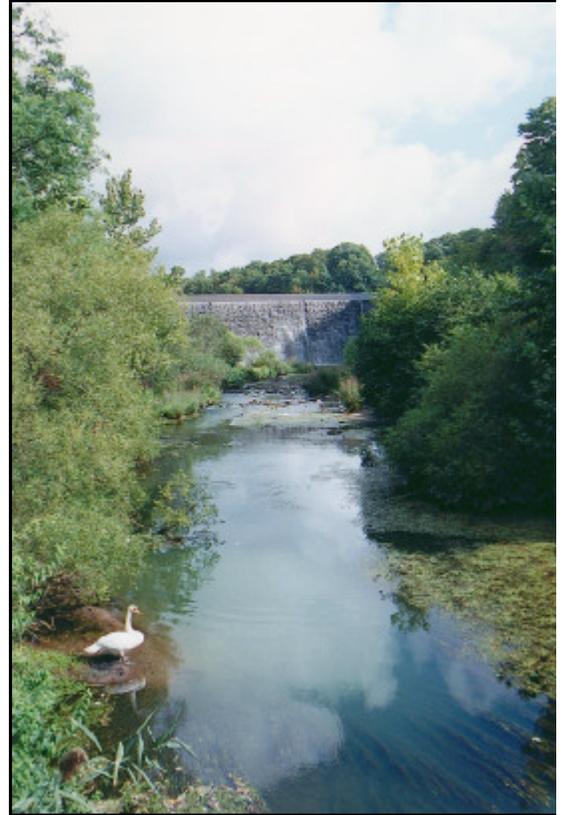


# PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT



## Downtown Rockville Supplement

Prepared by  
Harrall-Michalowski Associates  
Hamden, Connecticut

January 2003



Rockville Supplement  
Vernon Plan of  
Conservation and Development

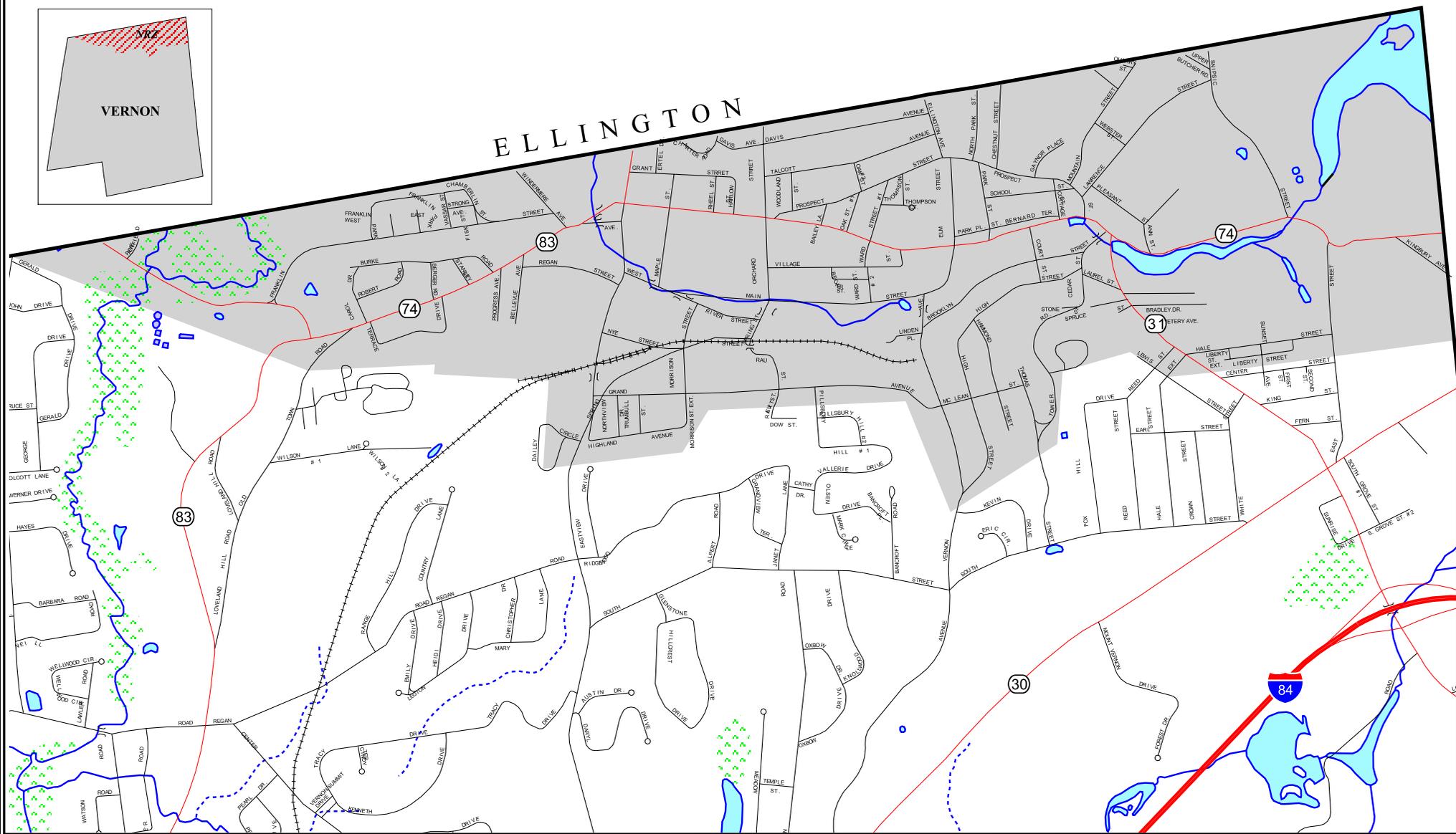
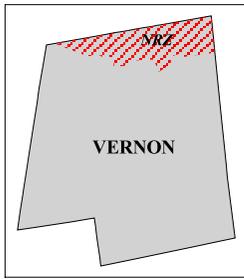
Downtown Rockville  
Vernon, Connecticut

Prepared by  
Harrall-Michalowski Associates  
Hamden, Connecticut

*Revisions as of January 2003*

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Data Sources:  
 Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection  
 Environmental and Geographic Information Center

Connecticut Department of Transportation  
 Planning Division

Town of Vernon  
 Office of Economic Development

■ NRZ Boundary

## ROCKVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION ZONE (NRZ)

VERNON, CONNECTICUT



**HMA** HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI  
 ASSOCIATES, Incorporated

Hamden, Connecticut January 2003

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## **Introduction**

Rockville has historically been the center of Vernon, Tolland and Ellington; its Downtown was the destination point for shopping and services, and was a primary point of employment. The neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Rockville were also the site of many lavish homes. Housing development during the post Second World War era changed the character of the neighborhood, with some higher-density, in-fill development as well as the conversion of many structures to multi-family rental housing. The construction of the highway system encouraged development along the I-84 corridor, drawing centers of employment, goods, and services away from Downtown Rockville.

These changes spurred a series of redevelopment projects that altered the spatial atmosphere and sense of place within Rockville. Presently, several groups are working to recapture the spirit and feel of Rockville. These groups include the Town of Vernon, The Rockville Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Committee (NRZ), and The Rockville Downtown Association (RDA), which also serves as the administrator of Rockville's Main Street Program. These groups have already begun to take stock of the assets and obstacles to revitalizing Downtown Rockville. The NRZ has prepared lists of issues, objectives, and implementation methods from four subcommittees: economic, housing, activities, and safety. The RDA drafted a *Plan of Recommendations to the Master Plan of Conservation and Development as they apply to the designated Rockville Downtown/ Main Street District*. Their efforts are the basis for this plan.

This report will review the ideas and suggestions brought forth by the NRZ and RDA, identifying those that are most feasible and will have the greatest impact on the character of Rockville. It will then make recommendations for implementing a revitalization strategy. Most of the suggestions in the RDA Draft Plan fall under the areas being considered by the NRZ subcommittees; therefore, the first section of this report is organized around the issues and recommendations as submitted by these two groups: economic issues, housing issues, design considerations, community identity and activity, and public facilities and infrastructure. The second section presents a summary of 2000 Census data for Rockville and the Town of Vernon, with some observations comparing the two. In the third section, a revitalization strategy is developed around four specific areas: economic revitalization, housing revitalization, community revitalization, and public space/ land use revitalization. The fourth section presents suggested actions to implement the revitalization strategy. The final section presents some general zoning recommendations

## **I. NRZ & RDA Issues and Recommendations**

The following is a review and summary of the issues identified and recommendations made by the NRZ and RDA.

### ***A. Economic Issues***

In concert with the Rockville NRZ process, the Town of Vernon has begun to take steps toward revitalization through participation in the Main Street Program. The RDA, as administrators of the Connecticut Main Street Program for Rockville, is working with the NRZ and the Town of Vernon on all issues concerning Downtown Rockville. An economically revitalized Rockville will not only benefit people residing within its boundaries, but also have far reaching benefit for the Town of Vernon and beyond. The provision of additional jobs benefits all those obtaining employment no matter their place of residence. While increased retail outlets bring money and people into the Town from outside of the Zone's and Vernon's borders, perhaps the greatest potential impact will be on the lessened tax burden on all Vernon residents. However, this is only possible with a revitalized downtown.

A vision of a revitalized Downtown Rockville includes increasing the amount of commercial retail, service, office, and residential mixed-use space in the Downtown both through the preservation and rehabilitation of existing space, as well as new construction designed to compliment the existing historic architecture already present in the Downtown. The "highest use" of commercial buildings in the Downtown should be consumer-driven retail, office, and restaurant space with an emphasis on cultural, social, and recreational activities and businesses within the Downtown.

Achieving this level of vitality hinges primarily on restoring economic viability to the area. Community activities and unifying design elements are of little consequence if there is no real economic activity within the Downtown. The following recommendations will help to improve the economic viability of Downtown:

- Provide ideas and funding for reuse of mill sites and commercial improvements, and tax breaks for building repairs and improvements.
- Revise the way in which properties in economically depressed areas are assessed.
- Relax building codes (but not life and safety codes) for older commercial buildings
- Improve aesthetics in the Downtown through unified signage on commercial buildings and improved streetscapes using landscaping and banners.

In addition, a unified marketing campaign promoting the Downtown's existing businesses and retail services will be a key element in Rockville's successful revitalization. Such a project has been identified as focus of the Main Street Program.

The expected increase in Vernon's elderly population should be a consideration in the planning of building re-use or new construction within the Downtown. Any future development within the Downtown may do well to include housing that caters to these changing demographics. Furthermore, retailers who tailor their services to increasing consumer needs, i.e. on-call orders, delivery, senior or businessperson-oriented services and goods, may provide a needed regional niche.

### ***B. Housing Issues***

The Rockville Neighborhood Revitalization Zone encompasses a historic district characterized by housing built between 1830 and 1900. The area surrounding Downtown Rockville in particular holds a large concentration of these homes, providing one of the more impressive collections of housing from this era found in Connecticut. Yet, this housing stock is expensive to maintain. In some cases, the enormity of these homes makes them impractical for all but the affluent family. Because of the cost associated with their maintenance, many of these historic single-family and two family homes were converted to multi-family structures, a use for which they were ill suited. The conversion of many of these large, historic homes has contributed to the depressed residential status of the area. This depressed status is characterized by a decrease in the number of owner-occupied dwellings and a decline in their maintenance and upkeep. The conversion of single-family homes to multi-family apartments, and the resulting influx of renters to Rockville, has also contributed to a high turnover in residents, resulting in overall neighborhood instability. In addition, the construction of in-fill housing increased population density and eliminated amenities such as yards and off-street parking. The culmination of all of these factors is a decline in property values as well as the quality of life found in Rockville, making housing preservation and rehabilitation all the more vital to restoring Rockville's neighborhoods.

Presently, there is a need for quality, affordable housing within Rockville for would-be homeowners. Many homes used materials in their construction and maintenance that have since been found unsafe, such as lead paint and asbestos. In addition, the infrastructure within Rockville is the oldest in the Town of Vernon. The failure over time to maintain and invest in the modernization of buildings and infrastructure has created an atmosphere of disinvestment in Rockville. The age and condition of Rockville's housing and infrastructure coupled with the limited financial resources of many Rockville residents pose challenges to preserving and maintaining this unique residential environment, yet doing so is essential to the overall revitalization of Rockville.

To combat these issues contributing to the decline in Rockville's housing stock, efforts should focus on housing preservation with a particular encouragement of increased homeownership, as well as the provision for amenities that will support neighborhood revitalization as part of the planned NRZ. In addition, the following suggestions should be considered in any plans regarding neighborhood preservation and revitalization:

- Blighted houses should be rehabilitated or torn down.
- Housing efforts should seek to preserve the historic character of the neighborhood, encourage home ownership, and discourage an increase in housing density.
- The Vernon Housing Authority, Vernon Non-Profit Housing Development Corporation, Town of Vernon, and other organizations should actively pursue grants from State and Federal agencies for revitalization of neighborhoods and rehabilitation of blighted neighborhoods, and work to develop programs that encourage homeownership, self-sufficiency, the stabilization of neighborhoods, a decrease in population density, an increase in upkeep and maintenance of properties, the use of high building/construction standards, and the preservation of historic architecture.
- The Town of Vernon should step up the enforcement of existing housing ordinances, conduct regularly scheduled inspections of housing within the NRZ Zone, and issue citations for properties in violation.

Other efforts to improve Rockville’s residential neighborhoods include increasing the frequency of street sweeping and trash collection in response to the dense, urban nature of Rockville’s neighborhoods, repairing road surfaces and sidewalks, and replacing street signs and guardrails in poor condition. Also, given the already high percentage of multi-family housing in Vernon, an increase in this type of housing should not be part of housing or land-use policy in Rockville.

***C. Design Considerations***

The Main Street Program has at its disposal a variety of design-related resources for the purposes of developing a comprehensive and historically sensitive Downtown Design Plan. This plan would be prepared with input and assistance from the Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) and Staff, Vernon Economic Development Commission (EDC), Local Historic Properties Commission, Vernon Historical Society, Design Review Committee (DRC), and the NRZ Planning Committee and would address the following issues: an overall color scheme; building exteriors including façade design, materials, and awnings; public space amenities; lighting; landscaping; signage; and parking as well as traffic and pedestrian issues. As part of the Main Street Program’s resources, the Connecticut and National Main Street Program Centers would provide free consultation and ongoing review of this Plan. The Main Street Design Committee should provide the implementation and oversight of the Downtown Design Plan in cooperation with Town officials.

Other design concerns include the removal of overhead power lines in the blocks surrounding Central Park and the need to improve aesthetics within the Downtown through a program of unified signage and improved facades and streetscapes. In addition, any revitalization or new development efforts in Rockville’s residential or business districts should compliment the historic character of the existing structures.

***D. Community Identity and Activity***

The area comprising the Rockville NRZ carries with it a negative image in the minds of many people living both inside and outside of the area. Manifested in extreme cases, some people are actually afraid to venture into Rockville and the Downtown. Additionally, the Zone has deteriorated from the retail, social, employment, and educational center of Vernon to an area lacking these important aspects, greatly diminishing the quality of life available within Rockville. The successful revitalization of Rockville requires a plan that addresses the need for community-building activities in centrally located public spaces while taking into account the needs of residents who call Rockville home. Ideas for community activities include foot and bike races, outdoor concerts, holiday/seasonal events, and neighborhood/green space clean-up efforts.

A strong community atmosphere would capitalize upon and promote the historic character of Rockville, increase community and recreational activities, and combat deteriorated appearances to create a visually appealing community. A key element to developing a community atmosphere in Rockville will be the presence of community gathering spaces, such as a social/ cultural center to host community activities. Existing public, gathering places, such as Central Park, should also be improved. Efforts to restore the Coggswell Fountain and place a gazebo in Central Park appear to be widely supported. Central Park also needs a new landscaping plan to restore its place as a visual focal point within the Downtown. In addition, the intense public use of Central Park requires the installation of an irrigation sprinkler system to maintain healthy greenery. Constructing a performance platform/ pavilion in Talcott Park would facilitate use of the park for community festivals and performances. The central location of both Central Park and Talcott Park lends them to use as community gathering spaces, a use which should be encouraged.

In response to the socio-economic diversity and changing demographics of the NRZ's resident population, the Town should consider establishing a community office to serve as a clearinghouse for information regarding community and social services available in Vernon. Such an office should be created in conjunction with social service agencies, area churches, and the hospital and should provide information on emergency food and housing, employment opportunities, transportation, medical care, childcare, and municipal services. The coordination of these efforts provides a greater opportunity to improve the quality life in Rockville.

***E. Public Facilities & Infrastructure***

The reinvestment in and modernization of infrastructure and public facilities is a key ingredient in the preservation and revitalization of Downtown Rockville. The Town of Vernon has already begun such efforts in the rehabilitation of the Town Hall and the Senior Center. Rehabilitated, Town-owned buildings would serve as anchors and encourage reinvestment of private dollars within Downtown Rockville. This rehabilitation of Town facilities is critical as these facilities are among the most visible and significant in Downtown Rockville.

Both the RDA and the NRZ recognize the key role that urban green space plays in the life of the Rockville community. They have identified needs for improved landscaping and lighting, as well as the improved maintenance of play equipment in Rockville’s parks and playgrounds. The replacement or addition of new play equipment, picnic tables, and additional landscaping would greatly improve these green spaces, thus, making them more inviting to families and those seeking recreational activities in Rockville. The following is a list of specific recommendations for each park within the Rockville NRZ:

#### Hockanum River Linear Park

- i. Proposed greenway along length of Hockanum River with benches, walking paths and historical markers

#### Central Park

- i. Focal point of downtown, urban green space
- ii. Gathering place for small public events: concerts, art shows, etc.
- iii. Needed improvements such as lighting, shrubbery, relocation of overhead power lines, and the restoration of Cogswell Fountain

#### Talcott Park

- i. Buffer between downtown commercial use and adjacent neighborhood of Victorian homes; this neighborhood in particular has seen a return of single-family owner-occupiers
- ii. Lends itself to use for community events given close proximity to downtown commercial center
- iii. Park should not be over developed; however, the addition of a performance platform or gazebo at the south end would fit within the natural gradation of the park’s topography and facilitate use a community festival/ performance space

#### West Main Street Playground

- i. Underutilized; Recreation and Parks Dept. should consider running summer programs to encourage use
- ii. In poor condition; needs improved maintenance of green space and equipment and additional picnic tables, play equipment, heritage trail signage

#### Village Street Playground

- i. Underutilized and poorly maintained
- ii. If improvements and/ or interest from surrounding neighborhood is not sufficient, it should be redesigned as a passive recreation open green-space for the high-density neighborhood that surrounds it.

Parking within the Downtown has been a cause of concern among many Downtown residents and business owners. The current parking regulations, such as the ban on overnight parking and the limited time available for on-street parking, are not conducive to a vibrant Downtown nor a sound residential neighborhood. A parking plan should be developed which will serve the current needs of Downtown traffic (i.e. Town employees, courthouse visitors and retail customers), anticipate parking needs during future downtown activities, and support the residential portions of the NRZ.

Creating a pedestrian friendly downtown is a key element in the revitalization of Rockville. Traffic calming measures such as the narrowing of roadways and extension of curbs and medians will slow traffic along Route 74 through the Downtown. Other pedestrian friendly efforts include the maintenance of present crosswalks and the addition of others in high-traffic areas. Several crossings and intersections were identified as having safety concerns for both pedestrians and motorists. Among these were crosswalks needed between West Main Street and Central Park and at the Mountain/School/Prospect Streets intersection; and the need to relocate CT Transit bus stops, so that a stopped bus does not obstruct an intersection.

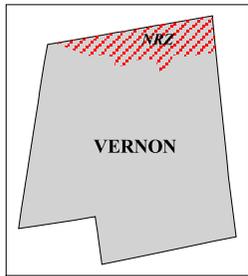
## II. Review of 2000 Census Data

In an effort to improve the planning process, a review of the 2000 Census Data was undertaken for the purposes of comparing Rockville to the Town of Vernon. The following table displays selected statistics from the 2000 Census that compare the Rockville Census Designated Place (CDP) and the Town.

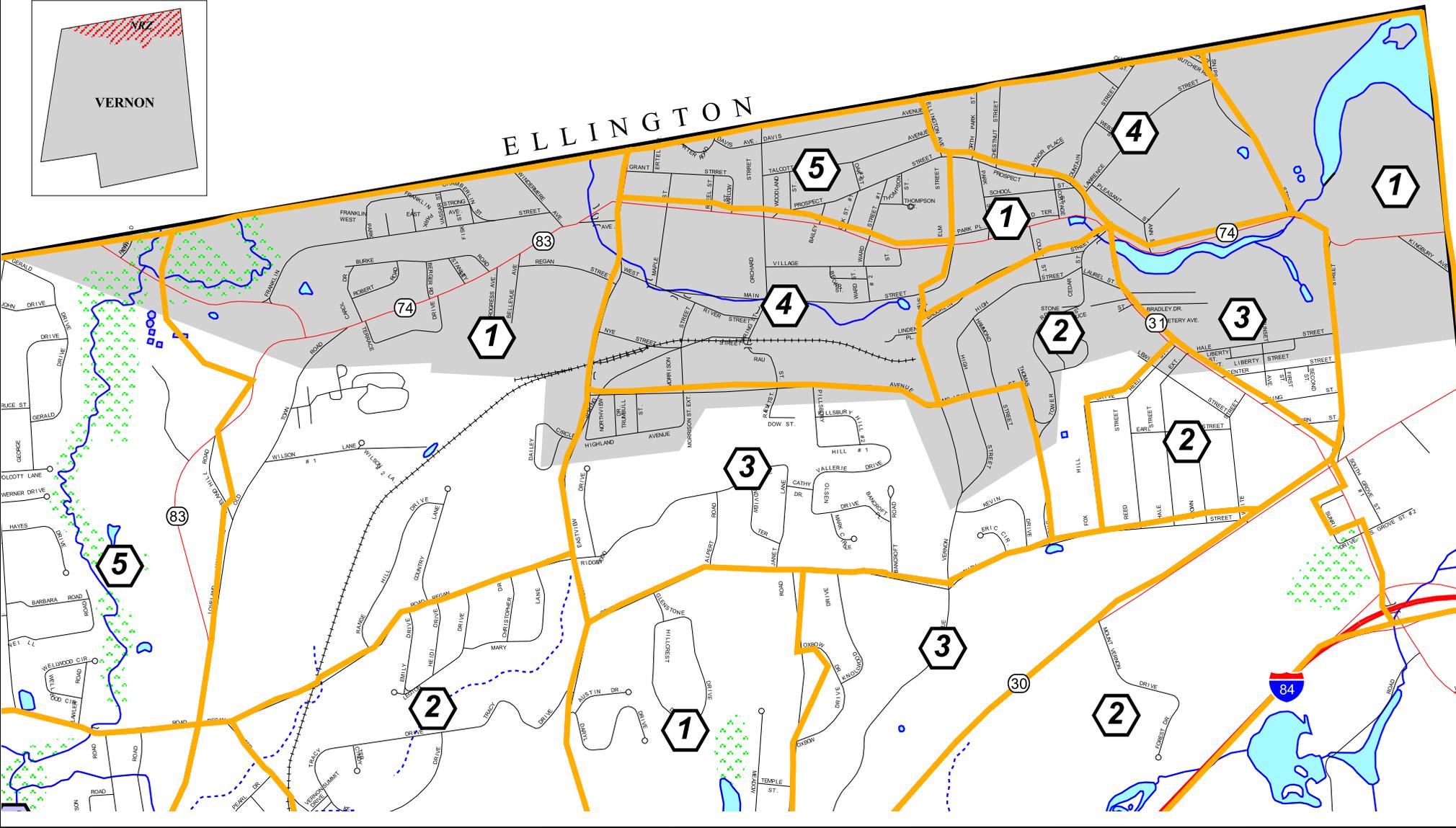
Rockville CDP and Town of Vernon  
2000 Census Data

Demographic Statistics	Town of Vernon		Rockville CDP	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	28063	100	7708	100
Median Age	37.7	X	32.4	X
Median Age: male	36.7	X	31.7	X
Median Age: female	38.7	X	33.1	X
Ages 18 and over	21858	77.9	5703	74
Ages 65 and over	3906	13.9	970	12.6
Households with individuals 18 or under	3439	28	1050	30.4
Households with individuals 65 or over	2775	22.6	772	22.3
Average household size	2.26	X	2.21	X
Average family size	2.9	X	3.02	X
Total housing units	13867	100	3824	100
Occupied housing units	12269	95.4	3456	90.4
Vacant housing units	598	4.6	368	9.6
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	54	0.4	5	0.1
Homeowner vacancy rate (percent)	X	0.7	X	2.2
Rental vacancy rate (percent)	X	4.9	X	7.2
Owner-occupied housing units	6935	56.5	1037	30
Renter occupied housing units	5334	43.5	2419	70
Average household size of owner occupied unit	2.51	X	2.46	X
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	1.93	X	2.1	X
Family households	7270	59.3	1733	50.1
Nonfamily households	4999	40.7	1723	49.9
Families with related children under 18	3381	46.5	1022	59
Group Quarters population: both sexes	343	100	84	100
Group Quarters population: male	115	100	57	100
Group Quarters population: female	228	100	27	100
Population in occupied housing units	27720	100	7624	100
Population in owner occupied housing units	17438	62.9	2549	33.4
Population in renter occupied housing units	10282	37.1	5075	66.6

Rockville differs from the Town of Vernon most significantly in the age of its population and tenure of its housing stock. Rockville residents are approximately five years younger than Vernon residents. The median age for Vernon residents is 37.7, while the median age of Rockville residents is 32.4. This five-year difference is consistent between the male and female populations. This lower median age is reflected in the differences in the



# ELLINGTON



Data Sources:  
 Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection  
 Environmental and Geographic Information Center

Connecticut Department of Transportation  
 Planning Division

Town of Vernon  
 Office of Economic Development

U.S. Department of Commerce  
 Bureau of the Census

-  **NRZ BOUNDARY**
-  **1990 CENSUS BLOCKGROUPS**
-  **1990 CENSUS BLOCKGROUP NUMBER**

## ROCKVILLE CENSUS BLOCKGROUPS

VERNON, CONNECTICUT

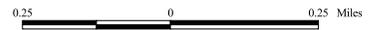


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January 2003

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percentage of households with children under 18 years of age with 46.5% for the Town and 59% for Rockville.

There is also a higher percentage of non-family households in Rockville (49.9%) as compared to Vernon (40.7%). These households can include both young singles as well as elderly. This difference is supported by the higher percentage of rental units. Rockville has a higher percentage of rental units comprising its housing stock than Vernon, 70.0% in Rockville versus 43.5% in Vernon. Two thirds of Rockville's population resides in rental housing; this is nearly twice that of the percentage in of Vernon. In addition, Rockville has more twice the vacancy rate of Vernon, 9.6% vacancy in Rockville versus 4.6% in Vernon for total housing stock. The homeowner vacancy rate in Rockville (2.2%) is over three times the rate in the Town (0.7%). These higher rental housing percentages and vacancy rates are typical of many older neighborhoods found in Connecticut. As a neighborhood ages, there is often a high rate of residents moving out of their homes. Homes that were previously occupied by owners become vacant; however, because of the changes in the neighborhood, the housing no longer attracts young buyers; thus, the housing shifts from being an owner-occupied home to being a renter-occupied property. This shift affects the rate of resident turnover as well as the maintenance and upkeep of properties, as witnessed in Rockville.

### **III. Revitalization Strategy**

Based upon the issues and recommendations prepared by the NRZ and RDA groups, the following strategies should be considered as implementation elements in the revitalization of Rockville.

#### **A. *Economic Revitalization***

The commercial revitalization of Rockville depends heavily on its continuing economic development. Economic development activities should be aimed first at maintaining Rockville's current economic fabric through such efforts as business retention and the preservation of historic structures. Secondly, these efforts should seek to strengthen the existing economic ties by consolidating similar business functions together to encourage the clustering of uses in the Downtown. They should also seek to strengthen the infrastructure and historic character of the downtown inclusive of the Town's commitment to reinvest in its facilities. Economic development efforts should be targeted at the recruitment of new businesses and activities that will enhance the overall character of Downtown Rockville. These efforts should include the modernization of facilities with digital telecommunications to make Rockville attractive to modern, growing businesses.

The inventory of existing Downtown businesses will provide a foundation to launch businesses attraction and retention efforts. Efforts should be made to diversify the array of goods and services available in the Downtown. Drawing from existing resource people such as local business owners and board members of the NRZ and RDA groups, the list of issues faced by small businesses owners in the Downtown should be prioritized. These groups can launch initiatives addressing these issues on a priority basis. One example might be to work with local banks to establish easy-application and low-interest loan programs for businesses looking to make improvements in their building facade or to expand a line of merchandise. The re-use of former mill sites as arts performance and exhibit space and office space for high-tech businesses has been used in many New England towns and may be a sound initiative in Rockville. Lastly, making appropriate use of community resources already in place, such as the NRZ and RDA will streamline and coordinate efforts, making them more efficient and increasing their impact potential.

#### **B. *Housing Revitalization***

There is clearly a need and desire to upgrade the housing stock in Rockville; however, much of the available funding has already been allocated for specific activities. The Vernon Non-Profit Housing Corporation, in conjunction with other Town agencies and departments, should identify some possible funding sources apart from the already-allocated HOME funds to assist property owners with the cost of maintenance, rehabilitation, and upkeep. The Connecticut Housing Investment Fund, Connecticut Finance Housing Authority, and State Department of Economic and Community Development may have additional loans and grant funds for this purpose. In addition,

local banks may be willing to provide low-interest loans. The work of other non-profit housing groups such as The Community Builders, Christian Activities Council, and Habitat for Humanity should also be encouraged, as these groups often have their own funding sources to bring reinvestment dollars into Rockville.

Another program designed to combat disinvestment in Rockville's neighborhoods is the Rockville Home Ownership Revitalization Program (RHOR). This program will (1) make currently deteriorated housing marketable for owner-occupancy and (2) provide opportunity for ownership through limited cash down payment assistance and closing costs for low to moderate-income families. These types of efforts require the coordination and input of a variety of development entities including, but not limited to, for-profit and not-for-profit developers, the Town, and State agencies such as Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA). The Town's Planning Office, in conjunction with the Economic Development Office and the Vernon Housing Authority, should be vested with the authority to actively seek partners for this type of development to provide a wide range of resources, allowing simultaneous action of a variety of redevelopment projects.

Senior housing has also been proposed as a potential development project for second stories in the Downtown; however, the reality of such housing being developed in Rockville seems slim given the lack of two story buildings present in the Downtown. Given the types of buildings present, the emphasis should be placed on filling existing space with retail and services that will work together to draw people downtown.

### ***C. Community Revitalization***

Central to the revitalization of any neighborhood is a common focus, a vision or idea that all agents within the community are seeking to promote and capitalize upon. Suggestions have been made to promote the antique character of Rockville, along the theme of "Historical Rockville," through activities associated with the Vernon Historical Society and the New England Civil War Museum, in addition to placing historical markers identifying places significant in Rockville's past. Other ideas along this theme might include a restaurant or diner with a Civil War/ historical motif and a community festival celebrating the Civil War's history. Many clubs are actively engaged in Civil War reenactments and such activities might be held in Talcott Park or another Rockville venue. Providing the Civil War Museum space to expand their collection of exhibits would further promote this theme.

Another possible theme for the Downtown is that of an arts and entertainment district, using the newly renovated auditorium in the Senior Citizen's Center to provide performance space to local dance or music schools, choirs, and other groups, in addition to promoting exhibitions of local artists in this building. The Vernon Arts Commission could take the initiative in recruiting and coordinating such activities.

Restaurants also have the power to draw people downtown. Diverse ethnic or themed restaurants, a coffee house, ice cream parlor, or bakery could all be at home in Downtown

Rockville. These would provide “destinations” to bring people into the Downtown as well as encourage patrons of other services to extend their stay.

***D. Public Space/ Land Use Revitalization***

The NRZ and RDA recommend several design changes and improvements to public space areas for the revitalization of Rockville. While each suggestion has merit, the following changes have the potential to make the greatest visual impact while requiring the least amount of capital and, therefore, should be given priority. First among these changes should be improvements to make the main arteries of Rockville more conducive to pedestrian traffic. These include (1) the relocation of overhead utility lines/ poles along Union/ West Main/ East Main Streets from Ward to Prospect/ Grove Streets; and (2) traffic calming measures along East/ West Main Streets (Rte 74) including narrowing the roadway with tree-island bump-outs and paved pedestrian crosswalks. Redesigning Park Place as a pedestrian mall will offer a transition between the municipal buildings and Central Park. The coherence of public space in Central Park will be restored by a landscaping plan that reorganizes the elements that now visually clutter the area. This calls for the restoration of the Cogswell Fountain and the arrangement of the veterans’ monuments in such a way that they complement, rather than detract, from one another and the park as a whole. The reorganization of Central Park will make Downtown Rockville more pedestrian-friendly and create a visual focal point. More extensive projects to improve the aesthetic/ visual focal points of Downtown, include constructing an in-fill building on East Main Street between Vincent’s Pharmacy and the Market Place, increasing the visibility of the Hockanum River and Fox Hill Tower, and redesigning Village Street which should include the expansion of the Rockville General Hospital and/ or other medical uses.

#### **IV. Activities to Implement the Revitalization Strategy**

The revitalization strategy recommendations contained in Section III can be implemented through a coordinated program of capital investments, both public and private. These investments should be made both in the Downtown portion of Rockville as well as in the surrounding residential neighborhood.

##### **A. *Downtown Rockville***

A key element to the revitalization of Downtown Rockville is the reinforcing of existing uses and the encouraging of land use clusters that create a critical mass of activity. Currently, there are several functional areas existing in the downtown. These include a government and social services cluster centering on Town Hall, the Senior Center and the Church Annex Building; health and medical services cluster centering on Rockville General Hospital (RGH) and the surrounding medical offices; a retail services cluster centering on the Main Street shops and Courthouse Plaza; a manufacturing/ light industry cluster comprised of the Ameribelle and Anacoil plants; and finally a legal cluster that centers on the Tolland County Courthouse. Rockville's revitalization should serve to further reinforce these uses by providing them with room to expand and encouraging in-fill development. The following are recommendations to reinforce several cluster uses and to provide supporting amenities within Downtown Rockville. The attached map shows these clusters.

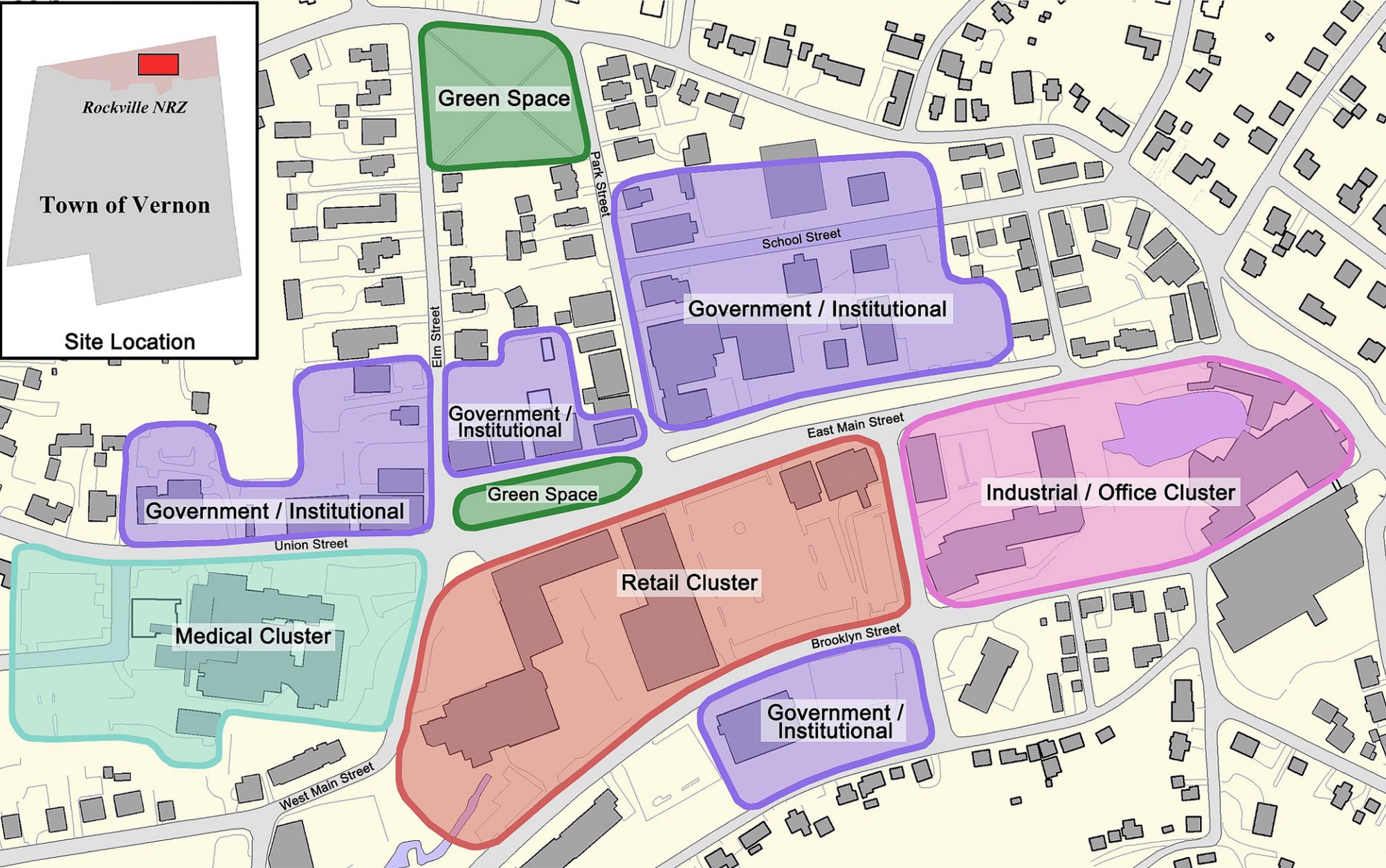
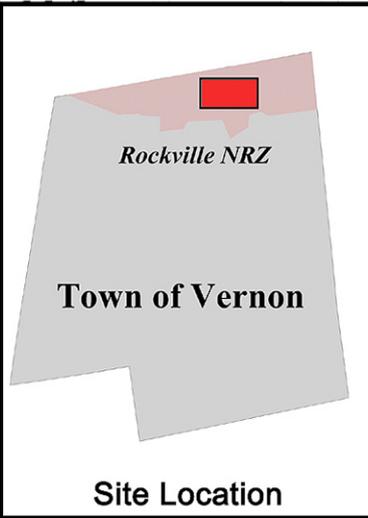
A strategy for a revitalized Downtown built around these clusters, the provision of supporting parking and recapture of the Hockanum River as an amenity to sew together the fabric of the area is presented in the drawing entitled Illustrative Revitalization Plan. Detailed proposals for the heart of the Rockville Downtown are shown on the Conceptual Plan Map. These proposals include pedestrian and visual linkages as well as infill development. This Plan should be a reference point for the reader as one reviews the proposed implementation activities. As part of the preparation of this Plan, a Significant Views Assessment was completed. The results of this assessment is shown on the Significant Views Assessment Map.

##### *Government Services Cluster*

Rockville is currently the location of a significant cluster of governmental uses including Town offices, the Senior Center, and library, as well as county courts and related judicial offices. Efforts should be made to reinforce these uses within the Downtown through the creation of a "municipal center" along Park Place, anchored by Town Hall, the Senior Center and the Citizen's Block Building. The Citizen's Block building should be renovated and used to house municipal offices, further expanding the space available to the Town for administration. Expanding the Rockville Library would also strengthen the government services and cultural uses in Downtown Rockville.

##### *Hospital/ Medical Cluster*

Rockville General Hospital (RGH) is an important employment and community asset located within the Downtown. This cluster of activity brings people to Rockville in large numbers from early morning to late evening. These visitors and employees provide a



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Town of Vernon  
 Office of Economic Development

Town of Vernon  
 Department of Engineering

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# LAND USE CLUSTERS

ROCKVILLE NRZ  
 VERNON, CONNECTICUT



HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI  
 ASSOCIATES, Incorporated

Hamden, Connecticut January 2003

substantial market for goods and services. Accommodation and expansion of the hospital and related medical uses within Rockville should be a basic element of the revitalization strategy. RGH should be encouraged to establish a gateway entrance and expand their campus to the south and west along Village Street, which is currently in need of redesign and revitalization efforts. Expansion to the east is not feasible due to the topography of the site and possible encroachment upon the existing retail/ service cluster. The pedestrian-friendly redesign of Union and West Main Streets (Route 74) will encourage patronage of the existing retail/ service cluster on Main Street and within Courthouse Plaza. Efforts should be made to attract new uses to the retail/ service cluster that provide goods and services attractive to hospital visitors and employees.

### *Retail/ Service Cluster*

The existing cluster of retail and service uses in Downtown Rockville is concentrated in Rockville Plaza, Courthouse Plaza, and along the south side of West Main Street. This central location within the Downtown makes goods and services easily accessible to patrons and employees of the Hospital/ Medical and Government Services Clusters. These clusters act as traffic generators, drawing people downtown and providing a customer base for Downtown Rockville businesses. Further efforts to develop the retail and services sector in Downtown Rockville should be two-fold. They should (1) provide a diverse array of goods and services to meet the needs of Downtown patrons and (2) make Downtown Rockville a pleasant and inviting place where people want to spend their time and money.

The first of these elements can be achieved by developing an inventory of goods and services available in the Downtown and seeking to diversify, expand, and market them to Downtown patrons, an effort which the RDA/ Main Street Program has pledged to undertake. The second element, creating a pleasant and inviting Downtown environment, is dependant on many efforts to improve the Downtown such as the physical design and infrastructure improvements suggested by the NRZ and RDA groups as well as providing destinations, such as restaurant and other attractions, within the Downtown. The retail sector as well as the overall spatial design of Downtown would be helped by the consolidation of parking in Courthouse Plaza and the in-fill construction of multi-use building on East Main Street between Vincent's Pharmacy and the Market Place. This structure would provide additional space to expand the array of goods and services in the Downtown. It should mirror the multi-story Citizen's Block and Church Annex Buildings at the west end of Central Park in design, creating visual consistency and cohesion on Main Street.

### *Parking*

After reviewing the parking currently available in Downtown Rockville, it appears there are sufficient resources to serve the existing Downtown uses. However, for future growth and revitalization of existing structures, certain initiatives should be undertaken. Courthouse Plaza has a large parking area with available spaces. In addition, there are several disconnected lots to the rear of properties; however, there is a need for better management, signage, and strengthening of connections between parking areas. In the near term, the existing parking lot behind Town Hall and Citizen's Block should be

linked with the parking available behind Rockville Bank, and points of ingress and egress placed on Elm and Park Streets. In the longer term, a proposal to construct a parking structure behind Town Hall should be pursued. This will support the already completed improvements to the Town Hall and Annex as well as future revitalization of the Citizens Block. With proper management, existing parking resources can also be used to serve other, off-peak evening, night, and weekend uses. Discussions should be held with the State for off-peak use of the courthouse parking garage. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a Parking Authority or vesting parking management responsibilities with the RDA.

### *Hockanum River*

The Hockanum River, which runs through the center of Downtown Rockville, should be the primary focus of land use revitalization. Unfortunately, given the current configuration of buildings and infrastructure, the Hockanum River plays no significant role in the landscape of the Downtown.

The Hockanum River flows from east to west, beneath the retail and industrial land uses along the south side of East and West Main Streets. As it passes through the Downtown, the River has been covered over and piped underneath the block between East and West Main Streets and Brooklyn Street, from the waterfall at the Anacoil building to the Rockville Professional Building. Between these two buildings is the Courthouse Plaza. This shopping center is currently underutilized; some anchor-tenant spaces are vacant, and the parking lot is rarely filled to capacity. Current retailers in this shopping area are not visible to either pedestrian or vehicular traffic through the Downtown, as the storefronts are oriented towards the parking lot, perpendicular to Main Street. This underutilized shopping center occupies a significant place in the landscape and configuration of the Downtown. The shopping center lies along Main Street, the main Downtown thoroughfare, just east of the existing small retail cluster; however, its present orientation and non-descript appearance does not provide for a visually or functionally cohesive retail center of the Downtown.

Given the underutilized nature of this shopping center and the significant place it occupies in the configuration of Downtown Rockville, a redesign of this space seems appropriate given the goals and objectives sought by the Rockville NRZ and the Rockville Downtown Association/ Main Street District. The RDA Draft Plan states as a goal “increasing the [amount of] commercial retail, service, office, and residential mixed-use space in the downtown” both through the preservation and rehabilitation of existing space as well as new construction designed in such a way as to compliment the existing historic architecture already present in the downtown. It also states that the “highest use” of commercial buildings is consumer-driven retail, office, and restaurant space and calls for an emphasis on cultural, social, and recreational activities and businesses within the downtown.

In keeping with this vision, a revitalization project that possibly opens up the river or at least provides better access to portions currently not culverted and ties it into the surrounding uses will greatly improve the appearance and configuration of Downtown.

The Illustrative Revitalization Plan shows possibilities of better access to existing parts of the river at the Falls at Amerbelle, the Cateract behind the Rockville Professional Building and the West Main Falls area. A project may involve opening up a section of the shopping center parking lot to expose the river below. New facades on the existing Ladd and Hall Furniture building that complement the historic nature of other buildings in the Downtown such as the Town Hall Annex and Union Congregational Church Annex buildings would help to create a consistent design theme in the area visible from Central Park. Constructing a landscaped pedestrian walkway north of the exposed riverfront would extend the retail cluster along the south side of Main Street to include the retail in the shopping center below. It may also provide space to develop a restaurant with outdoor/ patio seating. Opening up portions of the Hockanum River through the Courthouse Plaza parking lot as described above would bring exciting benefits to the Downtown. However, there is a need for a survey and engineering study to determine the feasibility and cost of such a project. Of particular concern are the hydraulics of opening up what is presently a closed pipe system. Even if this cannot be accomplished, the other river access enhancement recommendations should be pursued.

An alternative as shown on the Plan would be infill development without the river activity within Courthouse Plaza. The new access to the riverfront at the other locations discussed above will provide a visual focus and for the area south of Central Park and reestablish the river as an asset for Downtown Rockville. This project will strengthen the physical and visual link of this shopping center with the rest of Downtown surrounding Central Park and provide financial incentives for redevelopment using private dollars.

### ***B. Residential Neighborhoods***

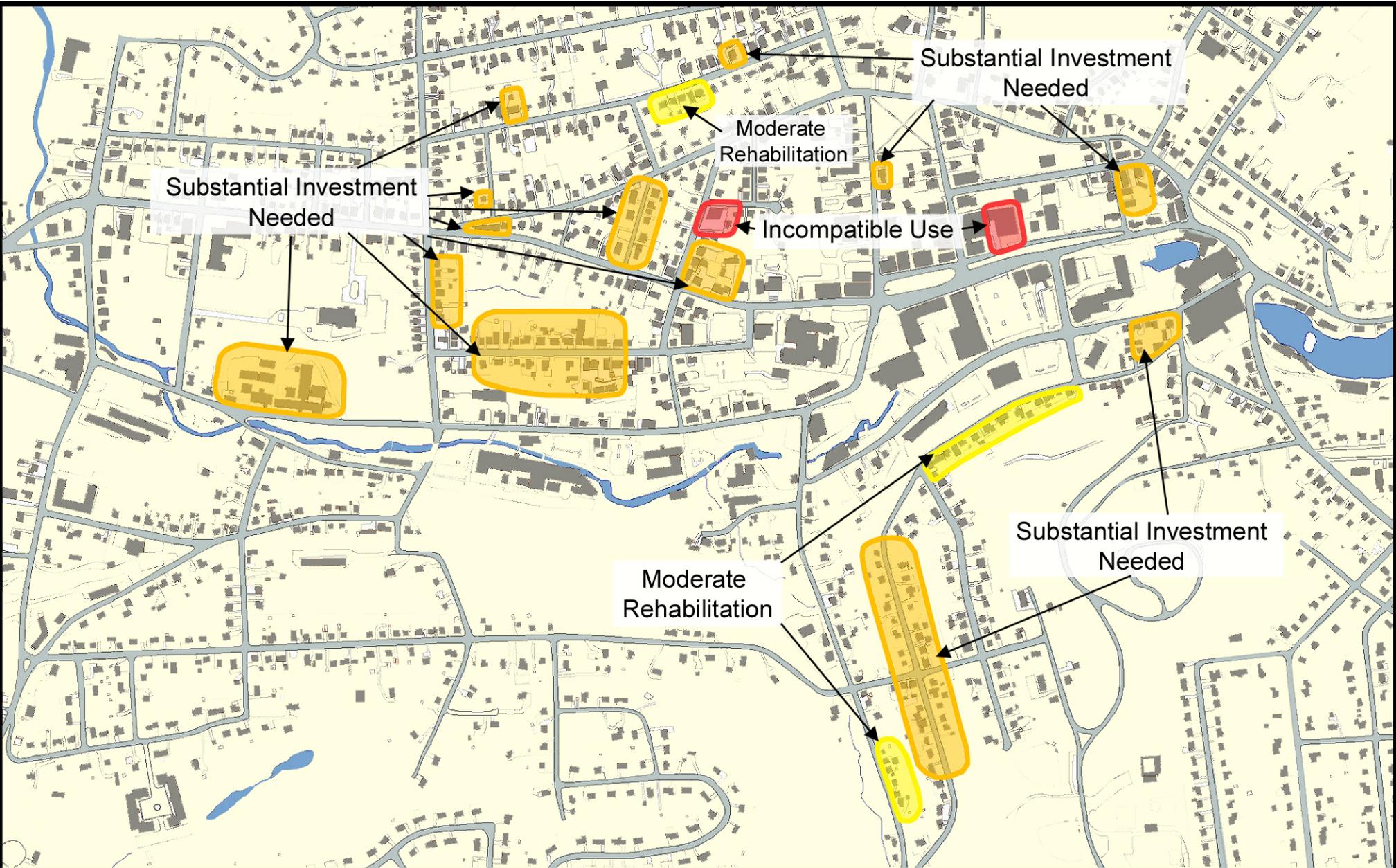
As described in this document, there are several clearly established goals that have been set by the NRZ Housing Subcommittee. In order to accomplish these goals, the following actions should be taken.

#### *Selected Demolition*

There are scattered structures throughout the neighborhood that appear to be physically deteriorated to the point where rehabilitation does not seem feasible. These structures should be acquired by the Town or an agent thereof and demolished. Following demolitions, these sites should be used for one of the following purposes: open space, off-street parking, or sale to adjacent property owners, depending upon the size and location of the parcel. Funds for this activity might be available through the CDBG Small Cities Program administered by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development.

#### *In-fill Development for Homeownership*

The Town should consider designating portions of the neighborhood where there is a concentration of deteriorated structures for the development of new home-ownership opportunities. Areas where such an approach might be considered include sections of Village Street, West Main Street, and High Street. These areas are shown on the map entitled Building Conditions.



Substantial Investment Needed

Substantial Investment Needed

Moderate Rehabilitation

Incompatible Use

Moderate Rehabilitation

Substantial Investment Needed

Data Sources:  
 Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection  
 Environmental and Geographic Information Center

Town of Vernon  
 Office of Economic Development

Town of Vernon  
 Department of Engineering

THIS MAP WAS DEVELOPED FOR USE AS A  
 PLANNING DOCUMENT. DELINEATIONS MAY  
 NOT BE EXACT.



# BUILDING CONDITIONS

ROCKVILLE NRZ  
 VERNON, CONNECTICUT



HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI  
 ASSOCIATES, Incorporated

Hamden, Connecticut

January 2003

*First Time Homebuyer Program.*

In order to create more homeownership in Rockville, a first-time homebuyer program should be implemented. Many communities throughout the country have been implementing programs where first-time homebuyers are provided down-payment assistance and other incentives to become homeowners. Both CHFA and CHIF currently have programs that should be aggressively pursued for Rockville. One innovative program being provided by non-profit housing organizations is a lease-to-own program whereby prospective homeowners can rent while accumulating resources and establishing good credit.

*Property Rehabilitation Program*

The Town should undertake steps to re-capitalize its property rehabilitation program initiated under the Small Cities Program. This can be done through future applications to the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. In addition, local banks should be approached about the possibility of forming a loan fund for property rehabilitation. This property rehabilitation program should be supported by a coordinated and comprehensive enforcement of all housing and building codes.

## V. Zoning Recommendations

The Vernon Zoning Regulations contain several sections specific to the Rockville NRZ. These districts are included under the overall umbrella of the Historic District section of the regulations and include the following districts:

- 4.15 Historic District – Planned Neighborhood Development
- 4.16 Historic District – Neighborhood R-10
- 4.17 Historic District – Residential Commercial
- 4.18 Historic District – Restricted Watershed
- 4.19 Historic District – Industrial

While there is no specific purpose or intent definition for the Historic District or the zoning within the District, it is assumed that the intent is to protect and enhance the historic and architectural characteristics and resources of Rockville. Although there is a Rockville Historic District Inventory, there is no specific description in the zoning regulations of the historic and architectural character or the resources to be protected and enhanced. At the same time, all uses with the exception of single-family and two-family dwellings, accessory uses customarily incidental to these uses and signs require a Special Permit in the Planned Neighborhood Development, Neighborhood R-10 and Residential Commercial Districts. The Industrial District has additional permitted uses. Section 17.3.3 of the regulations provides some guidance for Special Permits as found in Section 17.3.3.1 which reads as follows: “*No Special Permit shall be issued if it is found to be detrimental to the neighborhood or its residents, or alters the neighborhood’s essential characteristics*”. The Special Permit process also requires a public hearing as well as referral to the Local Historic Properties Commission. The Planning & Zoning Commission may at its discretion require the submission of a site plan for approval as outlined in Section 14 of the regulations.

While protection of neighborhoods in the Planned Neighborhood Development and Neighborhood R-10 Districts may require the use of the Special Permit, the Residential Commercial District and Planned Neighborhood Development Districts with such requirements may not be appropriate for the heart of Rockville in the government/institutional/business area. While there should be protection of the historic character of the area, the goal of revitalization and the support of a vibrant business climate would be better served by a zoning district specific to this purpose. Just as the 4.19 Historic District – Industrial permits a wider range of uses as of right; a similar approach should be taken in the establishment of a Historic District – Downtown Business & Residential District. This district should accommodate the cluster of government, institutional and commercial uses currently found in the area with proper provision for revitalization within a well-planned environment without the necessary burden of the Special Permit process other than for uses or intensities of uses which require individual attention. Concepts such as pedestrian linkages, public open space amenities, shared parking and integrated design should be included in the district regulation. The goal of the district regulations as expressed by the Rockville Downtown

Association should be ... “planned economic restructuring, business-friendly permitting, and planned growth of commercial properties.”

There should also be a review of the lot requirements in all the districts. The minimum lot area, minimum lot width, and front yard requirements are not reflective of current conditions in the area, nor are they the best design standards for revitalization. The current regulations result in many existing non-conforming lots, while the front yard set back requirements are not consistent with the historic development, site layout and architectural character of many sections of Rockville.

The regulation to implement the approaches outlined above should be drafted in cooperation with the Rockville Downtown Association, interested property owners and the Town Planner.



PEDESTRIAN LINKAGE

NEW  
2-3 STORY  
PARKING GARAGE

COURT

ROUTE 74 TRAFFIC CALMING  
& ROAD NARROWING

JUV. CT.  
OFFICES

SEN  
CTR

TOWN  
HALL

REDESIGNED  
CENTRAL PARK

VISUAL LINKAGE BETWEEN DOWNTOWN  
ROCKVILLE AND CENTRAL PARK

IN-FILL  
RETAIL

ROUTE 74 TRAFFIC CALMING  
& ROAD NARROWING

LIBRARY

ROCKVILLE  
GENERAL  
HOSPITAL

ROCKVILLE  
PROFESSIONAL  
BUILDING

COURT

# Conceptual Downtown Plan Rockville, Connecticut

**HMA** HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI  
ASSOCIATES, Incorporated  
Hamden, Connecticut January 2003

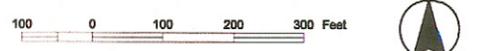
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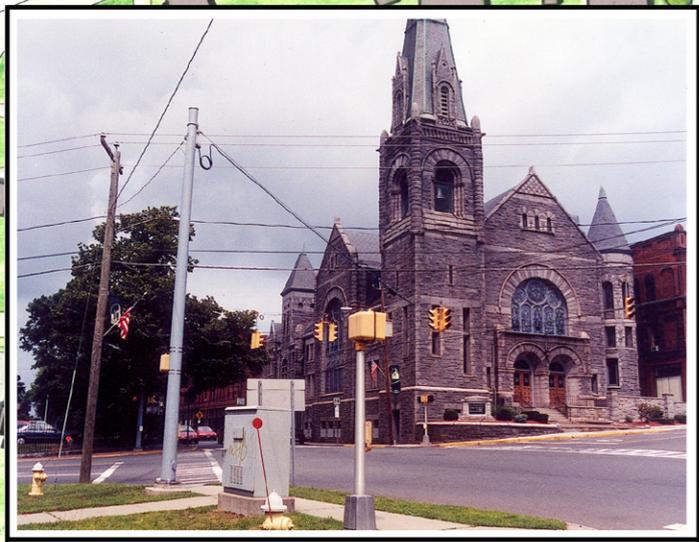




Illustrative Revitalization Plan  
 Rockville, Connecticut

HMA HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI ASSOCIATES, Incorporated  
 Hamden, Connecticut August 2002





**A. VIEW FROM EAST / WEST MAIN STREET DIVISION ACROSS CENTRAL PARK TO THE UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**



**E. VIEW OF CHURCH AND TOWN HALL TOWERS FROM EAST MAIN STREET AND PROSPECT STREET AREA**



**B. VIEWS FROM SOUTH SIDE OF WEST MAIN STREET TO FACADES OF BUILDINGS ON PARK PLACE, INCLUDING TOWN HALL AND SENIOR CENTER**



**D. VIEW OF COURT BUILDING LOOKING SOUTH DOWN PARK STREET**



**C. VIEW OF FOX HILL TOWER FROM ENTRY TO TOWN HALL**

**F. VIEW OF HIGH RETAINING WALL FROM EAST MAIN ST AND GROVE ST AREA**

Significant Views Assessment  
Rockville, Connecticut



HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI ASSOCIATES, Incorporated

Hamden, Connecticut

August 2002

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