



Can iQUILT Turn Hartford Around?

BY ANDY HART

In the past, most of the big plans to revitalize Hartford have looked to the suburbs for inspiration, be it suburban office parks (Constitution Plaza) or suburban shopping malls (the Civic Center Mall). The new iQUILT Plan, however, draws inspiration from Hartford's own past.

At a presentation of the plan Tuesday night at the Hartford Public Library, Douglas Suisman, head of Suisman Urban Design, asked the audience of about 100 people to study a picture of Downtown Hartford from the early part of the 20th century. The photo shows Asylum Street looking north from the Union Station railroad bridge. The streets are lined with shops, the sidewalks are crowded with people and the Park River curves gracefully through Bushnell Park.

iQUILT is a multi-faceted plan to bring that vibrancy back to Downtown Hartford. But the core of the plan, said Suisman, is connecting two of the city's main attractions: Bushnell Park and the Hartford Riverfront. The main physical elements of this connection would be the reconfiguration of Gold Street and the creation of a "greenway" to its north. This would lead to another key component of the plan, the revitalization of Tower Square into a larger, more pedestrian-friendly space. Suisman said Travelers was already planning to renovate the square and has expressed interest in following the iQUILT plan in designing that renovation.

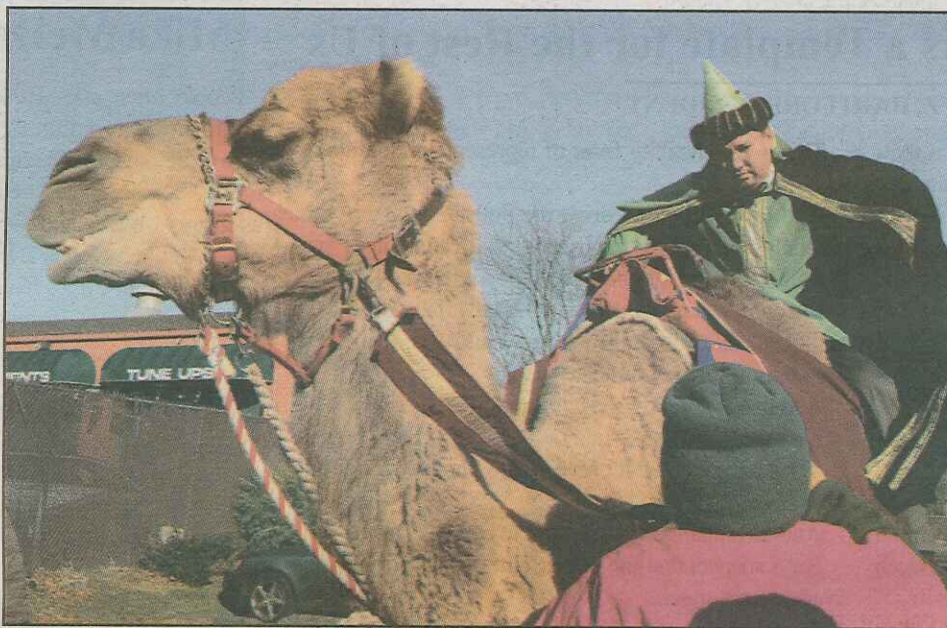
The Riverfront Plaza/Constitution Plaza complex begins across the street from Tower Square so that, if the iQUILT plan were completed as envisaged, a pedestrian could walk from the State Capitol to Riverfront Plaza and only have to cross four streets (Trinity, Wells, Main and Prospect).

Suisman cited Riverfront Recapture's role in changing the direction of development in Downtown Hartford. Until Riverfront Plaza, Hartford had primarily been looking for plans that would enhance the movement of automobile traffic through the city. Subsequent plans have concentrated more on increasing the flow of pedestrian traffic.

Like Riverfront Recapture, the iQUILT Plan also relies on moving water as a main attraction. Suisman said Bushnell Park was designed around the Park River, which was covered over in the 1940's to prevent flooding. Putting the river above ground again is impractical and might lead to more flooding problems. Instead, the iQUILT plan calls for the creation of a new brook in Bushnell Park using water supplied by Gully Brook, which rises in Keney Park and flows underground. The new brook would go above ground in Bushnell Park near Union Station and go back below ground at the Pump House. It would roughly follow the course of the Park River, vary in width from 50 to 100 feet and have a depth of about 18 inches. To accommodate the new brook, the Bushnell Park Carousel would be moved near the Pump House.

Although such major projects are still in the future, Suisman said several smaller parts of the iQUILT plan might be implemented as early as this year, including biking amenities, map kiosks, cultural markers and giant chess and checker sets in the park.

"The biggest obstacle [to the iQUILT Plan]," said Suisman, "is not political will, we have that. It's not money, because we're talking about relatively small amounts for a project of this nature. It's the self-doubt and cynicism that says it can't be done...but it can be done"



Camels and Kings on Park Street

Jonathan Espinar, owner of Hartford Elderly Services, gets ready to ride his camel in Hartford's annual Three Kings Day Parade down Park Street last Friday, January 6. The event was sponsored by the Spanish American Merchants Association (SAMA). The other kings were played this year by Bimal Patel, Vice President of Support Services at Hartford Hospital, and Rey Heredia, owner of Rey's Hot Dogs. Among the many on hand to watch the show were a large group of youngsters who walked over to the parade from the daycare center at Central Baptist Church on Main Street. (Hart photos)



Hartford...Once Upon a Time



This photo neatly mixes the familiar with the unfamiliar. The view is looking east up Gold Street in the 1950's or 1960's. On the left is the familiar: the Travelers Tower, the First Church Parish House and the office building (foreground) which still stands at the corner of Gold, Lewis and Trumbull Streets. At right is the unfamiliar: the old Heublein Hotel (foreground), the rear of a movie theater on Main Street (Loew's Poli, I believe) and the office building which once stood where Travelers Plaza now stands, directly south of the tower. Adding to the strangeness of the photo is the fact that Gold Street has since been reconfigured and now curves to the south. This area is a key element in the iQuilt Plan. (Photo courtesy of the James West Collection)

Remembering Dr. King by Giving

A Day for the Less Fortunate

Hope Point Charities will hold its annual Poor People's Rally in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King on Monday, January 16, from 8 am - 12 noon at Central Baptist Church, 457 Main Street, Downtown Hartford. Those who are homeless or otherwise struggling economically will receive free food, coffee, personal hygiene products and winter clothing. The event is co-sponsored by the Salvation Army, Blackwell Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church and Walk in the Light Outreach Center. To make a donation, or for more information, call Sam Saylor at 860-246-5336 or email hopepointcharities@comcast.net.

Knox Parks Food Drive

AmeriCorps Green Crew leadership team at Knox Parks will collect non-perishable food and gently used clothing for local homeless shelters in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The food drive will run from Monday, January 16th through Friday, January 20th. Goods may be dropped off at the Knox Parks office located at 75 Laurel Street in Hartford, Monday - Friday from 9 AM - 5 PM. Home or office pick up may be arranged by contacting Ericus Adams at 860-951-7694, ext.15, or ericusa@knoxparks.org.

A Candle for a Can

The Beloved Community Peace Vigil, held in honor of Martin Luther King Day, will take place at 5PM on January 16th at the Charter Oak Cultural Center, 21 Charter Oak Avenue, Hartford. Our Piece of the Pie, Hands On Hartford, and Connecticut Center for Non-violence will host this event with the theme "Give a Can, Get a Candle." To receive a candle for the vigil, volunteers will be asked to bring a non-perishable food item or personal care items. Community choirs will perform Civil Rights Era songs and Dr. King's teachings will be presented in multiple forms of artistic expression. Volunteers will pack and deliver care packages to local food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters.

NEWS BRIEFS

Saints Cyril & Methodius School Open Houses

Saints Cyril and Methodius School, 35 Groton Street, Hartford, will hold open houses at the school for the next three weeks. The first two open houses will be held on Wednesday, January 18, and Wednesday, January 25, from 8:30 - 11 am. The third open house will be held Wednesday, February 1, from 6 - 8 pm and will coincide with the school's science fair. Prospective students will have a chance to tour the school, visit classrooms and talk to staff. For more information, call 860-522-8490 or visit the website: www.sscmschool.org.

MARG Meets Jan. 12

The Maple Avenue Revitalization Group (MARG) will hold its first meeting of the new year on Thursday, January 12, at 6 pm in the lower level

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