

1 New Streets for Downtown North

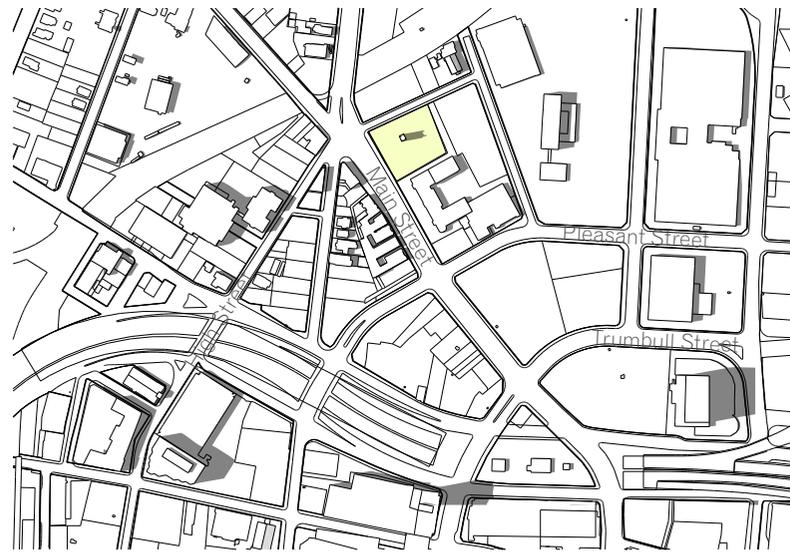
Much of the study area has a tendency to marginalize the pedestrian. The undeveloped parcels—whether vacant or underutilized—and the monumental, but largely unapproachable buildings create an environment that is unwelcoming.

The auto-dominated roads in the area only add to this effect. Many of the Downtown North streets are larger than necessary relative to the amount of traffic they carry on a daily basis. The existing lane capacity is more than double the current and foreseeable demand. This deficiency also offers an opportunity for the streets to be

retrofit to accommodate wider sidewalks, on-street parking, and bike lanes where appropriate.

Additionally, there is an inefficient street network in Downtown North. Many of the blocks are “superblocks”, which create an unpleasant pedestrian condition and restrict multiple outlets for traffic. This plan proposes creating **three new streets** in Downtown North to unlock development potential and create a tighter street grid. Recommendations for new street connectivity include:

- Providing an east-west connection between High Street and Pleasant Street,
- Building a new street that runs north-south between Pleasant Street and Trumbull Street, and
- Constructing a new street between Trumbull Street and Chapel Street.



Existing street network condition in Downtown North.



Proposed street for Downtown North.

2 Resolving High Street

The one-way circulation on High Street has notable spin-off impacts within this part of downtown, not the least of which is its impact on the viability of adjacent parcels. Any vehicle trip destined for High Street north of Chapel Street from the south or west must make excessive circuitous moves and any vehicle departing High Street north of Chapel Street must be routed similarly. This lack of direct connectivity impacts not just immediate development viability, but how the district north of I-84 is able to interact with downtown.

North and eastbound cars are effectively diverted away from these blocks, and the intersection with Chapel Street at Walnut Street is focused on accommodating entering and turning cars at the expense of safe pedestrian amenities and crossings. A two-way High would reconnect the district, calm vehicle speeds, and makes walking safer—all to the benefit of future development north and south of I-84.



Resolving access to High Street



Providing egress to Main Street

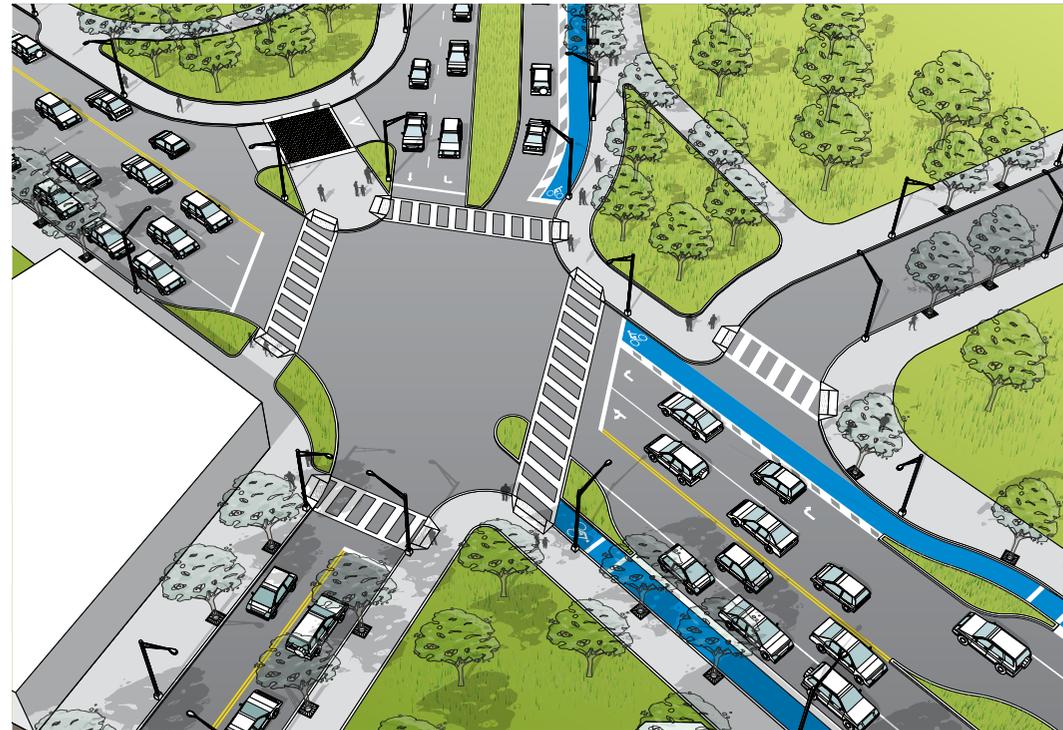
- Additional movement
- Existing movement

3 Albany Avenue and Main Street

The intersection of Albany and Main is a key gateway to the neighborhoods north of downtown; however, today it is characterized by excessive pavement, high vehicle speeds, little pedestrian accommodation, and a history of crashes. Problems at this intersection have been exacerbated by adding extra approach lanes on all streets, which has made the environment unsafe and hostile for both vehicles and pedestrians.

The recommended reconfiguration greatly reduces the size of the center of the intersection. Coupled with making High Street two-way, Albany and Main becomes a traditional four-way intersection without the shallow approach and conflict angles that exist today, bringing logical movement and predictability to the driving and walking experience.

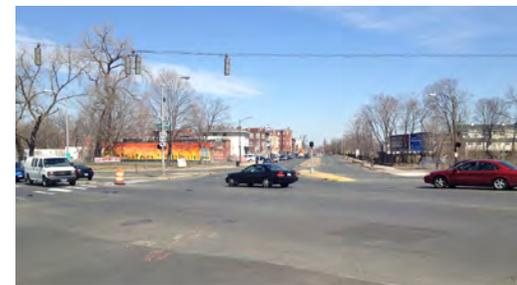
Furthermore, by reducing unneeded roadway capacity, the intersection can be made more complete with bicycle facilities, substantially improved and protected crosswalks, widened sidewalks, and visible curbspace for bus shelters. Returning vehicle space to the walking environment creates new possibilities for public space, landscaping, and public art that can celebrate this gateway at no cost to vehicle capacity.



The Albany Avenue and Main Street proposal reduces crossing distances for pedestrians.



Aerial of the intersection (Ann Uccello Street is currently terminated at the intersection).



The intersection's confusing turning movements make it dangerous for drivers and pedestrians.

4 Church Street (east of Ann Uccello)

Church Street—east of Ann Uccello—is somewhat constrained by the imposing structures on either side of it (the XL Center to the south and a parking deck to the north).

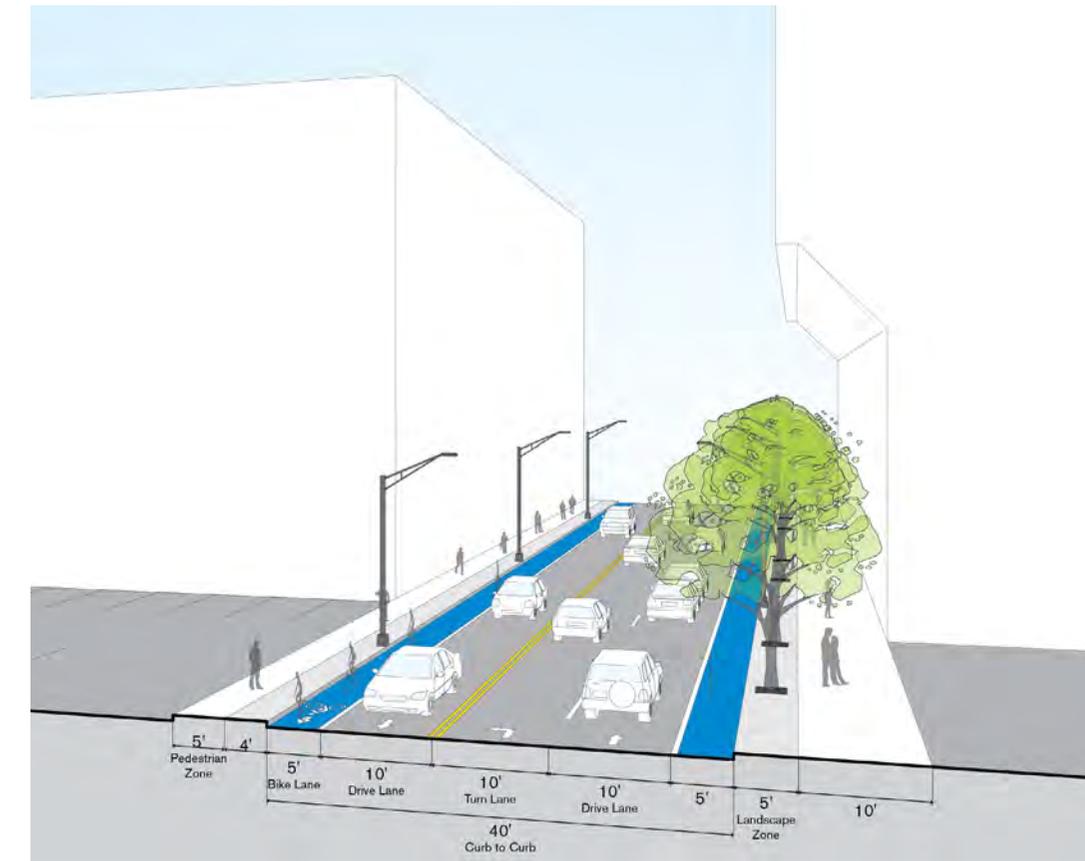
It is currently a two-way, four-lane road. The proposed redesign narrows the travel lanes, eliminates one westbound lane, and incorporates bike lanes into the design. The greatest challenge of this street is

finding ways to mitigate the presence of two inhospitable structures—the parking deck and the backside of the XL Center. This might be achieved through landscape solutions, such as additional planting, or public art.

	Existing	Proposed
ROW	69 feet	64 feet
Curb-to-curb	36 feet	40 feet
Number of travel lanes	4 lanes	3 lanes
On-street Parking	No	No
Bike Lanes	No	Yes
Direction	2-way	2-way



Church Street is overwhelmed by large concrete structures.



Proposed Church Street looking east. Sidewalk widths on the south side of the street vary due to the configuration of the XL Center's footprint.

5 Market Street

Market Street is an instructive example of the over-scaled nature of streets in Downtown North. Historically, Market Street was a primary connection to Downtown Hartford. The construction of I-91 changed the need for Market Street; however, its character remained unchanged.

It still has wide travel lanes and the general appearance of a high-speed roadway due to the scale of the street and the lack of uses framing its sides. The proposed design for Market Street narrows the travel lanes, removes one northbound lane, and adds on-street parking. If future development or city

events demand additional road capacity, the on-street parking lanes can be used to handle traffic for peak demand.

	Existing	Proposed
ROW	72 feet	74.5 feet
Curb-to-curb	49 feet	50 feet
Number of travel lanes	4 lanes	3 lanes
On-street-Parking	No	Yes
Bike Lanes	No	No
Direction	Two-way	Two-way



Market Street (looking north) is overbuilt for the current daily traffic that it handles.



Proposed Market Street looking north.

6 Pleasant Street

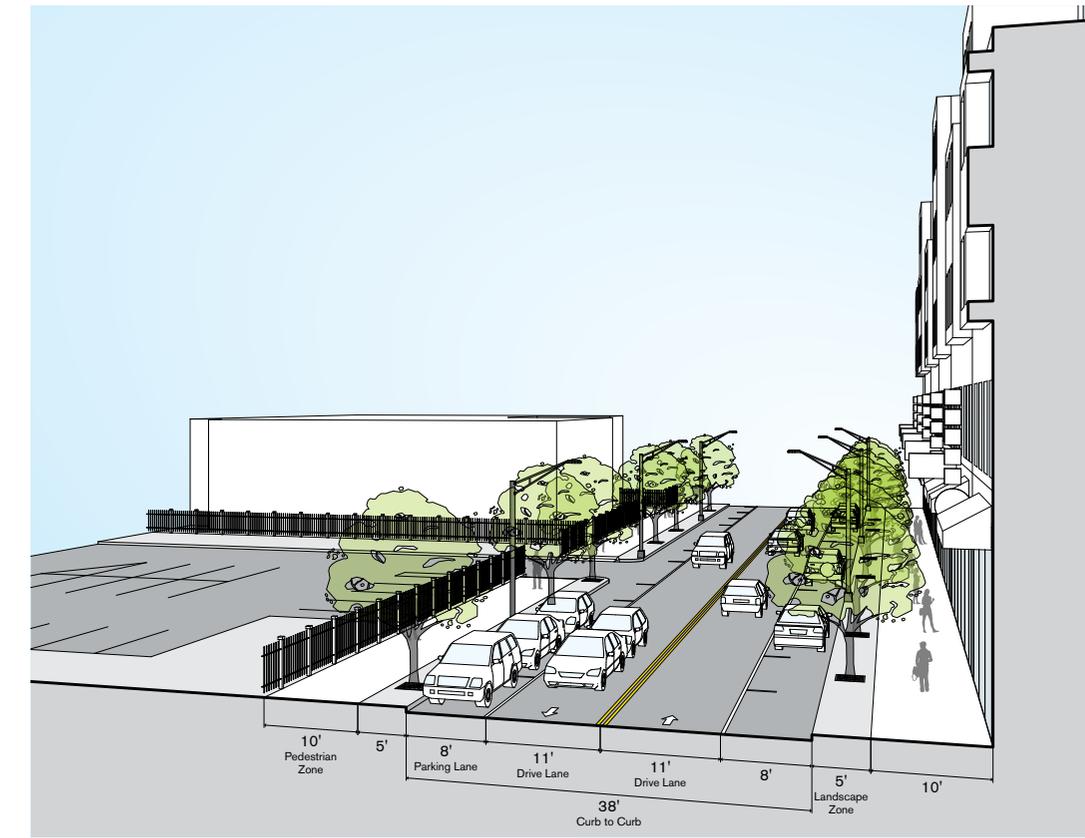
The existing roadway is four lanes wide with no on-street parking, or any defining context. This proposal transforms Pleasant Street, into a neighborhood-scale street. It becomes a two-way street with one travel lane in each direction. It also provides on-street parking.

A smaller-scale street relates well to the height of proposed development along Pleasant Street in Downtown North, which is mostly four-story residential buildings and townhomes. Considering the width of the street relative to the height of the buildings is important when designing environments.

	Existing	Proposed
ROW	68 feet	68 feet
Curb-to-curb	49 feet	38 feet
Number of travel lanes	4 lanes	2 lanes
Parking	No	Yes
Bike Lanes	No	No
Direction	Two-way	Two-way



Pleasant Street looking east at Main Street.



Pleasant street is reconfigured to provide on-street parking and broader sidewalks.



Open Space Planning and Design

The open space approach is defined by transforming what has often been seen as obstacles into assets.

Open Space Assets

In the past thirty years the City of Hartford has rediscovered some of its great open space assets.

Significant open space assets can be found within and adjacent to Downtown North. The growth and reinvestment by non-profits such as Riverfront Recapture have reversed a trend by which the expansion of infrastructure, such as rail lines and highways, have created a barrier for residents and visitors to freely access and enjoy the riverfront parks.

One of the largest and most significant assets for Downtown Hartford is Riverside Park, and the associated trail system. The parks current program, including trails, community rowing, and ropes courses, are the first wave of programs in the park that offers amenities to attract a wider group of people to the district and allow for its growth and expansion.

Wexford Park could be considered the most important space for the development of Downtown North, but it is a neglected and underutilized space. Commonly known as Heaven Park, it suffers from issues similar to the waterfront. Transportation infrastructure is overwhelming and blocks off access, including pedestrian and visual access. The park is in a state of disrepair; however, the construction of a formal skate park has begun with much community support.

Like Wexford Park's presence on I-84 air rights, similar attempts have been made bridge over layers of infrastructure in an effort to partially restore access to the river. Historically, access was gradually lost with the conversion of the Founders Bridge from a carriage and pedestrian gateway to a highway bridge and interchange.

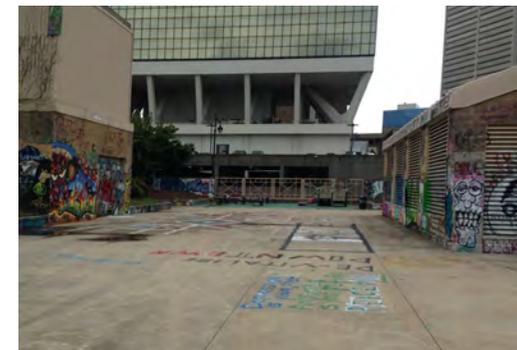
The pedestrian bridge off of Market Street spans I-91 and the adjacent rail line, but due to its visual appearance and isolated access point in downtown, it remains relatively underutilized.

The completion of Mortensen Riverfront Plaza in 1999 created another substantial

connection to Riverside Park. This plaza offers dramatic access, and also a programmable space. One limiting factor of this connection is bicycle access, which is constrained to a single elevator, thus reducing the possibility of wider use.



The Connecticut River is a treasured resource



Wexford Park offers some recreational use, but is physically uninviting for the majority of residents.



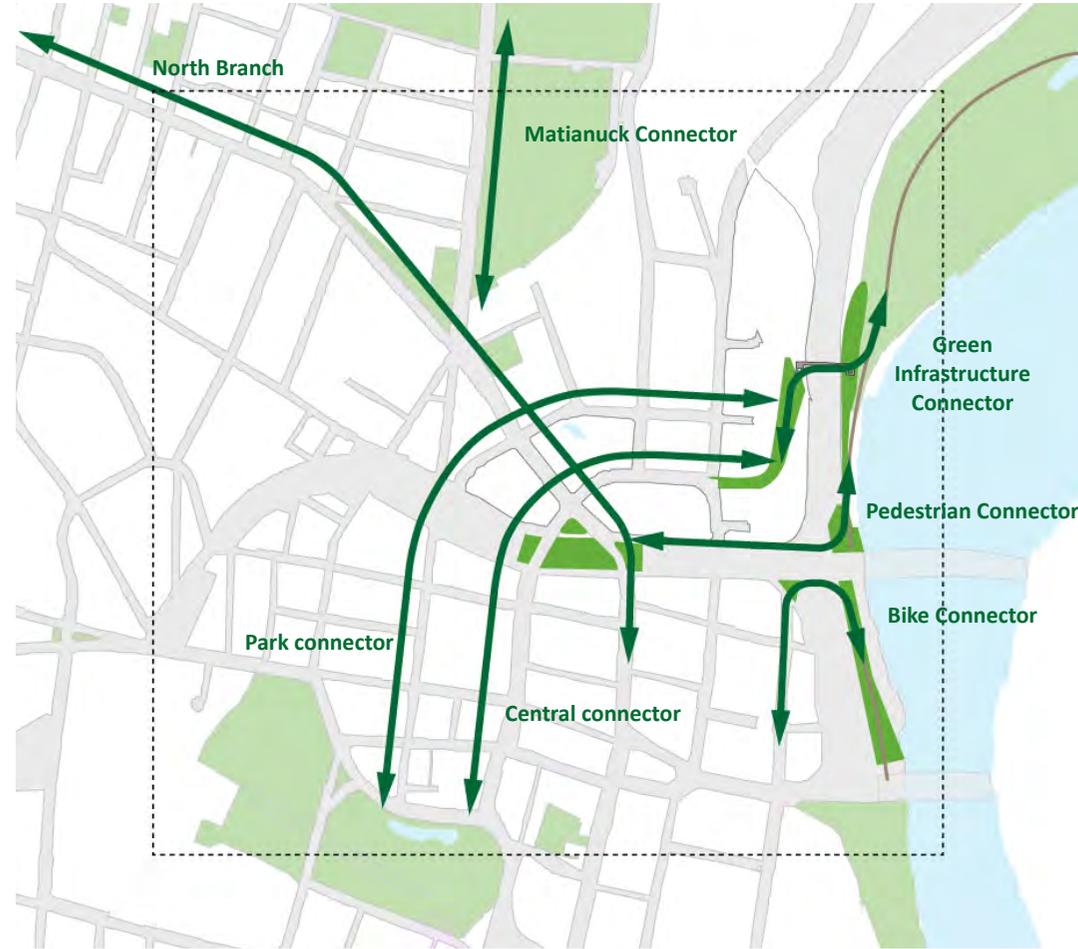
Open Space Connections

Connective Framework

The landscape framework for DN/DW focuses on creating and reinforcing the connections to river, and also looks to connect existing open spaces to a system. Opportunities exist within each of the connections.

- The North Branch connection emphasizes the relationship of the northern neighborhoods to downtown.
- Matianuck Connector connects people from downtown to some of the larger parks north of the district.
- The Pedestrian Connector and the Bike Connector work in tandem to allow for additional access points from the downtown to Riverside Park.
- Further, the Pedestrian Connector links the riverside to the new central open space for Downtown North.

The reformatting and the creation of a landscape connection to and from downtown over the existing pedestrian bridge offers an opportunity to create green infrastructure elements that can clean stormwater runoff and create a vegetated buffer to improve air quality, as well as provide a new city gateway.



City-wide open space connections/opportunities.

Getting to the River

Given the critical need for access to Riverside Park as recreational corridor for downtown, the team analyzed both the existing crossing and explored the potential for new access points.

Additional vehicular access points to the park are not likely to be feasible or desired since the available space to the left of the park is limited due the flood wall. The interstate effectively acts as the flood wall; therefore, any additional vehicular access to the river would come at a great cost. What is more critical to the growth of the district is that existing connections service pedestrian and bikes in a reasonable and seamless way.

Riverside Park can act as a key selling point for downtown because it offers immediately accessible waterfront programs and recreational uses. The more connections that can be created, reinforced or upgraded will help fulfill a landscape framework that will create value and the type of lifestyle amenities that residents desire.



Mortensen Plaza outdoor amphitheatre.



Floodwall adjacent to the Riverside Park trail.



Riverfront path below Bulkely Bridge.



Pedestrian overpass at I-91.

Open Space Design Concepts

Thoughtful landscape solutions can mitigate the barriers caused by infrastructure.

Landscape concepts that address the fragmented connections to the river, and a proposal for redesigning Wexford Park, are the key open space interventions for the project. The following section presents three different options for connecting to the riverfront, as well as a concept for a new “town green” where an existing deteriorated highway cap park sits.



View of the pedestrian bridge over I-91 looking east.



The pedestrian bridge over I-91 is completely enclosed with chain link fencing.



View of the bridge over the interstate.

Option 1: Landform

The first option for reconnecting to the river uses a large landform to improve access to the existing pedestrian overpass from Downtown North to Riverside Park.

The landform creates a continuous path from Market Street to the top of the existing pedestrian bridge. A reciprocal landform on the river side of I-91 brings the visitor down into the park where he or she can use the riverfront trail.

The landform is planted with salt-tolerant, pollution-hardy trees species, which frame a visual entrance to the district. Both the trees and the landform have additional environmental benefits including air quality improvement, acoustical buffering, and stormwater polishing capacity that are described further in the landscape strategies section of this chapter.

In addition to the landform, a redesigned pedestrian overpass should be considered. An improved overpass with added design elements, such as new lighting along the stairs and overpass, and decorative screening could provide a more inviting and safer experience when crossing over the interstate.



Option 1: Landform



The landform would be vegetated while the bridge itself could be accented with lighting.

