

America Downtown[®]

New Thinking. New Life.

New London

Downtown Action Agenda 2001



National League of Cities

HyattPalma

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ***New London Downtown Action Agenda 2001*** was defined by HyettPalma, Inc. The ***New London Downtown Action Agenda*** is based on:

- Discussions held with many members of both the private and public sectors of New London;
- Data collected by the City's staff;
- The results of a retail, office, and housing market analysis completed for Downtown; and
- The professional and technical expertise of HyettPalma, Inc.

A summary of the ***New London Downtown Action Agenda 2001*** appears below.

■ **Downtown New London Today**

Two surveys were conducted as a part of this project to gauge the health of Downtown New London as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners and managers of businesses located in the project area and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary trade area. A summary of the survey responses follows.

• ***Use of Downtown***

Approximately one-third of residents surveyed reported coming to Downtown with considerable frequency -- 34% said they come Downtown between 1 and 7 times a week.

• ***Purpose of Trips***

When asked why they currently come to Downtown New London, the top two responses were cited with almost equal frequency. These were "eating in

restaurants" (mentioned by 22% of respondents) and "shopping" (21%). Therefore, 43%, or just under half of those surveyed, said they primarily come Downtown at this time to eat and shop.

- ***Shopping Area of Choice***

Those surveyed were asked where they do most of their family shopping at this time, other than grocery shopping. Almost half of residents -- 48% -- said they do most of their shopping in Waterford. This included 43% who said they shop primarily at Crystal Mall and 5% who said they shop in Waterford, in general.

The next most frequently cited shopping venue was Wal-Mart, cited by 18% of those surveyed. It should be noted that there are two Wal-Mart stores located in the New London area, one in Waterford and the other in Groton.

Therefore, a full two-thirds of residents surveyed (66%) said they do most of their family shopping in Waterford or at a Wal-Mart.

- ***Downtown Characteristics***

Residents and business owners surveyed were asked to rate a list of 19 Downtown characteristics as being "good," "fair," or "poor" at this time.

Three characteristics were rated "good" by a majority of residents and four characteristics were rated "good" by a majority of business owners. In addition, one characteristic was rated "good" by just under a majority (50%) of residents and two were rated "good" by 50% of business owners.

All of these characteristics are shown below.

The two characteristics rated "good" by a majority of both residents and business owners were:

- The quality of restaurants (64% residents, 60% business owners); and

- Helpfulness of salespeople (60% residents, 70% business owners).

The third characteristic rated "good" by a majority of residents was rated "good" by 50% -- just under a majority -- of business owners. This was:

- The variety of Downtown restaurants (56% residents, 50% business owners).

The other two characteristics rated "good" by a majority of business owners were:

- Prices at restaurants (53% business owners, 46% residents); and
- Knowledge of salespeople (53% business owners, 45% residents).

Finally, residents and business owners agreed on the last characteristic rated "good" by 50% of both groups. This was:

- The quality of Downtown service businesses (50% residents, 50% business owners).

- ***Downtown Improvements***

Residents and business owners were asked to rate a list of possible Downtown improvements as being "very important," "somewhat important," or "not important" at this time.

Six improvements were rated "very important" by a majority of residents and seven received this rating from a majority of business owners. And, the six improvements rated "very important" by a majority of residents were among those rated "very important" by a majority of business owners. The improvements rated "very important" by a majority of both residents and business owners were:

- Recruit additional retail businesses (64% residents, 80% business owners);

- Increase the variety of retail goods (67% residents, 67% business owners);
- Improve the appearance of Downtown buildings (57% residents, 74% business owners);
- Improve the convenience of parking (57% residents, 67% business owners);
- Improve the cleanliness of the area (55% residents, 59% business owners); and
- Improve the availability of parking (53% residents, 60% business owners).

The one improvement rated “very important” by a majority of business owners, but not residents, was:

- Improve the quality of retail goods (53% business owners, 45% residents).

In addition, a significant percentage of residents (50%) and business owners (47%) said it is “very important” to improve the feeling of Downtown safety.

Finally, a significant percentage of business owners (50%) said it is “very important” to improve Downtown traffic flow (as opposed to 40% of residents).

When asked what else could be done to increase their patronage of Downtown, residents stressed the importance of:

- Waterfront activities;
- Activities for children and families;

- Entertainment and culture; and
- Restored buildings.

In terms of specific businesses, residents expressed a desire primarily for:

- Music, art and culture;
- Apparel stores for women, men and children;
- Bookstores;
- A movie theater;
- Unique, specialty shops; and
- Restaurants.

■ **Downtown New London Tomorrow**

A series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings were held to define the community's preferred vision of Downtown New London -- as it would ideally exist in the year 2008. Those participating in the sessions said that, by the year 2008, Downtown New London would be a vibrant area -- and a "success" -- that local residents would be "happy to bring our visiting guests and relatives to." This vibrancy would be built "on our uniqueness -- we're a working port."

Vision session participants agreed that "we've made great progress in Downtown." Examples of progress cited included past plans, recent investments, "good restaurants that you have to wait to get into," and good businesses. Now, this progress would be leveraged -- making Downtown New London even more appealing to customers and users.

Downtown would be clean, well-maintained, beautiful, and aesthetically appealing. This would include:

- Clean walks;
- Grassy areas;
- "Flowers spilling out of window boxes and planters all year-round;"
- "More responsible snow removal" -- on the part of both the public and private sectors so that snow is not piled onto curbs by the City and is shoveled from walks by property owners;
- Storefronts that are renovated and well-maintained by "landlords who have pride in their properties" and "who feel a sense of ownership and care for the community;"
- "Comfortable" illumination at night; and
- "Illumination coming from buildings" in the evening.

By the year 2008, Downtown's buildings would be filled with the following uses:

- Retail shops -- both "utilitarian" stores and destination stores -- that attract both visitors and local residents;
- Restaurants and other food establishments -- such as a permanent farmers market -- that attract locals and visitors;
- "A lot of residents" living in the upper floors of Downtown buildings, who would be able to have "all their support and entertainment needs met in Downtown;"
- Support services for residents, such as a grocery store and drugstore;

- Culture -- art, theater, dance, music, museums, bookstores, coffee shops, etc.;
- Events -- such as music in the park and a jazz festival;
- Education -- such as dance, pottery, and quilting classes as well as the presence of Connecticut College and Mitchell College;
- Professional offices in upper stories;
- Banking and finance;
- Legal services;
- Government offices; and
- High-tech businesses.

To support this mix of uses, Downtown would have:

- Parking that is safe and well-lighted so people "feel safe to park and walk to where they're going," whether that is shopping, eating, browsing, or to the waterfront;
- Traffic flow that makes it "easy to get to and around Downtown" and that does not "direct you out of Downtown on a one-way street;"
- Fewer social services; and
- A marketing plan that conveys all the success and excitement that can be found in Downtown New London.

By the year 2008, Downtown New London would be widely known as having the following image.

*A vibrant, charming, and historical
waterfront Downtown that is filled with New England charm.*

*A wonderful environment that is
healthy, beautiful, inviting, and thriving.*

*A pedestrian-oriented, bike-friendly,
and pet-friendly Downtown
that is busy and crowded with lots of people.*

*A creative, innovative, and inclusive Downtown
where the individuals of the City
get to express themselves.*

*A welcoming Downtown
that embodies and honors
ethnic, racial, social, and economic diversity.*

*A safe, clean, and appealing Downtown that is
the cultural center of New London County
and Southeastern Connecticut.*

*A place people would seek out to visit
along with other
tourist attractions in the region.*

*A fun place where
all kinds of people
are going all kinds of places
at all times of the day and night
and having a great time.*

***A quirky and colorful Downtown
that is "uniquely New London."***

■ **Downtown Retail Market Opportunities**

Taking steps to further enhance Downtown New London, and barring a significant decline in the national or regional retail economy, it is conservatively anticipated that Downtown may have the potential to support the filling/development of between approximately 50,000 and 80,000 net square feet of additional retail space by the year 2008 -- which could include expansions or sales increases by existing Downtown New London retail businesses and/or the construction of some limited amount of new retail space.

■ **Downtown Office Market Opportunities**

It is estimated that approximately 75,000 to 100,000 square feet of additional office space (15% to 20% increase) could potentially be supported in Downtown New London between now and the year 2008. This represents an increase in demand based on the expected continued enhancement of the area. And, as previously noted with retail growth potential, this square footage increase should be considered as an economic development goal of Downtown New London.

■ **Downtown Housing Market Opportunities**

Every effort should be made, consistent with the implementation of the overall Downtown enhancement program, to introduce more quality, market-rate housing in Downtown New London -- particularly housing in the upper floors of appropriate buildings located on Bank and State Streets and introduced in free-standing townhouse and garden housing complexes and mixed-use structures in the balance of the commercial district. When possible, the development of housing which offers views of the Thames River would be most appropriate and unquestionably very attractive to homeowners.

In addition, every effort should be made to maintain the highest level of single-family homes in proximity to Downtown New London.

Rather than placing arbitrary or artificial limits on the number of housing units appropriate for Downtown New London -- and in the neighborhoods near the commercial district -- it is suggested that the absorption of units in the marketplace be used as the indicator of demand. And, that every effort be made to develop the greatest number of market-rate units possible in and near Downtown when market conditions allow.

■ **Recommended Strategies**

The ***New London Downtown Action Agenda 2001*** contains two sets of recommended strategies:

- A ***Development Framework*** which should be used to direct and manage Downtown's future character; and
- A ***Course of Action*** which should be implemented -- by both the private and public sectors -- to create the best possible future for Downtown New London.

Both are summarized below.

Development Framework

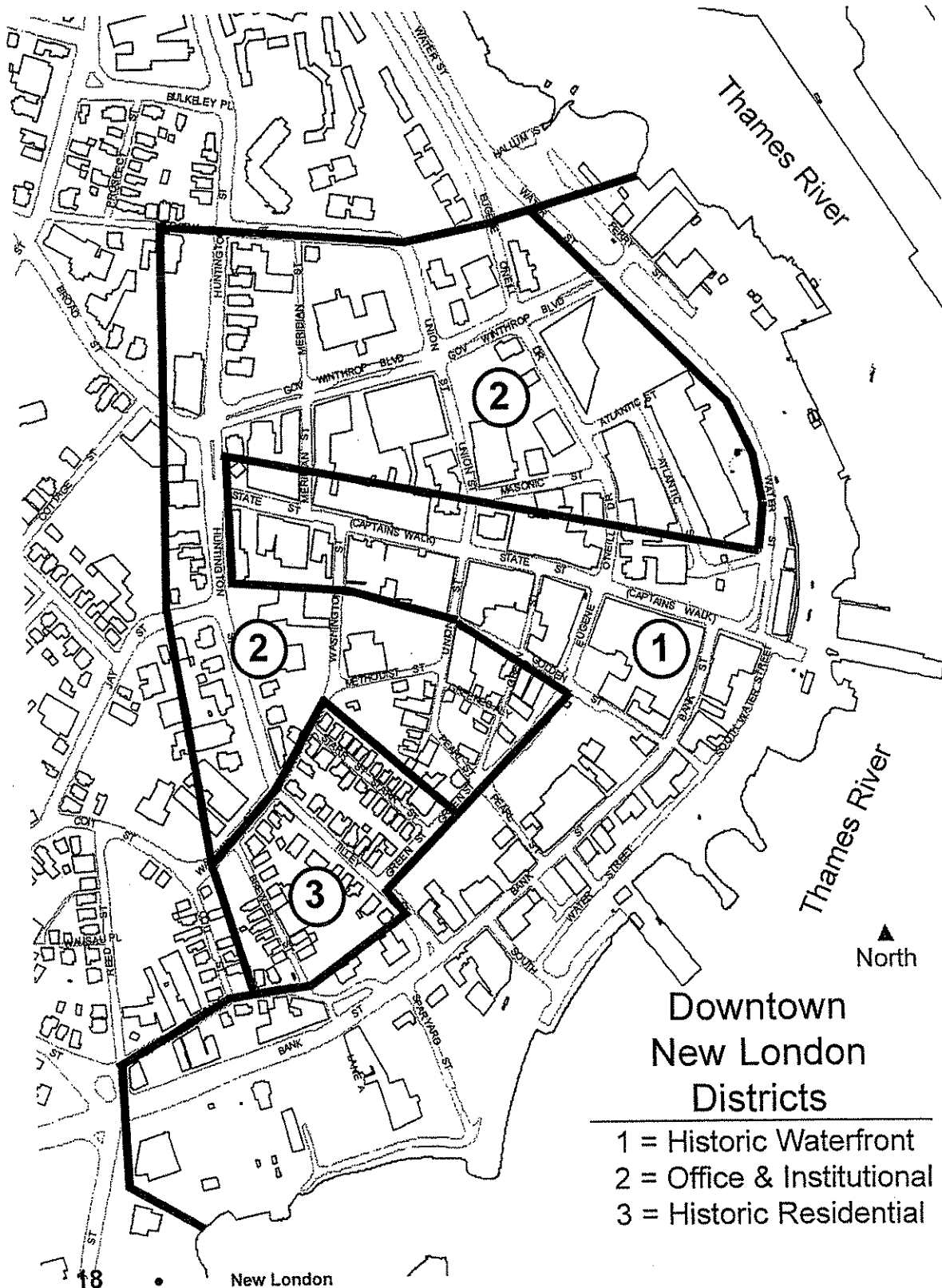
The following ***Development Framework*** should be used to ensure Downtown's future as an economically vibrant commercial district.

Markets

Downtown New London should be enhanced in a manner that makes it an appealing destination for **both** area-wide residents and area-wide visitors.

Districts

Downtown New London should be enhanced to create and reinforce the three districts discussed below and shown on the following map.



**Downtown
New London
Districts**

- 1 = Historic Waterfront
- 2 = Office & Institutional
- 3 = Historic Residential

- ***Historic Waterfront District***

The Historic Waterfront District -- the virtual heart of historic Downtown New London -- should contain a cluster of art, entertainment, food, and specialty retail uses in first floor building spaces, with market-rate housing and offices in the upper floors.

- ***Office & Institutional District***

The Office & Institutional District should continue to be strengthened as an appropriate location in Downtown New London for offices, institutional uses, lodging, and limited convenience retail uses, with additional market-rate, multi-family housing developed in free-standing buildings and in the upper floors of mixed-use buildings.

- ***Historic Residential District***

The Historic Residential District is an appropriate location for both single-family and low-density multi-family housing. Every effort should continue to be made to preserve the historic single-family housing clustered in the district.

Destination Downtown

Downtown's Historic Waterfront District should be heavily marketed to both area residents and visitors. This is essential since it is the uses contained in this district which will make Downtown New London a stronger and more appealing destination.

Focus Area

For the next three to five years, the Downtown enhancement effort must be focused on Bank and State Streets within the Historic Waterfront District. This is critical since it is the health of these streets which will dictate the public's perception of Downtown New London as whole.

Downtown Casino

There has been some discussion locally of developing a casino at the location of State Pier. Locating a casino in or near a Downtown can have a negative impact on that Downtown's businesses if:

- Tourists can have all of their gaming, food, entertainment, and shopping desires met within the confines of the casino -- thereby making it unnecessary for them to patronize "outside" businesses; and
- Local patronage of Downtown businesses -- especially of food and entertainment venues -- decreases as residents satisfy their food, entertainment, and shopping needs within the casino complex.

If it is decided to locate a casino on State Pier, the following steps should be considered, and implemented, before the casino becomes a reality -- in order to mitigate any negative impact it might have on Downtown and to, hopefully, create positive economic spinoffs for Downtown's businesses and entertainment venues.

- The casino complex should be designed to be as visually open and externally-oriented as possible -- to afford users a view of Downtown and the perception that Downtown is accessible.
- Care should be taken to limit, or not allow, types of retail businesses traditionally found in a Downtown -- and recommended for Downtown New London in this document -- to locate within the walls of the casino complex.
- A clear strategy should be developed, and agreed upon in advance by the Downtown Partnership and the casino developers, for marketing Downtown to the casino's users, hotel guests, conventioners, and others being served by the complex.
- A plan should be devised for mitigating traffic congestion that will occur in Downtown as a result of the casino's presence.
- Any parking facilities created for the casino should be located in a way that does not create an actual or psychological barrier between the casino and Downtown.

- Since the casino complex would have an impact on Downtown's economy, the City should consider earmarking a portion of any funds received from the casino for use in Downtown's enhancement. And, the City should dedicate those funds to Downtown annually -- for as many years as revenue flows from the casino to the City.

Course of Action

The following **Course of Action** should be implemented, by both the private and public sectors, to attain the community's vision for Downtown New London and to capture the economic opportunities identified in the Downtown market analysis.

Business Retention

Every effort should be made to provide the greatest level of assistance possible to Downtown New London's existing businesses to enable the businesses to better serve the marketplace and make them as profitable as possible.

- ***One-On-One Consultations***

Personalized, one-on-one assistance should be offered to every existing business in Downtown New London. This is one of the most beneficial technical assistance services that can be provided to small business owners to meet their individual business needs. This should be provided by New London Main Street staff meeting individually with business owners -- on a regular basis.

- ***Window Lighting and Displays***

All first-floor businesses in the Historic Waterfront District -- whether retail businesses, food establishments, service businesses, or cultural venues -- should keep their display window lights on until 11:00 PM, seven nights a week. Window displays should be kept clean and fresh by changing displays on a regular basis.

- ***Personalized Customer Service***

In order to distinguish Downtown New London businesses as different in the minds of the buying public -- meaning different from businesses in larger commercial

centers -- every effort should be made by Downtown businesses to offer the highest level of personalized customer service.

- ***Market Information***

As the overall enhancement program unfolds, any additional market information generated should be immediately shared with Downtown's existing businesses to help them better serve and take advantage of the opportunities found in the dynamic trade area.

- ***Incentives***

All incentives -- financial and technical -- which are offered by the City, State of Connecticut, New London Main Street, Connecticut Main Street Center, and any other providers -- should be heavily marketed to all of Downtown's existing businesses.

- ***Farmers Market***

Downtown is fortunate to have a Farmers Market at this time. However, the market should be further strengthened by:

- Increasing the offerings of the market;
- Making the hours of operation more convenient for area residents who work -- such as operating the market on Saturday and/or Sunday; and
- Relocation of the market to a more visible location, such as a portion of the new Waterfront Park or a re-designed Parade.

- ***Outdoor Dining***

Every effort should be made to provide the maximum amount of outdoor dining space during the warmer months -- including at locations with and without views of the water.

Business Recruitment

The following business recruitment strategy should be aggressively implemented by New London Main Street, in cooperation with the City of New London.

- ***Only Quality Businesses***

A concerted effort should be made to attract the highest quality businesses possible for Downtown New London, consistent with the range of businesses identified as appropriate in the market analysis.

- ***Independents vs. Nationals***

While national chain businesses may seek space in Downtown New London as the area becomes stronger over time, it is more likely that Downtown New London will always be an extremely attractive location for independent businesses.

- ***Initial Target Businesses and Uses***

Initially, the following types of businesses should be targeted for additional openings or expansion in Downtown New London:

- Small variety store;
- Art galleries, studios and framing;
- Antiques;
- Restaurants, particularly restaurants with ethnic offerings, entertainment, and outdoor dining space, both with and without water views;
- Home furnishings and accessories;
- Casual apparel and shoes (family); and
- Housing and offices (in upper floors).

- **Target Area**

Initially, attention should be targeted to the attraction and placement of appropriate businesses in the Historic Waterfront District of Downtown New London.

- **Recruitment Materials**

Working with the local real estate community and property owners, a packet of information should be prepared that can be provided to prospects.

- **Offer All Incentives to Prospects**

All incentives offered through the enhancement effort -- from all sources -- should be extended to qualified, appropriate new business prospects.

- **Anchors**

It must be realized that, for the most part, Downtown's draws will continue to consist of small businesses and venues that revolve around art, entertainment, food, and specialty retail -- as well as amenities such as the Waterfront Park. When such uses are increased in number and clustered for easy pedestrian access, they will then -- as a group -- act as anchors which successfully attract an increasing number of area residents and visitors to Downtown.

- **Proposed International Shops**

A considerable effort has been made by the New London Citizens Community Council over the past several years to establish a sizable number of international shops in Downtown New London. In order to further test the market for international businesses and, at the same time, provide an opportunity to grow the concept in the Downtown marketplace, it is suggested that the scope of the original proposal be modified by initially opening a shop or shops in one building, with multiple vendors offering international goods in portions of the store -- similar to the method employed by many antique malls -- or with one vendor offering a broad range of international products.

Housing Development

The introduction of additional quality housing in Downtown New London will help to create a more viable, vibrant 24/7/365 environment in the commercial district and elevate Downtown to its former status as New London's #1 neighborhood.

- ***Market-Rate***

In order to broaden the spectrum of Downtown housing units, focus should be placed solely on developing market-rate housing units aimed at attracting middle- and upper-income residents to Downtown New London in order to give the commercial district an appropriate balance of diverse residents.

- ***Ownership***

Most of the housing in Downtown at this time is comprised of rental units. Again, to broaden the diversity of Downtown housing, emphasis should be placed on developing more owner-occupied units – such as condos and co-ops. However, it should be noted that developing market-rate rental units would also be appropriate.

- ***Artist Lofts***

Consideration should be given to developing artist lofts in Downtown. This would be appropriate given the community's desire to encourage more arts and art-related uses in Downtown New London.

- ***Bacon, Crocker, and Cronin Buildings***

Currently, these three Downtown structures are owned by the New London Development Corporation (NLDC). And, it is understood that NLDC has held the properties off the market in order to find quality developers willing to redevelop the properties in a quality manner. This concern for Downtown should be seen as commendable.

The intent of NLDC is to resell the properties to quality developers. And, the community's desire is to see the buildings filled with market-rate housing in the upper floors and quality retail businesses in the first floors. The following steps are recommended to help both NLDC and the community reach these goals.

- Step ①

It would be ideal to market and sell all three structures, as a unit, to a single developer. However, to date, this has proven difficult. Therefore, the investment community should be informed that the properties are available to be sold separately to qualified developers.

- Step ②

To make progress as quickly as possible, the redevelopment of these properties should be started with the smallest and most manageable of the structures -- the Cronin Building. Starting small and working up to the largest and most costly project -- the Crocker Building -- will demonstrate market support for the adaptive use of these structures.

- Step ③

The City Council, NLDC, and all other entities involved in the disposition should agree on the desired uses for the structures. The agreed upon uses should be:

- Market-rate condos, co-ops, and rental units as well as artist lofts in upper stories;
- Retail uses, as well as food, art and culture, in the first floors; and
- Possibly a mixture of market-rate/artist loft housing along with offices in the upper floors of the larger structures.

- Step ④

The City Council, NLDC, and all other involved entities should also agree to insist that the structures be transferred only to qualified developers who are committed to quality projects and the agreed upon uses, with projects completed in a timely manner.

- Step ⑤

It is hoped that Connecticut College, which advanced NLDC the funds to purchase the properties, would be flexible in working with qualified and quality developers. This flexibility might include a willingness to hold the note on the properties and to use the rule of reasonableness regarding asking prices.

- Step ⑥

The properties should be marketed by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP). Doing so will enable the community to use an open process for soliciting and evaluating proposals.

- Step ⑦

In soliciting and selecting developers, preference should be given to seeing ownership of the structures transferred to local developers. Without a doubt, local developers will be more committed to and involved in both Downtown and the community than will absentee owners.

- Step ⑧

It is hoped that NLDC will focus on implementing the steps shown above in order to transfer the properties to qualified, quality developers at the earliest possible date.

Traffic & Parking

Currently, the City of New London is overseeing an analysis of Downtown parking issues and NLDC is overseeing an analysis of Downtown traffic issues. These efforts should include an evaluation of the following.

- ***Parking***

The analysis of Downtown parking should include an evaluation of parking management issues, and not solely an evaluation of issues pertaining to parking supply. A parking expert should be retained to address the following Downtown parking management issues.

- Time limits -- at on-street spaces and in public parking facilities -- and the enforcement of those time limits should be reviewed. The goal of this review should be to make parking time limits and enforcement as user-friendly as possible for Downtown's customers and clients, while ensuring parking turn-over.
- The parking permit system should be reviewed to ensure that it is as user-friendly as possible for Downtown employees.
- Public parking facilities should be made to feel as safe as possible by ensuring that light levels are adequate, by making sure that directional signage to and in the facilities is clear, by ensuring that the facilities are clean, free of potholes, and well-maintained, and by landscaping the surface lot facilities to enhance their appeal.
- ***Traffic Flow***
A traffic engineer should be retained to examine Downtown's one-way streets. The goal of this review would be to return one-way streets to two-way traffic, in all cases possible.
- ***Water Street***
The traffic engineer retained to examine traffic flow should also be asked to recommend ways to improve access to State Street for motorists exiting from Union Station and the ferry terminal.

Public Safety

In actuality, Downtown New London is a very safe area. However, some hold the perception that Downtown is not as safe as it actually is. Therefore, the following actions must be taken to align the public's perception of Downtown safety with the reality of the situation.

- **Lighting**

Light levels in Downtown appear to be adequate at this time. However, some in the community feel Downtown's streets are uncomfortably dark. This should be addressed by the following.

- Connecticut Light & Power should be asked to conduct a lighting audit in Downtown.
- To increase Downtown lighting, Downtown business owners should keep display window lights on in the evening, as suggested earlier in this document.
- A facade lighting program is being discussed locally. This is an excellent idea that should be implemented.

- **Police Presence**

The City's Police Department currently operates highly visible vehicle, foot, bicycle, and motorcycle patrols in Downtown. And, the Police Department has plans to increase patrols as waterfront activity increases. The good work of the New London Police Department should be applauded and encouraged with the goal of continuing to provide a viable, visible, friendly police presence in Downtown at all times.

- **Downtown Guides**

Consideration should be given to initiating a Downtown guide program during the Summer season.

- **Social Service Providers**

Downtown should strive to serve the needs of all income groups. However, Downtown New London should not be the reservoir for the majority of social service agencies serving the residents of New London County. Instead, Downtown's leaders should strive for parity, whereby Downtown would house its fair share of social service providers while expecting neighboring communities to do the same.

Public Improvements

The following public improvements should be implemented in order to improve Downtown's overall "look."

- ***Snow Removal***

Downtown is a center of commerce. As such, Downtown's business establishments cannot thrive unless customers can easily access them all year-round. Therefore, it is suggested that:

- The City consider adopting policies that require snow to be quickly removed from Downtown streets and walks;
- Sand be cleaned from Downtown's streets and walks more frequently than is currently the case;
- Consideration be given to frequent use of a "Green Machine," or similar form of cleaning Downtown's streets and walks on a regular basis; and
- The City government and the City Center District, together and cooperatively, implement the actions listed above to ensure that snow is quickly removed from Downtown walks and streets.

- ***The Parade***

The Parade should be redesigned so that:

- The berm facing Union Station is removed;
- The lines of sight from Union Station and the ferry terminal to State Street are opened; and
- A larger plaza area is created for community gatherings.

- **Beautification**

Working closely with City staff, the City Center District, New London Main Street, New London Garden Club, and New London Development Corporation are currently completing a Downtown Beautification Plan. Every effort should be made to complete and implement the findings of the beautification plan at the earliest possible date.

- **Entrances**

The major entrances to Downtown should be marked with welcome signs that read "Welcome to Historic Downtown New London."

- **Signs**

A wayfinding system of signs is currently being created for the City. This is an excellent initiative. Care should be taken to:

- Coordinate that system with Downtown's welcome signs; and
- Ensure that the wayfinding system includes signs leading motorists to Downtown and then within Downtown to Bank Street, State Street, all of Downtown's major attractions/anchors, Downtown's waterfront, and Downtown parking.

- **Eugene O'Neill**

Consideration should be given to more heavily promoting the fact that New London was the boyhood home of the only U.S. playwright to win the Nobel Prize, Eugene O'Neill. These connections should be stressed by:

- Noting as part of the wayfinding system -- on directional signs leading to the City and on entrance signs to New London -- that this is the "Boyhood Home of Eugene O'Neill;"
- Including in the wayfinding system signs that lead motorists to Downtown haunts which O'Neill frequented; and

- Placing a sign or plaque at Downtown locations connected with O'Neill -- to create "photo ops" for visiting tourists.

Building Improvements

Without a doubt, Downtown New London is home to a treasure trove of historic architecture. Fortunately, the intrinsic value of this architecture is understood and appreciated locally. And, several tools have been created to encourage owners to protect and enhance these structures. The following actions are recommended to bolster those tools.

- ***Incentives***

Currently, the City offers three financial incentives to encourage building improvements in Downtown New London. These are:

- A revolving loan fund;
- A facade matching grant program; and
- A sign grant program.

These are excellent programs which should be strengthened by:

- Increasing the "pot" of funds available for the matching facade grant and sign grant programs;
- Expanding the matching facade grant program to include buildings on Bank and State Streets within Downtown's Historic Waterfront District; and
- Concentrating the use of sign grant funds on Bank and State Streets -- so that a critical mass of improvements becomes more quickly visible.

- **Design Assistance**

Along with the financial incentives now in place, technical assistance should be provided to Downtown's business and property owners in the form of preliminary design assistance.

- **Get the Word Out**

The financial and technical assistance incentives available in Downtown should be more aggressively marketed to Downtown's business and property owners.

Marketing

A well-rounded marketing campaign should be created to tell "the world" about the improvements and investment already underway in Downtown, the Downtown actions programmed through this **Action Agenda**, and Downtown's additional successes, as they are realized in the future. The recommended marketing campaign should build on and include the promotional efforts being implemented by New London Main Street, the Downtown New London Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. In addition, the Downtown marketing campaign should include the following.

- **Joint Ads**

Currently, Downtown business owners participate in joint ads run in conjunction with Downtown festivals. This is a good start. However, to be more effective in yielding the desired results -- that of attracting additional consumers to Downtown -- a joint ad program should be developed that:

- Has ads running on a regular, year-round basis;
- Includes as many Downtown businesses and cultural venues as possible; and
- Includes seeking preferred advertising rates from local media sources.

- **Story Placement**

The buying public perceives stories that appear in newspapers, magazines, and on television and radio as being more unbiased and trustworthy than paid advertising. And, such stories have a tremendous impact on creating -- or recreating -- a Downtown's image. Therefore, along with the joint ad campaign, a concerted effort must be launched to obtain positive coverage from all print and electronic media in the City of New London, New London County, and throughout Southeastern Connecticut.

- **Student and Downtown Resident Focus Groups**

Focus groups should be held with students and Downtown residents to determine how to most successfully attract students to Downtown and to determine how to best engage residents in Downtown's enhancement and encourage their participation in that effort.

- **Newsletter**

Currently, newsletters are being produced by several groups involved in Downtown's enhancement, such as New London Main Street and City Center District. It is suggested that all the primary groups involved in Downtown's enhancement consider coming together to:

- Produce one, joint Downtown newsletter;
- Ensure that it is of excellent and professional quality, in terms of both graphic design and content;
- Publish it on a regular, monthly basis; and
- Distribute it widely to all of Downtown's front line constituents.

- **Web Site**

As with newsletters, several entities involved in Downtown have Web sites -- such as New London Main Street, Sailfest, the New London Development Corporation, and the City of New London -- and several others do not.

Entities operating Downtown-related Web sites should come together to ensure that:

- Their sites are sending out compatible and complementary messages -- and promoting a unified image -- of Downtown;
- The information contained on their sites is consistent with the **Downtown Action Agenda** being implemented; and
- Links between sites are well-established.

- **Special Events**

Currently, two major special events are held in Downtown New London on a regular basis. These are:

- Sailfest, produced by the Downtown New London Association, and a Downtown institution for the last 25 years; and
- The Celebration of Lights and Songs, produced by New London Main Street, and started three years ago.

Consideration should also be given to developing a third special event that would tie into two of the primary economic niches being created in Downtown New London. Specifically, this event should highlight Downtown's art and food offerings -- in the form of an Art and Food Festival.

Ideally, this would result in Downtown becoming well-known for three, annual, signature special events that draw residents and visitors from throughout Southeastern Connecticut, and beyond, thereby putting Downtown New London "on the map."

• ***Map & Guide Distribution***

New London Main Street has recently published a very attractive and informative map and guide for Downtown. The map and guide should be made available at the following locations, at a minimum:

- All ferries running from and to New London;
- Union Station;
- The Garde Arts Center;
- All major special events held in Downtown;
- Connecticut College, Mitchell College, and the US Coast Guard Academy;
- Pfizer's Global Development Center;
- Area-wide lodging facilities;
- Area-wide restaurants;
- Area-wide casinos;
- Area-wide destinations frequented by a large number of tourists; and
- Visitor information centers located along major highways in Southeastern Connecticut.

■ ***Partnership for Success***

The most successful Downtown enhancement efforts nationwide are those that are implemented by a partnership among the private and public sectors. For Downtown New London to reach its full potential, Downtown's key private and public

sector leaders, organizations, and constituents **must** plan together and implement together -- in partnership.

Today, there are many organizations and entities at work on Downtown's enhancement. Those most directly involved in this effort include:

- The Downtown New London Association, which produces Downtown's Sailfest;
- The City Center District, which focuses on maintenance and beautification issues in Downtown;
- New London Main Street, which is implementing the "four point approach" advocated by the Connecticut Main Street Center and the National Main Street Center -- with the four points being Design, Organization, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring;
- The City of New London, whose departments and staff have been very involved in a variety of Downtown issues and projects; and
- The New London Development Corporation, which focuses on real estate development throughout New London and owns several pieces of property located in Downtown New London.

In order to implement the **Downtown Action Agenda** in a timely, quality, and cost-effective manner, the entities listed above must come together in partnership to:

- Increase communication among the groups involved in Downtown's enhancement;
- Establish clear roles and goals among themselves, in terms of implementing the **Downtown Action Agenda** -- so that these entities do not duplicate efforts or waste scarce resources;

- Increase cooperation among the entities;
- Provide strong leadership that raises the public's confidence in Downtown;
- Ensure that a clear and unequivocal marketing message is being sent to the buying public as well as to the investment community;
- Continually reach out and involve the City's residents in Downtown's enhancement, to ensure that the effort is open, inclusive, and is made a community-wide priority;
- Take quality action -- and stimulate quality action by others; and
- Ensure that the ***Downtown Action Agenda*** is implemented in its entirety and at the earliest possible date.

To attain the above, a Downtown Partnership should be formed. The Downtown Partnership should be convened and meet quarterly, on an on-going and regular basis.

The Downtown Partnership should include, as a minimum, the following organizational/public representatives:

- The Board President of the Downtown New London Association;
- The President of the City Center District Board;
- The Board President and CEO of New London Main Street;
- The Board President and CEO of the New London Development Corporation;
- The CEO of the Garde Arts Center;

- The President of New London Landmarks;
- A New London City Council Member -- chosen by Council;
- The City Manager of New London; and
- The City's Director of Development & Planning.

The Downtown Partnership should be convened at the earliest possible date. It would be appropriate for the City -- at the highest levels (e.g., the Mayor and City Council) -- to invite those shown above to convene on a quarterly basis.