

Project Narrative

The Town of Farmington is embarking on an exciting place making project which is driven by the towns desire to bolster the sense of place in Farmington and to create an attractive gateway into the town and specifically into the National Register Farmington Center Local Historic District. All are in agreement that the district is quintessential Farmington. It is our brand. It is what we are known for.

The study area is bisected by CT RT 4. Over 28,000 cars per day pass through the area and it is the most heavily utilized entry into the town. It is adjacent to the Farmington Center Historic District, including the campus of the internationally renowned Miss Porters School, the Hill-Stead Museum and grounds (a National Historic Landmark), the Stanley Whitman Museum (another National Historic Landmark) and the Farmington Country Club. The study area is bounded on the west by the Farmington River.

The study area includes seven (7) inventoried historic structures. Only two (2) of the structures are in the local historic district. The other five (5) inventoried historic buildings are unprotected. A plan for this area will acknowledge these structures and hopefully lead to adaptive reuse rather than demolition.

This project is necessary because the study area, as displayed in Appendix A, will be undergoing significant change as a result of CT DOT Project # 51-260. This project, which is displayed in Appendix B, will begin in April 2015 and will take over two (2) years to complete. The project will permanently alter the rich historic character of the area. Currently there is no plan for how the area will develop post DOT. Currently there is no plan for the area post DOT.

The town Council has created a public/private land development committee which includes representatives from the Town Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Economic Development Committee. This group is spear heading this effort.

The group is staffed by two individuals with extensive experience in planning, economic development and downtown revitalization.

William Warner, AICP, Town Planner, is best known for his twenty five (25) years of service to the City of Middletown. In that capacity he wrote the downtown plan and lead the successful revitalization of Main Street. Mr. Warner has secured and administered millions of dollars in state and federal grants and has received numerous planning awards. Most recent and most relevant is the *2014 Connecticut Light and Power Award for Outstanding Contributions to Main Street Revitalization*.

Rose Ponte, Economic Development Director, spent 7.5 years working for the City of Torrington as their Economic Development Director. She has secured and administered numerous state and federal grants totaling more than \$2 million dollars and is best known for her work revitalizing downtown Torrington and creating the award winning Main Street Market Place. The Market Place brought 3,000 visitors to the downtown each summer and became a catalyst for bringing art studios, and 15 new retail shops that filled former vacant storefronts.

The Council Committee and staff have been working closely with a very active grass roots group known as “Preservation Now” to facilitate planning workshops and the creation of a Farmington Center Urban Design Plan. Once created the plan would be presented to and incorporated into the Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

Mr. Warner has prepared the draft existing conditions report which is included in this application as Appendix C. The next and most important step in the planning process is the public participation element of the plan. The town does not want to dictate the pattern of future development for the area. Time and again it has been shown that the best and most successful plans are those that rise up from the neighborhood, from the “grass roots”. A plan based on a public participation model will reflect the desires of the residents of the Town of Farmington, not the elected officials, not the bureaucracy or their paid consultants.

The town has established a web site link and an email database with close to 1,000 addresses of Farmington residents and businesses. Preservation Now is establishing a Facebook page. Email blasts and newspaper articles are planned.

To begin the face to face, on the ground, public participation element the Town is planning three public workshops involving several hundred residents of the town. The dining hall at Miss Porter’s School, with a capacity of over 300, has been reserved and the dates of the workshops have been set as follows:

- Thursday, March 26th, 2015 7PM – 10 PM Public Planning Workshop
- Friday, March 27th, 2015 Noon – 2 PM Mobile “Urban Design Classrooms”
- Saturday, March 28th, 2015 9:00 AM – 1: 00 PM Public Planning Workshop

To insure transparency and an open dialogue the Town is in need of a team of professionals to facilitate these public workshops.

The Town will solicit statements of qualifications and experience from teams of professional planning, architecture, landscape architecture and urban design consulting firms to facilitate the public workshops and provide preliminary planning and design services based on the public input.

These types of workshops with highly experienced professionals and sufficient support staff can be well in excess of \$5,000 per day. The Town of Farmington has allocated \$10,000 for this endeavor and is seeking a matching Partners in Preservation grant from the State Historic Preservation Office.

With \$20,000 the Town will be able to conduct extremely high quality and productive public planning workshops as discussed above.

The deliverables from the consulting team will be as follows:

- Facilitate and lead large public planning workshops to insure efficient and productive use of time;
- Act as “educator and facilitator” during break-out sessions and the urban design classrooms which will be a walking tour of the study area with discussions regarding the elements of good urban design;
- Prepare final report of public planning workshops;
- Provide up to 3 concept plans for areas within the study area based on public input;
- Provide preliminary architectural renderings of recommended streetscapes, building facades, public amenities, etc;

We are confident that the first step to a successful Farmington Center revitalization, which will preserve our historic structures and create a sense of place, is a comprehensive analysis and plan for the area, including extensive public input. This grant will enable us to proceed with this important initiative.