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There's something for everyone in Meriden, now and in the future

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"In the long term the most important question for a company is not what you are but what you are becoming" is a quote from Gary Hamel. The Wall Street Journal recently ranked Gary Hamel as the world's most influential business thinker, and Fortune magazine has called him "the world's leading expert on business strategy." The leaders at city hall have taken that advice to heart as we are always planning and preparing for the future.

A few examples of Meriden's future planning include the Meriden hub redevelopment. This 14.4-acre city-owned brownfields site is located in the center of our downtown. The project plan includes multilevel commercial buildings around the central hub property that could include offices, hotels and ground-floor retail. Such buildings would be a minimum of four stories, but not taller than seven. Most of the land, however, would be kept as open park space in order to accomplish flood control goals.

The Meriden Transit Center project will plan, design and engineer an intermodal transportation center and a parking area adjacent to the hub site. The project will take advantage of planned improvements to the New Haven-Springfield high speed rail corridor and the Springfield to New Haven commuter rail projects. The intermodal center will not only serve Meriden's existing Amtrak service but also will offer linkages to local bus, taxi and corporate van services. The intermodal center will provide increased access into and out of the downtown while allowing the city to attract new businesses, commuters and residents to the city's center.

Another project that's been in the works for a few years and has a few to go for completion is the Factory H demolition and site remediation on Cooper St., near the former hospital. Much of the remediation work has been completed with federal and state funding. Two blighted and hazardous structures at the seven-acre site will be demolished and environmental hazards will be remediated. The project will result in economic development opportunities, and neighborhood green and open space.

The West Main Street Streetscape Improvement Project is moving forward with design, engineering and implementation of streetscape improvements on West Main St. from Cook Ave. to Johnson Ave. Improvements will include a signalization, sidewalk repair, roadway improvements, and streetscape amenities. Repairs to this area of West Main St. have been on the city's radar for more than a decade. Similar streetscape improvements on East Main St. were made during the early 1990s, including adding a turning lane between Parker Ave. and Swain Ave.

This past summer the city council approved a new zoning district that could pave the way for a mixed-use commercial center on a 71-acre parcel on Preston Ave. The zone will allow a "lifestyle center" development which would incorporate a broad mix of commercial uses arranged in a pedestrian friendly way with strict design criteria. Attached residential units will also be permitted in

the zone.

Not all Meriden's development is "in the future". On the social side, downtown may be home to a new ice skating rink by the time winter's first freeze sets in. Plans for a 200-by-88-ft. portable ice-skating rink are in the works for the hub site. In July, the Cole Bros. Circus of the Stars, set up a 25,000 s/f tent on the city-owned hub site with elephants, tigers, camels, llamas and zebras and various trapezes, rings of fire, human-size cannons and other circus paraphernalia. Three performances captivated audiences from all over the state over a period of two days. We hope to get them back again next year. The annual "Festival of Lights" in Hubbard Park displays over a half million miniature lights in spectacular displays in tress, on the pond and nestled in the natural habitat of this magnificent park. It's free and open to the public beginning November 23rd.

There's something for everyone in Meriden, now and in the future. Come visit us, you won't want to leave.

Michael Rohde is mayor of the city of Meriden.

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