

East Hartford Burnside Church Brownfield Area-Wide Revitalization Plan Advisory Committee Meeting #1

September 16, 2025 @ 9AM-10:45AM | Welling Conference Room, East Hartford Town Hall

FACILITATORS

- Kimberly Baptiste – Colliers Engineering and Design (consultant)
- Jacob Robison - Colliers Engineering and Design (consultant)
- Bridget Snover – Colliers Engineering and Design (consultant)

ATTENDEES

- Connor Martin – Mayor, East Hartford
- Carlene Shaw – Town Planner / Project Manager
- Mike Beaudry – Owner of 87 Church Street
- Eileen Buckheit – Town Director of Development
- Sandy DiCicco – Head of Adult Services at East Hartford Public Library (Virtual)
- Steve Hnatuk – Town Deputy Director of Development
- Justin LaFountain – Senior VP of Planning at Goman & York
- Jennifer Lund – Pastor of the United Methodist Church
- Katie McLarney – Owner of 763 Burnside Avenue (Virtual)
- Daron Ross – Member of Economic Development Commission and ZBA (Virtual)
- John Ryan – Chair of Planning & Zoning Commission
- Doug Wilson – Town Engineer

FORMAT

This was the first Advisory Committee meeting of the planning process held hybrid with three virtual attendees. The project team facilitated a formal presentation introducing the project team, providing a project overview, reviewing proposed public engagement strategies, scope elements, timeline, and next steps in the planning process. There was an opportunity for the committee to ask questions throughout the presentation. The meeting concluded with an interactive visioning exercise.



PRESENTATION

Before the presentation, Mayor Martin expressed his excitement for this project, especially the conceptual design of Bicentennial Park and thanked everyone for being part of the Advisory Committee. Kimberly Baptiste facilitated a round of introductions of the Advisory Committee and project team. Mike Beaudry shared that he is a relatively new owner/investor in the 87 Church Street Mill.

01 Introducing the Project Team

Project Manager Kimberly Baptiste (CED) began the formal presentation by presenting the project team structure:

- Town of East Hartford: Project management and oversight
- Colliers Engineering & Design (CED): Lead consultant
- Camoin Associates: Market/economic analysis
- HRP Associates: Environmental review and ESAs
- Richter & Cegan: Public outreach assistance/ public space design
- Advisory Committee: Project guidance and feedback

02 Project Overview

Kimberly Baptiste reviewed the Brownfield Area-Wide Revitalization (BAR) study area, gave an overview of the BAR program and outcomes of the planning process:

- Comprehensive understanding of existing conditions, opportunities and challenges
- Community participation to gather feedback and help build sense of ownership in plan implementation
- Effective implementation strategies (based on market studies and feasibility analyses)
- Prioritization of specific brownfield sites for cleanup and reuse
- Prioritization for both public and private investment

Eileen Buckheit emphasized the importance of having a plan so that when opportunities present themselves, they can be acted upon. She said to think big and think long term. The plan will be adopted by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

03 Engagement: Informing the Planning Process

Kimberly reviewed the community engagement strategy, which includes multiple opportunities to solicit feedback from a diversity of stakeholders. These range from focused meetings with the advisory committee, stakeholder sessions, student and youth outreach, public workshops, and pop-up events. The project website, www.BurnsideChurchRevitalization.com, is a 24/7 community resource where the public can learn more about the project, find upcoming or past events, and submit comments directly to the project team.

Committee Comments:

- There is a large Spanish speaking population in the Town. Suggested that flyers and the project website are translated.
- Towns struggles with conducting outreach in area
- East Hartford doesn't have neighborhood groups

What We Heard: Are there any specific engagement tools or opportunities you would like to see incorporated into our process?

- Works best to reach out to stakeholders to encourage attendance
- Church willing to allow us to talk during coffee hour
- Every Door Direct postcards
- Social media - utilize own project account - will check social media policy if we are able to
- Set up a project information station at the Wickham library
- Channel 5 - local tv
- The gazette - free newspaper
- Ask library to send information out via social media
- AI not agreed upon within committee, AI phone number proposed, chair said he is not interested in utilizing AI at this point
- AP Gov at school? To go to classes

What We Heard: Are there any upcoming community events we can piggyback on?

- Holiday Fest - at park on main street
- Fall Fest, October 12th - at park on main street
- The Mill has 70 tenants in the building. Most are podcast or music studios or ghost offices that just need the address. Is there an opportunity to organize the tenants? Small business Saturday event?

04 Scope Elements & Timeline

Kimberly outlined the project's 12-month timeline, emphasizing that we're currently in the information-gathering phase pulling together existing conditions, the market analysis, and facilitating community visioning. She presented a breakdown of what the project team will be analyzing when it comes to physical characteristics of the study area and the market analysis. She discussed how community visioning will shape long-term goals and strategies and what elements will be included in the Land Use Master Plan:

- Public spaces and places
- Strategic redevelopment sites
- Perspective renderings to visualize future opportunities

Kimberly gave an overview of the implementation strategy that includes potential funding sources, planning level cost estimates, and a timeframe for implementation.

05 Next Steps

September

- Begin Stakeholder Outreach
- Advance Existing Conditions
- Advance Market Analysis

October

- Public Engagement
- Steering Committee Meeting #2 – November TBD, **Carlene to send out doodle poll**
- Draft Vision and Goals

06 Visioning Exercise

The meeting concluded with an interactive session where committee members provided one-word responses to key questions.

Visioning Question #1: How would you describe the study area today?

- **Opportunity** - for more programming at parks, owners willing to work with the Town
- **Connector** – East Hartford doesn't have a lot of north south links, main way to travel between Burnside and Silver Lane. Has large assembly areas, school, church, library, places for people to get together
- **Fragmented** - Established institutions - school, mill buildings, churches - usually do not talk to each other. Burnside is usually quiet, but it is busy during school pickup/drop off.
- **Quiet (x2)** - Very little foot traffic though many institutions and businesses and bus stop in the area. Would like to see busier. Most people are on their individual properties, no programming, people in and out, Cottage Street is so quiet people don't want you to drive on it.
- **Discombobulated** - too much in some spots, not enough in others. Large walking population, but no one walking anywhere. Library has been closed for 7 years for renovations, but people are still figuring out it is open. Too many closed storefronts, but shops have too much stuff (maybe signs?) in windows.
- **Diverse** - many different land uses, large Spanish speaking population. Large amount of property owners. Decades ago Burnside was a heavily used area for shopping and errands, plaza on 700 block was stronger and better tenants.
- **Underutilized** - town within a town - insulated, vendors, school. No cohesive factor that attracts people. Business aspect is transient. Needs to be more things for people to do. Bodegas, but no major draw.
- **Dated** - modernize and conserve historic uses.

Visioning Question #2: What is the greatest opportunity the study area?

- **Diversity (x2)** - a diversity of opportunities - a diversity of voices, can incorporate into one plan, diverse places are people that want to go to. Market diversity of area.
- **Community** - being able to bring people to the mill and bring people together
- **Residents** - residents that were there in 1987 are there now. People are happy with what is there now or they do not know that there is an opportunity to change it.
- **Connections** - Connect diverse nodes, more vibrancy. Change attitudes to get people out of their homes.
- **Centrality** - creating a sense of community of diverse groups.
- **Placemaking** - fragmented nodes. Come up with name for neighborhood? Only one neighborhood in town.

*Bicentennial park named for 1976 bicentennial - planted a diversity of trees in area but most have died.

Visioning Question #3: If you could make one improvement or implement one project in the study area, what would it be?

- **Investment** - connections to Hockanum river, sidewalk replacement, façade improvement.
- **Redevelopment/revitalization** - breathe new life into the area
- **Restaurant** - full service restaurant. Opportunity based on having churches in the area. 87 Church, opportunity to have outdoor seating. Destination.
- **Anchor** - Attract new major investment opportunities that assists other businesses.
- **Recreation** - Pickleball, walking trails, bridge from mill parking to rec trails.

- **Education** - Stone Academy building which because Goodwin university. East Hartford is growing as an educational center, connect corridor to education centers.
- **Neighborhood organization** - participation from multiple stakeholders. NRZ?