

BASIC CRITERIA FOR GUIDING
RIVERFRONT REVITALIZATION

Report Prepared By:

City Planning Department
Hartford, Connecticut

August 1, 1980



Court of Common Council

CITY OF HARTFORD

350 MAIN STREET
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06103

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July 31, 1980

Dear Citizen:

Recapturing Hartford's riverfront for our economic use and enjoyment, poses an important and exciting opportunity for the City in the 1980's. Improved access to our riverfront can create new economic activity generating additional tax revenues, and provide new housing and recreation opportunities for all Hartford residents. The City Redevelopment Agency is already entertaining private development proposals for lands bordering the river. The manner in which these projects are developed will have enormous impact upon the City's ability to reclaim the riverfront for our future benefit.

In this regard, the City Planning Department has produced the following report which proposes guidelines for evaluating riverfront developments. These guidelines are considered to be of an interim nature, until a more detailed plan for riverfront development can be prepared and adopted.

The City is making this report available to you for your information and more importantly for your input. Please review the document carefully and address your comments for improvement, ideas for riverfront development, etc., to the City Planning Department: 550 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06103; attention Mr. David Mann. Kindly submit your written comments by no later than September 15, 1980 so that your City Council can act on this matter with proper dispatch.

Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Rudolph P. Arnold

Rudolph P. Arnold
Chairman, Planning Development
& Zoning Committee

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the Connecticut River in Hartford is documented as early as 1633, when Dutch settlers set up a trading post at the mouth of the Park River. The importance of the river in Hartford has grown and ebbed in the almost 250 years following this event.¹

Interest in Hartford's riverfront and in riverfronts all over the country, is again being reawakened. Land resources are so limited, and the riverfront itself is a resource of such great and varied potential, that its revitalization is emerging as a clear priority for individuals, cities, and organizations in river cities around the country.

This movement did not begin overnight. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, and continuing into the early 1900's, cities began to turn away from their riverfronts. The rivers were polluted, their banks blighted and cut off from access and use, first by railroads and later by highways.

Visionaries began to predict the final demise of their cities' riverfronts unless changes were made. By 1950, pollution abatement began, and waterfront improvement had become an accepted part of planning doctrine in most cities.

This public concern was matched by policy tools and federal funding made available through urban renewal, highway and housing programs. When combined with private investment, these resources made riverfront revitalization a possibility.

¹ See Appendix A, A Brief Chronology

PROJECTS PLANNED AND UNDERWAY IN RIVERFRONT STUDY AREA

Increasing pressure is being brought to bear near Hartford's riverfront by developers anxious to satisfy the demand for office space, commercial use, and housing.³

There are currently several proposals under consideration by the City's Redevelopment Agency in the downtown riverfront area and immediately south. A summary of these proposed developments, as well as others, follows:

Redevelopment Areas:

Columbus Boulevard East (South Parcel) - Hartford Steam Boiler is planning to build a new corporate headquarters and office space which would connect to Constitution Plaza and would allow for future connection to the Connecticut Riverfront. At this time, it is proposed that the building be 500,000 square feet, with at least a 600 car parking space. The project will take approximately two years to complete and will cost about \$40-50 million.

Columbus Boulevard East (North Parcel) - Canal Randolph plans a 10-story office tower on this parcel, having a 640,000 square foot floor space. Parking for 480 cars is planned on 5 levels, 2 of which would be underground. Plans show a possible connection to the river; total project cost is about \$49 million.

Van Block Avenue - Two developers are presently seeking development rights to rehabilitate 10 abandoned mill housing buildings between Huyshope and Van Block Avenues. There are five 3-story and five 4-story

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See Appendix D, Possible Uses

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key to the success of waterfront revitalization programs in other cities has been a single, essential element: the process has been a cooperative effort involving community members, public officials and private sector representatives. Without the joint participation of these three interests, riverfront revitalization in Hartford may not be realized.

This process has already been informally inaugurated. On March 24, 1980, the City Council requested that staff prepare a draft outline of basic criteria for guiding riverfront revitalization.

On May 2 of this year, a seminar entitled "Hartford's Riverfront" was held at the Old State House in Hartford. It was co-sponsored by the Downtown Council, City of Hartford, Connecticut River Committee, Connecticut River Watershed Council, and the Hartford Architecture Conservancy, and hosted by the Travelers Insurance Companies.

1. A comprehensive plan of the riverfront should be initiated by a riverfront action group consisting of interested private sector, public sector, and community representatives. (See following description of Urban Waterfront Action Groups).
2. The attached interim riverfront development criteria should be approved by the Court of Common Council. This action will ensure that any development proposed before a comprehensive plan is presented will be reviewed in the context of existing conditions in the area and future development options.

INTERIM RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

I. Purpose:

To establish interim criteria for guiding the revitalization of Hartford's riverfront. These criteria will be used to evaluate riverfront and related development proposals until an overall riverfront plan is adopted.

II. Over-riding Goals:

- A. To promote activity along the Hartford riverfront that will realize the economic potential of this valuable resource for the citizens of Hartford.
- B. To promote imaginative development of the Hartford riverfront that will foster civic pride through its use and enjoyment by the people of Hartford and the Greater Hartford region.
- C. To coordinate and link riverfront development with the development of adjacent neighborhoods and downtown.
- D. To improve and assure public access to and along Hartford's riverfront.
- E. To respect the natural features of the Connecticut River and its shoreline.

III. Development Criteria:

- A. GOAL: To promote activity along the Hartford riverfront that will realize the economic potential of this valuable resource for the benefit of the citizens of Hartford.

Historically, the Connecticut River has played a significant role in the economic life of Hartford. The construction of the railroad, flood control dike and interstate highway system isolated the riverfront and curtailed its use by Hartford's citizens and business community.

Riverfront development offers great potential and focus for the enthusiasm and energy of the entire Hartford community. The scale and location of the riverfront is suited to uses city-wide and even region-wide in scope. As the river forms the long eastern boundary of the City, the riverfront is less than four miles from any City location. This proximity should support the river's use as a social and recreational amenity.

Social

1. People and activity create an exciting and vital environment. This activity is critical to the revitalization of neighborhoods and downtown.
 - a) Will the project attract people to the riverfront and/or adjacent areas?
 - b) Does the physical design of the project encourage public use?
 - c) Does the project propose to include a cafeteria, which will service its occupants to the detriment of downtown restaurants and merchants?
2. If the riverfront is to serve the entire Hartford community, its development should offer diversity of use.
 - a) Will the project accommodate a variety of activities that can serve Hartford's diverse community?
 - b) Will there be sufficient public facilities to support public activities?
3. The river provides a unique opportunity for boating, swimming and other activities. Will the project promote water-related activity?
4. The Connecticut River is a regional, as well as City resource. How will the project benefit the people of the Capitol Region?

- a) Does the project plan address adjacent development in terms of compatible scale, massing and visibility?
 - b) Will the project block views from existing buildings to the riverfront?
3. Many of the City's landmark buildings are in close proximity to the riverfront area. Will the project respect views to the City's landmarks?
4. Barriers between the riverfront and the remainder of the City are both physical and psychological. This separation must be reduced, if development is to be successful. Will the project reduce the "sense" of separation between the City and the river?
5. Land outside of the flood control dike falls within the jurisdictions of multiple agencies.
- a) Does the project conform to the requirements of appropriate agencies?
 - b) Does the project have the support of the appropriate agencies?
6. Land outside of the dike is in the Connecticut River flood plain.
- a) Does the project design take into account changes in river levels and flood conditions?
 - b) Will development impact on the flow of the Connecticut River? How will this impact be neutralized?
7. The highway, railroad and dike create significant problems in servicing development outside of the dike.
- a) Is the project feasible in engineering terms?
 - b) If access across the dike is proposed, will the structure meet minimum clearance standards of 16 feet, 3 inches over highway and 22 feet, 3 inches over railway?
 - c) Will development penetrate the dike at any point?
 - d) How will the development provide for utilities to areas outside of the dike?

3. With improvements of environmental quality of the Connecticut River, recreational uses on the river should increase. Will the project provide direct access to the water for boaters, etc?
4. Above street level access has been established in Constitution Plaza and adjacent areas. If geographically appropriate, will the project conform to this design precedent and provide access at this level?

Transportation

1. The impact of Riverfront development on transportation and parking will be most critical in the area adjacent to the Central Business District.
 - a) Will the project disrupt any critical vehicular or pedestrian patterns?
 - b) Will the project increase vehicular and/or pedestrian conflict? How will the project alleviate this conflict?
 - c) How will the project address any required increase in parking?
 2. A significant number of Hartford households are transit dependent. Can the project promote transport of people or goods on the river?
 3. There may be potential for a return of waterborne transportation. Will the project promote transport of people or goods on the river?
- E. GOAL: To respect the natural features of the river and its shoreline.

The separation of the river from urban development in Hartford has created opportunity in one sense. The Connecticut River and its shoreline is relatively undisturbed, supporting a variety of plant and animal forms in their natural state. The richness of this natural environment contrasts sharply with the development in the remainder of the City offering great potential for passive recreation.

APPENDIX

SECTIONS A. - D.

APPENDIX A

HARTFORD'S RIVERFRONT: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY¹

- 1633 The House of Hope, a Dutch trading post, is built at the mouth of the Park River.
- 1636 Thomas Hooker arrives over land to found Hartford, the development of which centers on the river.
- 1700 The shipyard industry is initiated in settlements on the Connecticut River, including Hartford. It is the colony's first industry, and between 1700 and 1816 more than 4,000 ships are built.
- 1764 An English officer visiting the City writes: "Here they build vessels for the lumber trade to the West Indies, from 100 to 150 tons, and float them down in freshes, in Spring and Fall.
- 1773 Hartford's leading merchant/captain, Jeremiah Wadsworth, persuades the legislature to raise money by lottery for marking the Saybrook bar.
- 1800 Headed by John Caldwell (president of the Hartford Bank) and John Morgan (grandfather of J.P. Morgan), the Union Company is chartered to deepen the river bed below Hartford, to build wharves and to collect tolls to pay for these improvements. Salmon cease to spawn in the river because of upstream dams.
- 1810 John Morgan (Hartford's biggest shipowner), has two brigs, 11 ships and one schooner in foreign trade. Joint underwriting of marine risks in Morgan's coffee house leads to the beginning of Hartford's insurance industry, with the founding of the Hartford Insurance Company.
- 1844 River traffic is now at its peak; in one year alone Hartford records 2,000 arrivals and departures of sail and steam vessels at her 20 wharves. Completion of the railroad to Springfield signals the end of the boom in upriver traffic.
- 1866 At the port of Hartford 616,000 tons of cargo are unloaded, and 26,211 passengers arrive or depart. As late as 1911, 683,000 tons of materials are handled with a value of \$24 million.

¹ Adapted from a report by Ellsworth Grant

APPENDIX B

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF RIVERBANK IN HARTFORD

The Hartford Riverbank begins at the Windsor townline, adjacent to wooded State-owned property in Windsor Meadows. The bank begins high, with a natural levee, and is cut by a slough just north of the mouth of Meadow Brook. The land adjacent to the riverbank, about 90 acres, is rich farmland. Although still in use as farmland, it has been zoned industrial and is privately owned. While the City maintains a right of way through the property, it is the only acreage bordering the river which the City does not own or control.

The vegetation along this high flood plain and levee area is mixed rich forest with a well-developed shrub layer and ground cover; some silver maple and cottonwood are found.

Meadow Brook empties into the river immediately south of this area. It is sluggish during most of the year, but during rainstorms and during Spring thaw, it drains a large area. Erosion from the farmland to the north combines with run-off from the stream to form several large sandbars and islands downstream.

Below Meadow Brook, the 45 foot Corps of Engineers Dike begins and continues the length of the Hartford shoreline. The banks outside the dike vary from natural levee and high flood plain to low flood plain, tidal flat and slough, until just north of the pumping station and railroad trestle which crosses the river.

Aquatic vegetation on the tidal flat (the River is tidal to North of Hartford), composed of sand and silt, is rare; the tidal flat is mostly open. Farther up the bank is woodland with dense annual grasses, herbs

Development in this area must be decked, for nothing can penetrate the dike. Any connecting walkways, utilities, plazas, or other access must be elevated a minimum of 30 feet over I-91, which parallels the dike here. Such development would be costly and would be likely to be intensive. Proposed changes to the I-91/I-84 interchange could further limit options if not carefully planned.

Immediately south of the downtown section of the riverfront, the bank remains steep but widens. At the I-91 Charter Oak Bridge interchange, the dike and I-91 split, as I-91 is routed inland. Construction of the Park River conduit continues in this area.

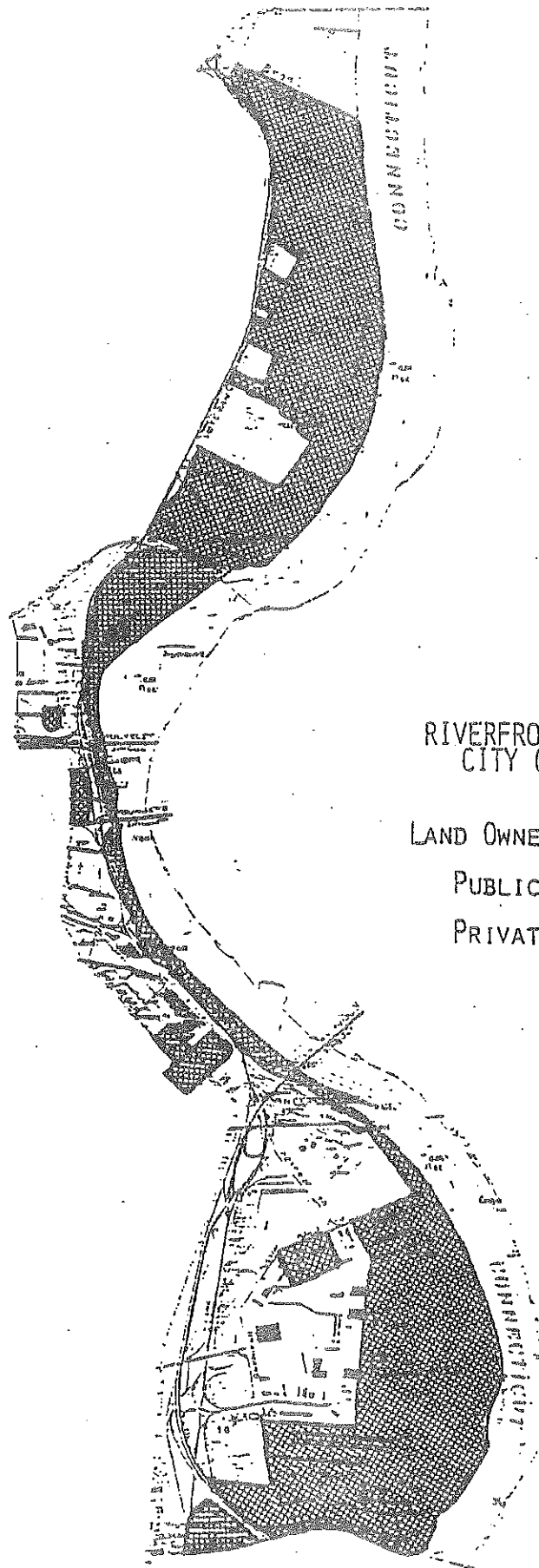
Immediately below Charter Oak Bridge, adjacent to the old HELCo plant, is a stone jetty. Inside the jetty is an oil terminal which is still in use. Just south of the HELCo plant is a small tidal flat. In this section of the river, adjacent to Brainard Field, the banks are low flood plains. These flood plains (outside the dike) continue south to the Wethersfield townline. The woodland is lush in Spring and Summer, and is a natural refuge for songbirds, waterbirds and other wildlife. The area borders Wethersfield Cove; in early spring it is generally under water until the river recedes from flood stage.

Temperature

Annual temperature readings for the Connecticut River taken in Agawam, Massachusetts, indicate that mean temperature ranges from a low of 35°F in February to 58°F in May to 83°F in August. Temperatures as low as 30°F and as high as 93°F have occurred at Agawam.


APPENDIX C


MAP SECTION

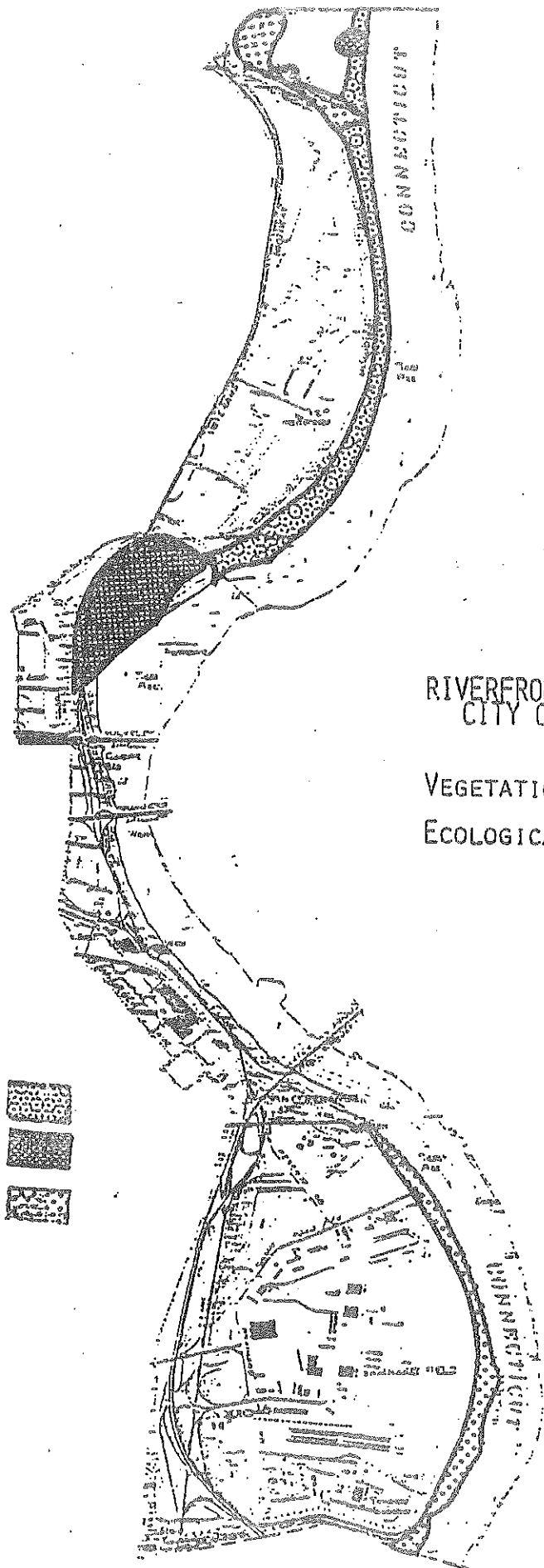


RIVERFRONT STUDY AREA
CITY OF HARTFORD
1980

LAND OWNERSHIP-MAY 1980




PUBLIC 

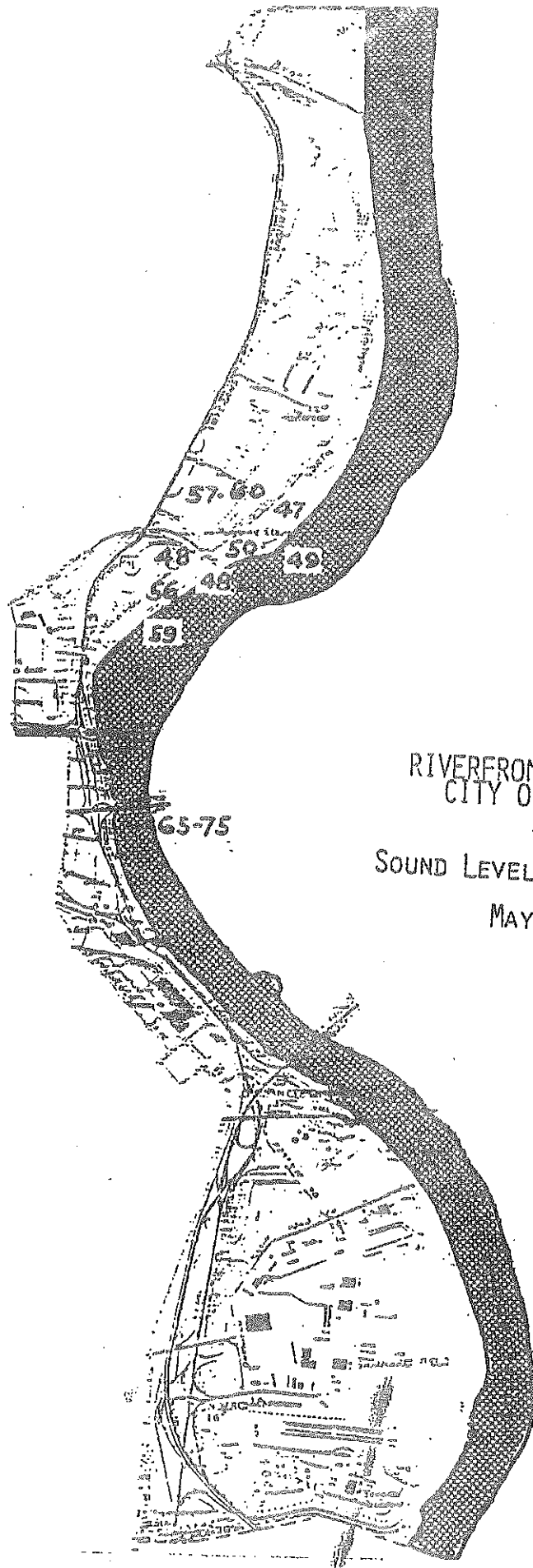
PRIVATE 



RIVERFRONT STUDY AREA
CITY OF HARTFORD
1980

VEGETATION AREAS
ECOLOGICAL AREAS

- LOW FLOOD PLAIN 
- HIGH FLOOD PLAIN 
- NATURAL LEVEE 



RIVERFRONT STUDY AREA
CITY OF HARTFORD
1980
SOUND LEVELS IN DECIBELS
MAY 1980

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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