BRIEFING BOOKLET
Development-Related Strategies

NEWINGTON TOWN CENTER

8

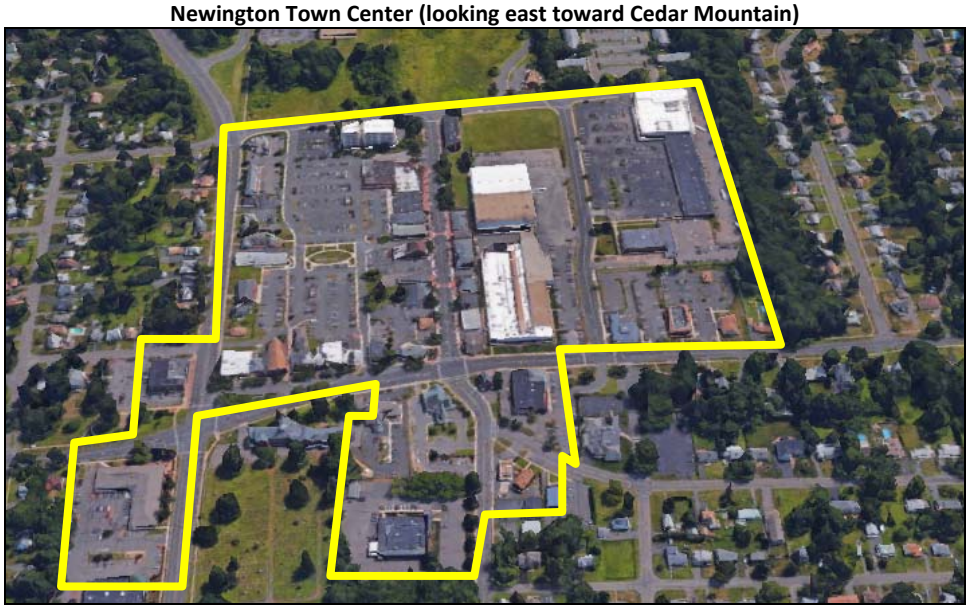
NEWINGTON
2020 POCD

POSSIBLE GOAL STATEMENT	*Strengthen Newington Town Center as a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly area with a strong "sense of place."*

A key issue for the POCD is how to make Newington Town Center more vibrant and attractive and relevant to the needs of the community now and in the future.

Newington Town Center should be the major community focal point and the business, civic, institutional, and cultural center of the Town. Just as West Hartford Center reinvented itself following the construction of Westfarms Mall and then evolved itself further with the development of Blueback Square, Newington should strengthen Newington Town Center as a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly place with a strong "sense of place."

Newington Town Center (looking east toward Cedar Mountain)



Walk Score

Newington Town Center has a "walk score" of 66 points out of 100. Walk score is an indication of whether there are destinations within a compact area, not whether there are sidewalks or other pedestrian accommodations.

Studies have shown a positive correlation between walk scores and real estate values (sales prices and rental rates).

The most desirable scores are between 70 and 100:

- 90-100 is considered a walkers' paradise where residents don't need to own a car;
- 70-89 is very walkable and residents probably don't need a car.

Below 70 and neighborhoods are somewhat walkable but probably necessitate public transportation, a bike or a car for getting around. A score below 50 means the community is car-dependent, and a score below 25 means residents need to drive everywhere.

The Town Center area has several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints which are worth contemplating:

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Good population in trade area • Good traffic flows • High occupancy • Served by bus transit • Relatively compact area • Shared parking already in place • Focal point for community events	• Lack of strong anchor • Lack of cohesive "brand" • Lack of casual dining opportunities • Lack of fine dining opportunities • Pedestrian traffic is light / moderate • Parking configuration seen as desolate / inconvenient

Opportunities	Challenges
• Much land area could be available for future development • Yield per acre (floor area, taxable value, etc.) could be increased significantly • Can change perception / reality • Façade improvements	• Industrial facility interrupts connectivity of uses and pedestrianism • Hard to incorporate properties across Cedar Street as part of a cohesive whole • Retaining a grocery store

The POCD recommends that Newington seek ways to:

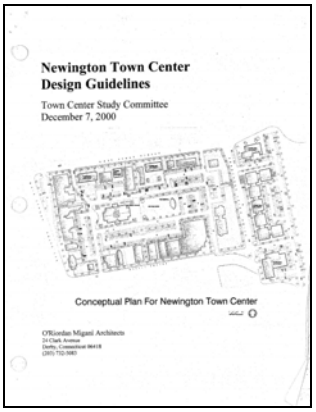
- Build on strengths,
- Overcome weaknesses,
- Seize opportunities, and
- Address constraints.

To do this, it is recommended that a community-driven planning process (like a community "charrette" or a carefully constituted steering committee) be undertaken for the Town Center area in order to:

- establish an overall vision,
- suggest possible regulation changes, and
- set the stage for complementary development.

While Town Center Design Guidelines (which contains a conceptual plan for part of Newington Town Center) were prepared in the year 2000, much has changed in the Town Center and the world of retail in the past two decades and it is probably time to revisit the Town Center and have a conversation about ways to enhance the vibrancy and vitality of Newington Town Center as the primary community focal point and support uses and development which help achieve this goal.

Design Guidelines

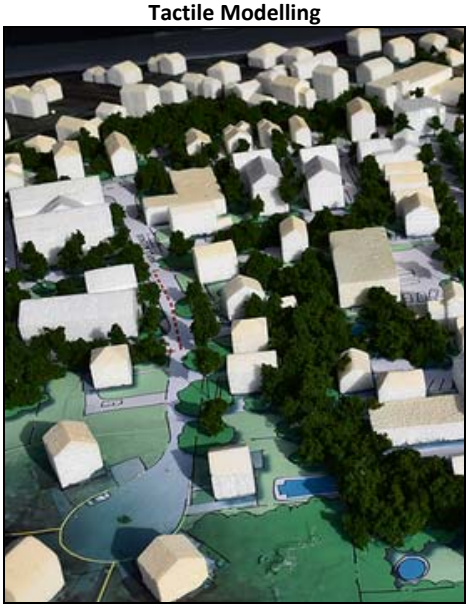

Newington Town Center
Design Guidelines
Town Center Study Committee
December 7, 2000
Conceptual Plan For Newington Town Center

A charrette process results in community-driven support for development which is considered appropriate for the location. Key elements include:

- Visual preference survey
- Area walking tour for shared observations
- Participatory design exercises
- Facilitated discussions
- Developed graphics to illustrate consensus

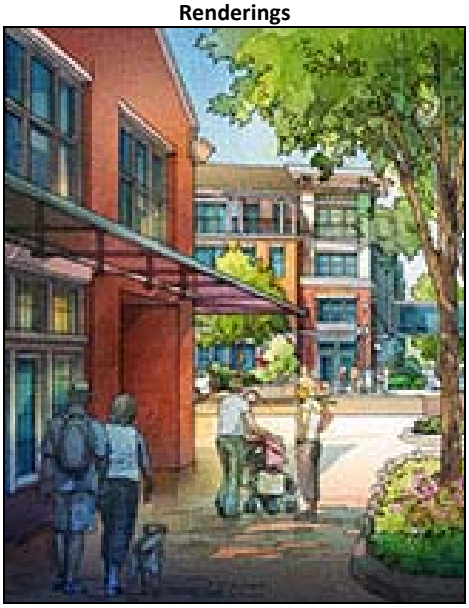
Community Driven Participatory Process

Tactile Modelling



Conceptual Plan

Renderings



Charrette

A charrette (sometimes called a design charrette) is an intense period of collaborative design and/or planning activity in which a group of designers craft possible:

- solutions to a design problem, and/or
- visions for a specific area.

The general idea of a charrette is to create an innovative atmosphere in which a diverse group of stakeholders can collaborate to "generate visions for the future". Charrettes can also serve as a way of quickly generating design solutions while integrating the aptitudes and interests of a diverse group of people.

While the structure of a charrette varies, charrettes often take place in multiple sessions which allow for:

- a larger group to break into smaller groups,
- design sketches to be prepared to reflect expressed concepts.

Eventually, the work products of multiple groups or multiple sessions are brought back to a larger to attain consensus or for further dialogue.

Active Street Uses

Features which contribute to an active and pedestrian-friendly streetscape include:

- shops,
- restaurants,
- outdoor dining,
- other uses that generate significant pedestrian traffic.

An active and pedestrian-friendly streetscape can also result from:

- public parks,
- benches, fountains, and other street furniture, and
- large display windows which attract passerby interest.

Passive Street Uses

Features which do not contribute to an active and pedestrian-friendly streetscape include:

- blank walls,
- driveways,
- parking lots,
- vacant lots,
- abandoned buildings, and
- offices (or banks) with little apparent activity.

In addition to the charrette process, the Zoning Regulations which guide activities in the Town Center district should *consider modifying the regulations* to:

- Allow restaurants by Site Plan approval (rather than Special Permit) to help attract more restaurants.
- Allowing outdoor dining by approval of a Site Plan modification rather than requiring a Special Permit.
- Consider requiring a Special Permit for a "passive use" identified below which is located at street level (since such uses can significantly deter pedestrian activity).
- Allowing apartment uses in a business building by Site Plan approval (rather than Special Permit).

ACTIVE STREET-LEVEL USES (Retail Trade / Services)	**Site Plan**	**Special Permit**
Retail stores, personal service shops or stores.	■	
Bakeries.	■	
Theaters, recreation and entertainment	■	
Restaurants (excluding drive-in or curb service)		■
Temporary / seasonal outdoor dining		■
Health clubs and dance studios.		■
PASSIVE STREET-LEVEL USES (Offices / Banks)		
Business or professional offices.	■	
Banks.	■	
Corporate headquarters, research / development.	■	
RESIDENTIAL USES		
Multi-Family Residential (17.4 units/acre)		■
Residential Buildings for the Elderly (60 units/acre)		■
Apartments in Business Buildings		■
SUPPORT USES		
Parking Lots	■	
Parking Garage		■
OTHER USES		
Clubs or fraternal organizations.	■	
Food preparation, caterers	■	
Funeral parlors or mortuaries.		■
Printers, dry cleaners, and the like.		■
Fueling station located within a shopping center		■

To encourage additional development in the future, the TPZ should consider *reducing the parking standards* in the Town Center area. Studies have found that mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly areas may only need a parking ratio of about 3.0 spaces per 1,000 SF of floor area since people park once and then visit multiple locations. The Zoning Regulations currently require parking as high as 6.0 spaces per 1,000 SF of floor area parking ratio but allow a request for a reduction to 3.5 to 4.0 spaces per 1000 SF for adhering to required design standards. Rather than make this a discretionary request that the TPZ could deny (which can deter property owners and developers due to the uncertainty), this could be made a blanket standard for everyone in the Town Center district where they are within a certain distance of Constitution Square (the Town parking lot). The TPZ could retain the provision in the Regulations (Section 3.12.A.5.B) which allows a total exemption from parking standards in certain situations.

In addition, the TPZ should consider whether there are ways to *provide stronger incentives* for the dedication of land for municipal parking (see Section 3.12.3) – in addition to exempting buildings from parking requirements when land is dedicated to public parking, communities such as West Harford and Darien and have then gone ahead and reconfigured the parking area to provide more spaces and better circulation).

The TPZ should *continue to maintain* the Town Center Village Overlay District (Section 3.12A) which provides for design review of new uses to ensure that new development and/or redevelopment enhances the character, landscape and architectural quality of the Town Center. However, the TPZ may want to revisit the language in Section 3.12.A.2 which appears to require Commission approval of a change of use in an existing building (even if no new exterior construction) is proposed.

In addition, the TPZ should *continue to maintain* the provisions which allow some flexibility in area and/or dimensional standards for good design and consistency with adjacent buildings:

- Yard setback requirements,
- Frontage requirements,
- Lot area requirements, and
- Use of on-street parking.

Newington Town Center

POSSIBLE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Encourage appropriate development and redevelopment of the Town Center which enhances a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

2. Invest in "place-making" since doing so creates economic value for all property owners (more visitation, longer stays, higher sales, higher rents, and higher sale prices) and for the community as a whole.

3. Encourage growth and retention of a diversity of businesses in the Town Center to continue to attract residents, shoppers, and visitors from Town Center and elsewhere.

4. Reinforce Newington Town Center as a great place for residents, visitors, and business investment and a place that fosters a strong sense of community.

5. Promote the Town Center as a place that accommodates shopping, dining, leisure, work, housing and governmental services, in an architecturally, economically and socially diverse and pedestrian-friendly environment.

6. Maintain and improve the character of the Town Center and its pedestrian-friendly nature, historic elements and diverse range of architectural styles.

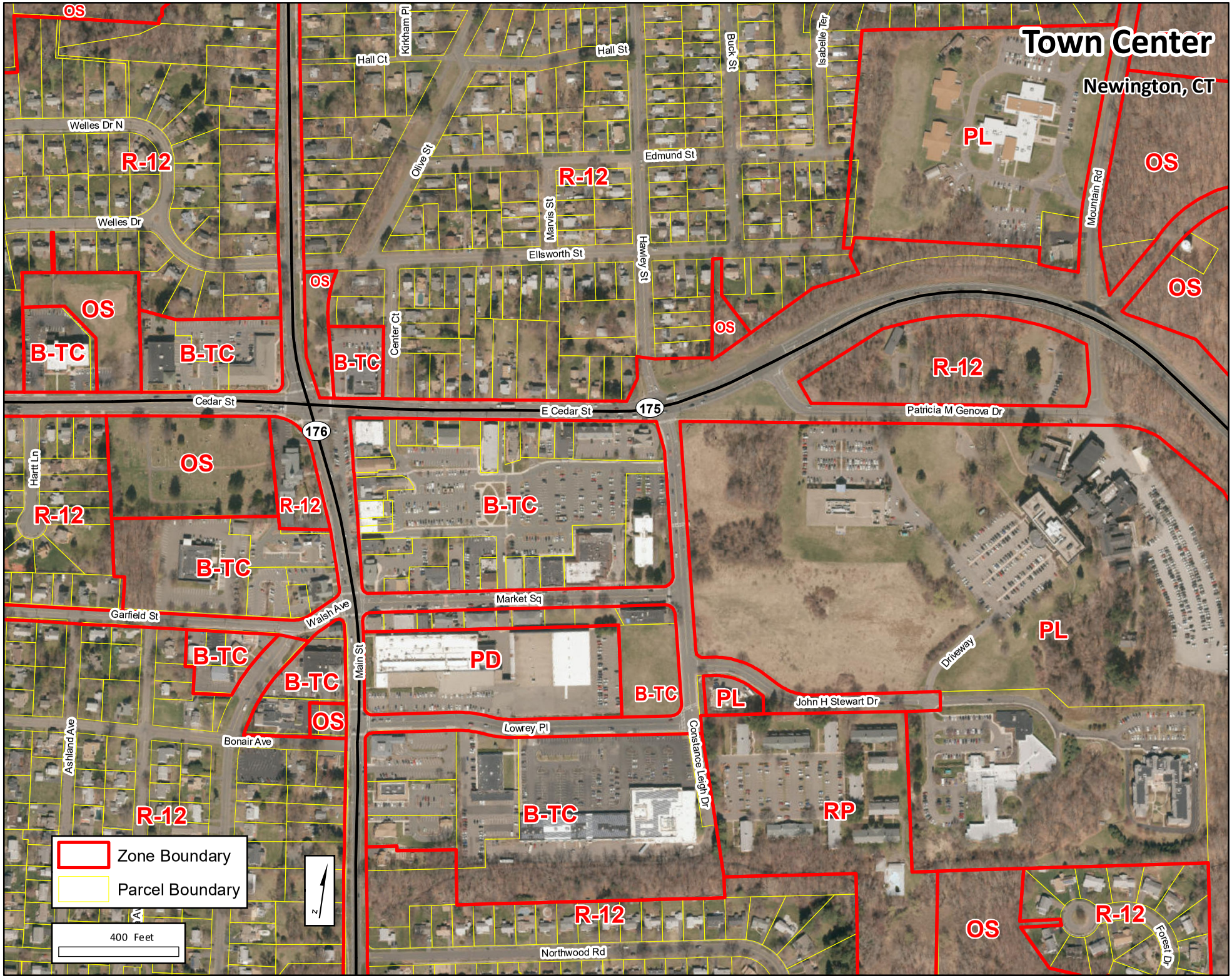
7. Seek to ensure that the Town Center is well-maintained, comfortable, and safe for people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds at all times of the day.

8. Maintain the attractive look and feel of the Town Center and its relationship with surrounding neighborhoods.

9. Maintain and enhance transitional "buffer" areas and seek to ensure appropriate scale, height and setback to adjacent residential areas.

10. Manage traffic and parking to reduce impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods and enhance safety, mobility and convenience for businesses, residents and visitors.

11. Seek to implement improvements within the Town Center and surrounding neighborhoods to enhance pedestrianism, handicapped accessibility, bicycle access, transit use, and other forms of mobility (including "Complete Streets").


Town Center
Newington, CT
OS
Welles Dr N
R-12
Welles Dr
OS
B-TC
B-TC
Hall Ct
Kirkham Pl
Hall St
Buck St
Isabelle Ter
Olive St
R-12
Edmund St
Marvis St
Ellsworth St
Hawley St
OS
Center Ct
B-TC
OS
PL
Mountain Rd
OS
OS
R-12
Patricia M Genova Dr
Cedar St
E Cedar St
175
176
Hartt Ln
OS
R-12
R-12
B-TC
B-TC
Market Sq
Garfield St
Walsh Ave
B-TC
B-TC
OS
Main St
PD
B-TC
PL
John H Stewart Dr
Driveway
PL
Lowrey Pl
Bonair Ave
Ashland Ave
Constance Leigh Dr
R-12
B-TC
RP
R-12
OS
R-12
Forest Dr
Northwood Rd
Zone Boundary
Parcel Boundary
400 Feet
N

Do these policies and action steps make sense for Newington?

Are there any policies or action steps you feel should be added or deleted?

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR 2020 POCD

A. POLICIES (Strategies anticipated to continue over time)

1. Seek to enhance the vibrancy and vitality of Newington Town Center as the primary community focal point and support uses and development which help achieve this goal.
2. Maintain regulations which will support a vibrant mixture of business, civic and residential uses in Newington Town Center and a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly area with an active streetscape.
3. Continue to use the Town Center Village Overlay (and the Town Center design standards) to ensure that new development and redevelopment enhances the character, landscape and architectural quality of the Town Center (and maintains or re-uses existing facades and/or materials, where feasible).
4. Continue to ensure that streetscape improvements (sidewalks, lighting, trees, streets/curbing signage etc.) are of the highest quality and consistent in design theme as the streetscape along Main Street.
5. Promote sidewalks and pedestrian pathways, enhance them with trees, lighting, and site furnishings, and eliminate physical barriers.
6. Continue to seek grants and other funding to extend and enhance streetscape improvements along Main Street, Market Square, Lowrey Place, Constance Leigh Drive, Cedar street, East Cedar Street, Garfield Street, and into Constitution Square (parking lot).
7. Seek ways to expand and improve the public parking area including additional private property donations for public parking.
8. Continue to support and facilitate the Town Center as a location for community events and public gatherings.
9. Continue to ensure that building height and land uses at the perimeter of the Town Center are sensitive to adjacent residential areas.

B. ACTION STEPS (Specific tasks intended to implement the POCD)

- ☐ 1. Consider undertaking a community-driven planning process (like a community "charrette" or a carefully constituted steering committee) for the Town Center area to establish an overall vision, suggest possible regulation changes, and to set the stage for complementary development.
- ☐ 2. Evaluate Town Center parking requirements and permit lower parking ratios if the land uses comply with design guidelines, joint use and time-of-day shared parking.
- ☐ 3. Utilize the strategic framework of the National Main Street Program in cooperation with the business sector and Town Center property owners as the Town Center continues to evolve.