

# Hartford's iQuilt: The Start Of Something Big

**National agency honors plan to connect cultural institutons**

Courant Editorial

July 24, 2010

If you like Hartford's proposed iQuilt plan, well, so does the National Endowment for the Arts. The NEA has awarded the city a prestigious grant of \$250,000 for the culture-based downtown design plan. Hartford was one of only four cities out of more than 600 applicants to win the \$250,000 award.

The iQuilt, initiated by the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, is a plan to connect some 45 of Hartford's cultural assets and public spaces with pedestrian and bicycling routes running from the Capitol and Bushnell Park to the river, and then enhance the area with improvements. One promising feature would be a "GreenWalk" pedestrian pathway from the riverfront to Bushnell Park.

The grant money will help push the project into the design phase, which will feature graphic and landscape design as well as the design of the pedestrian network.

With the momentum from the NEA award, it's not too early to be thinking about who will manage the iQuilt and how its programs and activities will be funded. It's now part of the city's plan of conservation and development, which hopefully will help integrate it into an expanded public transportation system.

It's important that iQuilt move ahead at flank speed, because it offers a way to make some major improvements in downtown Hartford. For example, with a more energized and active Bushnell Park, it may make sense, as housing expert Arthur Anderson proposed a decade ago, to build a new state office building in the area and turn the handsome state buildings along the park into housing. The iQuilt could help make it happen.