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Hartford: Spurring Economic Development to Position Our Future Growth



Eddie Perez, Mayor of Hartford, CT

When Dutch settlers founded Hartford, they built a fort and called it "the House of Hope." In 1635, the "City of Hope and Opportunity" was born and in the 21st Century it is in the process of continuing an unprecedented renaissance - despite some of the toughest economic challenges in recent memory.

Yes, New England's Rising Star is shining brightly again. If one of the poorest cities in the country can position itself for growth for when the economy recovers, then there is real hope for Main Street America.

We're building on positive momentum regarding our neighborhood economic development projects. The future Public Safety Complex in downtown Hartford is the Capital City's cornerstone effort. This project provides a centralized facility for fire, police and emergency services; creates jobs and spurs economic development in three neighborhoods; has a positive environmental impact by using fuel cell technology; and preserves an historic structure.

The complex is the centerpiece of a bigger vision that has included marquee projects like the Connecticut Science Center and the Marriott Hotel along our historic riverfront. That vision also includes capitalizing on the vibrancy and energy of the main arteries through our neighborhoods and building the Mort and Irma Handel Performing Arts Center at the University of Hartford and stringing a pearl necklace of success along Albany Ave. that includes our new YMCA. That provides even more pieces to help complete and evolve the bigger puzzle that includes housing efforts like the Hollander Center which turned a vacant office building into 70 mixed income and all "green" apartments and re-defining public housing at Dutch Point to help renters transition to being homeowners.

The catalyst for all this began several years ago with school construction, which to date is still one of the city's biggest accomplishments. During the past eight years, we have completed more than \$500 million in construction and renovations to provide a positive learning environment for our students. Thanks to this, educational reform, and choice to

better engage parents in the educational equation, students today are better prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. They are the future workforce for Hartford - the job hub of the state, the Insurance Capital of the World, an Arts and Cultural Mecca, and a destination choice thanks to our historic parks and architecture and our diverse neighborhoods.

Diversity is Hartford's strength. 65 languages are spoken here and that diversity is showcased in our shops and restaurants, businesses and entertainment venues that attract people for miles. When Hartford is strong, the region is strong. But in order to compete in today's global economy Hartford must be an international destination as well.

Easier access to transportation can play a major role in the city's growth. That is why it is essential that Hartford takes the lead and works with the surrounding communities to achieve a regional transportation system. We need to link commuter rail, Amtrak, and our access to Bradley International Airport. A regional transportation system is an investment in our economy as well as our ecology. It will take advantage of various modes of transportation that already exist and connect them with the goal being that they run more effectively and efficiently and serve more people. It will create jobs and make it easier to get to existing jobs. Hotels will benefit and tourism will get a boost. Hartford will continue to be New England's Rising Star and more because it will have revitalized something that all people need: a means of getting from point "A" to point "B" safely, economically, and efficiently.

All this is being taken into consideration as we devise our "One City, One Plan: Hartford's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) for 2020." A series of community conversations will construct and prioritize this guide for public and private development and policy decisions over the next ten years to serve as a comprehensive source for information about all of Hartford's planning and growth efforts. It will also tie-in past accomplishments like \$200 million parking facilities for major employers and current \$42 million construction of a science and technology center at one of the gateway entrances of the city to future development considerations in three approved development zones that will weave together the progress and promise that we call Hartford.