

**RESULTS FROM THE WATERFRONT PLANNING CHARRETTE
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT**

MAY 2000

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This report is a concise summary of the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities that emerged as a result of the Charrette held in Middletown, Connecticut on April 1, 2000 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Statements are intentionally presented in the words and phrases of the participants. The goal of this brainstorming exercise was to articulate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Middletown's 85-acre waterfront property and create a vision for developing the site. This report is divided into four sub sections and an appendix with general waterfront planning principals. The four sub sections are:

- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- Important Considerations in Developing the Site
- Our Recommendations for Middletown's Riverfront
- An Action Agenda

I. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The facilitation process was used to bring people together and articulate and exchange ideas and issues related to the strengths and weaknesses of waterfront planning. This report is a summary of key issues raised by the participants.

Strengths

- The location of the property is a strength, especially in relation to other city owned properties
- The site is accessible by the highway, the railroad, and the river
- The property is proxemix to the downtown area
- The land is in a high-visibility location
- The land is close to residential districts
- Middletown is near Boston, New York City, and Hartford markets
- The railroad runs through the property and could be developed and maximized for tourism and commerce
- The property has a fantastic view (downriver, across to Portland, and up river towards the city)
- The curve in the river is an asset
- Attractive development is a possibility due to the low density of the area
- The development could revive Main Street
- There are recreational opportunities within the 2500 feet of riverfront
- The existing seasonal businesses will benefit
- There is a lack of development
- The scale of development is proportional to the waterfront and the downtown
- There are "campus-like" open space areas that provide green buffer zones
- There are lights coming from Route 9 that would help to light the area
- There are underdeveloped wetlands
- There is potential for a marina or a launch
- There are employment and economic opportunities
- The land is owned by different people, representing different interests

- There is strong public support
- Middletown residents want to preserve the history

Weaknesses

- There is a danger of altering the character of Middletown
- Overbuilding would destroy the character of the Town
- With the development of the riverfront property, the downtown would lose attention
- Route 9 is a physical barrier to the waterfront location
- Current zoning regulations would limit affordable housing
- There is not a connection between Main Street and the waterfront property
- The existing businesses should not be relocated
- Access to the property from the highway is poor
- Railroad tracks could be detrimental to the development of the marina
- There is no master plan for the Site
- Current parking conditions are inadequate
- The town has waited too long to develop the waterfront
- The flood plain is a concern
- The property is near CVH
- There is a perception of high crime
- There may be river contamination
- The location of the sewer plant needs to be changed
- The absence of a bridge south of the development area might be a weakness
- Sumner Brook needs to be improved
- The two railroad crossings at grade make the area dangerous for pedestrians
- River Road is congested
- The land is owned by different people, representing different interests
- The new development should work with the downtown area instead of against it
- There will be a potential impact on the tax payers
- There could be a lack of involvement from neighboring communities

Opportunities

- The development of the waterfront could enhance the development of the entire area from the North End to the South Gateways through integration
- There is an opportunity to create a central park with an ice skating pond, a gazebo, concessions, a boardwalk, and bike and jogging paths
- There is an opportunity to create synergy of activities
- There is 2500 feet of space
- There is an opportunity to create housing for all income levels
- There is an opportunity to create connections to downtown
- The project is being started at a good time for the community
- There is an opportunity to use the river to connect the area's history to the community
- There is an opportunity to create a space for families and children, possibly in connection to a performing arts center

- The project will expand the tax base
- The development will create jobs
- The property will create new appreciation for the town by a new generation
- There is an opportunity to attract small businesses
- There is an opportunity to utilize the arena for additional opportunities including a Tall Ships event, Amistad museums, and historical exhibits)
- There is an opportunity to attract new investments
- There is an opportunity to tear down the old buildings and build something nice
- There is an opportunity to attract tourists
- There is an opportunity to enhance public access
- There is an opportunity to recruit business and recreation in equal doses
- There is an opportunity to promote the cultural assets of the Town
- There is an opportunity to consider the North and South ends of the waterfront
- There is an opportunity to develop the railroad to minimize traffic congestion
- There is an opportunity to include Waterfront Park in the plans for development
- There is an opportunity to improve Sumner Brook
- There is an opportunity to preserve the wildlife and wetlands area
- There is an opportunity to explore events, like a “Head of the Connecticut” regatta or steam excursions from Saybrook
- There is an opportunity to explore houseboat rentals along the river
- There is an opportunity to acquire and restore the present brick building
- There is an opportunity to use Union Street as a link to the new area
- There is an opportunity to explore the use of the waterfront as a means of transportation (water taxi)
- There is an opportunity to explore different concepts for a marina
- There is an opportunity to explore a unique identity for the big picture
- There is an opportunity to build with a Nantucket flavor

Threats

- Pollution of the river is a concern
- Ignorance of opportunities
- No action is a threat
- There is insufficient funding
- Over development would threaten the whole area
- Political opposition to regionalization of the water treatment plant would be a threat
- If the development is not done correctly, the town could lose the opportunity to develop a high quality image
- There will be time limits for the project to be finished
- The developers should be encouraged to become involved with the project
- It is difficult to mix 24 hour vibrant activity with a residential community
- Government regulations could complicate plans
- Preserve uniqueness of town through avoidance of copycat development

- The town should be selective in what goes into the area in order to preserve the character of Middletown
- The media could pose a threat
- The loss of the historical fabric would be a threat
- Creation of an unsafe area is a threat
- Lack of state funding would be a threat
- Pressure for commercial development would crowd out local merchants
- Gentrification is a threat
- There is a need for low-cost housing
- A lack of response from Portland may be a threat
- Middletown has the second highest traffic accident intersection in the state
- There is a lack of political will
- The current residential community could pose a threat
- Failed redevelopment is a threat
- There is an ongoing cost of maintenance

II. Important Considerations in Developing the Site

After discussing the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities facing waterfront development, the participants were asked to visualize activities and uses on the site and discuss considerations they thought important in developing the land. What follows is a summary of their thoughts:

- Study other riverfront properties
- Accrue multiple forms of access to the Waterfront
- Begin to develop a Master Plan for the project in a timely fashion
- Explore and address barriers to development
- Involve families in the planning process and keep them in mind when planning for the waterfront
- Integrate the plans with other town plans and those of surrounding communities
- The water is a valuable asset
- Maintain connections between the waterfront and the downtown areas
- Conserve open space
- Maintain the town character
- Keep Heritage River designation in mind
- Create compatible public access
- Protect the landscape
- Recruit bipartisan support for proposed activities
- Be sure that the development is environmentally sustainable
- Celebrate the river
- Make the master plan flexible
- Be sure that the outcome improves the quality of life
- Make the area a tourist destination
- Increase pedestrian traffic
- Do not block the view from the river

- Create a sense of place
- Create a mix of businesses
- Create public and private partnerships
- Make it a fun place
- Promote sustainable development
- Include all the neighborhoods in the planning process

III. Our Recommendations for the Middletown Riverfront

Based on our observations and experience with waterfront planning, we offer the following recommendations for consideration as the planning for the Riverfront progresses.

1. The Connecticut River must become the primary focal point in all Middletown waterfront planning. This may appear to be intuitively obvious but, unfortunately, it is frequently forgotten. From Hartford to Springfield to Brattleboro, communities have turned their backs to the river or used its river's edge to place unwanted land uses. It is essential that each proposed activity be measured by its impact on this treasure.
2. The river parcels must be planned and marketed as an entity. To this end, it is important that it be treated as a distinct district. This can happen through zoning regulations and incentives. It could also occur via marketing (i.e.; the "River Village"). Such attractions will not occur immediately. However, over time, the new identity will emerge.
3. The City should examine the use of Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC) type powers to insure that it can control and guide the development of the area. EDIC powers enable the City to enter the marketplace through eminent domain, and the buying, selling and holding of property. Even with the extensive number of property owners in the area, this power is the only means the City has to insure that quality development, that matches City goals, can emerge. Please note: at times, the fact that the City has this power is often enough to influence positive development.
4. We recommend that any housing that occurs in this area be upscale. We understand the concerns expressed at the charrette concerning the need for affordable housing and diversity. We also believe that the City needs to attract upscale residents. With these points in mind, we urge the City to develop housing assistance measures (i.e., Community Development Block Grant Assistance) that will enable those residents presently in the area to remain. However, future housing should be market rate.
5. We urge the City to develop zoning powers that encourage "master planned" and "Planned Unit Development" concepts. To stimulate the use of these approaches, we urge the City to provide density incentives and to let developers know of its willingness to participate in tax increment financing agreements.
6. We urge the City to develop "umbrella" design regulations and detailed design guidelines for the area. The umbrella design regulations would require a series of tests before development

could occur. These tests would center upon the relationship of the project to the river in respect to a defined village character, the degree to which there is a pedestrian emphasis and the extent to which there are mixed uses. The Design Guidelines would explain the intent of the area to develop cohesively and what the desired character is. Developers would be urged strongly to relate to these detailed suggestions (note: They would not be required.)

7. The riverfront must be planned with respect to a series of “screens”. The first screen is the river itself. Any and all projects must ensure that the river is included as part of the development concept. At times, it may be a waterfront use or based upon a riverfront theme. At other times, it may simply include waterfront access. The second screen is the environmental screen. By all accounts it is essential that the environmental cleanliness of the area be insured. Moreover, all development must respect the flora, fauna, wetlands, and streams that lace the area. In fact, any development proposal should carefully show how the elements will be incorporated and protected. The third screen is the “connectedness” screen. Any and all development should show how it would create a distinct area that connects to the city as a whole. This connection should include pedestrian, vehicular, visual and landscape elements. The fourth screen is the institutional screen: The city should have a presence in and adjacent to the area. It may be through control of harbor activities, the creation of ports and waterways or even help to find institutions to move into the area. The institutional process adds security and a sense of commitment and sets a time for the development of the area.
8. The City should own as much of the land as possible. Riverfronts should be protected forever. As such, it should be municipally controlled. Through leasing agreements (to include 99 year leases), with “payments in lieu of taxes” arrangements, the City’s interest will be both profitable and protected.
9. We urge that Wesleyan University become a participant in the riverfront development. This could be through teaching, athletic or conference activities. It’s world class reputation coupled with it’s commitment to quality could help to set the desired tone for the area.
10. Viewsheds must be protected. In fact, we would encourage the City of Middletown to coordinate with the Town of Portland to insure that viewsheds from both sides be protected. These could be a highly innovative approach: We have never heard of two communities that came together to protect their viewsheds for their neighbors. Nonetheless, we believe that this approach would help to add and secure value for all development.
11. The questions concerning the flooding of the area and the smell of sewage must be answered bluntly, forthrightly and instantly: investors must have confidence that they will be corrected. We are quite aware of the time, cost and controversy of flood prevention programs; the public and financial investors need to know that this issue will be resolved in a timely manner. It also needs to know that the sewage plant will be removed from the area. No one will invest in quality projects until this problem is corrected.

12. The fact that the Connecticut River is a National Heritage River adds an amount of “cache” to its flowing through Middletown. We strongly urge that the City play a role in the planning activities of the Connecticut River Watershed Association to insure that it captures any grants and/or financial aid that becomes available. Moreover, we urge the City to work with its Federal senators and congressional representatives to provide funding to build on the Heritage designation.
13. The river in the Middletown area is rich in history. And yet, based upon the perspectives of many of the participants, little is know about its history. We urge the City to request it Historical Commission to research the importance of the river in Middletown’s development and to insure that it is articulated in any and all development (i.e.; historical markers, festivals, street names).
14. The river district should be marketed as a festival center. The City and its charter should develop a series of such events that are spread throughout the year and developed in such a manner that merchants in the river district and downtown are able to gain advantage. It is clear that the University’s new activities represent one important first step in this direction. Please note: these festivals should be spread throughout the year: the district must be multi-seasonal.
15. We urge the City to create a brochure where it carefully and succinctly lays out its desires for the area and what it will do to help any developer that matches the City’s desires. It should stipulate the planning goals, the planning regulations, the design controls and guidelines, a summary of the history of the River District and the financial assistance that will be given by the City.
16. The City needs to constantly reinforce to the citizens that the River District is unique and special. The next action would be to develop a series of forums on successful riverfront development where planners from these cities explain how their riverfronts were recaptured.
17. The City should create/expand river walkways and bicycle walkways along its entire waterfront. Moreover, it should pursue this concept with its neighboring communities to create a regional system. Such systems, over time, add economic value to a community. We urge that such a concept be pursued as early as possible in the development of the area due to the fact that it would demonstrate the City’s commitment to improve the area and to quality development.
18. The aforementioned connections to the Downtown should be multifaceted and “run deep” and be “seamless.” We perceive the Riverfront District as connected but separate. As such, it must compliment but not duplicate activities found elsewhere. It must also be oriented to expand the retail activities of Downtown.
19. There must be an emphasis on “security” from the start. This means creating a climate that is free of criminal concerns. It does not mean creating a gated community. It does mean, however, that a strong police presence and security sensitive design treatment be developed.

20. The railroad track issue must be resolved. If it is perceived as a barrier then it will impact development. If it is perceived as a safety issue, it will also impact investment. There are also questions of liability that will have to be addressed. It need not be an obstacle but the issues will take time to resolve.
21. The City should develop an overall “regional strategy” as soon as possible. The key regional issues include: a) flooding, b) sewage treatment, c) the railroad line, d) bike/pedestrian paths, e) the viewsheds, and f) potential future funding under the Heritage River designation.
22. The City must emphasize quality in its planning. It should move slowly, steadily and emphasize the long term, high end and upscale uses for the area. It must be patient.

IV. An Action Agenda

We were asked to recommend a timeline and recommended actions that the City should take to effectively monitor the planning process for the Riverfront. The following represent our thoughts

Actions that Should be Initiated within 90 Days

- The Steering Committee should carefully delineate the borders of the riverfront such that all parties are clear as to what parcels of land are included.
- The City should start planning for the Riverfront as a distinct area – The Riverfront District
- The planning staff should carefully inventory and catalog information for the River District. This should serve as an information report on the state of the Riverfront. It should include data on safety, environmental issues, relocation strategies, transportation connections, etc.
- The Steering committee should meet with riverfront landowners to discuss future plans and relocation options if needed.
- The Steering Committee should prepare a “Best Practices” Report for its steering committee that focuses on the successes of other Riverfront communities.
- The City should invite the mayors and or planners of five cities that have successfully revitalized their riverfronts to a conference to find out how they become effective.
- The Steering Committee should prepare a concise report on all public stakeholders including Federal Agencies (i.e.: Corps of Engineers, Housing and Urban Development), State Agencies (Department of Environmental Protection), Public Utilities (the railroad) and the City and determine their roles and interests.
- The planning staff should explore the development of a Community/ Economic Development Corporation that would focus on the Riverfront.
- The Steering Committee should meet with the Connecticut River Watershed Commission staff to determine its role and how best to tap into its resources.
- The Steering Committee should meet with faculty from various design schools and contract with them for planning and design assistance.

- The planning staff should prepare a brochure that would summarize the findings of the charrette and disseminate it as widely as possible.

Short Term (1-3 Years) Actions

- The City/EDC should recommend zoning changes to reflect the needs of a new Riverfront District.
- The City/EDC should recommend Design Guidelines for the Riverfront District
- The City/EDC should prepare a Strategic Development Plan for the River District
- The City/EDC should complete a regional assets study that could be used for marketing purposes and target appropriate development entities.
- The City/EDC should explore financing packages for desired development.
- The City should move the sewage treatment plant and address safety and transportation issues
- The City/EDC should acquire critical land parcels to maximize desired development for the Riverfront District.
- The City, DEP and EPA should complete and/or facilitate all necessary environmental mitigation

Long Term (3 years +) Actions

- Control, monitor and phase the implementation of the Strategic Development Plan
- Plan activities and festivities for the Riverfront District
- Reinforce existing and create new physical, visual and thematic connections to Downtown
- Promote and market the Riverfront and Downtown
- Promote regional approaches to development along CT River with maps and guides and planned activities
- Seek sponsors for Riverfront activities.
- Work closely with the DOT to implement a new Route 9 interchange design which enhances access to the area, connects the area to Downtown and is at a scale compatible to proposed development.

A Final Word

Middletown has an incredible opportunity to plan for a special area that can showcase the City's natural, historical, cultural and recreational assets while building on its economic base. The Riverfront District, when carefully planned, will enhance Downtown and promote regional connections along the Connecticut River. The District will be an exciting and dynamic place attracting residents and tourists alike. The City should take the time to study and plan for this District in a comprehensive way such that development will reflect the values and character of the community.

IV. Appendix: General Thoughts on Waterfront Planning

We offer the following perspectives on waterfront developments in an effort to help the City of Middletown as it begins to comprehensively plan for its waterfront development. These thoughts are based on our observations and our experiences in working with waterfront communities across the Northeast.

Strategic Planning for the Waterfront and Downtown is Crucial

One of the strategic steps to having a successful waterfront is to have a long-range waterfront plan and comprehensive zoning regulations to reflect and enforce it. In order to maximize the potentials for the waterfront, it is important to determine the use and character that the waterfront will serve. Waterfronts must be planned with the water as a unifying element. In fact, we urge waterfront communities to first emphasize water dependent and water related uses. Waterfronts should be integrated inland as extensively as possible. The daylighting (the opening up of these water bodies for public viewing) of channels, canals, rivers and streams can add value to communities and, perhaps more importantly, can integrate the waterfront more fully into the fabric of the community. No where can this be more vividly noted than in the City of Providence, where the City has recently changed the direction of its river (three miles from the Atlantic Ocean) and created one of the most vibrant city centers in New England. The river is used for festivals and ceremonies throughout the year. There are elegant bridges and pedestrian walkways along its edges and as well as open picnic areas that tie in the shopping areas, hotels, office buildings and the state capital. It has totally transformed the city. While Providence's river corridor has been comprehensively planned, as part of a major revitalization effort, the Ipswich River through Peabody, Massachusetts, is being integrated into an existing downtown fabric. This river had been long forgotten: It was simply a small stream that flowed behind the downtown shops and institutions. Approximately five years ago, the city cleaned the river and created walkways along its banks. Today, many buildings are re-orienting their entrances to focus on both the riverside and the City's Main Street. It is following the example of the nearby town of Ipswich which has long integrated the river into its downtown: Many shops have openings on both river and land sides.

There should be recognition of the need to plan for multiple publics. The downtown areas adjacent to waterfronts are likely to attract different types of people all through the day. For example, from 8:00 to 9:00, office workers will be on the street. From 9:00 to 12:00, it will be tourists who would be followed by the lunch crowd. From 2:00 to 5:00, tourists again will be commonplace. At five, the "night crowd" begins and continues until after midnight. While no two waterfronts will have the same mix at the same time, the fact remains that they all will have to cater to mixed publics: Workers, boat owners, business people, tourists, families, night-lifers and they all have different requirements that need to be met.

Successful waterfront development typically builds on historic and cultural assets.

Many waterfront communities are rich in history and culture. Historic and cultural structures draw tourists and help with the educational aspects of waterfronts as well. The maintenance and management of these elements are important to waterfront planning and marketing.

In larger cities, these attributes are typically well protected and promoted. We have seen the progress of Boston's efforts to create a walking trail along its waterfront and the marvels of Baltimore's Inner Waterfront and New York's South Street Seaport. All have enhanced the retail base of the waterfront areas. In smaller towns, they are too frequently ignored. Indeed, communities with long histories such as Point Judith, Rhode Island, and Stonington, Connecticut, make it extremely difficult for the pedestrian to observe and participate in the waterfront experience. Gaining access to historic and cultural facilities, however, is not a costly endeavor. With careful planning, they can be enjoyed by downtown business owners, workers, residents and tourists.

Waterfronts can be successfully revitalized when the issues of mixed uses are resolved.

Museums, aquariums and teaching programs would certainly be a draw for tourists and residents alike. As well, teaching and research programs would be highly beneficial to the waterfront related industries. A research laboratory for a specialized trade could make the waterfront a special destination for professional groups as well as students. The federally funded "Sea Grant Program" provides resources for American universities to become involved in such activities. For example, faculty from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are currently involved in aquaculture experiments in Quincy Waterfront. Further, hundreds of school children each day visit Boston's Aquarium and its "Tall Ships" (The U.S.S. Constitution and The Beaver). Similar activities can be found on Chatanooga's riverfront and in Baltimore's Inner Waterfront. New Bedford is staking a large part of its commercial future on the tourism/education components through its proposal to create an aquarium/hotel/conference center along its waterfront. As well, the waterfront area has recently been declared a national historic park.

The Wood's Hole Oceanographic Institute (Massachusetts) is significantly involved in activities along Falmouth's waterfront in Buzzard's Bay. Within hundreds of yards one can move from a quiet, bucolic campus through laboratories and research facilities to a village shopping center to the Knorr (one of the National Oceanographic and Atmosphere Administration's research vessels), to the hustle and bustle of the Massachusetts' Steamship Authority Terminal. The teaching activities co-exist nicely with both working and recreation functions due to the scale and organization of space. However, it is important to remember that they have very different needs and serve primarily very different clientele. Serious scientists and curious day-trippers rarely have common purposes! If waterfront uses are mixed, special attention needs to be given to each element such that one doesn't negatively impact the others. The Port of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has accomplished this quite nicely. Across from the City's best hotel is one of the largest scrap yards in the Northeast. It is active and colorful while still messy. Tourists are able to observe what is happening through open fencing: They are able to gain a sense of the activity without interference. In a final analysis, regulations clearly need to address possibly conflicting issues.

The recreation potential of waterfronts has dramatic potential in the coming decade. Waterfronts are considered to be wonderful recreational amenities for communities. The potentials for boardwalks, marinas and swimming areas are certainly considered to be assets for both the local residents and tourists alike. A recreational waterfront also acts as a catalyst for other tourist related activities such as specialty shops, restaurants, hotels, marinas/boat rentals and aquariums.

If the waterfront is to serve as a tourist attraction, it is important to keep in mind services and amenities that are necessary for tourists. Information kiosks, telephone booths, public restrooms, benches and trash receptacles need to be provided and be well marked. It is also essential to remember that the tourism experience is intended to be unique and special. For this reason, waterfronts that create a special atmosphere can gain an advantage. Historic preservation, architectural guidelines, period street lighting and/or different street patterns (e.g. cobblestones) can all add flavor to the experience.

Examples of balanced waterfront development include Newburyport, Massachusetts, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Wickford, Rhode Island and Port Jefferson, New York. In all of these instances, there is no one feature that stands out: It is the balanced combination of activities that has led to success.

Careful zoning, historic preservation, architectural and site planning regulations can add great value to downtown waterfronts.

Zoning regulations, architecture and design controls and site planning regulations are all important to ensure that historical, cultural and aesthetic attributes as well as the optimal juxtaposition of uses at the waterfront. Design, color, lighting and the festive nature of a place are definite draws. These elements enhance the feeling of security, vitality and bustle. In terms of design, there is a strong case for maintaining a sense of harmony, scale and “cultural feel” with the waterfront. While one should not get carried away and recreate a stage setting (“ye olde port”), it is important to respect the evolutionary character of the waterfront. While color inevitably adds to a positive aesthetic environment it also contributes, along with lighting, to the creation of a strong sense of security. The walking public must feel totally safe when walking through the area. The key word is “feel.” If there are psychological feelings of distress then, regardless of fact, the chances of public use of this space will decline. As Harvard Professor Michael Porter has noted, one of the most important elements of urban revitalization is a total sense of safety and security. Given that waterfronts often are considered dank, the homes of the derelict and dangerous place, the need to change this image must be a priority. Moreover, the transitional areas between waterfronts and downtown are equally problematic.

Urban design controls must call for a “stepping down” in the height of buildings. Too frequently, the views of waterfronts are blocked by high-rise buildings. We urge communities to maintain a low-rise profile along the waterfront and, if necessary, to increase the height as one moves inland. This concept has been successfully adopted in Boston where high-rise structures have, on the whole, been kept well back from its working and recreational boating areas.

A physical, social and psychological connectedness must be nurtured or developed between downtown and the waterfront.

In order for a community to begin capitalizing upon its proximity to a waterfront it must almost literally “turn around” and begin facing the water once again. Downtown districts have typically developed next to the water’s edge with streets radiating out from the waterfront area. Buildings have built up along these streets with their backs to the water. From the water’s edge itself, the downtown and community can appear almost closed off to travelers. From the street level of the downtown area, the water may not even be readily visible. Finding a way to re-connect with the water will be essential for any small town that wants to revitalize its downtown through waterfront development.

In order to maximize the potential of the waterfront, there needs to be a well-defined connection between the waterfront and the downtown area. As tourist waterfronts tend to be catalysts for growth in tourism related activities, the community as a whole can benefit through supporting businesses. Downtown stores, hotels and restaurants can be an integral part of the tourist experience. Wide roads or large paved parking areas that disconnect the rest of the community from the waterfront will be less likely to attract tourists inward from the waterfront. The issue of wide roads is particularly problematic. Throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s a period of great highway building, highway engineers typically chose flat areas that were less than vibrant as sites for their roads. Too frequently, they are located along the water’s edge. In Hartford, it is virtually impossible to walk from the center city to its riverfront – although it is less than 1/2 mile distant. (It is only today where, through the Adrian’s Landing Project, that this linkage is finally occurring). Similar disconnections can be noted in Middletown, New Haven and Bridgeport, Connecticut and Providence, Rhode Island.

When direct connections are not possible due to the historic layout of the waterfront and the community, good signage and design elements (such as period streetlights or walkways and bridges) could offer direction and draw people from one area to another. This “connectedness” can be clearly noted throughout New Bedford’s Historic Whaling District and Portsmouth’s Strawberry Banke. In fact, the scale of these cities is such that there is little separation between the waterfront and the historic parts of downtown. Furthermore, there are constant efforts to expand the connections to other surrounding areas: One does not feel that the port and downtown are two distinct areas.

There is also a need to define the nature of the local market. Allowed uses at the waterfront could be of concern to downtown businesses. This would certainly depend on the physical layout of the waterfront in relationship to downtown. When the downtown area or retail business center is adjacent to the waterfront, there is little distinction between waterfront and downtown. However, when the waterfront is separated from the downtown there is the potential for competition. This must be carefully watched. In Providence’s case, waterfront revitalization has helped to shift the market center of the city toward the river’s edge. This has raised such a concern in the City that the Mayor required a recent “river’s edge” developer, through a linkage agreement, to also invest in the traditional downtown as a condition for gaining building approval.

The downtown environment at the street level can play a significant role in the successful integrating the waterfront and downtown. Traditional streetscape programs that incorporate overall signage programs, street furniture and unique paving patterns can take on a water characteristic in downtowns with active waterfront communities. Bringing aspects of the water such as color, symbols, and waves can all serve as a reminder to shoppers and visitors that the water and its activities lie just beyond the edge of the downtown. These aspects of the water can be incorporated in the signs used to identify the downtown district, on signs for individual businesses, in the paving patterns of bricks used in parks and along the sidewalks.

Concerning festivals, they attract people: People like to see and be seen. These events ranging from the “taste of downtown” and “chowdah” fests to the regatta and yacht races can add value. We have seen these activities add value to smaller downtowns across New England. However, we have also noted one key problem: Too often, the events are not coordinated with the downtown merchants. The crowds come when the businesses are closed, the participants block out regular customers or the streets are blocked such that deliveries cannot be made. We can illustrate this problem through a recent case when a Lollapalozza Concert was held at Quonset Point. The crowds were so huge that virtually no normal business could occur. The sponsors gained a profit but a significant number of local businesses actually suffered.

Waterfronts benefit significantly from open spaces such as parks, plazas and trails: They add economic value.

The term waterfront project represents a wide range of options from bike and pedestrian trails to river and boardwalks to plazas, docks, piers and market places. The scale and size of a waterfront project will be determined by many factors including available funding and the needs of the community. Before selecting a specific amenity, a community should assess the specific needs of their downtown and identify the unique characteristics of their waterfront and downtown district. Does the downtown need a better mix of businesses, or do the buildings themselves need rehabilitated? Do people still use the downtown as a place for their primary shopping needs, or is it an area that is struggling to compete with a strip commercial center on the edge of town? Does the community want to promote a downtown that is used daily by its citizens, or is it a district that attracts tourists by providing specialized goods and services?

Finding answers to these and other questions can help determine the type of downtown and waterfront area desired by the citizens of a community. This information then can be coupled with the unique physical characteristics and natural beauty of the waterfront to select the best project for each town. Towns can choose from several types of waterfront projects that vary in size and purpose.

Trails can be situated along a waters edge and extend into the downtown area and beyond. This type of systems links the water’s edge, the shopping district, and nearby residential areas in a way that opens up the waterfront and downtown to children, parents, and tourists. We have noted them, for example, in Skinneatlis, New York, and Peabody and Ipswich, Massachusetts. The City of Portland, Michigan, a small town situated at the merging of the Lookingglass River with the Grand River in lower Michigan has created approximately 4 miles of river trails that provide year round entertainment for all members of the family. These trails provide spaces for roller blading,

biking, walking, cross-country skiing, and take advantage of historical bridges crossing the two rivers. These paths wind along the river, through an existing city park at the water's edge, and pass through the downtown.

City parks provide a space near the water's edge that also allows a community to come together. These parks provide a reason for people to come down to the waterfront. While there, they are able to take advantage of nearby shopping and dining establishments. These city parks can provide outdoor spaces for recreational activities that involve water such as boat rides, etc. or they can be an area for families to gather. The community of Port Clinton, Ohio, has developed small city parks along the two streets running parallel to the main street of the downtown. These parks feature historic statues as well as gazebo and gathering spaces for downtown shoppers and employees. Adjacent to the water the community has situated sports athletic fields that draw kids during the day for informal sports and families during the evening for organized games during the summer months.

Boardwalks and riverwalks provide citizens of the communities as well as tourists a way to interact directly with the water. These walkways put a person directly on the water's edge and give the water prominence in the community. Today, these walks provide access to docks used for recreational fishing and sporting as well as larger boats and yachts. For shoppers to a downtown district they can showcase the downtown as well as the area's history. The town of Grand Haven, Michigan, has been particularly successful in using this tool to revitalize their downtown area. The main street through the downtown, Washington Street, radiates out from the water's edge. The street culminates in a plaza area that allows visitors to access the 2 1/2 mile boardwalk. The boardwalk features access to shops, eateries, charter fishing boats, a miniature golf course, and scenic parks. As well the boardwalk takes visitors pass several prominent features of the downtown. Tourists are able to visit the Tri-Cities Historical Museum housed in the original railroad depot; the Waterfront Stadium, which seats 2,400 people and was built for viewing the "World's Largest Musical Fountain that plays nightly during the summer months; the William Ferry Landing, a plaza area that provides a brass replica of the Grand River done to scale and imbedded in the cement walk area of the boardwalk.

While one can argue that these amenities are expensive, there is a significant amount of evidence that they encourage investment and reinvestment and add value to neighboring properties. Once the link is accomplished there is inevitably great community pride. This is particularly valid in areas that celebrate local culture. In New Bedford, for example, the existence of the whaling historic district (now a National Historic park) has continued to spur interest in both the downtown and the waterfront. Its location, between the port and central business district is the "glue" to the city's revitalization strategy. In Springfield, Massachusetts, the city has long sought means and methods to move people from its Connecticut River front (home of the National Basketball Hall of Fame) through its downtown to its complex of museums – a journey of approximately one-mile. It is now developing plans to link the areas through flags, unique lighting and symbols related to Dr. Seuss (Theodore Giesel, author of the Dr. Seuss series, was raised in Springfield). In this case, the city is using its heritage (the founding city of basketball, famous author, its culture) to link the downtown to the water.

Waterfronts must be comprehensively linked to key transportation systems and adopt traffic management policies.

Unplanned traffic circulation can be chaotic for both vehicles and pedestrians. Some separation or controlled traffic management is necessary regardless of the use at the waterfront. This becomes more imperative if there are mixed uses. Adequate parking, well-defined walkways, (bike paths) and jogging trails need to be established. The need for managed circulation is a requirement not only for both the aesthetics and functionality of the waterfront but also for safety reasons. Once again, if it is not possible to entirely separate vehicle traffic from pedestrians, strategies such as traffic calming or specific time limits for service vehicles would be beneficial.

Marketing and promotion are required if the downtown waterfront is to prosper.

Not unlike any other amenity, the waterfront needs to be marketed and promoted. All aspects of the waterfront need attention. The working waterfront needs to be marketed toward water related industries and support services. The education aspects need to be marketed toward professional and trade associations as well as universities and other educational institutions and the recreational aspects need to be marketed and promoted toward residents and tourists alike. The waterfront, along with all its functions, and the community itself needs to market and promote itself as a tourist destination. Depending on the nature of activities, it could market itself to different target audiences such as family tourists, the young college/university students, business travelers, the sports minded tourists, seniors or people looking for a relaxing hide away. Above all, the marketing must be balanced. We know of no downtown waterfront success story that has narrowly defined its orientation: Balance leads to success. We also know of few successful downtowns that survive by orienting them to a short season (e.g. the summer months). It is very important that marketing specialists orient themselves to a multi-seasonal approach. This has worked quite well in the downtown waterfront areas of Martha's Vineyard (Edgartown, Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs) where the marketing specialists have successfully expanded the "shoulders of the season" from April to December: Each year more and more businesses are expanding the length of time that they are in operation.

Given the special nature of downtown waterfronts, there is a great need for public private partnerships.

Management issues are crucial to the well being and success of the waterfront. Given its varied functions and clientele, public/private partnerships are in order. Most likely there will be a port/waterfront authority that will be in charge of overseeing the day-to-day running and management. However, the authority needs to work closely with government officials to ensure coordinated and collaborative efforts. The Chamber of Commerce and/or the Tourism Boards will play a role in the recreational and tourist aspects of the waterfront management. Other public service divisions such as police, fire protection and parking authorities will play important roles. Established merchants, associations and recreational clubs will be involved along with special interest groups. Coordination and communication among all these various functions will be crucial to the management and success of the waterfront and the community as a whole. There must also be a sharing of costs. Waterfront areas are "high maintenance": They frequently require additional municipal resources (security, lighting, sweeping). We have found that the use of Business Improvement District arrangements is an excellent approach to resolving this issue.

V. In Conclusion

As communities seek to enhance their downtowns, those with waterfronts find themselves in a unique position to offer something special to citizens and visitors. Finding ways to make the waterfront an essential part of the downtown is a challenge to small and mid sized communities, but also a great opportunity to build upon their unique culture and history. This section has provided several examples of towns that have each found a special way to meet the needs of their downtown by providing amenities at the water's edge. These waterfront developments have been successful in bringing more people of all ages to the community and to the downtown.