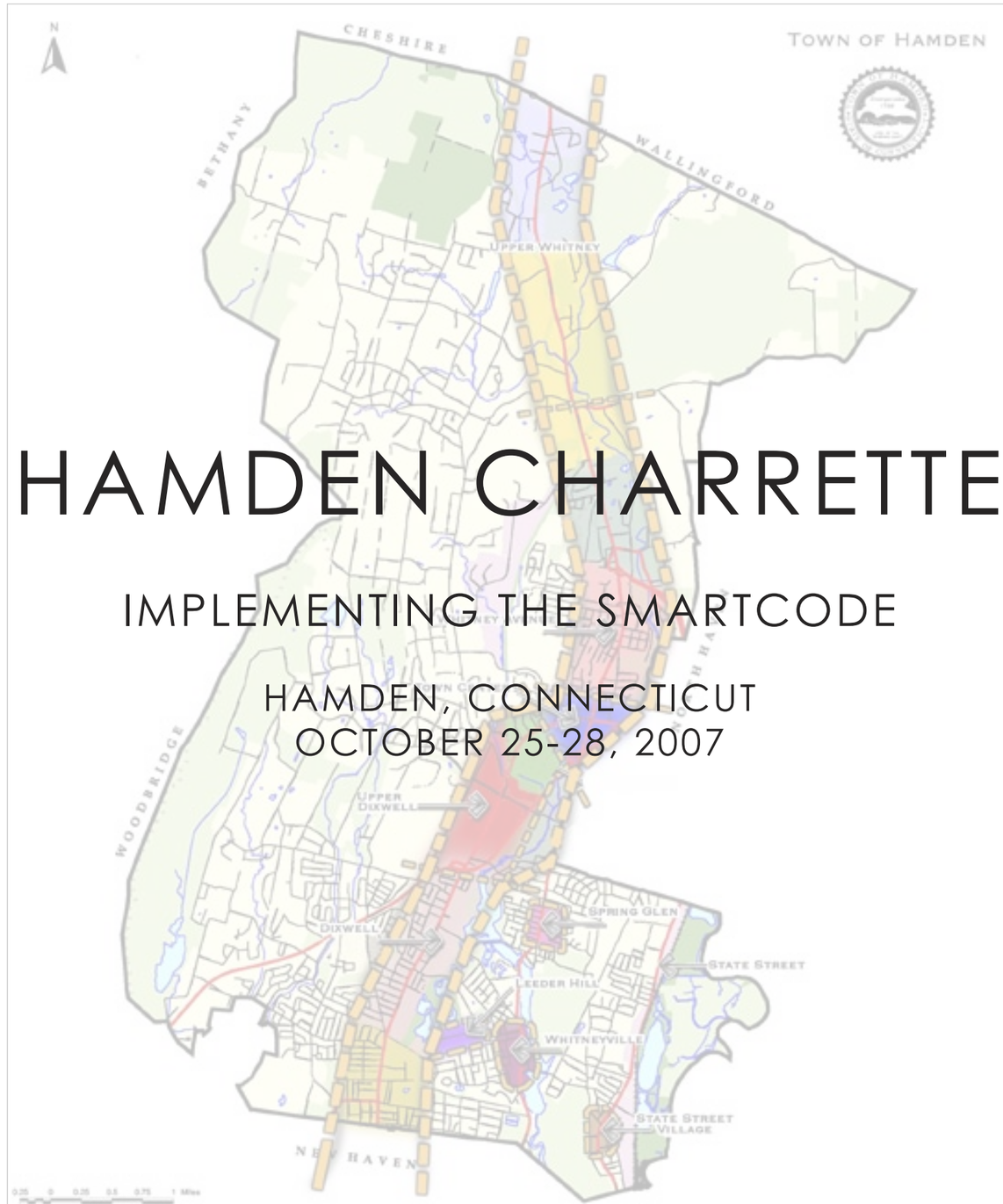

HAMDEN CHARRETTE

IMPLEMENTING THE SMARTCODE

HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT
OCTOBER 25-28, 2007

SMARTCODE CHARRETTE

Hamden, Connecticut

October 25 - 28, 2007

Charrette Team:

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Funding:

Town of Hamden

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RESIDENT COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS

October 2007

QUINNIPIAC
- Town/gown issues: students living in area, parking lots taking over
- More sidewalks
- Need 2 separate centers: Quinnipiac and Route 40 south
- Quinnipiac needs more of a college feel.
- Sites of concern: hotel proposal and church

MT. CARMEL
- Need more sidewalks to take walks and curbs to prevent rain water from flooding basements
- Need more consistent trash, traffic (speeding) & noise control
- Need local grocery shopping
- Need grid streets on west side

SPRING GLEN
- Slow traffic on Whitney Ave. with landscaping solutions, visual improvements, trees
- Need additional, better, safe pedestrian crossings
- Maintain village center; add cohesive signage and consistent architectural codes; mixed use with Mom & Pop retail and residences or offices above
- On-street parking strategies that would reduce the required parking for sites like Walgreen's
- Need playground for small children
- Need better transit links
- Need better orientation of where you are
- No big box - concerns about Walgreen's - its suburban plan feels out of context
- Need bike routes

WHITNEYVILLE
- Calm Whitney Ave., add parking on-street
- Add bike lane on Whitney Ave. & bike connection to Farmington Canal
- Limit light pollution
- Close Eli Street and reclaim the park
- Put a road around Lake Whitney for access
- Put a gazebo in the cemetary and remove the chain link fence
- Awning encroachment issues need to be resolved
- Thru trucking is an issue; truck routes not being enforced

LEEDER HILL
- Whitney Center owners would like to creat a neighborhood center; expansion will open up the area - theater and cafe planned
- Address parking issues & building closer to the road
- Replace munitions area with a park
- Work on connections for the other senior housing complex as well as residential area

NEWHALL
- Tear down abandoned school
- Remove contaminated soils more than 4 feet down; 100% cleanup wanted
- Restore neighborhood with trees, sidewalks, crosswalks, "children at play" signs
- Improve traffic pattern at Mill Rock and Newhall intersection; 2-way on Morse Street; consistent roadway direction
- Improve sewer infrastructure, trash pickup
- Integrate Newhall with adjacent neighborhoods

DIXWELL AT PUTNAM
- Need more entertainment venues such as performing arts, theaters
- Neighborhood needs a name
- More green space, shade trees - streetscape plan needed
- Need smaller scale commercial; commercial buildings need coding in a way that raises their quality

MAGIC MILE
- Middle School does not match the character of the town
- How to encourage developers to follow the SmartCode
- More east/west connections needed

CENTERVILLE
- Need design and aesthetic improvements such as parking in the back
- Consideration for town-wide gatherings
- Make more pedestrian friendly
- Consider converting Memorial Town Hall into a cinema
- Consider traffic circle at Dixwell/Whitney intersection

STATE STREET VILLAGE
- Improve neighborhood center
- Improve reliability of town services
- Shopping and East Rock Park within walking distance, yet it doesn't feel like a neighborhood - lack of pride in the area
- More crosswalks and walk lights

Background

Hamden was originally settled in 1638 as an alliance between small independent-minded villages. These areas have retained some of their original identity although time has taken its toll. Hamden's population has grown from 20,000 in 1920 to almost 60,000 at present and encompasses just over 33 square miles.

Hamden's development pattern is a progression from urban fabric at its southern border with New Haven, to suburban and then rural areas at its northern border with Cheshire. Hamden boasts a diverse population and a rich landscape with mountains, forests, rivers and streams, parks and hiking trails. It is also home to Quinnipiac University and The Paier School of Art.

As a community approaching build-out, the majority of Hamden's land not designated as open space or containing environmentally sensitive areas has already been developed. However, development of the remaining vacant land, infill development at selected nodes along Hamden's corridors and the redevelopment of brownfield sites in the future can significantly impact the Town. In order to support and protect the quality of life invisioned as part of the Town's future, a balance between development, the conservation of open space and natural resources, and the preservation of the Town's historical and cultural resources is necessary. At the same time, it is recognized that investment and development is necessary to address tax base issues and the economic well-being of the Town and its residents. A balance between conservation, preservation and development is a primary focus for future land use issues in the Town.

The goals of this process are the preservation of the Town's sound housing stock and stable neighborhoods; the regulation of in-fill development in keeping with the character and scale of surrounding neighborhoods and development; the preservation and enhancement of the Town's open space and recreation areas; the creation of linkages between open space, community facilities and residential neighborhoods; the rejuvenation of the Town Center and commercial corridors; the promotion of future development efforts which provide new housing, recreation, business and employment opportunities; and the support of quality of life improvements.

This charrette addresses areas along the corridors of the Town: Dixwell, Whitney, and State. The purpose is to promote the development of a mix of uses ranging from housing to commercial, office, and service uses which will bring vitality to the Town's corridor areas. Additionally, the provision of linkages, both physical in terms of pedestrian, transit and vehicular linkages and functional in terms of shared usage and uses which complement future development is a focus of this charrette.

These goals are uniquely suited to the principals guiding the development and implementation of the SmartCode. A proven tool for implementing positive change within a community, the SmartCode has been selected as the appropriate guide for addressing the changing needs of the Town's zoning regulations. The charrette process will tailor the SmartCode to the local needs of Hamden, provide examples of how the Town can improve through implementing the SmartCode, and offer on-going opportunities for public participation.

What is a charrette?

The charrette process consists of an intensive on-site work session that lasts several days, brings together a broad discipline of professionals and experts, and includes as wide a range of local policy makers, regulators, enactors, and citizens as possible. The work environment is open, collaborative, energetic, infectious and productive.

The main purpose is to maximize public engagement and participation in a process that affects their lives and to adjust professional input to respond to the unique character and conditions of the community. The thrust of a charrette is two-fold: educate the charrette team about the history, culture, values, wishes and needs of the local citizenry, and educate the local citizenry about means and methods for accomplishing their goals.

Overview of the October 2007 Charrette

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The Hamden Charrette began on a Thursday evening to maximize public availability. The kick-off session included a presentation on what Smart Growth is all about, identification of the targeted areas for changes to form-base zoning, the approach for updating use-base zoning for the residential areas, and an agenda for creating new regulating plans and calibrating the SmartCode over the next four days. The entire group of citizens and professionals then broke into focus groups organized according to eleven identified Hamden neighborhoods targeted for changes to form-base coding. The focus groups fleshed out issues and dreams for their specific neighborhoods, participated in a visual survey, and identified the physical location where everyone could agree the center of the neighborhoods most comfortably resides.

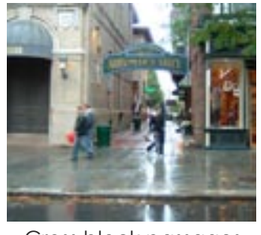
Over the next four days the charrette team worked to calibrate the SmartCode, to create form-based regulating plans, to explore use-base coding issues in residential areas, and to explore illustrative plans for the eleven neighborhoods. Progress was presented in daily well-attended public meetings where the team learned more about Hamden and the public learned more about Smart Growth. During this evolving process, plans were constantly critiqued and adjusted to better reflect unique conditions right up to the final presentation Sunday evening.

Quality of Life

Underlying all the Smart Growth principles is the basic attempt to improve the quality of life. Quality of life is an allusive concept that seems to have evolved into a focus on safety and vehicle mobility standards which, unwittingly, has created the auto-dependent sprawl that faces us today.

Through the eyes of Smart Growth, one can begin to identify different quality of life standards and set those standards in place with the goal of creating better communities, based on the unique charm and character that makes Hamden a special place. The identification of the aspects of Hamden that are worth preserving, protecting and extending into future development leads to an imperative to establish standards that will guide their successful creation. Further, this imperative extends to nurturing awareness so that the people of Hamden can knowledgeably demand high standards. It is only in communities where citizens demand high standards that better quality of life can be achieved.

CHARRETTE PROCESS


Cross block passages

Light Court

Arcade

Stoops

Gallery

What is the SmartCode?

Conventional Development

* Zoning by Use

  Malls
  Business Parks
  Housing

* Street Patterns Discourage Through Traffic
  Channel Traffic Through Limited Arterials

* Street Design favors primacy of the Automobile

* Street Trees are minimal

* Off-street parking is Primary Goal, resulting in:
  Large Structured Parking
  Lifeless and Unsafe Streets, particularly at night

* Streets are engineered to make drivers feel safe

* 2-7% increase in value and tax revenue

* Buildings designed in isolation – signature buildings

SmartCode

* Zoning by Form
  Define Street as Public domain
  Neighborhoods have a Recognizable Center
  Central Square or Green
  Mixed Retail, Office & Residential
  Schools are within Walking Distance

* Streets are Networked to allow for a variety of travel routes

* Street and Path Design favor primacy of the Pedestrian

* Street Trees are encouraged

* On-street parking is encouraged
  Parked cars buffer sidewalks, making pedestrians feel safer
  Valuable space is preserved for further development & open space

* Streets are engineered to make pedestrians feel safe

* 15 – 25% increase in value and tax revenue

* Buildings designed in community with each other to create a public domain

Shopfront & Awning

Forecourt

Terrace

Porch & Fence

Common Lawn

Before

After

Before

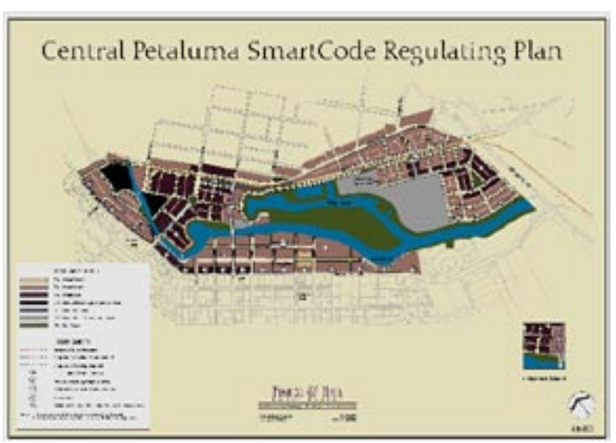
After

Before

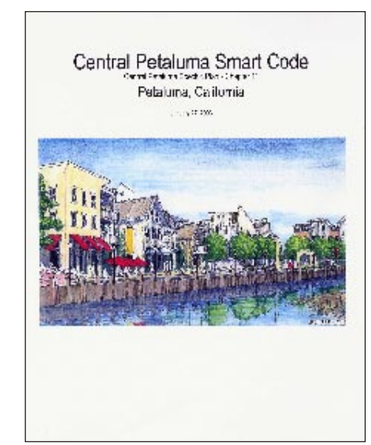
After

Before

After



This master plan and SmartCode (a type of form-based coding) were designed by a team led by Fisher & Hall Urban Design, with Lois Fisher as Director of Design, through a community process during which the Central Petaluma Advisory Committee and other members of the public identified their interests for this area. These included river- and pedestrian-oriented development, a mix of architectural styles, and lively public spaces. Within 2 years of the SmartCode's adoption, empty blocks that had languished for years into urban blight transformed as over $100 million of new development was entitled, including a riverfront plaza, 200 dwelling units, a 12-screen cinema, a 3-story parking garage and 94,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. The SmartCode provides guidance, incentives and lowered risk for positive, vibrant, and walkable development to add value and revenue to commercial and residential interests as well as tax base to the city to relieve burden on outlying residential areas.



Petaluma SmartCode - First in U.S.

SMARTCODE IN USE

What is Transect Zoning?

exerpt from "A New Theory of Urbanism" by Andres Duany, Scientific American, vol.283, number 6, December 2000

The transect is a concept drawn from ecology. It is a geographical cross section through a sequence of environments - for example, from wetland to upland, or tundra to foothill. The transect extends the natural environments to the human habitat by increasing density and immersive urban character. The gradient spans from the villa in the woods to the large suburban lots in a common lawn served by a sparse network of roads and on to urbanized sectors of ever greater complexity and continuity. Villages and towns are composed, invarying measures, of these environments. Cities extend the range to an urban core made of buildings, with little if any nature. All sections fulfill the set of human needs and desires. Based on our observations of vibrant communitites, we find a commonality among the design principles for each section of the transect. At the boundaries between sections, including that from the natural to the man-made, an overlap of the envisioned characteristics allows them to fit together smoothly.

The transect does not eliminate the standards embodied in present zoning codes. It merely assigns them to the sections of the transect where they belong. Thus, the existing requirements for street width are not deemed to be right or wrong but rather correctly or incorrectly allocated. Wide streets may be appropriate where speed of movement is justified, even at the expense of the pedestrian environment. Similarly, current standards for closed drainage systems are not wrong; it is just that they are appropriate only for urban areas with curbs and sidewalks. In rural areas, rainwater can infiltrate through deep, green setbacks and swales. In fact, the transect widens the range of design options. Under conventional codes, for example, front setbacks must either be a 25-foot grass yard or a paved parking lot. The transect offers at least six more options.

Not all possible environments fit into the transect. Civic buildings such as religious, educational, governmental and cultural institutions often demand special treatment. Airports, truck depots, mines and factories are also better off in their own zones. But the transect does away with other, unjustified forms of single-use zoning wherby any attempt to unite the places of daily life - the dwellings, shops and workplaces - is considered an aberration that requires variances. In this regard, a transect-based code reverses the current coding system, forcing the specialists to integrate their work. It is a new system that, as Modernist architect Le Corbusier said in a different context, makes the good easy and the bad difficult. And in so doing, it may reconcile the American public to the growth that has become inevitable.

T1 - Natural

T2 - Rural

T3 - Sub-Urban

T4 - General Urban

T5 - Urban Center

T6 - Urban Core

TRANSECTS