



Navigator

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A Downtown Master Plan... *Make the right thing easy*

By KENT J. BURNES

Having worked in hundreds of downtowns across the United States, I like to start by looking at early planning maps of the city center. Most downtown cores were well-planned grid networks, which allowed for easy access to all parts of the downtown area, and provided social, physical and economic value for the residents. Downtown was predictable.

Over time, we tinkered with these original plans until we actually made the downtown dysfunctional. We implemented projects that were not part of an overall plan, in essence, dismantling downtown. As years went by downtown became less of a planned area and more of a mish-mash of uses, in many cases, in conflict with one another. We have all seen the results; industrial uses in residential areas, broken rhythms of the ground floor retail experience, traffic grid-lock, and in many cases a gap-toothed look for the once majestic downtown area. In the absence of a comprehensive plan we often attempt to fix the dysfunction of downtown by implementing disjointed projects. We use lots of band-aids which make the wound much worse.

A downtown master plan is a document that describes, in words and with visual tools, an overall development concept which includes both present and future property uses as well as future land development plans.

Today most communities that we have come to admire for the rebirth of their downtowns use a master plan to guide development. A master plan connects all of the dots in the relationship between the current physical place and what that place

will be in the future, and it does so in a comprehensive manner.

A master plan provides a road map detailed enough to give us a snap shot of what will be, but fluid enough to allow for change. A master plan will help attract, guide and support new development. Good developers want to know what the community wants and what else will be developed adjacent to their own projects.

The master plan defines acceptable uses that the market can support and where



A Connecticut Main Street Center Resource Team recently developed recommendations to revitalize downtown Darien, CT. This sketch depicts suggested infill development at the intersection of Boston Post Road and Center Street (downtown's 100% corner). The first three buildings from the right are proposed mixed-use buildings with retail on the ground floor located on what is now a commuter parking lot for the Darien MetroNorth train station. The proposal is intended to serve multiple objectives: help to create critical mass; capitalize on the transit-oriented nature of downtown; provide a more consistent and contiguous street-wall to enhance walkability; re-establish a grid of streets to improve pedestrian links, mitigate traffic congestion and calm traffic; and, "bridge" a major gap between two retail districts that are divided by the commuter lot and a railroad overpass. David Sousa, AICP, ASLA.

they should be located or clustered. Transportation and circulation, streetscape amenities, public spaces and infrastructure needs are all included. Finally, a master plan must provide guidance on the partnerships needed to move the plan forward

and how downtown will be managed, marketed and promoted.

But it is not enough just to have a master plan. Community leaders must commit to implementation and implementation will only happen if *you make the right thing easy. This means updating your zoning regulations to be in agreement with your master plan.* For example, if your master plan focuses on creating an area of retail, restaurant and entertainment uses on the ground floor, then make the right thing easy by implementing a ground floor ordinance that will keep other service businesses off the ground floor in the core retail area. If your master plan encourages a pedestrian-oriented, park-once-and-walk environment, make the right thing

easy by reducing suburban, strip-style requirements for on-site parking and dictate that future parking opportunities be located behind buildings which are built up to the sidewalk.

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The ultimate goal in creating a master plan is to suggest the "big picture" directions that will provide for downtown's long-term sustainability, rather than offer "quick-fix" or short-term solutions.

Kent Burnes is a nationally ranked downtown revitalization consultant and works with Downtown Management Services. You may contact him by email at kent@burnesconsulting.com

Information on tools and steps for downtown master planning can be found at www.ctmainstreet.org

The Connecticut Light and Power Company Honored for Its Leadership by the National Trust

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Main Street Center gave its 2006 Main Street Business Leadership Award to The Connecticut Light and Power Company for making the vision of vibrant historic and traditional commercial districts in Connecticut a reality and its steadfast financial and administrative commitment to the Connecticut Main Street Center. The award was presented as part of the National Main Streets Conference in New Orleans on June 5th.

In 1994, CL&P representatives expressed concern that state leaders had yet to realize the benefits of using the Main Street Approach. The company was also concerned about protecting its significant investment in the infrastructure of older commercial districts across the state. Bruce Carlson, then manager of the company's

Economic and Community Development department, convinced CL&P to provide the funding and administrative support needed to start a statewide Main Street program in 1995, appointing current CMSC Board Secretary Lisa Bumbera as the program administrator.

Eleven years later the Connecticut Main Street Center and its local programs are going strong thanks to CL&P's investment of over \$1.6 million. Designated local Main Street programs have generated over \$452 million in public and private reinvestment in their downtowns. This represents \$70.70 of reinvestment for every \$1 spent on a local Main Street program, making the Connecticut Main Street program one of the most successful economic development programs in the country.

Waterbury and Winsted Named 2006 National Main Street Communities

Connecticut Main Street Center has announced that two local commercial districts have been named *2006 National Main Street Communities* by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center. *Main Street Waterbury and Friends of Main Street (Winsted)*, both non-profit corporations, have been recognized for outstanding accomplishments toward their goal of the revitalization of their respective historic commercial districts.

National Main Street Program Accreditation is a partnership between Connecticut Main Street Center and the National Trust Main Street Center to establish standards of performance for local Main Street programs and provide accreditation to those that meet these standards.

The National Accreditation designation process evaluates established commercial district revitalization programs according to 10 basic performance standards. These standards provide benchmarks and guide-

lines on the way an organization should be functioning and serve as incentives for improvement.

left: **The historic Green in downtown Waterbury.**



above: **Main Street, looking west, in Winsted.**

Talking Small Business...



Customer Service Starts With Trained Employees

by
Dave Helmin

Earlier this week I stopped by a nationally-known coffee shop on my way into the office for my bi-weekly routine. The counterperson was very polite and genuine. I ordered my small-decaf-iced-mocha-latte with skim milk and a doughnut and she proceeded to make the order after repeating it back to me.

Once the order had been entered into the computer, I gave her five dollars and then noticed that she had charged me for a medium latte instead of a small one. I pointed this out to her. She apologized and began to figure out the difference in her head. I gave her credit for attempting this feat; however she could not complete the task. She turned to one of her co-workers and asked what to do. By now the line behind me had grown from two to six customers in need of satisfying their caffeine addictions. I knew that she should have returned \$2.23 to me but the other employee was insistent on providing me with sixty three cents. Since I didn't want the now angry mob behind me to start turning over napkin dispensers and coffee stirrer holders, I took my change and walked out.

I am a believer in giving businesses a second chance. At the end of this week, I attempted a second shot at the coffee shop. This time I ordered the same size latte and a muffin. Once again, I was charged for a medium latte instead of a small one. I told the counterperson who immediately apologized and asked the manager what to do. The manager explained how to void the transaction and re-rang it. I told the manager what had happened previously. She replied, "Wow". There was neither an apology from the manager nor a refund of additional change from the previous visit.

Bottom line: *The best establishments in the world cannot survive insufficient employee training.* Both employees had been spottily trained and put out on the floor before they could perform the task competently. As owners with employees, you must make sure they know everything they need to in order to provide superior customer service. *Take the time to train. It's critical to the success of your business.*

Dave Helmin is the Business Development Specialist with Connecticut Main Street Center.

The Hartford Courant Receives 2006 CL&P Award

Connecticut Main Street Center presented *The Hartford Courant* with the 2006 Connecticut Light and Power Company Award for Outstanding Contributions to Main Street Revitalization at CMSC's Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation on June 19th at The Crocker House in downtown New London.

Connecticut Main Street Center established the award in 2001 to recognize those organizations and individuals who dedicate themselves to promoting an awareness of the necessity of a comprehensive management approach to the revitalization of Connecticut's historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.

In recent years, *The Hartford Courant* has campaigned for Coltsville's designation as a national park, the preservation of the landmark Wilde Building in Bloomfield, and the revitalization of the Park Street and Albany Avenue neighborhoods in Hartford. The periodic *Cranes & Scaffolds* feature reports the status of revitalization and community development projects in the capital

city. In announcing the 2006 award CMSC President & CEO John Simone said: "Under the leadership of President, Publisher and CEO Jack Davis The Hartford Courant established *PLACE: Commentary About Where We Live*. Under *PLACE* editor Tom Condon this commentary highlights such issues as sprawl and smart growth, preservation, urban planning, open space, architecture, traffic, transportation and parking, adaptive reuse, community development and more. The *PLACE* board of contributors is peopled by experts in these areas who have a passion for lively, walkable communities and downtown environments, and the community's right to be part of the creation of that environment. Additionally, *The Courant's* editorial page commitment to and focus on the preservation and revitalization of Connecticut's downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts is exemplary and deserves to be recognized and celebrated."

In 2002 the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which founded the National Main Street program 26 years ago, presented *The Hartford Courant* with a coveted National Preservation Honor Award for its leadership role in stimulating awareness and discussion about the need for good urban design and the importance of preserving historic resources. Responding to news of the Connecticut Main Street's 2006 award, Jack Davis said: "As a member of the National Trust board, I'm familiar with the support the Trust gives to Main Street programs and regard it as a really significant distinction to be recognized by the Connecticut Main Street Center."

Welcome New Downtown Resource Center Members!

- *Broad-Park Development Corporation*
- *Town of Thomaston*

Don't Miss This Workshop!

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SIGN UP FOR THIS WORKSHOP!

Economic Realities of Downtown Revitalization

Donovan Rypkema of Place Economics

July 28, 2006
8:30 am - 4:00 pm
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Berlin, CT



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

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

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