

# Much Ado About Parking

By Al Sylvestre, Research Analyst, Department of Labor

**W**ith more parking space than public parkland in its downtown, Hartford's planners are considering the role parking plays in city life. The 435.2 acres of parking in downtown's two square miles would cover the University of Hartford campus, Bushnell Park, and the entire river-front park system in Hartford and East Hartford combined. Comparable cities such as Cambridge, MA and Arlington, VA dedicate 80% less land to parking than our capital city. This article looks at the challenges excess parking brings to Hartford; the ambitious measure taken by the city to integrate parking with development to attract new residents; and a new downtown development that applies design principles prioritizing vibrant street life over storing cars.

From 1960 to 2000, Hartford's parking-to-building-area ratio more than doubled because of its desire to emulate suburbs' easy access to parking. Map 1 shows the results of this trend. The city's 21<sup>st</sup> century development priorities are evolving from its pursuit of Class A office space<sup>1</sup> to adding housing that would transform downtown from a briefcase town to a vibrant and diverse 24-hour community with active street life. Since 2014, 881 apartments have been added

downtown, with 477 more under construction, and 188 units in planning or design phases. With the adoption of form-based zoning,<sup>2</sup> Hartford became the state's first municipality with no minimum parking requirement for downtown development. Factors contributing to the city's reconsideration of its parking requirements included:

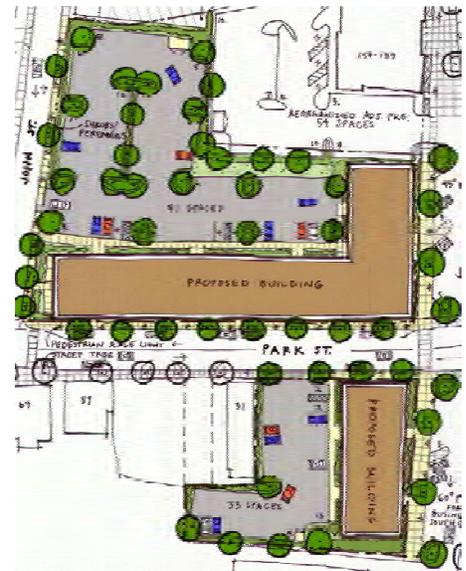
- Increased per-unit housing costs on infill development;<sup>3</sup>
- Small business opportunities lost to greater land-area requirements;
- The heat-island effect of large surface parking lots;
- The unsightliness of vast parking lagoons.

Hartford's planning and zoning commission and city council also had to consider these areas of resistance to the no-minimum parking requirement:

- Individuals who want to keep the parking privilege;
- Planners that use parking as leverage to negotiate other public benefits.

A \$26 million infill project on downtown's southern edge that is redeveloping two long-vacant

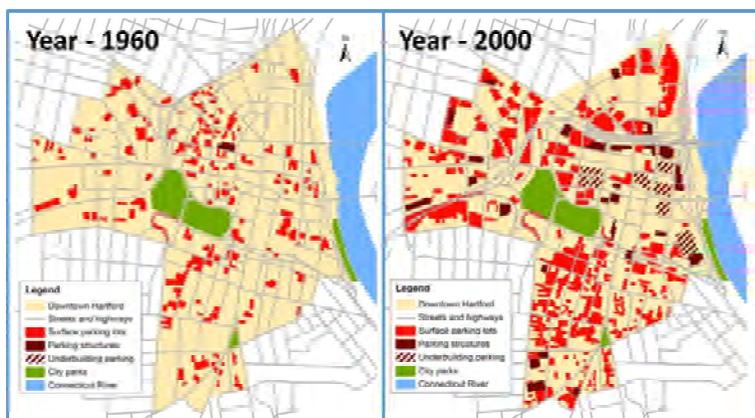
Map 2: Parcels A & B Preliminary Site Plan



parcels with 126 apartments, a rooftop lounge, 24,000 square feet of commercial space (Figure 1), and 124 parking spaces addresses several parking challenges. First, it brings the buildings close to the sidewalk where parking no longer acts as a barrier to the sidewalk and street-level activity. The parking lots, as shown on the site plan (Map 2), feature plantings that minimize the expanse of paved surface reducing the heat-sink effect by which the dark surface absorbs heat by day and releases it at night. Further, the plantings trap carbon dioxide and introduce elements of nature that break up the concrete, pavement, and glass monolith of dense urban development. Providing one parking space per residential unit rather than the one per bedroom (and one to four spaces per 1,000 square feet of commercial development) typical of suburban development reduces the need for land dedicated to parking.

Demographic trends, technology, economics, space-use efficiency, multi-modal

Map 1: Parking Growth From 1960 to 2000



**Figure 1: Rendering of Parcels A & B Developed**



transportation integrating bicycling, walking, and transit use, shared parking, and pricing will have to be taken into account as cities and towns allocate land for storing our vehicles. Currently, 83% of the U.S. population is living in urban areas - up from 64% in 1950. With this expected to reach 89% by 2050, designing and applying

parking solutions will determine the livability of our cities and suburbs. ■

1 Class A office buildings are the newest in their market with central locations that fetch the highest rents.

Class B buildings are older and can

be returned to Class A status with some renovations. Class C are older still, in need of extensive renovation, command the lowest rental rates, and take the longest time to lease.

2 Form-based zoning is a land development regulation to foster predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form rather than separation of uses as its organizing principle.

3 Infill development revives vacant or under-used land, seeking to craft well-functioning neighborhoods with residential density supporting transportation choices, conveniences, and amenities.

## GENERAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS

<i>(Seasonally adjusted)</i>	1Q	1Q	YoY CHG		4Q	QoQ CHG	
	2021	2020	NO.	%	2020	NO.	%
<b>General Drift Indicator (2007=100)*</b>							
<b>Leading</b>	105.9	109.6	-3.8	-3.4	106.7	-0.9	-0.8
<b>Coincident</b>	93.0	95.5	-2.5	-2.6	92.0	1.0	1.04
<b>Real Gross Domestic Product**</b>							
<i>(2012 Chained \$, SAAR)</i>							
<b>Connecticut (\$ in millions)</b>	250,538.8	248,334.4	2,204.4	0.9	246,890.2	3,648.6	1.5
<b>United States (\$ in millions)</b>	19,086,375	19,010,848	75,527	0.4	18,794,426	291,949	1.6
<b>New England (\$ in millions)</b>	986,394.8	982,275.4	4,119.4	0.4	970,578.9	15,815.9	1.6
<b>Per Capita Personal Income**</b>							
<i>(Current \$, SAAR)</i>							
<b>Connecticut</b>	87,695	78,263	9,432	12.1	80,238	7,457	9.3
<b>United States</b>	66,889	57,523	9,366	16.3	59,532	7,357	12.4
<b>New England</b>	81,711	70,883	10,828	15.3	73,991	7,720	10.4
<b>Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index (2007=100)***</b>							
<b>Connecticut</b>	111.59	102.06	9.5	9.3	110.43	1.2	1.1
<b>United States</b>	127.21	118.10	9.1	7.7	126.49	0.7	0.6

Sources: \*Dr. Steven P. Lanza, University of Connecticut    \*\*U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis    \*\*\*Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

**General Drift Indicators** are composite measures of the four-quarter change in three coincident (Connecticut Manufacturing Production Index, nonfarm employment, and real personal income) and three leading (housing permits, manufacturing average weekly hours, and initial unemployment claims) economic variables, and are indexed so 2007 = 100.

The **Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index** summarizes current economic condition by using four coincident variables: nonfarm payroll employment, average hours worked in manufacturing, the unemployment rate, and wage and salary disbursements deflated by the consumer price index (U.S. city average).