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City of Hartford is like a string of pearls - a number of elements contributing to its vibrance and vitality

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The pearl necklace has long been appreciated for its simplicity and natural beauty. However, a closer look reveals that the necklace's beauty is derived from the collection of individual gems that each offers its own luster to the piece as a whole. These pearls begin as a lowly grain of sand that through a natural and organic process transforms into a radiant and valuable jewel. In many ways, the city of Hartford is like a string of pearls, with a number of elements that contribute to its vibrance and vitality.

When I arrived in Hartford 12 years ago, I experienced the city in a way that seemed contrary to those who had lived in the region for a long time. Many of my neighbors and colleagues seemed cynical and negative about the city's offerings and opportunities. As a newcomer, though, I could view the area from a different perspective and appreciate the pearls and beauty of the Hartford region. I could discern the sense of place that was a hidden gem buried in the negative perceptions of the community. Hartford was at the beginning of its renaissance and revival that in these short 12 years has progressed from an idea to a plan and, in many areas, real bricks and mortar. The area is still a work in process, but progress continues to be made.

Keys to change in any region are multi-faceted and result from recognizing the pearls we have, extolling their value, and appreciating their beauty and contributions to quality of life. Like pearls on a string, these gems connect to each other to build the necklace we have. Hartford's pearls include:

Quality of Life

- * Hartford is blessed with many parks and open spaces like Bushnell, Elizabeth, and Kenney Parks that are developed and maintained by the city. We also appreciate access to the Connecticut River created by projects by Riverfront Recapture. As gems we have, we need to revisit these and enhance the user's experience to encourage healthy living by design.

- * The city offers arts and cultural venues that reflect the cultural diversity of our region. We are fortunate to experience the rich offerings of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Bushnell Performing Arts Theater, the Hartford Stage, and the Wadsworth Athenaeum to name a few.

Visionary Leadership

- * Public and private leadership is a driver to our renaissance. Our community has many voices with different viewpoints and interests, but with the same focus: to make the region attractive to all and to create a collaborative energy that fuels the engine of change. In today's complex global environment, solutions require a collective energy and involvement to progress. Hartford has certainly experienced this collective leadership at all levels in state and local government, with concerned and committed citizens and with large and small businesses and corporations. The joint commitment of public and private constituencies has yielded positive results throughout the city.

Positive Regulatory Climate

* Streamlining the regulatory process without compromising the openness and transparency that the public deserves is an essential element to progress. Removing uncertainty from the process and establishing clear expectations provides for good development when coupled with good public policy. Managed growth provides a balance allowing change to progress with appropriate controls to protect the public's interests. Work needs to be done here to streamline the process and to commit to a progressive approach to land use and development.

* Progressive zoning must respond to the development climate of today and for the future, for archaic and outdated zoning requirements that don't keep up with the needs of today become a barrier to creative and sustainable land use. Outdated zoning regulations stifle planning creativity and discourage creative growth that responds to market trends. The development community needs tools to implement intelligent land uses such as mixed-use communities where residential, commercial, and retail areas co-exist to create a synergy of uses that sustains both the community and the environment.

These elements within our city started as grains of sand in terms of contributing to a vibrant and growing region. With time, energy, and continued leadership they have become pearls. The Hartford region, as the past slogan reminds us, is a "Rising Star." The MetroHartford Alliance has immersed itself through the leadership of CEO, Oz Griebel, in most of these issues and been a focal point and a voice for many of these constituencies.

As business leaders, committed residents, and government leaders, we are collectively responsible for contributing our own jewels and refining each pearl. Over a period of time, these gifts are knotted together on a simple string and held together by a clasp that creates the pearl necklace. The Hartford region is well on its way to being the pearl necklace that will be appreciated as the heirloom we leave behind for future generations.

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