** The need for affordable housing in this state affects a vast cross section of our workforce. A study commissioned by The Partnership for Strong Communities says, **“2000 Census data shows that Connecticut has lost 20 – 35 year old population and the likelihood is that we will continue to lose population and skilled workers if we do not provide housing they can afford.”**

People living downtown keep a neighborhood alive into the evenings and on weekends, increasing the perceived and real sense of vitality and safety. And it is likely that people living downtown may also work downtown, thus reducing traffic, pollution and reliance on gas. Speaking of reduced traffic, how often is 55-Plus (or Active Adult) Housing built on isolated tracks of land forcing residents to drive for every need? These are the very people

who often want to drive less (especially at night) and walk more. They can only do this when they live in a neighborhood with stores and services in close proximity.

So what is needed to foster mixed-use and mixed income development? The Brookings Institution published a very simple yet persuasive answer in a 2005 report entitled

“Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization.” Step # 4 is “Make the Right Thing Easy.” If there is a desire for mixed-use development, then every possible economic and community development tool must be put into



Haymarket Building in Downtown Norwich

place. These tools include new zoning regulations, appropriate interpretation and use of building and fire safety codes (particularly in historic buildings), financing mechanisms, streamlined permitting processes and use of tax incentives. **In short, once you declare your intention, make sure you’ve put systems in place that make that intention a reality.**

The Connecticut Main Street Center is encouraging input and support from its Downtown Resource Center network of members and partners to determine how these systems can be put in place. This will require educational and technical assistance activities and advocacy at the local and state level. You will be hearing more from us about these issues throughout the year. Stay tuned.

John Simone
Executive Director



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SAVE THE DATE!
Connecticut Main Street Center
2006 Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation

MONDAY, JUNE 19th
at 5:30PM

The Crocker House Ballroom
in Downtown New London

Building Local Preservation through the CLG program

Strengthening municipal preservation programs is one of the most important aspects of the Certified Local Government (CLG) program. Jointly administered by the National Park Service in partnership with State Historic Preservation Offices in each state, **the CLG program provides technical assistance and small grants to local governments seeking to preserve their unique historic character.**

The CLG program seeks to: 1) ensure the broadest possible participation of local governments in the national historic preservation program while maintaining preservation standards established by the Secretary of the Interior and 2) develop and maintain local historic preservation programs that will influence the zoning and permitting decisions critical to preserving historic properties.

The CLG program helps to institutionalize historic preservation by making it a part of local government. And, because local planning staff often plays a key role in CLG projects, the thread of historic preservation becomes woven into the fabric of local land-use policy. Today CLG grants support a wide range of projects, including building reuse and feasibility studies, design guidelines and historic district ordinances, and many kinds of public education, including marketing materials.

Under the National Historic Preservation Act, federal law requires the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office of the

Commission on Culture and Tourism to set aside ten percent of Connecticut's annual historic preservation funding for grants to eligible town governments. About \$55,000 is available to CLGs on an annual basis.

In a new approach announced by the State Historic Preservation Office, communities will be eligible to apply for grants between \$1,500 and \$2,800 for projects that produce reports, public education materials, or historic preservation events. The grant awards do not have to be matched and they are intended to:

- encourage new awareness of historic preservation at the local level
- expand the scope of current public education outreach
- strengthen a historic district commissions administrative or regulatory capacity
- produce written or website materials for homeowners and/or town officials
- generate fresh ideas for programming that brings historic preservation to new audiences
- allow historic district commissions to develop multi-year programs

For information on the CLG program contact Mary M. Donohue at 860-566-3005, ext. 323 or email: mary.donohue@po.state.ct.us.

Connecticut's Certified Local Governments: Bridgeport, Brookfield, Canton, Chaplin, Colchester, Colebrook, East Hartford, Fairfield, Glastonbury, Groton, Guilford, Hamden, Hebron, Killingly, Ledyard, New Fairfield, New Haven, New London, New Milford, Norwich, Orange, Roxbury, Salisbury, Simsbury, Southbury, Tolland, Vernon, Waterford, Westport, Windsor, Woodbury, and Woodstock.

Welcome New Downtown Resource Center Members!

Town of Colchester

Town of Salisbury

Westville Village Renaissance Alliance (New Haven)

CMSC's Helmin Gets Into the Minds of Downtown Small Businesses Owners



CMSC
Business
Development
Specialist
Dave Helmin

"It was great to have someone come in and tell you exactly what customers are thinking. I followed Dave's suggestions about merchandise display. The luggage I had since the store opened sold in less than three days."

Helmin has 26 years in the hospitality industry including six years as owner/operator of two Connecticut restaurants. He spent nine years with the Morse School of Business Hotel and Restaurant Management

Program as instructor, Department Chair, and Director of Education. He was instrumental in the design and development of the curriculum for the Center for Culinary Arts located in Cromwell.

He has conducted workshops in numerous downtowns, including Torrington, Niantic, Wallingford, Manchester, Waterbury and the Upper Albany neighborhood in Hartford. He works with Executive Directors of local

Main Street programs and Special Services Districts, Economic Development Directors and Economic Restructuring Committees. And Dave is making his way around the State, by visiting with various small business development partners, including the Connecticut Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF), and University of Hartford's Micro-Business Incubator.

Dave also has a word for downtown professionals, "Taking advantage of our small business services ultimately makes your job easier. I can be the "bad guy", giving business owners an honest appraisal of their business. Sometimes they just don't accept advice coming from the Main Street Director. By bringing in an experienced consultant from the outside, you put yourself in a better position to establish a trusting relationship with your downtown merchant."

When asked what advice he shares with small business owners CMSC Business Development Specialist Dave Helmin replies, "I tell them they're not alone. They must look

to each other for support in order to raise the level of the entire downtown district. Having been there myself, I understand small business owners - they have drive and dedication and think they can and should do everything. But they need help. That's where we come in!"

Since hiring Dave Helmin as Business Development Specialist one year ago, Connecticut Main Street Center has provided numerous hours of assistance, training and networking via workshops and one-on-one consultations with downtown business owners throughout Connecticut.

Helmin's recent workshops include: "*Sharpen Your Competitive Edge*", an introductory workshop that provides overview of the new realities for small business, "*Superior Customer Service & Selling*", providing business owners a self-evaluation of current service models and effective selling techniques, and "*Cost Effective Advertising*", which focuses on development of an advertising program that fits the strategic business plan. And Dave's one-on-one consultations with business owners cover a variety of issues, from external signage and "curb appeal", to visual merchandising, to menu evaluation for restaurants. CMSC's small business services are getting rave reviews:

"We have completely moved around our storefront display, based on your ideas."

"It's better than having a secret shopper - he not only identifies a problem, he offers a solution."



Recent Downtown Revitalization Institute Certificate Recipients with CMSC's John Simone (from left) Dawn Leger of Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Norman MacNeill of the Town of Putnam Economic & Community Development, and Linda Osten of Capitol Region Council of Governments.

Downtown Revitalization Institute 2006

APRIL 28TH – *Using Design as a Tool for Downtown Revitalization*

JULY 28TH – *Economic Realities of Downtown Revitalization*

OCTOBER 27TH – *Promotional Strategies for Your Commercial District*

Each workshop is scheduled from 8:30am – 4:00pm at Northeast Utilities Headquarters in Berlin.

To register, visit our website at www.ctmainstreet.org

DON'T MISS THIS WORKSHOP!

April 28, 2006
8:30 am to 4:00 pm
Northeast Utilities
Auditorium in
Berlin, CT

A Downtown
Revitalization
Institute Workshop

Using Design as a Tool for Downtown Revitalization



For directions and to register
visit www.ctmainstreet.org or call 860-280-2337

Drawing courtesy of Yale Urban Design Workshop

Connecticut Main Street Center is funded by the *State of Connecticut Department of Economic & Community Development* and *The Connecticut Light and Power Company/Yankee Gas* and is committed to bringing Connecticut's commercial districts back to life socially and economically.



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