

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING



City of New Haven
John DeStefano, Jr., Mayor

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

New Haven is a mature city with a development pattern that has evolved over four centuries. While the central core is well-framed by a grid of nine squares, the balance of the city is an organic collection of, among other features, residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, open spaces, institutions and industrial districts. These qualities are often noted for their diversity and livability, thereby creating a unique and celebrated “sense of place”.

In general terms, the city’s housing and land use patterns are more dense and more integrated than other municipalities in Connecticut. In addition, mixed-use districts, either by design or by heritage, continue to be among the city’s more prominent land use features.



Figure 4.1: As shown in this Alex Maclean photograph, much of New Haven’s residential landscape is characterized by unit over unit residences on narrow lots.

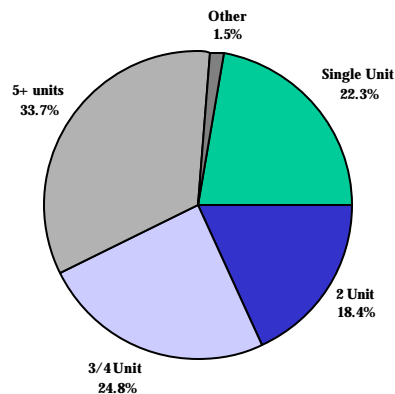
Housing Units by Type of Development

Although the state as a whole is predominately comprised of single-unit housing, New Haven’s housing stock is older and more diverse. Of the 54,000+ dwelling units in New Haven, 22% are in single-unit homes, 18% are in two-unit homes, 25% are in three- and four-unit homes and 34% are in five+ unit complexes.

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Among the state's major cities, New Haven has the second highest percentage of two-unit housing. This is in keeping with the city's traditional pattern of development in the older neighborhoods, in particular the unit-over-unit houses found throughout Fair Haven, Newhallville, the Hill and elsewhere. In addition, the city has the highest percentage of 3- and 4- unit houses, which relates both to traditional housing styles and to favorable regulations allowing for the conversion of two-unit homes to higher densities.

Figure 4.2: Housing units by type in New Haven, 1999



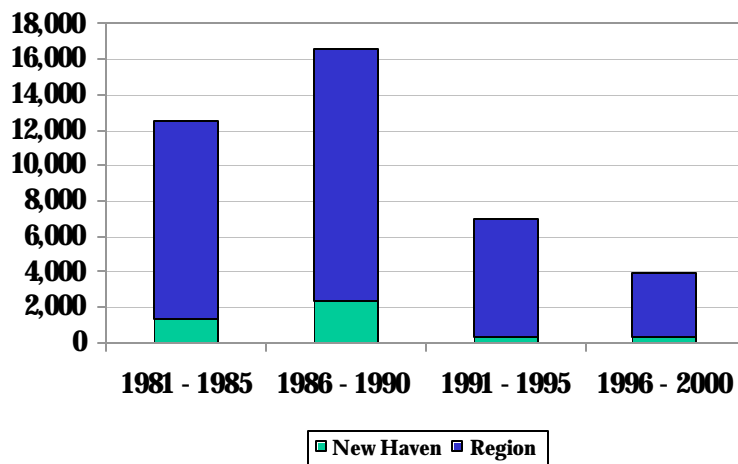
Housing Sector Activity

In 1999, housing permit activity in New Haven, relative to the size of the housing stock, lagged behind both state and regional averages. Moreover, the city's share of the south central regional housing market is growing smaller. Over the past 20 years, urban development has expanded well beyond the urban core. From 1981 - 1985, permit activity in New Haven accounted for 12.2% of all permits in the South Central region. By 1996 - 2000, however, New Haven's share of regional permit activity declined to 5.5%. Regional land consumption for urban development has increased dramatically as well. According to the South Central Regional Council of Government's regional land use plan, urban development in the outer suburbs increased 10% from 1970 to 1990.

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In spite of the maturity of the New Haven market, the lack of available land for subdivisions and intensive new construction, there remains a healthy amount of activity in the city. In 1999, the city issued 234 new housing permits. Of these, 173 were for new single-unit homes – highest among the state’s major cities for that year. The demand for single-unit housing reflects a demand for contemporary trends toward homeownership, but within the context of an urban area.

Figure 4.3: New Haven’s Share of the Region’s Permit Activity, 1981 - 2000



The value of all permitted residential construction in 1999 in Connecticut totaled over \$1.4 billion. The South Central region’s share of this value was \$165 million (11%). The value of permits in New Haven was significantly lower than the state average and among the lowest municipalities in the region, placing 11th overall and 13th in single-unit value.

Aside from the remarkably high figures in Stamford, New Haven fares well against the state’s other major cities. In Bridgeport, Hartford and Waterbury, single-unit values did not exceed \$61,000. Also, note that single-unit values in New Haven exceeded Hamden and approximated East Haven, two communities with more open and available space for new development.

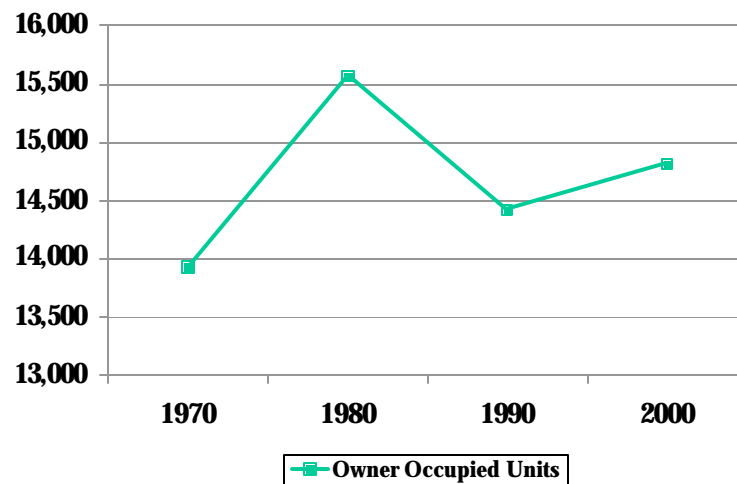
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Owner Occupancy

According to the 2000 US Census, 29.6% of all occupied housing units in New Haven are owner-occupied. Although the percentage is down slightly, owner occupancy has been relatively steady over the past 20 years. In 1990, 31.8% of the city's occupied housing units were owner occupied and in 1980 30.7% were owner occupied.

Homeownership rates are generally lower in areas of higher density and limited single- and two-unit housing. However, as an important bellweather statistic of neighborhood planning, increasing the number of homeowners is a longstanding policy in the city. The policy is appropriate given the relationship between homeownership and neighborhood stability. Homeowners have a long-term stake in the community, contribute directly to the property tax base and are on-site stewards of real estate.

Figure 4.4 Number of owner occupied units in New Haven, 1970 - 2000



Following the 1990 Census, the City Plan Department estimated that 88% of the city's single-unit detached housing stock and 75% of its two-unit housing stock was owner-occupied. These figures fall off significantly for higher density developments, including multi-family houses and apartment buildings.

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Distressed Housing

Distressed and deteriorated housing continue to be core issues related to neighborhood planning in New Haven (see Figure 4.5). While no single factor causes distress and deterioration, it is apparent that a combination of poor structural condition, limited land area and the general neighborhood environment (public safety, aesthetics, etc.) all contribute to deteriorating conditions.

According to the 2000 LCI / Fire Department Building Survey, there are 596 vacant structures in New Haven. This is down significantly from the 751 reported in 1999 in the Consolidated Plan. By neighborhood, the Hill (194), Fair Haven (84) and Newhallville (61) have the largest aggregate numbers of vacant buildings.

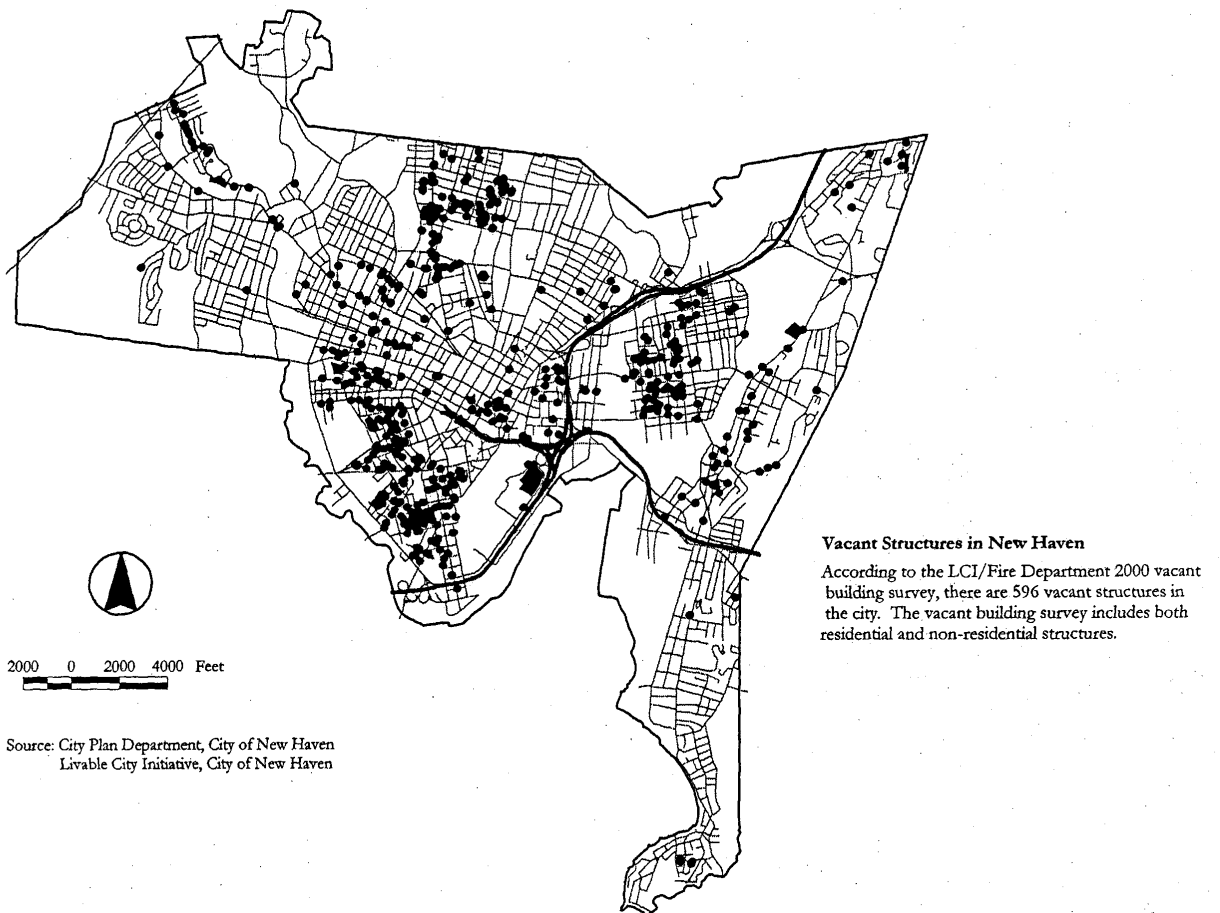
Similarly, there is a high incidence of properties in some stage of municipal foreclosure in New Haven (469 in 2001). Of these properties, 137 were located in the Hill, 77 in Fair Haven and 56 in Newhallville. As a percentage of all parcels in the neighborhood, West River also has a high number of foreclosures (20 total, or 3.1% of all parcels).

A number of socio-economic factors impact the stability of the housing stock. High rates of families in poverty (20.5% in 2000) and low median family incomes (\$29,604 in 2000) place additional stress on the housing stock – often leading to deferred maintenance of general repairs, landlord/tenant issues and foreclosures.

Well over 1/3 of the city's housing stock was built before World War II. The age of the housing stock generally increases the costs for rehabilitation, including costs to remove lead paint, underground petroleum storage tanks and repair long-term structural damage.

There are a number of similarities in the neighborhoods with high levels of distressed housing. The Hill, Newhallville and Fair Haven are older, denser neighborhoods. All three are Empowerment Zone neighborhoods, reflecting lower income levels in the community. As such, there is a wide set of needs ranging from small paint / improvement programs to marketing for the transition to new homeowners. Often the market for new homeowners is limited to the local population as the availability of inner city homes is not as well known on a regional basis.

Figure 4.5: Map of Vacant Structures in New Haven



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Affordable Housing and Government Assisted Housing in Connecticut

The cost of housing in Connecticut remains high relative to the nation as a whole. The South Central Regional Council of Government's land use plan estimates that 40,000 households in the region (approximately one in every five households) spends over 30% of total household income on housing. SCRCOG, in calling attention to the housing issue, estimates a shortfall of 8,000 affordable housing units in the region.

In New Haven, the cost burden is significant. The 2000-04 Consolidated Plan reported that 67% of all renter households qualify for public assistance as their incomes are at or below 80% of the area median family income. The need is manifested in long waiting lists for Housing Authority units, Section 8 vouchers and in the shortfall of emergency shelter and transitional housing space.



Figure 4.6: Homes at Monterey Place, HOPE VI development

New 2000 US Census Data suggests that the problem is as or more severe than in 1990. The median family income in New Haven is now \$35,950, well below the statewide median of \$65,521. In addition, there is a widening gap between the state's wealthiest and poorest communities. There are three times as many persons in poverty in New Haven than the state as a whole and four times as many families in poverty.

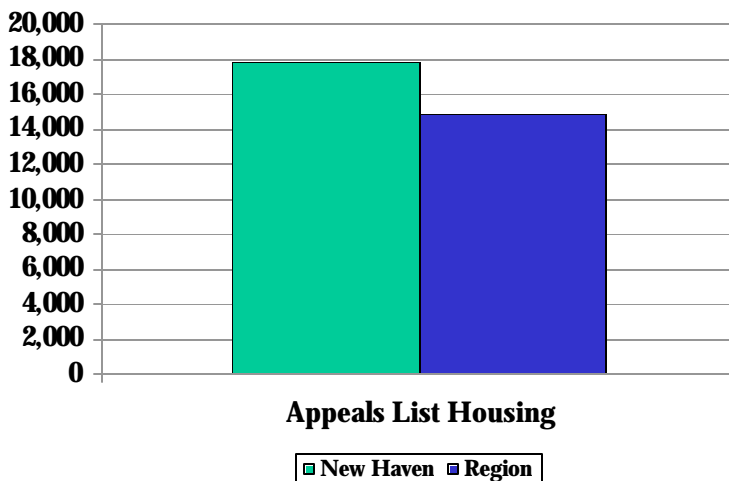
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The affordability of housing in New Haven also is affected by the high housing costs associated with property taxes, maintenance and capital improvements and high energy costs. Energy efficiency programs are typically not built in to affordable housing developments.

The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development maintains the affordable housing appeals list as part of the program and implementation of CGS Section 8-30g. The list calculates “assisted housing” as that percentage of housing units that are either (a) Assisted Housing Units – housing for occupancy by low- and moderate-income households that is/has received government aid; (b) Ownership Housing – housing financed with mortgages from Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and/or Farmer’s Home Administration; or (c) Deed Restricted Properties – deeds encumbered by affordable housing covenants.

With more than 10% of their housing stock included on the list, New Haven, Meriden and West Haven are the region’s only three exempt municipalities. Statewide, New Haven, with 17,823 (33.7%) units, has the second highest percent of assisted housing. Hartford is first with 20,135 (39.8%). One in every ten listed units in the state is located in New Haven; three in every ten are located in Hartford, New Haven or Bridgeport.

Figure 4.7: Units of appeals list housing in New Haven and the rest of the region



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Historic Preservation

New Haven is rich in historic resources, including a wide variety of historic residential neighborhoods and landmarks, both buildings and places. There are 18 National Register Historic Districts in the city and three local historic districts. There are also 32 properties or sites on the National Register that are individually listed. Approximately 4,000 properties have been identified in surveys conducted by the Connecticut Historical Commission as possibly being eligible for listing on the National Register. Included in this is the recently-established 18th National Register District in and around Westville Village. Also, the Suburban Westville Historic District was recently designated on the State Register of Historic Places.



Figure 4.8: The Quinnipiac River frames the local and national historic districts.

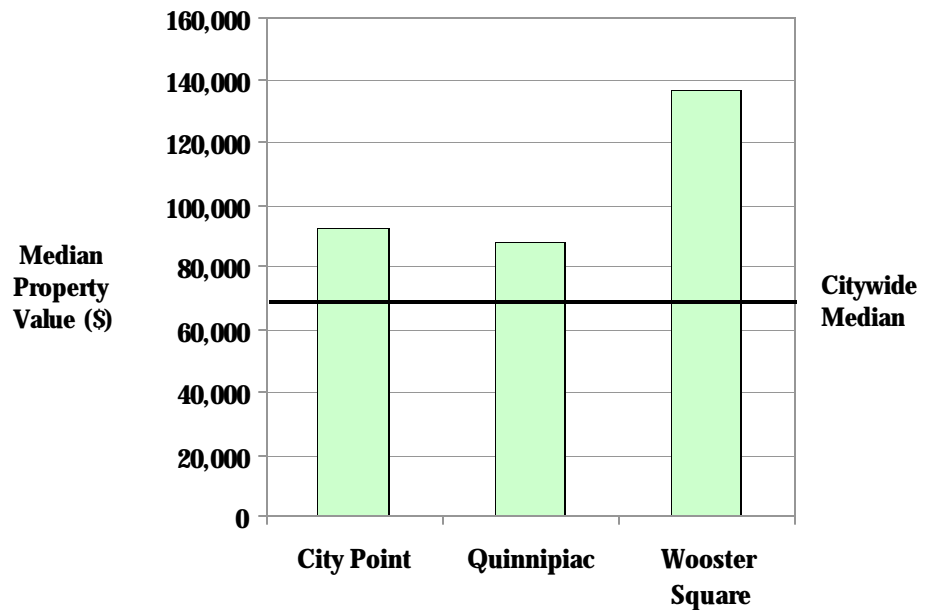
The City of New Haven is a Certified Local Government under 101 (c)(1) of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The CLG status is conferred to enhance the role of local governments in historic preservation by formalizing and strengthening local programs and its links with the Connecticut Historical Commission. As a Certified Local Government, the City acknowledges and assumes many responsibilities for the protection of historic resources. These responsibilities include the enforcement of local legislation for disseminating and protecting historic properties, establishment of the Historic District Commission and provision for public participation in historic preservation programs.

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The three local historic districts are Wooster Square (est. 1970), Quinnipiac River (est. 1978) and City Point (est. 2001). These districts contain 178, 241 and 123 properties respectively. All three are defined by a distinct residential architecture and a unique environment. At Quinnipiac, for example, recent and historic construction complements a waterfront location and village atmosphere. As new construction and renovations occur, there is a need for diligent review and project oversight. Although building activity within the districts is regulated, community education and public awareness is required. This is particularly true for commercial establishments within districts.

There is continuing interest in new local districts, partially due to the healthy property values in the existing districts. The 2001 Grand List indicates that property values in City Point, Quinnipiac and Wooster Square are well above the median residential class property value in New Haven.

Figure 4.9: Median residential class property values within local historic districts



In addition to the registered and surveyed properties, there is an inherently historic context to the city in general. As both a colonial city and as an

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industrial city, New Haven's development pattern is a distinctive pattern which, from an urban design perspective, is worthy of preservation. Therefore, many infill housing developments seek to emulate the urban context.

The urban design context – though not part of existing zoning – is of particular interest given the high cost of rehabilitation in local historic districts. Given the limited state tax credit assistance available, a broad expansion of the local historic district program will be difficult to achieve in lower income communities.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- Housing and land use patterns in New Haven have evolved over several centuries and are, therefore, atypical of the Connecticut development landscape.
- The city's neighborhoods have unique and organic qualities, which contribute to a profound "sense of place" and an agreeable urban living environment. The prevailing land use pattern is a classic example "new urbanist" design philosophy (higher densities, pedestrian and transit connections, high quality aesthetics, etc.).
- The city's most stable neighborhoods, in general, are pedestrian-oriented, aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sound. There are walk-to-work options and convenience goods in accessible locations. Community services, including schools, parks and playgrounds are within a reasonable walking distance of many homes. Tree-lined residential streets, as well as the surrounding commercial areas, enhance this urban environment.
- This contextual urban environment is among the city's most important assets and must be stewarded against inappropriate infill, conversions, encroachments and other potentially deleterious / nuisance influences.
- In some areas, the urban environment is a healthy mix that contributes to a high quality of life. In East Rock, for example, a number of small grocers and specialty retail shops are co-mingled in a residential environment. Generally speaking, the neighborhood functions well, with stable conditions, a pleasing environment and rising property values.

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- In other areas, nuisance and poorly operated uses have had an adverse effect on surrounding land use. Distressed property is seen more in older, lower income neighborhoods. Various factors contribute to the deteriorating influences, including poor structural condition, limited marketability and the overall condition of the surrounding area.
- Over time, certain zoning policies have eroded the inherent and prevailing character of New Haven's neighborhoods. For example, in an RM-2 zoning district, the minimum lot area per unit is 2,000 s.f. Therefore, existing single- and two-family homes (even those on modest lot sizes) are often converted to higher densities.
- In addition, high density zoning complicates infill and flag lot development by allowing for densities often higher than the prevailing character of the area.
- Since there are few opportunities for new subdivision development in the city, appropriate infill and redevelopment are central housing and neighborhood development strategies.
- Aggressive code enforcement and property turnover (from tax delinquency to resale) will continue to stabilize neighborhoods and advance a comprehensive redevelopment strategy.
- Redevelopment plans, though largely dormant in recent years, can be an ideal complement to the current Livable City approach. Redevelopment plans provide an opportunity to target specific deteriorated properties (both existing and in the future) in a more streamlined manner than the sometimes cumbersome foreclosure process.
- Affordable housing remains an integral component to the city's housing strategy. In order to meet the increasing demand for affordable units, however, the strategy must be part of a regional approach. Already, New Haven has the region's largest percentage of affordable housing appeals listed properties. Therefore, a workable, lasting solution must include a balanced approach of market-rate and affordable units, spread more evenly across the entire South Central Connecticut region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

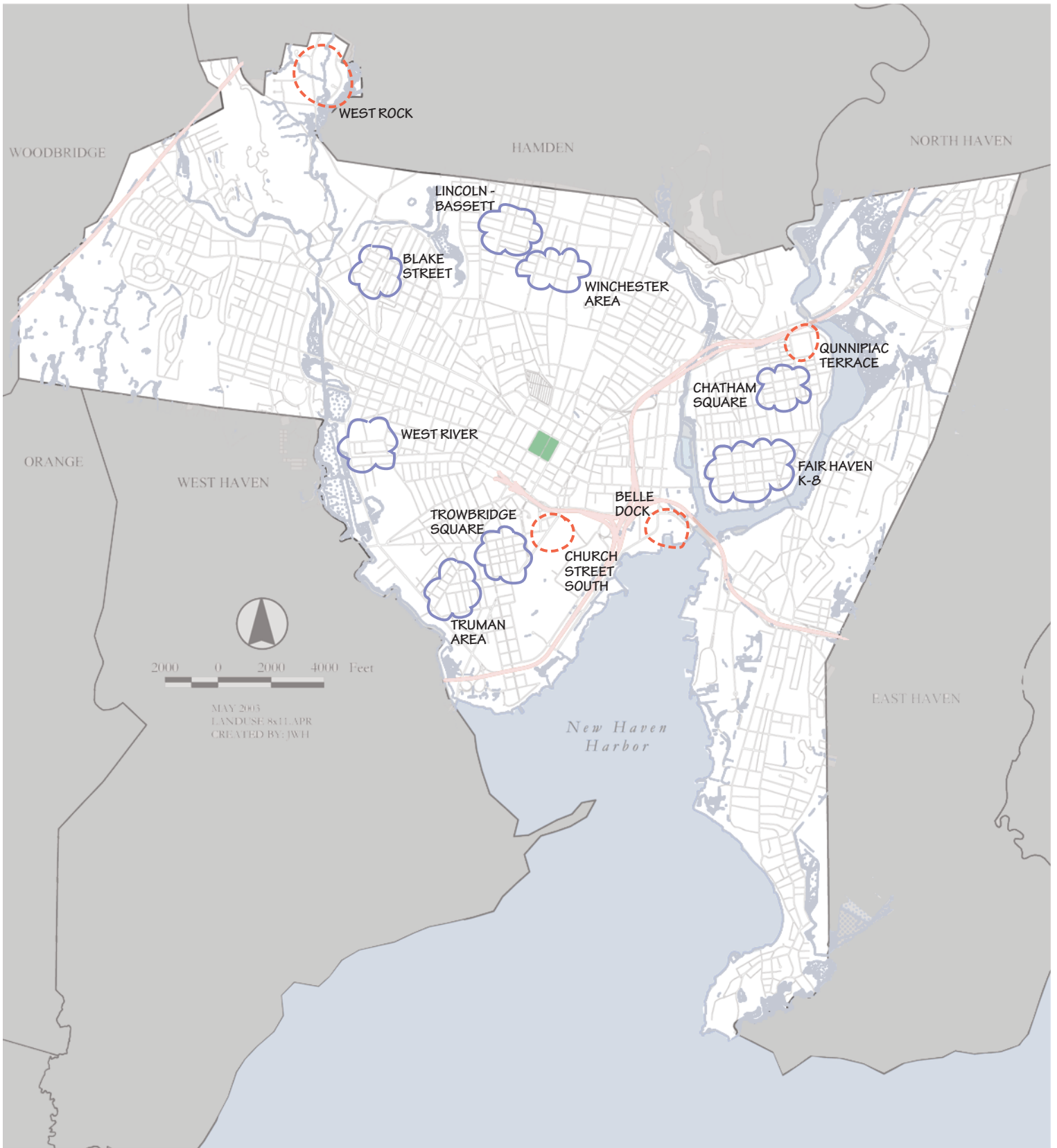
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The plan’s recommendations for housing and neighborhood development are organized around the following themes: Homeownership, Environment, Identity, Enforcement and Balance.

Homeownership. Homeownership is a bellweather of neighborhood stability and the foundation for community development. As such, the revitalization of certain neighborhoods and the preservation of others hinges on a healthy number of owner occupants.

- Encourage the construction of single- and two-unit housing in manner consistent with the prevailing neighborhood character.
- Allow new construction of multi-unit developments only in appropriate locations and / or with a companion homeownership plan.
- Encourage the conversion of vacant and / or deteriorated multi-unit structures to appropriate densities for the surrounding area.
- Encourage public and private employers to participate in government homeownership programs.
- Encourage the rehabilitation of the city’s existing housing stock and, where this is not feasible, new construction on buildable lots in a manner consistent with the prevailing character.

Environment. New Haven’s urban environment is a national model. The city’s neighborhoods are aesthetically-pleasing and pedestrian-friendly. Decisions that affect the urban environment, be they related to land use development, traffic circulation, street trees, etc. must be reviewed in light of their surroundings. As part of the review process, the city and private developers must consider aesthetics, preservation, the relationship new development to existing development patterns and the impact of new development on the overall quality of life.



HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

--- Neighborhood Development

★ Revitalization Opportunities



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- Revise relevant sections of the Zoning Ordinance to prevent the inappropriate conversion of residential-class properties to higher densities and to restrict the inappropriate development of high density, multi-unit buildings where such development is not in keeping with the prevailing neighborhood character.
- Reinforce the urban environment and sense of place through site plan and design review of private development and through contingencies on public funding.
- Reinforce the urban environment through historic preservation, design standards and / or the establishment of new local historic districts. Assist the preservation movement – particularly in low income areas – with technical and financial assistance.
- Use redevelopment and other tools to address nuisance and deterioration issues, including uses that are deleterious to the neighborhood in general.
- Consider the impact of new development on the existing urban fabric, relative to traffic, noise, public convenience, public safety, aesthetics, site design and layout, etc.
- Encourage and support the redevelopment of government-assisted housing in a manner that enhances the urban environment through contextual urban design, appropriate density and integration with the surrounding area.
- Promote the urban environment through energy efficient design, green spaces, community gardens, street trees and other pervious landscape treatments.
- Facilitate connections between transportation and employment centers. Encourage “walk to work” and transit-oriented developments as a way to enhance the urban environment and to reduce vehicle miles traveled. Encourage pedestrian access and amenities to everyday errands by creating walkable, pedestrian-scale built environments.

Identity. As a city of neighborhoods, each residential area has distinct qualities that form a foundation for redevelopment. In particular, the school construction program provides an unparalleled opportunity to link neighborhood revitalization with the public school system.

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- Promote the revitalization of residential areas and neighborhood commercial districts in and around facilities included in the school construction program, including Lincoln Bassett School (Newhallville), Jackie Robinson School (West Newhallville), Fair Haven K-8 School (lower Fair Haven), Truman School (Hill) and Barnard School (West River).
- Promote the revitalization of residential areas clustered around significant public spaces, including Trowbridge Square (potential local district) and Chatham Square, and job centers, including Science Park, SCSU and River Street.
- Encourage the development of dramatically new neighborhood forms as part of revitalization programs at select locations, including West Rock, Quinnipiac Terrace, Belle Dock and Church Street South.
- Enhance the waterfront residential communities in Hill / City Point, Fair Haven and elsewhere by encouraging compatible development and land uses with minimal adverse impacts on the surrounding area. Waterfront development objectives should include relationship to the water, compatibility the city's coastal program (with emphasis on public access) and design in a manner consistent with the fabric of the surrounding area. In Fair Haven, the Quinnipiac River National Historic District is an appropriate geography for more intensive neighborhood planning, including consideration of zone changes consistent with the aforementioned land use objectives, neighborhood-scale traffic planning and potential expansion of the local historic district.
- As a city of neighborhoods, each residential area has distinct qualities that form a foundation for redevelopment. In many instances, the city's status as a Certified Local Government is a beneficial technique to advance a revitalization effort. Likewise, the school construction program provides an unparalleled opportunity to link neighborhood revitalization with the public school system.

Enforcement. The City of New Haven must continue to be an active player in furthering redevelopment by continuing an aggressive code-based effort to eliminate deteriorated uses and abandoned sites.

- Encourage the revitalization of distressed, privately owned property through enforcement of existing regulations for interior and exterior maintenance and through the creation of clear consequences for delinquent

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private owners, moving aggressively to Housing Court and other necessary actions while protecting the rights and needs of non-owner occupants.

- Encourage the stabilization and revitalization of publicly-owned property through a timely disposition process. Use the Land Disposition Agreement to advance other housing and neighborhood objectives, including appropriate densities, homeownership and contextual design.
- Establish systematic code enforcement sweeps to correspond with neighborhood planning and housing revitalization programs. Seek to protect the city's investment in its neighborhoods by ensuring the stewardship of private property.

Balance. Given the city's housing stock and its economic standing, the vast majority of the region's government assisted housing is located in New Haven. Consistent with *Vision*, the Regional Land Use Plan, the regional housing policy must seek to balance government assisted housing in New Haven and the inner ring suburbs to include the entire south central Connecticut region.

- Encourage the de-centralization of government assisted housing across the south central Connecticut region.
- Encourage low- and moderate-income housing developers, including quasi-public entities, to operate on a regional basis and to partner with market-rate development opportunities.
- Encourage the development of low- and moderate-income housing, including government assisted housing, that is in harmony with regional plans for transportation improvements.