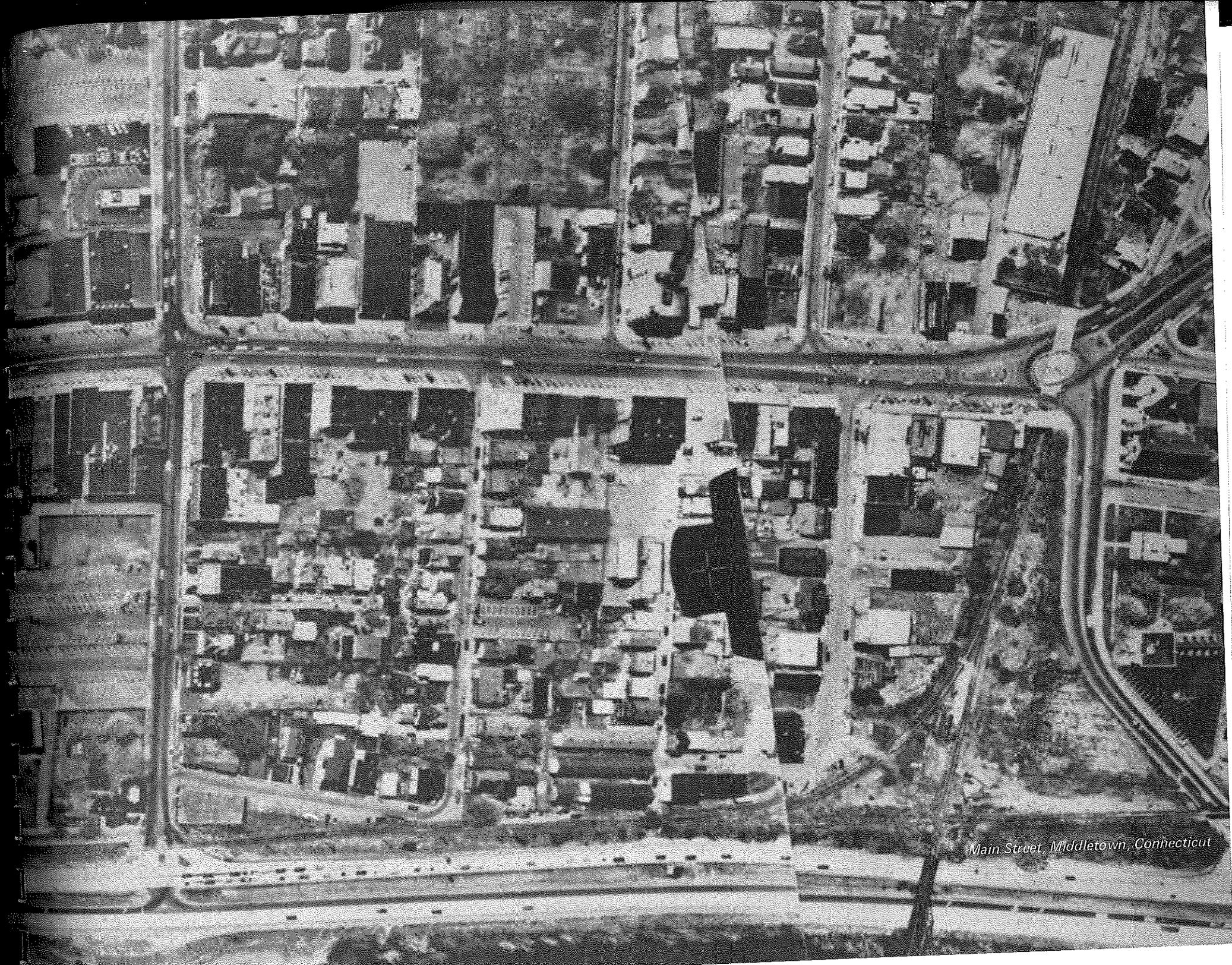


Main St. Design

Middletown, Connecticut



Main Street, Middletown, Connecticut

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Middletown, Connecticut

Prepared for the
**Municipal Development Committee
of the Middletown City Council**

and the
Middletown Redevelopment Agency

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Introduction

The following report presents a proposed design concept for Main Street prepared under the auspices of the Municipal Development Committee of the City Council and the Redevelopment Agency and developed with a technical committee – the Downtown Planning Committee – comprised of the various City staff and commission members listed on the following page. Prepared in response to long-standing concern over the function and character of Main Street, the concept is a key element in the planning framework for all of downtown Middletown.

The plans and designs which follow are preliminary in terms of specific detail but establish the basic layout proposed for Main Street in terms of pavement width, parking locations, traffic flow, sidewalk width and landscaping locations. Upon agreement as to the basic plan, detailed design plans will be prepared as the basis for final engineering drawings.

DOWNTOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE
Middletown, Connecticut

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Contents

Background and Groundrules	1
Main Street Design	3
Union Street to College Street	7
College Street to Washington Street	9
Washington Street to the Arrigoni Bridge	13
Private Participation	15
Traffic Circulation and Parking	17
Next Steps	21

Background & Groundrules

Background

Main Street has been the subject of much concern and many plans over the past twenty years due to the evident problems of traffic, parking, and pedestrian conflict. Despite this concern, few changes have occurred on Main Street and the problems persist. Traffic flow is hampered by cars backing out of angled parking spaces; vehicles waiting to park obscure vision; and pedestrians must traverse over 80 feet of pavement to cross Main Street. In addition, parked cars, continuous paved areas, disorganized signs, and unrelated facades contribute to the cluttered, unattractive appearance of Middletown's main shopping street.

Two programs now in progress provide the opportunity to create a more attractive Main Street designed for shoppers and pedestrians while also meeting parking and traffic circulation needs.

1.

New streets to be constructed in the Metro South Urban Renewal Project will, for the first time, provide continuous traffic movement parallel to Main Street south of Washington Street. These streets – (a) DeKoven Drive extension south across Union Street to Sumner Street and East Main Street, (b) Broad Street extended to South Main Street and (c) alignment of Church and Union Streets – will permit the diversion of through traffic from Main Street. Although the long-standing need for improved access from Route 9 will still be required to complete the downtown circulation system, these new streets will improve traffic flow within the downtown area.

2.

The expansion of off-street parking areas on either side of Main Street, in conjunction with improved pedestrian access from these parking areas to Main Street, will relieve much of the pressure to park on the street. If, as contemplated, off-street parking is made free to the shopper, Main Street can be confined to strictly short term use.

Groundrules

A number of basic groundrules were established prior to the start of design. These established the scope of the design options and were deemed necessary for the development of a plan which could be implemented in the near future.

1.

Although Main Street will continue to carry some vehicular traffic, volumes should be reduced to the extent possible. Drivers who do not have a downtown destination should have a convenient alternate route, thus leaving Main Street to shoppers.

2.

Parking on Main Street will be retained where necessary and appropriate.

3.

The modified traffic circulation plan must not be dependent on any new streets other than those to be constructed under the Metro South Renewal Project, since no specific program for providing other new streets has been developed.

4.

Although traffic flow characteristics north of Washington Street require a different street cross-section, the same design theme should be utilized for all of Main Street.

5.

The design treatment of building facades along Main Street should be considered as part of the total design plan. Participation of private property owners in the overall improvement program should be encouraged.

Main Street Design

Several alternate concepts for Main Street were considered under the established groundrules. The concept finally agreed upon was chosen for a variety of reasons, many of them practical considerations necessary if the plan is to achieve maximum value with the least possible expense. All of the following factors were ingredients in the selected concept.

1.

Changes in existing features such as curb lines, center line crown, drainage patterns, and existing utilities were kept to a minimum so that the largest possible proportion of expenditures would be devoted to visible improvements.

2.

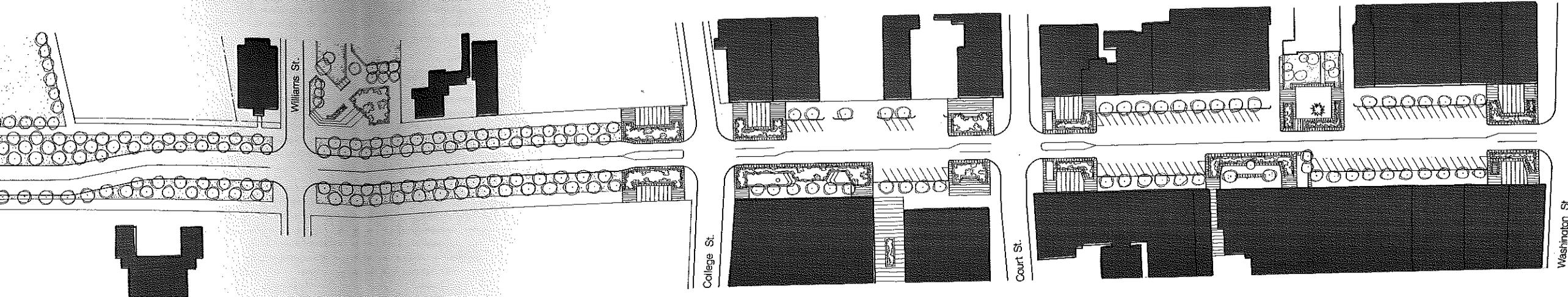
Since all of the improvements north of College Street will require local financing (the two blocks south of College Street are within the Metro South Project) the plan can be staged in accord with available funds. Therefore, each stage can be done well rather than having to spread limited funds thinly over the entire area.

3.

Since various segments of Main Street have a different character and function, the design is flexible enough to adapt to each.

The Design Concept

The design concept for Main Street is divided into three major sections.

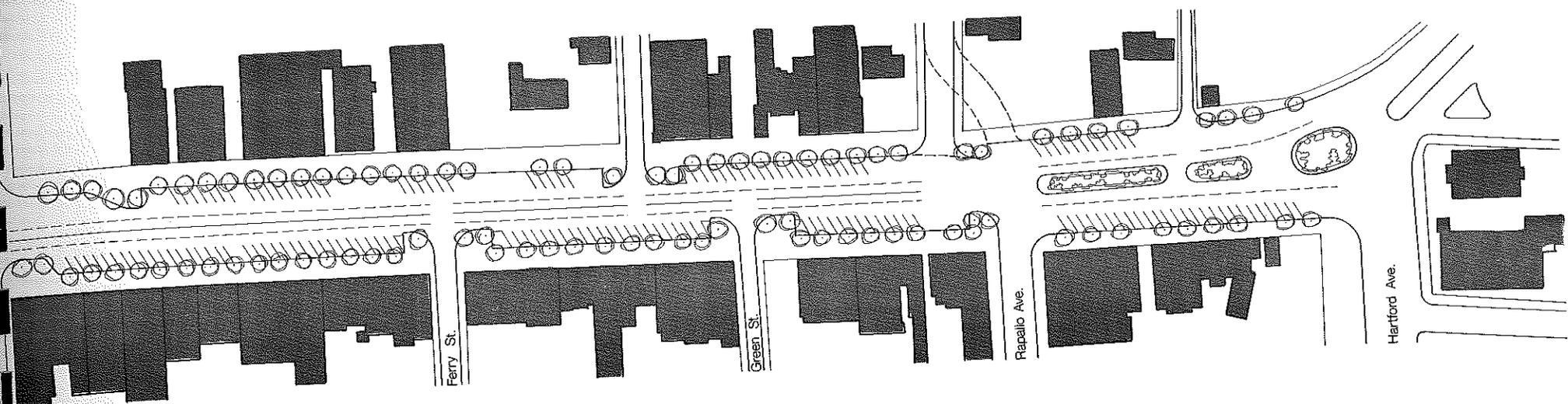


Williams St.

College St.

Court St.

Washington St.

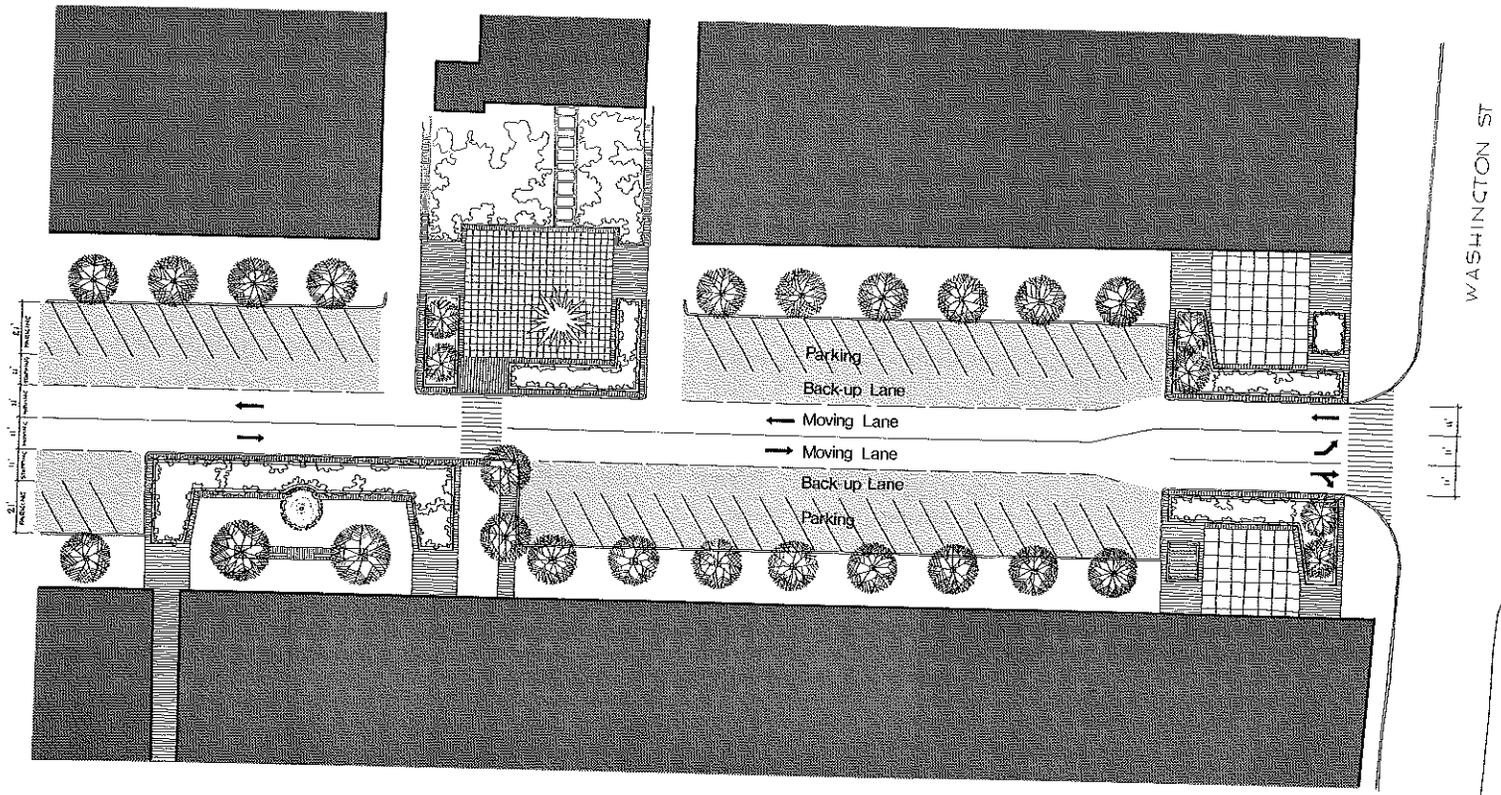


Plan showing the design concept for Main Street from Union Street to the Arrigoni Bridge.

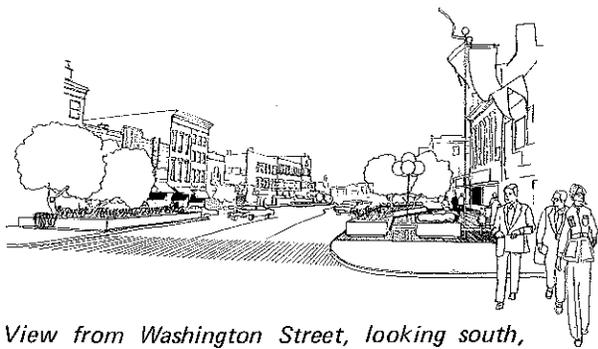
Union Street to College Street

This entire section is within the Metro South Project; its theme would be a continuation of South Green. From an offset alignment opposite Main Street Extension, a 40-foot roadway would swing to the present center line and continue north to College Street. One traffic lane in each direction would be provided plus an eight foot "breakdown" lane on each side. At the southern end, South Green will be enlarged some 50-feet to the east. As the roadway aligns with the present center line, a 20-foot grass mall on either side of the street will replace the area now used for angle parking and separate the street from the present sidewalks which will be repaired. A double row of trees will be planted in the grassed area on either side of the street and will very much resemble the park along Washington Street as an entrance to downtown.

Since all but a few of the existing buildings on either side of Main Street will be replaced with new development providing its own off-street parking, no parking on Main Street is required. The tree lined malls will provide an attractive foreground for the Middlesex Historical Society, the Baptist Church and the Armory as well as for new development in Metro South.



Detailed plan of a typical section of Main Street showing widened sidewalk areas, landscaping, parking, and traffic lanes.



View from Washington Street, looking south, showing reduced width of pedestrian crossing.

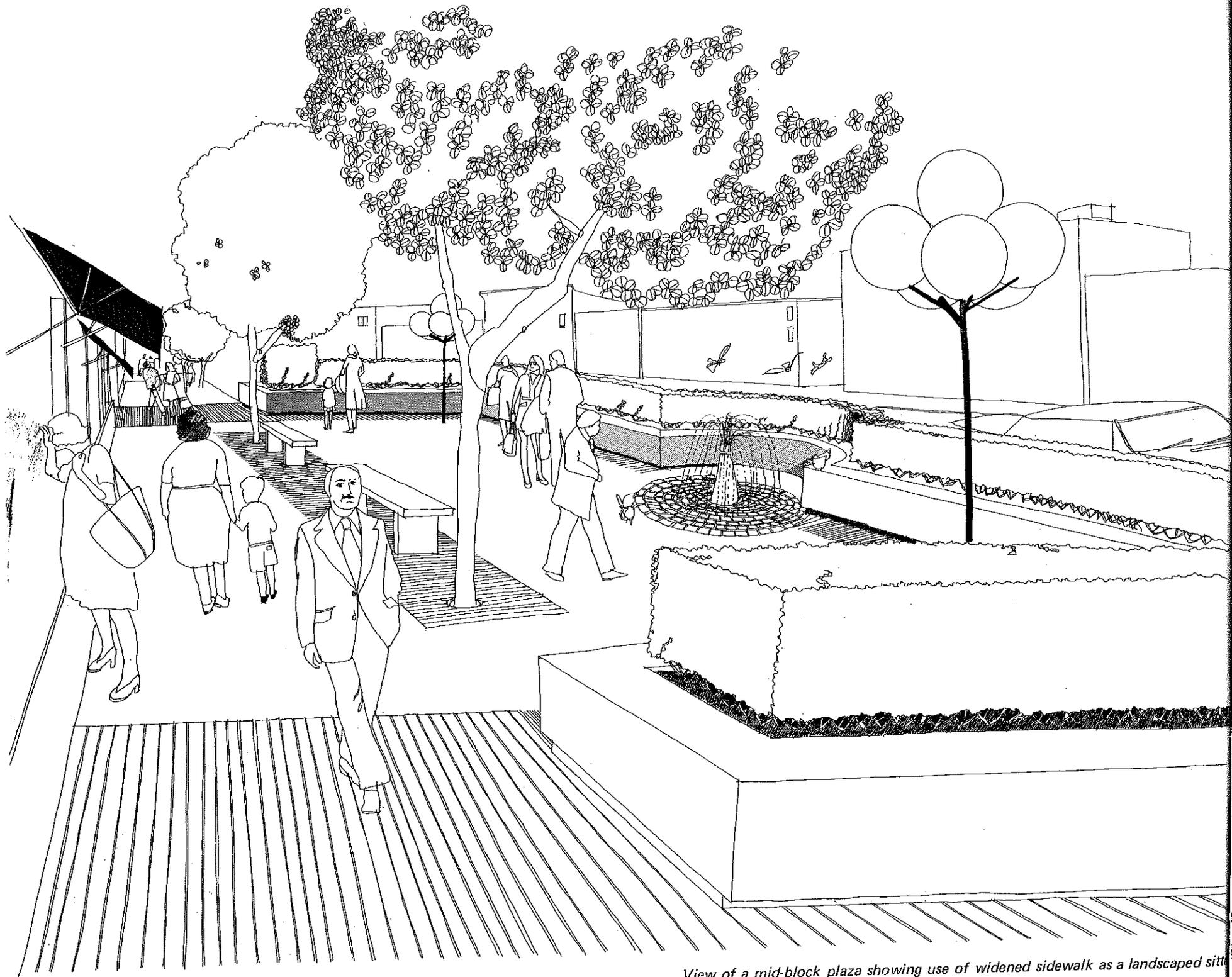
College Street to Washington Street

Main Street in this section is almost solidly lined with buildings; pedestrian activity is greatest here. The plan provides a series of pedestrian plazas in this section — created by widening the sidewalk area into the space now used for angle parking — located at each of the eight street corners as well as mid-block between Court and Washington Streets. Each plaza would be about 40 feet wide and vary in length depending upon its specific location.

The corner locations were selected in order to properly channel traffic, to reduce the street width a pedestrian must cross, and to achieve high visibility not only along Main Street but also from the cross streets as well. The two mid-block locations were chosen to provide a pedestrian crossing point at the center of this long block. The plaza on the west will extend the green in front of the Holy Trinity Church to create a central open square suitable for a variety of activities; the plaza on the east will be connected to a pedestrian walk leading to the Columbus Plaza parking areas.

Each plaza will be individually designed to include such items as benches, trees, planters, fountains, covered shelters, and lighting. The existing sidewalks next to each plaza will also be incorporated by use of similar paving and landscape materials. In between these plazas, the existing curb lines and sidewalk areas would be retained, although additional trees would be planted along the curbs.

One 12-foot lane of traffic would be permitted in either direction. Where angle parking is provided there would be an eleven foot stopping lane between the parking and the travel lane. At the corners, 33 feet of pavement would be provided to permit a separate left turn lane.



View of a mid-block plaza showing use of widened sidewalk as a landscaped sitting area



A view of Holy Trinity Church showing how the front lawn can be enlarged to create a small square.

Washington Street to the Arrigoni Bridge

This section is controlled by the Connecticut DOT and carries substantially more traffic than the two southern sections; therefore, changes in the basic street layout have been kept to a minimum. At the corners, where parking is now prohibited, small landscaped areas have been extended from the existing curbs to continue the theme established between College and Washington Streets. Additional trees will be planted along the sidewalks and the same "street furniture" — planters, lights, benches, etc. — will be used here as are used south of Washington Street.



existing



Suggested design

Suggested treatment of building fronts along Main Street to illustrate the affect of coordinated sign and facade design.

Private Participation

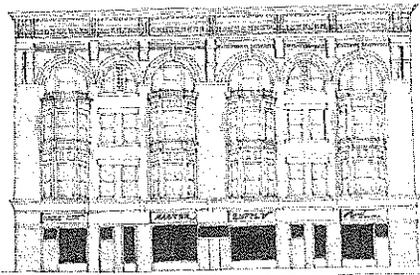


existing

The character of Main Street is by no means confined to the appearance of the public right-of-way. Equally important are the buildings on either side which enclose the street.

Although there are many fine buildings on either side of the street, the total appearance of Main Street is somewhat chaotic despite some individual attempts at design improvements. Some of the most obvious appearance problems are due to (1) the size, design and location of signs; (2) storefront "modernizations" which ignore or attempt to cover up the original building facade; (3) the use of inappropriate colors and (4) incompatible treatment of adjacent buildings.

The City has limited control over these aspects of Main Street and it is not within the scope of this project to suggest detailed design treatment for all of the building facades on Main Street. However, it must be recognized that a successful Main Street improvement program is dependent upon the participation of private property owners as well as the City. A number of sketches have been prepared to indicate possible treatment of existing facades which would enhance their appearance and complement the public improvements to Main Street.



Suggested design

Traffic Circulation & Parking

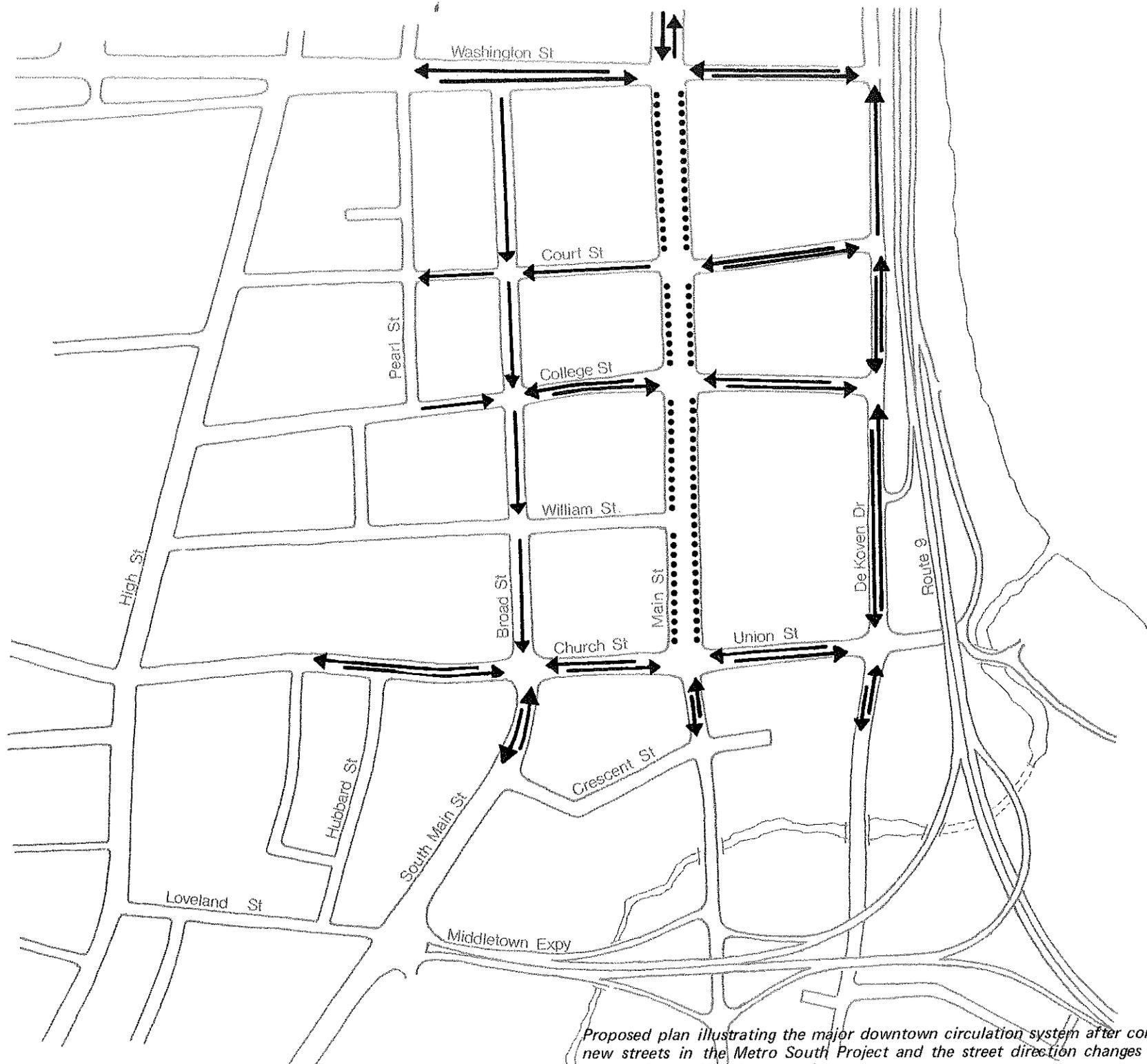
Traffic Circulation

Traffic flow on Main Street has been the subject of much study over the years; proposals have varied substantially depending upon the particular objective at the time. Plans to eliminate angle parking and provide center islands for left turns were geared toward getting maximum traffic capacity; other plans, which precluded through traffic flow, were aimed at creating the best pedestrian environment.

The proposed design concept for Main Street represents a compromise between these two extremes. Through traffic on Main Street will be discouraged, although permitted, and encouraged to use parallel streets instead. By proper use of signal timing, signs, and traffic regulations, Main Street will be oriented primarily to that traffic which has a particular purpose or destination there.

For the concept to be successful, acceptable traffic flow characteristics must be maintained after its completion without dependence on such indefinite projects as Route 9 improvements or the downtown "loop" north of Washington Street. The changes in traffic patterns that will result from Metro South street improvements, the Washington Street widening and the Main Street design were analyzed and traffic movements were redistributed on the revised street system. The data used for this study were gathered from previous studies and existing sources. No new traffic counts were taken due to cost limitations and street construction projects in process which altered normal traffic patterns.

The results of this analysis indicate that the traffic changes described below are needed to accommodate traffic flow adequately upon implementation of the Main Street design in conjunction with a coordinated system of signal timing and traffic regulations. All other streets will continue to function as they do now.



Proposed plan illustrating the major downtown circulation system after construction of new streets in the Metro South Project and the street direction changes necessary to accomplish the Main Street design concept.

1.
Broad Street and DeKoven Drive should become one-way streets to increase their capacity and to reduce turning conflicts. Southbound Broad Street and northbound DeKoven Drive would be signaled to allow free moving flow as an alternate to Main Street. The exception to this basic one-way pattern would be DeKoven Drive between Court Street and Union Street. While two lanes would flow northbound, one southbound lane would permit shoppers parked in the major parking areas between Main Street and DeKoven Drive to return to the south without having to use Main or Broad Streets. The affects of maintaining two way traffic on Broad and DeKoven were examined and it was determined that the additional turns permitted would result in excessive delays, particularly at the intersection of Broad and Washington Streets.

2.
The left turn from Washington Street westbound to Main Street southbound would be prohibited to improve traffic flow and divert some traffic from Main Street. Several left turns from Main Street would also be prohibited.

3.
As part of the Metro South project, Church Street and Union Street will be realigned to intersect opposite each other in front of the YMCA and will provide a continuous two-way street from the river to the west.

It must be recognized that the street improvements to be constructed in the Metro South Project must be completed before the above traffic plan can be implemented and before the Main Street design can begin construction.

Parking

Parking has always been an important function of Main Street as well as one of its major problems. As discussed previously, the design plan recognizes that, in certain areas, Main Street parking is necessary. North of Washington Street, parking will remain essentially as it is. From Washington to College Street some 85 of the approximately 120 existing spaces will be retained. However, conflicts with moving traffic will be substantially reduced since through traffic volumes will be less and the present traffic lane adjacent to the angled parking will become a stopping and back-up lane instead.

The long term future of downtown depends on implementation of the proposed off-street parking program. As additional, well located parking areas are created, it may become possible to remove additional parking spaces from Main Street where appropriate.

Next Steps

The design concept for Main Street described in this report has been developed to the point of a basic design plan. A traffic plan to accommodate related circulation changes has been prepared. Before proceeding further, the various affected public agencies and private organizations, as well as the general public, must be brought up to date and given an opportunity to react to the proposal.

Although any plan which suggests such a dramatic change to Main Street is not apt to gain unanimous support, there must be general understanding of the proposal in order to evaluate its potential benefits. The considered opinions of a well-informed public may well contribute to a more successful design.

After public review, and perhaps modification, of the design concept, it will then be necessary to prepare detailed plans on which accurate costs can be based. At the same time, those design or traffic elements which require further refinement can be pursued.