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PRESENTED FOR DISCUSSION**



# First Town Downtown

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
November 2003**

In 2003, First Town Downtown (FTDT) and the CT Main Street Center co-sponsored a market niche strategy study for Windsor Center in Windsor, CT. John Shapiro, from the community planning consulting firm Abeles, Phillips, Preiss & Shapiro, Inc. of New York, was in Windsor on September 18, 2003 to assist First Town Downtown in conceptualizing a market driven economic development strategy for the Windsor Center.

The 2003 Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates market analysis report for Windsor Center centers around the feasibility of two distinctive strategy options: (1) Sociability – the favorite place for Windsor residents, or (2) Destination - a small specialty destination, and the need to select one or the other. Each option has its own advantages and opportunities.

Looking at market position, Windsor Center's lack of centrality and convenience detracts conventional retailers that are part of the traditional destination shopping mix. This fact combined with the reality that there has been and continues to be plenty of opportunity to create shopping destinations elsewhere poses a liability for the Center in becoming the town's principal place for shopping posed a liability.

However, what Windsor Center lacks for conventional retailers, it more than makes up for niche retailers. Due to historic development patterns, the highest density of population (hence spending power) with the town is proximate to Windsor Center. It also rewards those who go there with an unusually pleasant pedestrian experience. The Center is more than appropriate for specialty stores.

At 100,000 square feet, Windsor Center is already equal in size to a small destination-shopping district. Such districts usually feature scenic resources such as waterfronts, or spectacular architecture such as grand railroad stations. They emphasize dining and food as well as boutiques. Most often, they have a further basis for recognition in the marketplace; e.g., a museum, a theater, wealthy clientele, or celebrity clientele.

As this list of features reveals, Windsor Center is not quite there yet. Its mix leans towards convenience goods and services. It lacks a major attraction. Nor does it have the type of specialty clientele that others like to follow. But it could work on these liabilities.

In reviewing sources of demand, Windsor Center has several populations to draw upon: Town of Windsor residents, local workers, and visitors: corporate, hotel, and special events.

The next step; implementation of a Sociable place or a Destination location requires the Windsor community to think in terms of objectives, strategy, teamwork, and immediate action. The timing is ripe to proceed with participation from Windsor Center's stakeholders.

***A MARKET NICHE STRATEGY FOR  
WINDSOR CENTER, CONNECTICUT***

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## INTRODUCTION

Windsor Center is a small downtown that features historic buildings, the town hall, town library, a popular supermarket, a handsome town green, and plenty of charm. Yet, it is not fulfilling its potential. This is evident in a ground floor commercial mix that leans towards offices not stores, low foot traffic, and a number of vacancies.

The Town government and the civic and business community long ago united to launch a Main Street management program for Windsor Center—named “First Town Downtown” (FTDT), since Windsor is said to be the oldest permanent English settlement in the State of Connecticut. With many small successes behind it, FTDT decided that it would now be of value to call in an outside expert to provide advice on market niche and commensurate enhancement strategies.

The Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) is an umbrella organization for the state’s “main street management” organizations. CMSC has engaged Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates to provide general technical assistance to its members on market-based strategies. Thanks to grants from the Connecticut Main Street Center and funding from First Town Downtown, Windsor Center was selected for more in-depth analysis.

The technical assistance effort began with a compilation of past surveys, data, maps, etc. by FTDT, with help from Town of Windsor staff as well as CMSC. (It has helped that a past executive director of FTDT presently leads CMSC.) A full day tour and series of interviews and work sessions were then arranged in September 2003. The site visit culminated in an interactive workshop with FTDT, Town, business and civic leaders. Alternative market niche and enhancement strategies were presented and tentatively agreed upon.

***Their crux starts with the observation that Windsor Center is too small to do many different things well. It has just the right size and features to be either a small specialty destination for a wide trade area, or the favorite place for Windsor residents to meet and greet while running errands. These two functions are not totally incompatible: a strong local clientele provides authenticity for a regional center; elements of a regional destination would strengthen community pride in the local center. There may even be an evolution from one to the other. But for the immediate future, the business, civic and political leadership should focus on one and one only. Coming out of the workshops, it was decided that the emphasis should be on Windsor as a sociable place.***

This report serves to document and elaborate upon these findings and recommendations. It begins with a market overview. The two basic options are then described; featuring a matrix indicating how various enhancement strategies would differ under each option. Those strategies consistent with the sociability goal are then elaborated upon. The report concludes with a description of some next steps for FTDT and the Town to consider.

Special appreciation is due Gary J. Roman of FTDT and John Simone of CMSC for organizing and leading the study effort; and to the Town of Windsor and Centre Coffee Bar for hosting the workshops. A full list of participants and a partial list of sources are presented below:

**Study Participants**

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**Partial List of Sources**

First Town Downtown, *research and data from ESRI Business Information Services*  
First Town Downtown, *survey results*, 1996  
First Town Downtown, *Welcome to Windsor Center*  
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Planimetrics, *Draft Plan of Conservation and Development*, 2003  
Town of Windsor, *Annual Report*, 2002  
Town of Windsor, *Traffic Study Inventory*  
Town of Windsor, *Windsor Fall 2003*  
United States Census Bureau, *Census of Population*, 2000  
Windsor Chamber of Commerce, *Discover Historic Windsor*  
Windsor Chamber of Commerce, et al., *Revolutionary Windsor*

## MARKET POSITION

***Windsor Center has a number of retailing liabilities that in fact need not impede its prosperity. Its key difficulty is that it is inherently inconvenient in terms of auto-mobile-oriented shopping. Its key advantage is that it is a pedestrian-scaled place that need not compete with the auto-oriented malls and shopping centers on their terms.***

### **Liabilities**

Retail business districts derive their size and power from their relative visibility and convenience to shoppers. There was a time when Windsor Center was the center of its community. The main road leading north from Hartford was Windsor Avenue. The main means of moving goods and people were the river and railroad. Windsor Center was strategically located at what appears to be the first dry place to cross the Farmington River west of the Connecticut River floodplain. Two historic centers grew up on either side of that crossing: Palisado Center, in addition to Windsor Center. Windsor Center became the stronger of the two. This is in part because the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers framed a larger trade area to the south than to the north. More particularly, starting in the mid 1800s, Windsor Center's railroad station and many brick factories made it the more bustling place.

Nowadays, the main road is Interstate 91; highways are the principal ways of moving goods and services; and the real commercial hubs are at highway exits and interchanges. Highway exit office and industrial districts have supplanted the riverside factories. New subdivisions have been built in the outlying areas. Windsor Center simply lacks the centrality and convenience needed to be the town's principal place for shopping.

And there has been and continues to be plenty of opportunity to create shopping destinations elsewhere. The laying down of new highways through virgin land invited the assemblage and building of shopping complexes—strip centers, malls and shopping centers—designed around the needs of vehicles not pedestrians. These retail districts offer ample parking visible from the arterial; large spaces suitable for national and regional retailers; and, most important, convenience to tens of thousands of passing vehicles. From a conventional retailing perspective, little Windsor Center has little to offer.

The numbers speak for themselves. Windsor Center has perhaps 100,000 square feet of retail space. (Refer to Table 2, later.) A typical supermarket-anchored shopping center has 80,000 square feet; a typical mall 500,000 square feet. Whereas one hundred years ago, Windsor Center was the primary shopping for the area, malls and strip development have been built aplenty in the past few decades. (See Table 1.) The traffic level along Broad Street approximates 13,000 vehicles per day; the traffic level along I-91 approximates 120,000 vehicles per day. With exceptions, conventional retailers would be foolhardy to look at Windsor Center before exhausting the possibility of locations more convenient to the highway.

**Table 1. Comparative Retail Square Footages**

Shopping Center	Square Footage	Travel Time from Windsor Center
Windsor Center	100,000	not applicable
645/700 Poquonock Avenue	21,000	3 minutes
Day Hill Shops	34,000	4 minutes
494 Windsor Avenue	131,000	5 minutes
Main Street, Windsor Locks	105,000	10 minutes
Buckland Hills Mall	2,000,000	10 minutes
Granby Road	60,000	15 minutes
Copaco Shopping Center	255,000	16 minutes
<b>Rounded Total:</b>	<b>2,618,000</b>	<b>not applicable</b>

*Source: FTDT, 2003; except for Windsor Center figure which is a rough estimate by PPSA based on FTDT data*

(Note: The West Farms Mall in West Hartford/Farmington and Buckland Hills provide an additional 1.5 and 2.0 million square feet respectively of retail in 20 minutes' drive time.)

At present, there is a dearth of comparison retail and dining opportunities in the town. ("Comparison shopping" refers to clothes, furniture, gifts, and other items where price and quality can be strongly differentiated; as distinct from "convenience shopping" for groceries, hardware, drugstore items, and other items where proximity to home is far more important. Dining includes entertainment.) The Bradley International Airport Connection, Bloomfield Avenue and Day Hill Road corridors are largely built up for offices and industry. (Hereafter, these three areas corridors are simply called Day Hill.) Most residents travel to Manchester and Enfield for their comparison shopping and dining.

Could Windsor Center expand to meet this demand? Not likely. As the table below indicates, there is plenty of vacant space and office/service space that might be converted into retail space. But to do so, Windsor Center's retailing would have to spill out from the "Main Street" ambiance along Broad Street, to take in significant square footages on the side streets. This would be possible only through unlikely interventions, such as major arterial improvements leading to the highways, condemnation of houses to create parking fields, or alternatively construction of garages. These actions would be expensive and highly risky, not to mention politically non-palatable.



**Table 2. Windsor Center Square Footages**

Type of Space	Square Feet:	
	By Use	Subtotals
Convenience Retail	77,400	
Comparison Retail	<u>62,800</u>	
Subtotal for Retail		140,200
Personal Service	60,200	
Professional Service	93,100	
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	<u>53,500</u>	
Subtotal for Services and Office		206,800
Government	79,300	
Church, Civic	101,400	
Residence	<u>146,500</u>	
Subtotal for Other		327,200
Vacant		<u>81,800</u>
Total		<u>756,000</u>

Source: FTDT, 2003

(Note: Elsewhere in this report, a rounded figure of 100,000 square feet is employed for Windsor Center. This is because while we believe that the “retail” square footage measured by FTDT likely includes storage and other space not traditionally counted.)

In the end, only selective expansion is possible. Windsor Center is pretty much a fixed commodity; though, as discussed next, this is in fact its greatest strength if the goal is to attract niche, not conventional retailers.

**Assets**

What Windsor Center lacks for conventional retailers, it more than makes up for niche retailers.

Due to historic development patterns, the highest density of population (hence spending power) within the town is proximate to Windsor Center. The Town Hall, main public library, post office and other civic uses are located in the center. A radial road pattern brings traffic through the center. Residents in the northeastern part of town are channeled through Windsor Center due to the infrequency of both Farmington River and Connecticut River crossings, and the tendency to commute to the south. No road has a great deal of traffic volume. (The average daily counts are 6,300 for Poquonock Avenue, 5,100 for Bloomfield Avenue, 12,800 for Broad Street, and 7,400 for Palisado Avenue.) Yet the cumulative count is somewhere in the area of 15,000 vehicles per day—enough to support a major pharmacy. Though off-center, Windsor Center is still convenient.

Windsor Center has some convenience to a wider trade area. Highway spurs to the northwest and southeast enhance the Town of Windsor’s centrality in the region. This explains the large amount of office and industrial development of the last two decades. It also provides sufficient centrality for the Town to host the Shad Festival, Revolutionary Windsor event, and especially the SummerWind Performing Arts Center. Four highway exits are proximate to Windsor Center.

Most important, Windsor Center rewards those who trouble to go there with an unusually pleasant pedestrian experience. The Center is a very walkable several hundred linear feet. The buildings are largely historic in character, with handsome edifices such as the St. Gabriel Church and former Railroad Station. Old growth trees abound, providing shade and a sense of quiet. The Town Green is a gathering place as well as a thing of beauty. The Town Hall, Windsor Public Library, United States Post Office, several schools, churches, Masonic Lodge and VFW Post all contribute to the civic identity of the place. There is a concentration of service banks (as distinct from the drive-throughs and ATMs that frequent most shopping centers and malls). Windsor Center presents itself as a quintessentially traditional New England town center.

Indeed, shoppers celebrate this asset. In FTDT's consumer surveys, the vast majority of the respondents praised Windsor Center's cleanliness (96 percent), attractiveness (83 percent), and pedestrian-friendly character (78 percent).

Windsor Center is not well suited to most chains and franchises. The retail spaces are eclectic in size and features. Some spaces involve steps up; others are broken up within houses; still others are obscured by the old growth trees. A few even lack sidewalks (most notably Geissler's Supermarket and Windsor True Value Hardware—two of downtown's three anchor stores). Most stores do not have adequate parking within the customary 400 feet of their entries.

But Windsor Center is more than appropriate for specialty stores. These stores are often idiosyncratic in their preferences. A café oriented to students can, for instance, be up a flight of stairs; while one oriented to mothers with young children needs to be easier to get in and out of. A hardware store needs parking right in front for errands; while a computer software store can have it around the corner. For specialty stores, groupings of like types of stores and identity matter more than convenience; low rents matter more than unobstructed space. Older downtowns can often play an important role as an incubator, especially for new businesses started by local residents. In this respect, a turnover of stores may not be a problem but symptomatic of a source of strength. In sum, there is the potential for synergy between Windsor Center as a pedestrian-oriented place and niche retailers.

### **Sources of Demand**

Windsor Center has several populations to draw upon.

The primary population is of course Town of Windsor residents, thanks to the draw represented by Town Hall, main Town Library, Post Office, etc. Approximately 28,200 people now live in Windsor. After phenomenal expansion in the 1950s, population growth has slowed to approximately 0.2 percent per year, half of the rate of growth in the State of Connecticut. Planimetrics, in connection with their work on Windsor's Plan of Conservation and Development, project the year 2020 population at 29,800. (See Table 3.)

**Table 3. Percent Population Growth in Windsor**

Decade	Average Annual Increase
1950s	6.5%
1960s	1.6%
1970s	1.2%
1980s	1.0%
1990s	0.2%
2000s	0.1%
2010s	0.1%

Source: *Planimetrics, 2003*

Windsor's population is lodged solidly in the middle in terms of income. At \$64,100 per household in 1999, Windsor ranked third in the county in terms of median household income, and well above the State's median of \$53,900. (*Source: Planimetrics, 2003*) A reported 40 percent increase in housing values over the past five years indicates an influx of a more affluent population, but not dramatically so, since housing prices have escalated throughout the region in connection with both lower interest rates and fewer housing starts.

A secondary population is comprised of local workers. The number of Windsor-based jobs now tops 17,500, thanks to the offices, industries and hotels along the Interstate Highway.

A troubling statistic is that this figure is down from 18,700 in 1990. (*Source: Planimetrics, 2003*) More problematic though are the simple facts that (1) Windsor Center is on the wrong side of the Interstate Highway, compelling most workers to drive out of their way to visit; and (2) many large firms in Day Hill reportedly provide cafeterias, mandate one-half hour lunch breaks, or both. Nationally, one-half of all sales to workers are for lunch; and most sales are made during lunchtime.

Visitors to these offices, hotels, and special events, including SummerWind, generate an additional population. With seven hotels in Windsor and Windsor Locks, there are something on the order of 1,800 hotel rooms. Reportedly, 5,000 to 8,000 people attend SummerWind concerts. But again, Windsor Center is handicapped by its off-center location one to several miles away from the Interstate Highway, SummerWind and the closest hotels.

It should be noted that the more traditional way to consider market demand uses simple radii as a surrogate for travel times. Employing radii of one, three and five miles yields a small primary trade area comprised of the Windsor Center neighborhood, a secondary trade area comprised of most of Windsor, and a tertiary trade area that again takes in parts of neighboring municipalities. (Refer to Map 1 at the end of this chapter.) A more accurate travel time polygon was arrived at by FTDT. (Refer to Map 2 at the end of this chapter.) This yields a primary trade area comprised of only eastern Windsor, and secondary and tertiary trade areas that take in parts of neighboring municipalities.

The three-mile radius corresponds pretty much to the traditional ten-minute travel time for convenience centers, after discounting the impact of highways that can take people out as well as in and through the trade area. (Compare Maps 1 and 2.) It also corresponds to the Town of Windsor. The smaller one-mile population is too small to support

the Center; the wider five-mile population is not only far-flung, but also poorer. (See Table 4.) For reasons of spending power as well as proximity, the Town of Windsor/ three-mile radius population is the one to focus on.

**Table 4. Comparison of Different Trade Areas**

Demographic	Radii:		
	1-mile	3-mile	5-mile
Population	3,500	25,600	45,900
Median Household Income	\$45,900	\$55,000	\$46,000
Employees	1,700	15,900	63,100

*Source: FTDT, based on Business Information Solutions data, 2003*

**Market Niche**

Market niche responds not just to the gross numbers, but also to the nuances within those numbers. For Windsor Center, there are a number of key statistics, trends and qualities to highlight.

**Loyal Shoppers.** Windsor Center’s resident and worker populations overlap: 34 percent of all Windsor residents who work also commute to jobs within the town; coincidentally, 30 percent of Windsor-based employees also live within the town. Thus, approximately 5,300 people live and work in the town. These people can be counted upon to seek most of their shopping, dining and entertainment locally. This not only includes supermarket and clothing purchases, but also specialty dining.

Windsor’s population is quite stable, with approximately one-out-of-two housing units occupied by the same household for ten or more years. Only two-out-of-the-ten other towns in the county have as stable a population base to draw upon. This stability can contribute to shopper loyalty.

Over the next two decades, the town’s demographic is expected to age. (See Table 5.) This is likely to generate greater demand for the types of services that older adults put a premium on—including places to meet friends, informal eateries such as coffee shops, personal banking, and hobby shops. Seniors put a particular premium on service, something that traditional downtowns are generally better at than malls or shopping centers.

**Table 5. Windsor Age Trends**

Age Category	Age Range	Trend to 2020
Infants	0 – 4	Stable
School age	5 – 19	Lower
Young adults	20 – 34	Higher
Middle age	35 – 54	Lower
Mature adults	55 – 65	Much higher
Retirement age	65 +	Much higher

*Source: Planimetrics, 2003*

**Windsor Center Residents.** Residents of the immediate area shape market niche, not only because they are a part of the primary trade area population, but also because they provide the street life that defines a downtown's image. Simply contrast the impact of several hundred historic house enthusiasts with several hundred seniors in the same income category; or several hundred artists with several hundred welfare families also in the same income category.

Notably, Windsor Center's historic homes do not, according to realtors, tap any different market population than the town in general. Worse, residents living within one mile of Windsor Center have a much lower median household income. (Refer to Table 4.) This points to a potential to shape Windsor Center's market niche through a downtown housing strategy emphasizing a more upscale population interested in historic home renovations.

**Youth.** The neighboring Loomis Chaffee School can also shape market niche, again because of the influence on streetlife and image as much as through buying power.

Loomis Chaffee has only 150 faculty and 750 students, of which 350 are day-students generally living within one-half hour travel time, and 400 board at the school. But these 900 faculty and students represent a captive market for Windsor Center, which is within walking distance, and which must be passed through to go shopping elsewhere. Most students also have affluent parents who can be counted upon to visit and attend special events at the school.

Loomis Chaffee amenities include an open-air amphitheater, the Richmond Art Center, a video production studio, Founders Chapel performance space, three gymnasias, 17 tennis courts, the enclosed Savage/Johnson (ice skating) Rink, Benjamin Van Doren Hedges (indoor swimming) Pool, and "The Meadows" athletic fields. The school is presently fundraising to build a 400-seat performing arts center. The school also accommodates a sports camp and a professional operatic training program called "Intermezzo" during the summer.

Some of these amenities are available to Windsor residents on a limited basis—most particularly the ice-skating rink, something that the Town could not otherwise afford to build. Other facilities can and should be open to town residents as part of a good neighbor policy.

In this way, Loomis Chaffee could contribute to a youth-oriented niche, complementing the Windsor Library and Town Green. More ambitiously, as described later, Loomis Chaffee could anchor an approach involving the marketing of Windsor Center as a regional center for music.

**Regional Residents.** A considerable population lives within only a fifteen-minute drive of Windsor Center. (Refer to Map 2.) Theoretically, it may be possible to tap this market population due to the dearth of historic shopping districts in the area, and the relative weakness of downtown Hartford. Two factors argue against such a niche, however.

First, much of the trade area takes in relatively impoverished north Hartford neighborhoods. This brings the median income figure down. It also represents an impediment due to racism, in which gains with North Hartford's largely minority population are likely to be offset by losses with the suburbs' largely Caucasian populations; i.e., if Windsor

Center attracts more of the North End minority population, it may lose a portion of the white suburban population due to racism.

Second, the trade area takes in a vast array of shopping opportunities. Americans generally travel an average of ten minutes for their convenience shopping, and twenty minutes for their dining and comparison-shopping. The highways and arterials that can bring regional shoppers and diners to Windsor Center can just as easily take them to many other places.

Third and related, Windsor Center would in this larger trade area be taking on West Hartford Center. This would be a losing proposition. West Hartford's one-, three- and five-mile radii enjoy higher population counts; and West Hartford is more affluent than Windsor. The resulting weight of disposable income assures that West Hartford would continue to dominate. (See Table 6.)

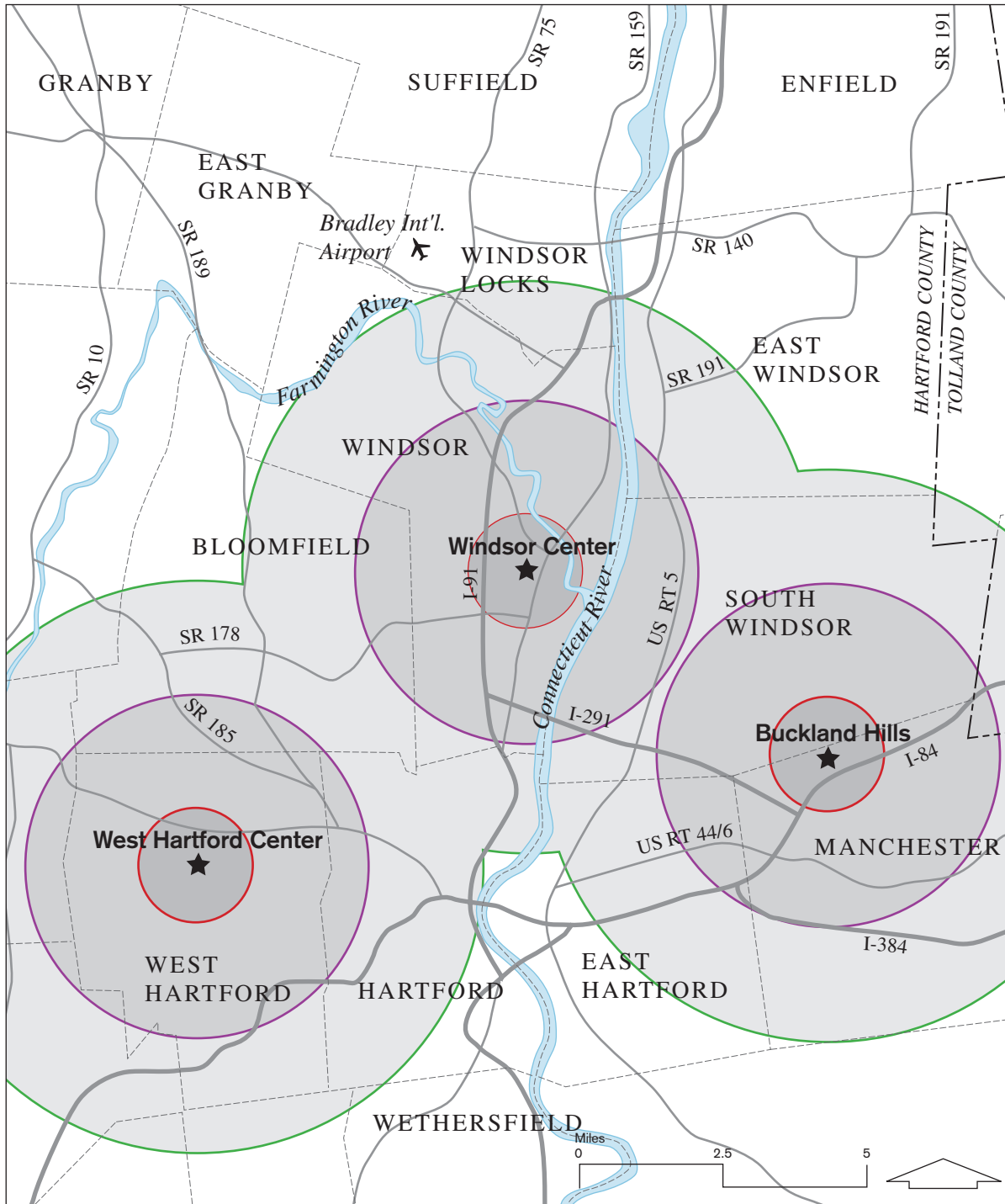
**Table 6. Comparison of Windsor and West Hartford Trade Areas**

Radii	Total Disposable Income:	
	Windsor Center	West Hartford Center
1-mile	\$ 71 million	\$ 367 million
3-mile	\$ 495 million	\$2,234 million
5-mile	\$1,482 million	\$4,025 million




*Source: FTDT, based on Business Information Solutions data, 2003*

To succeed in tapping a regional market, Windsor Center would have to distinguish itself entirely from not only West Hartford, but other West Hartford "wannabe's." While West Hartford is largely built out, Farmington Avenue and Asylum Hill are, for instance, already trying to tap an overflow market based on proximity. Windsor would need to identify an entirely different image and attraction base, building on intrinsic assets such as Loomis Chaffee.

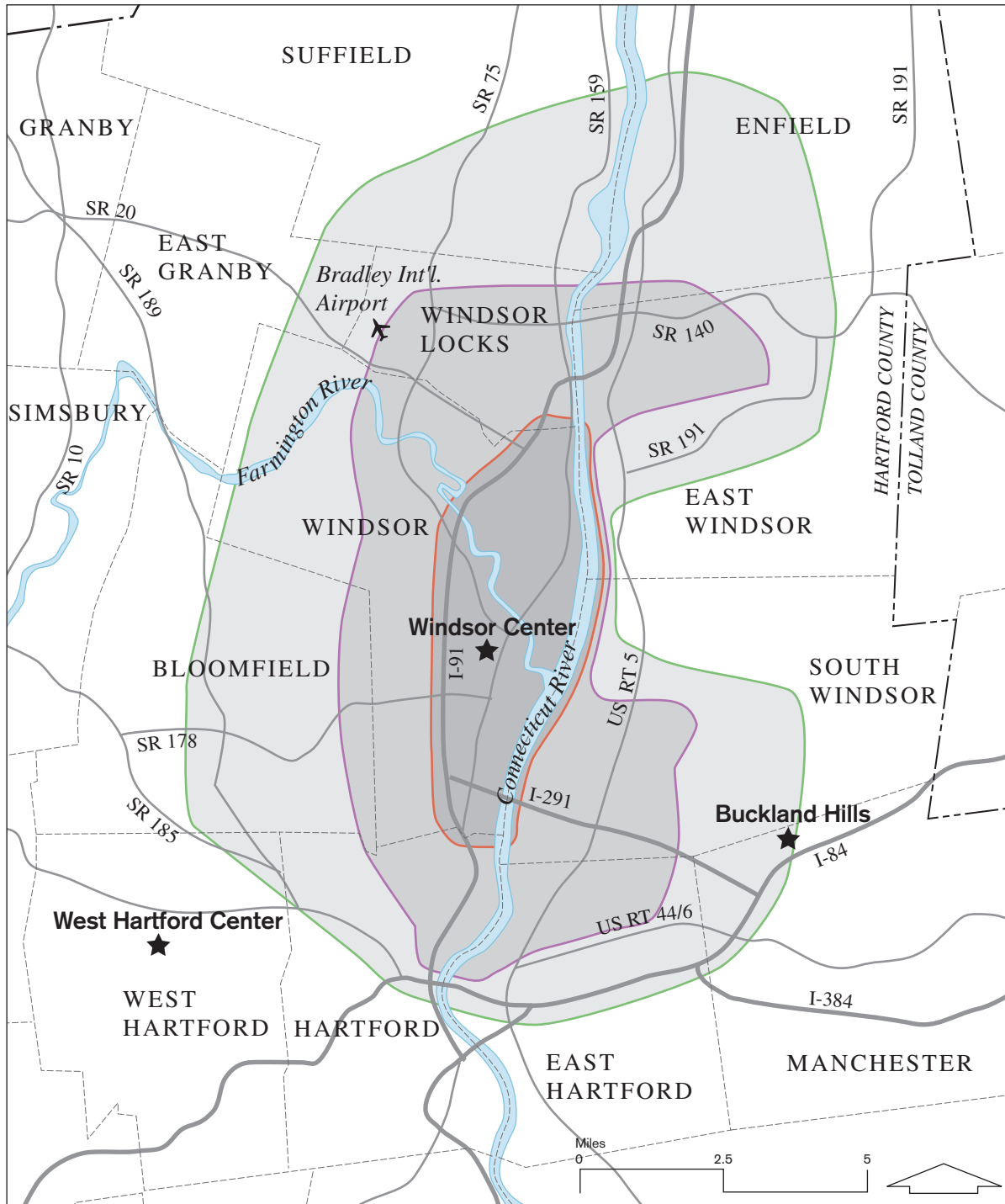
### Windsor Center Trade Areas






Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Real Estate Consultants 2003

-  Five mile radius
-  Ten mile radius
-  Fifteen mile radius

### Windsor Center Travel Times



Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Real Estate Consultants 2003

-  Five minute drive
-  Ten minute drive
-  Fifteen minute drive



## TWO OPTIONS

***Windsor Center can be either a successful center of community pride and sociability, or a specialty regional destination. It already fulfills the former function pretty well. Thanks to Loomis Chaffee and SummerWind, it could also evolve into the latter function. It is important to decide which option (or “attitude”, as one workshop participant called it) should motivate commercial revitalization efforts, given the Center’s limited space resources, not to mention the Town and FTDT’s limited capital and time resources.***

### **Sociability Option**

At 100,000 square feet, Windsor Center is roughly the same size as a convenience oriented shopping center. It offers pretty much the same retail mix too: a supermarket, drug store, and small hardware store.

There are deviations and variations, of course. First, its anchors provide service to make up for their relatively small size. Geissler’s Supermarket has about 25,000 square feet, compared to the typical shopping center supermarket of 40,000 or more square feet. At about 5,000 square feet, Windsor True Value Hardware pales in comparison to a Home Depot. The town is served by a chain CVS Pharmacy which serves as an anchor. Second, Town Hall, the Windsor Public Library, and United States Post Office serve as additional anchors.

Third, Windsor Center lacks huge parking fields facing the main arterials, typical of shopping centers. (Though there is some front-facing parking at both Geissler’s and the Arthur’s strip.)

Fourth, this handicap is more than offset by the Center’s lovely pedestrian and historic qualities, which shopping centers try to emulate usually through ersatz.

Fifth, like most traditional downtowns, Windsor Center is hard pressed to attract chains and franchises. The vehicular traffic counts are moderate; there are better locations near the Interstate Highway; Windsor Center spaces are encumbered either in layout, size or proximity to parking. But sixth, these factors are not liabilities for starter and unique businesses. Often, downtown businesses can instead become what one workshop participant called “celebrity” merchants. Examples from Windsor Center presently include Bart’s Drive-In Restaurant, Bill Selig Jewelers, Central Street Antiques, Jordan Florist & Gifts, and the new Centre Coffee Bar. These businesses serve as “magnets”—i.e., high quality stores that generate significant shopper loyalty.

The market support for the Sociability Option is proven: it is precisely what we see. The question is can it be notched up; and the answer appears to be yes.

There is roughly \$70 million dollars in disposable income within the immediate trade area defined by the one-mile radius; and \$500 million dollars in the wider trade area defined by a three-mile radius (\$430 million after deducting the one-mile radius). Applying a generous \$250 per square feet in sales to Windsor Center’s roughly 100,000 square feet in space yields a need to capture roughly \$25 million in local expenditures. To meet this

goal, Windsor Center would have to capture 40 percent of all expenditures within its one-mile radius; this is not realistic. There is ample spending power within the three-mile radius; in this case, Windsor Center need only capture 6 percent of all expenditures.

Where does Windsor Center fall in terms of its reliance on the primary (one-mile) and secondary (three-mile) trade areas? When asked in FTDT surveys where their competition is, a plurality of Windsor Center merchants indicated the Manchester malls. This implies that they are doing well within the convenience goods category for residents in the closer, one-mile trade area. When asked where their shoppers hailed from, merchants described a far-flung clientele (though they were not asked to indicate their relative numbers). This implies that they are also tapping into the wider, three-mile trade area. A speculative playing out of reasonable capture rates is presented below. (See Table 7.) These numbers indicates the potential for limited expansion.

**Table 7. Market Support for Windsor Center as a Sociable Place**

Statistic	Trade Area:		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
<u>Demand:</u>			
Radius	1-mile	3-mile	3-mile
Disposable Income	\$70 million	\$430 million	\$500 million
Speculative Capture Rate	15%	5%	7%
Available Spending	\$10 million	\$20 million	\$30 million
<u>Supply:</u>			
Square Feet			100,000 sf
Target Sales per Square Foot			\$250 psf
Target Gross Sales			\$25 million

Source: PPSA, based on FTDT data, 2003

How might Windsor Center capture the incremental increase in expenditures available? Simply by doing a better job at what it already does.

The first focus should be on enhancing pedestrian amenities. While pedestrian-scaled, Windsor Center has a number of features that pose a nuisance to shoppers. Broad Street could be made easier to cross. Turning movements in and out of frequent cross streets and curb cuts pose safety problems. In particular, the “100 percent corner”—the place with the greatest visibility and traffic volumes—could be made more pedestrian-friendly. In Windsor, the “100 percent corner” is formed by the intersection(s) of Broad Street, the Town Green service Road, Union Street, Palisado Avenue, Poquonock Avenue and Bloomfield Avenue. As this roster of streets implies, this is a congested, confusing place that has been redesigned over the years with the vehicle, not the pedestrian, mainly in mind. It’s time to revisit that design in light of a new emphasis on the pedestrian.

The second focus should be on enhancing scenic qualities. Windsor Center is already quite handsome—featuring a gorgeous Town Green, fronted by historic buildings, encircled by river, green spaces, and historic homes. Protections are needed to safeguard this attractive physical setting; i.e., the Town should strengthen its historic district and scenic view regulations. Small-scale interventions are also useful to enhance the setting; e.g., simplifying the signage in and around the Town Green. In particular, while Broad

Street is an attractive boulevard, Poquonock Avenue is too much of a commercial strip; it needs redevelopment as well as better landscaping.

The third focus area has to do with boosting the spending power of local residents. As indicated above, residents in the one-mile radius can be counted upon to generate three times the capture rate manifest by residents in the three-mile radius. Yet, these closer-in residents lag behind their outlying neighbors in terms of household income. Providing incentives for historic home restoration, marketing the Center's walkable lifestyle, encouraging nearby multifamily housing (including at 33 Mechanic Street), and promoting a commuter railroad are some of the ways that a more affluent population could be attracted to Windsor Center.

FTDT and Town of Windsor are already pursuing most of these strategies, commensurate with the fact that, as noted, Windsor Center is already a sociable center which town residents put much stock in.

### **Destination Option**

At 100,000 square feet, Windsor Center is already equal in size to a small destination-shopping district. Such districts usually feature scenic resources such as waterfronts, or spectacular architecture such as grand railroad stations. They emphasize dining and food as well as boutiques. Most often, they have a further basis for recognition in the marketplace; e.g., a museum, a theater, wealthy clientele, or celebrity clientele.

As this list of features reveals, Windsor Center is not quite there yet. Its mix leans towards convenience goods and services. It lacks a major attraction. Nor does it have the type of specialty clientele that others like to follow the lead of. But it could work on these liabilities.

Before explaining this further, it is useful to indicate how the destination option plays out in terms of dollars and cents. As indicated earlier, there is roughly 2.6 million square feet of retail space in retail centers located within the roughly five-mile radius. With 100,000 square feet, Windsor Center represents 4 percent of this square footage. Many of the competing centers are larger with major chains and destination stores; some are in more affluent areas; either way, these competing centers will attract higher gross per square foot spending. Plus there is nearby West Hartford to contend with, as noted. Using a blended 2.33 percent regional capture rate, applied to a regional disposable income figure of \$1,500 million, Windsor Center could draw as much as \$35 million in sales expenditures. This yields a healthy average \$300 sales per square foot per year—enough to create a prosperous and somewhat bigger downtown. (See Table 8.)

**Table 8. Market Support for Windsor Center as a Regional Destination**

Statistic	Trade Area:		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
<u>Demand:</u>			
Radius	3-mile	5-mile	5-mile
Disposable Income	\$500 million	\$1,000 million	\$1,500 million
Speculative Capture Rate	5%	1%	2.33%
Available Spending	\$25 million	\$10 million	\$35 million
<u>Supply:</u>			
Square Feet			100,000 sf
Target Sales Per Square Foot			\$300 psf
Target Gross Sales			\$30 million

Source: PPSA, based on FTDT data, 2003

Note that expansion would be necessary, not just desirable. A good half of Windsor Center’s stores are in the convenience category. These convenience stores include Geissler’s Supermarket, Windsor True Value Hardware and CVS Pharmacy—representing nearly half of the retail space and all of the Center’s retail anchors. An additional 50,000 square feet of comparison and dining space, anchors and magnets would have to be created to support this shift in market emphasis, and achieve the targeted 100,000 square feet of dining and specialty shopping.

Thus, the destination option is contingent upon an expansion of the retail district. Logically, this can only happen in two ways: as infill, such as the former Town Hall site; and to the east—taking advantage of underutilized buildings and property. To do otherwise would infringe on a healthy residential neighborhood.

Such expansion to the east was attempted several years ago, resulting in considerable building, road and parking improvements. While these still hold the Center in good stead, the apparent failure of most of these back-street businesses points to the need for some bigger intervention.

Clearly, what are missing are destination attractions and/or specialized clientele.

With regard to both: Windsor Center could build off of its latent music resources. Loomis Chaffee would, in this scenario, be key. For instance: if they more widely advertised their recitals and concerts; or if they expanded these public performances into summer, when they now scale down in order to conserve staff and financial resources; or if they made The Meadows available for music festivals which do not emphasize one single stage (which the SummerWind Festival provides); or if they located their proposed performing arts center in the Plaza Theater. (Note, however, that Loomis Chaffee justifiably considered this last idea impractical. Windsor Center is inconvenient for the frequent coming and going associated with a performance center fully integrated into a learning campus setting.)

Loomis Chaffee must and need not be alone in this emphasis. Outdoor concerts on the Town Green and in front of Town Hall already draw a crowd. SummerWind is a notable success, with corporate donations to the tune of about \$1 million per year. The Centre Coffee Bar is planning to feature music events.

Other projects could be re-shaped to tie into the music theme. The 33 Mechanic Street loft building could be converted into housing for performers, with shared soundproofed rehearsal and recording spaces. It or other side-street buildings could be converted into faculty and visitor housing for Loomis Chaffee, bringing the campus closer to Windsor Center. Public art could emphasize sound elements, such as chimes or bells. Churches could be encouraged to allow amateur music performances. Revolutionary Day could feature marching bands.

The reopening of the Plaza Theater would be a top project. Tenant recruitment could emphasize a bookstore with a large music sheet selection; or instrument store; and of course a record/compact disc store. The Radio Museum would be another priority—best housed in the Plaza Theater right on Broad Street, but really anywhere (e.g., in the Town Maintenance Building or in 20,000 square feet of the 33 Mechanic Street building as they currently propose).

By marketing all of these together, it should be possible to create a local version of the Marboro Music Festival. Greater regional visitation, restaurants and gift stores would of course follow.

### **Need to Choose**

Each of these two options has its advantages. The Sociability Option is attractive in its practicality. The Destination Option is appealing in its excitement. Workshop participants struggled with deciding between the two.

Why not both? Because there simply is not enough space or resources. Based on our experience, each option needs about 100,000 square feet, little of which can be overlapping in character (really, only the restaurant component).

Could Windsor Center evolve from one to the other? Yes. It already fulfills the sociability function well. The community could struggle with the destination goal, using the sociability option as the fallback. The present anchors would remain the same. Instead, the emphasis would be on retail expansion on the side and back streets.

However, the community would do better to choose. Time as well as financial and space resources are limited. While some decisions may be the same (e.g., improvements to the Center's walkability), others would be different (e.g., the reuse plan for 33 Mechanic). This is all too evident in the comparison matrix that follows at the end of this section. (See Table 9.)

When pressed in the workshop, participants gravitated to and finally—if reluctantly—chose the Sociability Option. It was not only considered more practical, it was considered more beneficial *to the community*, notwithstanding that the Destination Option might be more beneficial *to property owners*. Low cost/low risk elements of the Destination Option were still considered desirable, but more as a way of boosting community pride than re-tooling Windsor Center for a different clientele altogether.

**Table 9. Comparison of Destination and Sociability Strategies**

Destination	Both	Sociability
<u>Themes:</u>		
Music SummerWind	College town Loomis Chaffee Recreation	Riverfront History
<u>Featured Project:</u>		
Theater	Town green	Railroad stops
<u>If Only...</u>		
Jestures in downtown		LP Wilson in downtown
<u>33 Mechanic Street:</u>		
Radio museum Musician housing	Loomis housing	Higher-income housing
<u>Plaza Theater:</u>		
Radio museum	Antique center	Store or community access
<u>Other Anchors and Magnets:</u>		
Auction house High-end theater	Farmers market	Supermarket Hardware store CVS Town Hall Post office Library
<u>Restaurant/Retail Mix:</u>		
Gourmet restaurants	Ethnic restaurants Café, coffee bar Wine bar Ice cream	Coffee shop, diner
Boutiques Craft stores Antique stores	Kayak/sports Bookstore Comic books Record store Bead store Knitting store Baker	Florist Computer Wine store
Celebrity merchants	No chains/franchises	Local resident merchants
<u>Complementary Land Uses:</u>		
Artist loft space Inn	Live/work space Bed and breakfast	Affluent housing
<u>Access Improvements”</u>		
Corridor enhancement Highway signage Parking authority Interceptor parking Meters	Bicycle route(s) Bicycle amenities Parking signage Parking management Coordinated parking Striping	Commuter train station Bus shuttle Less signage Kiosk for weekly events Pedestrian access to adjacent neighborhoods
<u>Pedestrian Improvements:</u>		
Expensive pavers	Center Green Pedestrian crossing Street trees Benches	

## FOR DISCUSSION

Destination	Both	Sociability
	River trail Gazebo	
<u>Design Improvements:</u>		
Public art	Outdoor dining Outdoor sales Sandwich signs	Community art
<u>Management:</u>		
Open Friday eve Banners	Open Sat and Sun	Open all the time Kiosks
<u>Special Events:</u>		
One big music event Shad Festival Regional catchment	Seasonal events Revolutionary Day Worker population	Lots of little events Concerts on the green Town residents
<u>Marketing:</u>		
Create a "buzz" Marketing at the hotels Media advertising Publicist for music		Promote pride Shopper guides

Source: *PPSA and workshop participants, 2003*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

***Based on the research and workshops, a decision was made to emphasize Windsor Center's position as a sociable place for local and town residents. This vision not only involves enhancing the center's ample historic and walkable qualities—mainstays of "main street management" strategies; it also involves bolstering the surrounding residential neighborhood. A few relatively low-cost and low-risk elements of the destination vision are included in order to add to the excitement of the Center. But the emphasis is on increasing the "capture rate" from the existing three-mile trade area (pretty much corresponding to the Town of Windsor), rather than on re-tooling for a five-mile trade area (which seems too ambitious). It is also important to note that the Sociability Option was selected not only because it was considered more practical, but also because the rewards to town residents were considered more ample. Windsor Center is only one of a number of New England-style downtowns in the Hartford region; but it is the civic heart of Windsor.***

### **Anchors and Magnets**

***Continue to place emphasis on Windsor Center's civic anchors.*** Many downtown revitalization efforts revolve around creating an attractive village green, building a new town hall within rather than in the outskirts of the center, renovating the library in downtown, keeping the post office from moving out. The most expensive elements of this strategy are already in place in Windsor Center.

Not to say that there isn't room for improvement. Plans to incrementally restore sight lines across the Town Green make sense. So does the idea of adding winter ice-skating to the Green. Windsor Library's expansion plans are to be supported. The United States Postal Service should be encouraged to locate their trucking element elsewhere, while retaining a retail post office in downtown. This would create additional and more coordinated rear parking area.

***Continue to place emphasis on Windsor Center's convenience anchors.*** These presently include Geissler's Supermarket, Windsor True Value Hardware, and the CVS Drugstore. These three stores alone establish Windsor Center as a small, easily navigated place in which to run the essential errands of a typical weekend.

Their only limitations have to do with access and parking. Geissler's front parking lot involves some risky turning movements that could be better dealt with. Neighboring True Value's sidewalk access has been usurped by parking, which is better shifted over in connection with shared parking with Geissler's. CVS's parking appears to be adequate, though it, like the Post Office and True Value, would benefit from regulations that promote fast turnover directly in front, in accordance with the need to provide easy in-and-out service for quick errands.

***Seek unique magnets for downtown.*** There is little space to accommodate large-scale anchors. At present, the largest vacant space is the Plaza Theater, the Rappaport Building at 33 Mechanics Street, the vacant lot available at the corner of Maple and Broad, and the former auction house on Palisado Avenue (in good condition but report-



edly for sale for a pricey \$600,000). The shopping center at Poquonock Avenue and Palisado Avenue provides a redevelopment opportunity that would be hard to pull off due to the presence of stable tenants and an income flow that would be disrupted for the duration of development.

The emphasis should be on what one workshop participant called “celebrity merchants”—businesses that are unique in their service and image. Geissler’s Supermarket and reportedly Bill Selig Jewelers perform this way; Taste of India and the new Centre Coffee Bar have the potential to build-up a following, as well.

***As one example of a new magnet: Support the efforts of Long River Adventures to locate their kayak and canoe business in or near Windsor Center.*** Long River Adventures appears to be set on a location along the Farmington River close to the Interstate Highway, i.e., in Windsor. They are presently located in the South End of Hartford.

Long River requires 3,000 square feet now, with 1,000 square feet for display and the remainder for storage. They hope to grow over time. They can only afford \$6 per square foot per year (psf/yr), meaning that they need cheap or subsidized space. (Windsor Center rents are now at about \$10 to \$15 psf/yr.) We suggest that the Town be prepared to provide the space. This is justified if the kayak operation is viewed as a park concession. Long River might also expand to include bicycle rentals, visitor information, week-day after-school programs, and other amenities.

Any location in Windsor should be supported. But a location in or near the Center would have two benefits. First, it would bring additional visibility to Windsor Center’s restaurants, especially to a regional clientele. Second, it would complement the youth image created by Loomis Chaffee, helping to diversify the age-group(s) that Windsor Center most appeals to.

Long River could in theory locate just about anywhere since they truck their kayaks to the water’s edge. In this instance, they might be suitably located in the current Town Maintenance building behind the railroad station.

Point of fact, Long River is best located at the water’s edge. In this instance, the most appealing location is at Bart’s Drive-In Restaurant. There is already parking and a boat launch at this location. Since space is limited, perhaps some accommodation can be made with Bart’s, which would benefit from the kayak (and bicycle?) rental clientele, much for the same reason that they benefit from the patrons of the special events that they already sponsor.

The Long River project is emphasized because, though small, it can provide just the type of early visible success that any Main Street Management effort needs.

***Promote the reuse of the former Plaza Theater.*** At roughly 7,000 square feet, the theater is the largest vacant space on Broad Street.

The Plaza Theater is far too small (and remote) for a five- or ten-plex theater—the contemporary format in order to achieve economies of scale. At 500 seats, it is ideal for dance, but that would require an enormous backstage area that would be expensive to assemble and build. As for a community rehearsal space and theater, the Jesters are

well-housed elsewhere; and the LP Wilson Center and High School provide relatively cost-free alternatives. As to the creative hope that Loomis Chaffee would reuse the theater: Windsor Center is inconvenient for the frequent coming and going associated with a performance center fully integrated into a learning campus setting; and the need to provide the hundreds of parking spaces would encroach upon Windsor Center's quaint, walkable character. Theater reuse is impractical.

Two fallback positions are possible. Either the theater can be reused as a store (as described later under Tenant Recruitment), or it can be reused as a church (as rumored to be in the works). The store reuse is clearly preferred. (Later reference is made, for example, to an antiques emporium.) But a church reuse can still be complementary to the Windsor Center Sociability strategy. It brings people to the Center, especially if made available for other uses on other days. Such other uses might include serving as a rainy day alternative for Town Green concerts; a larger-scale setting for readings and events sponsored by the Windsor Library; etc.

### **Restaurant/Retail Mix**

**Recruit "mom and pop" stores.** In FTDT's consumer surveys, the lack of variety of stores was noted as the number one problem, though to be fair, the majority of shoppers still found it good or fair.

Tenant recruitment is not easy. Chains and franchises are easy to contact: they are listed in various sources and have site location personnel. But they will prefer the strip and mall to Windsor Center. Their benefit is dubious anyway. Imagine if Geissler's was a typical small supermarket, like C-Town; or if True Value did not offer a high degree of personal service. Such stores would detract from making Windsor a special kind of place.

Instead, the tenant recruitment strategy should emphasize improvisation. Windsor Center boosters should think about specific, idiosyncratic stores or businesses that might want to relocate or expand to Windsor Center. How about approaching, for example: the successful Lucinda Bead store located to the west on Poquonock Avenue, which might like to relocate to within walking distance of Loomis Chaffee; and the successful knitting store in Avon, which might be ready to open another outlet; and the Centre Coffee Bar, which might be interested in opening a catering store and bakery around the corner. Advocates might also think about unconventional venues for getting the word out. Loomis Chaffee graduates might, for instance, be a prime group to approach about used bookstores, record emporiums, and other businesses that would address the shopping priorities of students. (Reportedly, a great many Loomis Chaffee graduates responded to the recent request for proposals in connection with the reuse of 33 Mechanic Street.)

Finally, proponents should view property owners and realtors as partners, not competitors. FTDT should defer on brokerage and finders fees, for instance.

**Recruit restaurants.** Merchants intuit the need for emphasizing food. When asked "what other businesses would you like to see in Windsor Center" in FTDT's 1996 survey, three out of four respondents indicated dining establishments; one out of three indicated entertainment.

Windsor Center will face some difficulty getting and keeping restaurants. Quality restaurants gravitate to locations convenient to the greatest disposable income (such as West Hartford), or locations that offer lunch/dinner and weekday/weekend trade (such as downtown Hartford). Chain restaurants gravitate to locations convenient to commuters (such as Manchester). Restaurants thrive on a discriminating clientele that dines often; or on a constant flow of business to amortize the investment made in kitchens, bathrooms, and décor. Windsor Center does not offer either advantage.

Windsor Center does have several, potentially offsetting advantages. The first is Loomis Chaffee—which provides the Center with visibility to a relatively affluent population, as well as access to entrepreneurs. The second is proximity to the thousands of workers now employed in the Town, albeit on the other side of the Interstate Highway.

***Be supportive of, but do not “lead with” the antique niche.*** Windsor Center has a small concentration of antique stores. This is somewhat surprising. Usually, antique centers gravitate to major arterials and other locations marked by high visibility to an affluent population, or to downtowns where there is significant housing turnover and especially historic renovations, or to places with large cheap spaces close to either of the above. Windsor Center offers none of the above.

Several antique dealers—including the largest dealer, Central Street Antiques—were queried in the course of the study site visit. They generally described accidents of fate (family ownership of space, for instance) as the reason for being in Windsor Center. One dealer indicated that they and the others aggressively market to compensate for the location's inherent weaknesses.

This niche is therefore not the strongest one to lead with, as the closure of the antique auction house shows. But it should be pursued, as it is complementary to other niches. The restaurants and especially the Centre Coffee Bar benefit from the antique stores, and vice versa.

With rents now nearing \$15 psf/yr on Broad Street, most antique stores will tend to locate in the less prominent locations. An exception might be the former Plaza Theater. Large, multi-vendor antique centers are a common reuse for the obsolete theaters and department stores typical of Main Streets.

***Restrict ground floor offices on Broad Street.*** At present, the typical ground floor rent is \$10 to \$15 per square foot per year (psf/yr) in Windsor Center, for both retail and offices. (By comparison, West Hartford's typical ground floor rent is \$30 psf/yr for retail and \$20 psf/yr for offices.) Retail uses tend to be starter businesses with a higher failure rate than offices, which are therefore willing to sign longer leases. Hence, at present, offices have the edge over retail in Windsor Center.

Part of the success of Windsor Center as a place to shop depends on the shopping and window-shopping experience—the ability to walk along a sidewalk past a string of stores and eateries. Intervening offices represent “dead space” in the continuity of the shopping street. On the other hand, offices represent an improvement over vacancies.

This conundrum cannot be fully satisfied to both landlords and shoppers. At the workshop, a reasonable solution seemed to be to prohibit offices at the street level only along Broad Street (where the pedestrian shopping experience is most important). Offices

would still be allowed above Broad Street stores, and of course in ground floor spaces everywhere else in Windsor Center. Realtors and banks, it should be noted, would be viewed as retail not offices, since they are part of the shopping experience. The new regulations would instead bear on lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc.

### Complementary Land Uses

***Strongly promote historic home restorations in and around Windsor Center.*** According to realtors, downtown's historic houses sell to pretty much the same clientele as the 1950s to 1970s ranches and split-level houses in outlying areas (middle income families), for pretty much the same prices (\$180,000 to \$220,000). There is potential, realtors feel, to sell to higher-income "alternative lifestyle" households. First, it is hard to find an affordable historic house in a Hartford region community with good schools. Second, Windsor Center is not only convenient to both Hartford and the Day Hill employment centers, but also to Bradley International Airport and an Amtrak station, and thus is appealing to the self-employed.

There are several means by which the Town might promote historic home restoration. First, historic district designation, listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, house tours, etc. can create a marketing buzz that realtors will be the first to capitalize on. (Note that the Town Green area is already listed on the National Register; and the Palisado Green area is listed on the Connecticut Register.) . Second, naming the area an historic district and strengthening the Town's historic protections would provide future homeowners with a sense of security as to their investment in effort as well as money. Third, real estate tax incentives could be employed, in which the higher taxes on restored historic homes are deferred for several years.

Most valuable, the Town should aggressively support a commuter railroad station in Windsor Center. This station would likely have limited ridership. The vast majority of commuters will still drive to the region's suburban commercial centers, not downtown Hartford or downtown Springfield. But it would, like the historic district designation, create a needed buzz.

***Promote multifamily housing in the area around Windsor Center.*** Multifamily housing in and near Windsor Center would confer several advantages. In ascending order of importance: First, it adds to market population, though only by a degree. Second, it provides new life for now underutilized properties. Prime candidates include sites along Poquonock Avenue and the industrial buildings behind the railroad station. Third, the population living in and around a downtown disproportionately shapes the market niche for downtown. Witness the different impact of fewer than fifty artists in Peekskill in Westchester, and several hundred welfare families in Thompsonville in Enfield.

The demand for multi-family housing can be taken pretty much for granted. At 77 percent, Windsor has the highest proportion of single-family detached housing units in the county—where the proportion averages 55 percent. This is despite the fact that so much employment is concentrated in the town.

In addition, Windsor is an attractive community with growing starter-family and empty nester populations. (Refer to Table 5.) These are the two prime populations for multifamily housing. Realtors report that Windsor Center has proved particularly popular with

seniors, perhaps because of its sense of community and smaller lot and house sizes, in addition to the more general inducements of quality hospital care nearby and competitively moderate Town and school taxes. This bodes well for senior housing in and near Windsor Center.

The viability of multifamily housing is also likely. At \$140,500 in 1999, Windsor ranked third in the county in terms of average sales prices. At \$830, Windsor ranked second in terms of average rents. (*Source: Planimetrics, 2003*)

It should be noted that multi-family housing should not impede on the traditional single-family housing character of Windsor and especially the historic neighborhood surrounding Windsor Center. Rather, it should be directed to the Poquonock Corridor and 33 Mechanic Street, where it would revitalize now underutilized property.

Nor should multifamily housing be favored on public or private open space around Windsor Center. While immediate development is always gratifying, fifty or even ten years from now the loss of park-like amenities will be regretted.

***Promote the redevelopment of 33 Mechanic Street as housing and an attraction.***

The sponsors of a proposed Radio Museum presently control this building, with the possibility of a reverter clause that would vest control with FTDT. At 85,000 square feet, the building is too large for the Radio Museum. Indeed, they have proposed reusing only the southernmost 20,000 square feet, identified as Building A; and redeveloping the rest of the loft building for housing or other uses.

The Radio Museum concept worked better with the destination option described earlier. But as noted, the Sociability Option can still benefit from destination elements, so long as these elements do not distract or detract from more strategic projects. Also, the Radio Museum sponsors have muddled along too long with this prime property.

With these thoughts in mind, there is every reason to be supportive of the Radio Museum, provided that the Town and FTDT can gain control of the real estate and assure its constructive reuse. Why not reserve the 20,000 square foot Building A for the Museum, while redeveloping the rest of the building, regardless of who is the ultimate owner of the property (the Museum sponsors or FTDT)? As an alternative, why not swap the Town maintenance shed for 33 Mechanic Street? In that case, why not reuse the shed for another civic use, such as a party space available on a cost-plus basis to town residents?

Assuming that Building A is reused for a community or shared use, 33 Mechanic's remaining 65,000 square feet of loft space lends itself to housing. Conventional low- and moderate-income housing would reuse the building but do little for Windsor Center. Artist lofts (another form of low- and moderate-income housing) is always exciting; and it stands a better chance of working here than most places. The definition of artist can be broadened to include performing arts, architecture and craft. Housing for Loomis Chaffee faculty and visitors would draw the school more into Windsor Center and the life of the wider community. Loomis Chaffee might also set aside some space as guest rooms open to the general public, providing a vehicle for a much-wanted bed-and-breakfast type of establishment in Windsor Center. Luxury housing is always the fall-back, though it would likely be contingent on relocating the Radio Museum elsewhere given the likelihood that developers would want total control over the building.

The rehabilitation of 33 Mechanic for housing will not prove easy. Access improvements would be needed to Palisado Avenue, e.g., along what appears to be a public right-of-way. Sound attenuation would be needed fronting the railroad. The roof and heating systems need to be kept in good repair for the interim, adding to carrying costs. The per-unit cost is likely to be as expensive as for new construction.

But whatever the difficulties in attracting developer interest, the building—if well maintained for the interim—has assured residential value in the long run. Few sites offer interesting spaces, with views out over open space, next to an Amtrak station, walking distance from an attractive civic center, with all of the necessities of daily living at hand, in a town that has a decent school district, within a ten to thirty minute commute of most of the region's jobs.

***Maintain the scenic necklace around Windsor Center.*** Windsor Center currently benefits from a setting amidst river, field and historic district. The approach from the south is along Broad Street—which has a distinct boulevard quality, graced by many historic and brick homes. Guidelines to promote preservation and emulation of these houses, preservation of street trees, etc. should be promulgated. To the immediate west is an older historic neighborhood, ripe for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places and clearly worthy of protection by means of a local historic district designation. To the northwest are a golf course and wetlands. The potential development site at Poquonock Avenue and Mack Street is key to opening up views of the golf course; higher density housing would seem appropriate to capitalize on those views and the Avenue's greater visibility. Most important, to the east and northeast is the Farmington River and its associated floodplains and wetlands. The Town should continue to preserve this area from development (for environmental as well as aesthetic reasons), and continue to feature the Windsor Center River Trail as a recreational amenity.

### **Access and Pedestrian Improvements**

***Improve parking management.*** Windsor Center does not have a parking crisis. This is corroborated in FTDT's 1996 survey of businesses. When asked "How can the Town help you," parking ranked behind code enforcement, and barely ahead of recreation, youth activities, police and beautification. In the same survey, only one out of ten businesspeople said that parking was poor; three out of ten said it was good or excellent; and the remainder said it was fair. Parking is usually merchants' number one complaint, by a wide margin. Not in Windsor Center.

Shoppers agree that parking is adequate. In FTDT's consumer surveys, only 8 percent of the shoppers portrayed parking as a problem, well behind variety (addressed earlier) and hours of operation (addressed later).

By our own observation, Windsor has an enviable inventory and layout of parking. There is on-street parking along Broad Street; and frequent advantage is taken of the opportunity for diagonal parking. There is off-street parking directly in front of the two retail anchors—Geissler's and True Value. There is parking behind Town Hall, Windsor Library, and many businesses; as well as side-street parking. Parking complaints are particularized—e.g., at the Post Office—substantiating that the total inventory is adequate.

The implication is that the problem has less to do with the quantity of parking than its management. Short time limits should be enforced (if necessary with parking meters) in front of the uses that require rush-in and rush-out service (True Value Hardware, CVS and the Post Office stand out). Lines can be painted to better indicate where to park. Diagonal parking should be maximized, as it generally yields a 25 percent increase in the number of spaces from parallel parking. Signs could indicate where the off-street lots are. Wherever and however possible, individual businesses should be encouraged to make their lots available for general public use. This can be based on time-of-day availability; the Windsor Federal Savings and Loan Association has, for instance, set a good example by making its lot available for events after business hours. Multi-user parking can also be promoted through parking waivers for development and redevelopment, a shared parking ordinance, etc.

If the business district becomes a wild success, additional parking will be needed. The FTDT plan to consolidate and align parking lots is clearly the way to go then. This plan could still be adopted as part of the Town's official Plan of Conservation and Development, better enabling the Town to seek the needed improvements in connection with future redevelopment. But based on the current lack of crisis, the Town can better spend its capital dollars elsewhere.

***Improve pedestrian circulation.*** Windsor Center's extraordinary attractiveness for pedestrians can still be improved upon. Issues and ideas include the following:

*Redesign the Poquonock/Bloomfield/Prospect/Palisado/Broad/Union/the Town Green service road intersections.* As this mouthful reveals, this is no easy series of intersections. Over the years, improvements have made it a safe and easy place for cars to navigate, but not pedestrians. Some new ideas to explore include: a rotary, bump outs, striated pavers to mark crosswalks, alignment of sidewalks at the crossings, mid-street respites, re-timing the traffic signals, etc.—all with the pedestrian in mind.

*Reduce curb cuts.* Normally, we would suggest prohibiting curb cuts and drive-throughs altogether. But the concentration of banks is one of Windsor Center's advantages as a service center; and with the possibility of alternative sites looming large, Windsor Center banks need their drive throughs. But these drive throughs should be looked at creatively, to see where they might be consolidated (e.g., with parking entries) or simplified.

*Reduce vehicular/pedestrian conflicts.* As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the entry/exits and parking areas for Geissler's/True Hardware should be reexamined with the pedestrian in mind.

*Ease crossing Broad Street.* As its name indicates, the main street of Windsor Center presents a challenge to pedestrians, especially seniors and children. One solution is bump-outs—involving extending the sidewalks on either side the width of the parking lane. It can be combined with striated crossings—which is now far more affordable than in the past. Traffic signals may be called for at key locations. "Yield to pedestrians" signs would be consistent with the Center's small-town ambiance. All of these solutions have the added benefit of slowing down traffic, giving passersby the opportunity to get better acquainted with what Windsor Center has to offer; i.e., they reduce the drive-through-fast problem that several merchants complained about.

Such access improvements—combined with continuous shopping, shade trees, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and attractive storefronts—leads to a “park once and walk” behavior pattern. This in turn reduces the need for parking as well as the driving-about-the-center-looking-for-yet-closer-parking phenomenon.

**Streetscape and Design Improvements**

***Amplify the historic feel of the retail core along Broad Street.*** The ingredients are varied, as indicated below. (See Table 10.)

Table 10. Broad Street Design Elements

<u>Element</u>	<u>Discussion</u>
Street trees	The Pin Oaks now prevalent should be replaced with Pear Trees or other species that do not obstruct views of stores. This can be done gradually over time.
Street lighting	Pedestrian-scaled lighting should be emphasized, rather than roadbed-oriented lighting. Otherwise, the sidewalks look dim compared to the roads. The lighting standards should emulate historic styles.
Building lighting	Alleyways, historic buildings, etc. should be amply lit. Remember, most people experience downtown at or after dusk.
Attractive pavers	Due to their expense, brick pavers should be used selectively, as presently is the case—whereby they are concentrated around the Town Green.
Benches	These should face in from the curb.
Street wall	It is essential that buildings bolster the sense of sidewalk and frontage. This involves use of plate glass windows instead of blank walls, frequent entries, contextual design features, etc.
Directional signage	Plenty of signs not only creates visual pollution, the clutter handicap their utility. Street signs should be carefully controlled in terms of their size and siting.
Store signage	The message is subject to freedom of speech, but not design (except when the design is intrinsic to the message, e.g., the golden arch for McDonald’s). Certain elements should be carefully controlled: the number of signs (one or two), backlighting (none of that), color (light lettering on dark backgrounds are preferred). Other elements should not: protruding/perpendicular signs should be allowed, for instance. The object is tasteful eclecticism, not tasteful conformity.
Store displays	These should not be regulated, as such. But solid roll-down gates can be prohibited (mesh gates are now affordable). Merchants should also be encouraged to open up views into their stores. Window-shopping is more important than sale signs in a traditional downtown.
Historic restoration	Clearly, historic guidelines are called for to protect the significant amount of architectural character in Windsor Center. This character is not limited to 100+ year-old buildings. The deco “florist” sign on Broad between Central and Union Streets is, for instance, worthy of preservation. While it can add to costs, historic preservation mandates protect all property owners against the poor decisions of their neighbors.
Parking lot landscaping	Pin Oaks or other broad-canopy trees should be planted throughout the parking lots. Parking lots should ideally be recessed below the grade of the cross streets, thus offering views out and beyond. There should be plenty of connecting sidewalks.

*Source: PPSA and workshop participants, 2003*

Nor are these or similar ingredients unique to Broad Street. Many of their elements (e.g., lighting, trees) should extend to the side streets. But there might be variations. As exam-



ples: There might be a requirement for brick facing on new construction along Broad Street south of Windsor Center, emulating the prevalent use of brick dating to the town's heyday as the state's brick-making center. Maple and Elm Street side streets may involve guidelines involving the residential look of buildings and maintaining a landscaped edge along parking lots.

**Encourage outdoor dining, selectively allow outdoor display, and allow sandwich signage.** Broad Street benefits from wide sidewalks—so wide that they appear empty of people. Outdoor dining would be the easiest and most attractive way to create a sense of activity. Outdoor displays and sandwich signs would add to the sense of animation, and help to advertise businesses that now have their signs obstructed by the Pin Oak canopy.

Obviously, none of these outdoor elements should go unregulated. Sidewalk clearances must be maintained; eight feet should be adequate. Outdoor displays should only be allowed for flowers, plants, furniture, groceries, and other more inviting products that do not create a flea market ambiance. Sandwich signs should be limited to one per business. All three—tables, displays, signs—should be sited not to create obstacles and maintain an easy and safe corridor within which to walk.

**Promote façade and storefront improvements.** Clearly, the Town should promote more attractive storefronts, signage and building facades. One difficulty is that (according to FTDT's 1996 survey of businesses) two out of three businesses rent their space, compared to a more typical one-out-of-two ratio. The negotiation between the owner and merchant often breaks down as to responsibility for improvements. One advantage that Windsor has, however, is the ability to provide tax and other incentives. (The basis of this advantage is described in the last chapter.) We have also found that free technical assistance is an expedient way to promote such improvements. A more attractive façade, sign or building treatment is frequently not any costlier than a standard job; it's just that the property owner is seeking the most expedient route. Free technical assistance can substitute for a more conventional treatment. The potential receptiveness of businesspeople is evident in the same FTDT survey: half of the respondents indicated that the Town can help through beautification.

**Be ready to promote "contextual" redevelopment on key sites.** At first glance, Windsor Center appears to be built out. In fact, there are a number of "soft sites" that are either vacant or underutilized. These include: the shopping center at Palisado and Poquonock, the former Town Hall site at Maple and Broad, the Plaza Theater (either the whole building or just the theater portion) should its total or partial demolition ever prove necessary, and most regrettably, even Geissler's should that business go through some sort of a crisis (e.g., fire or retirement).

Any such new development should learn from the Town's success with CVS. Each new Building should align with and front the sidewalk. The roofline should emulate those of its neighbors. Glass display windows should be maximized, rather than blank walls. Design details should allude to historic precedents. Etc.

The Town should be prepared to offer "carrots" to match the "sticks" of added design stipulations. These might include tax incentives (as described in the last chapter of this report). They certainly could include allowing higher buildings in connection with upstairs offices or housing.

### **Management, Special Events, Marketing**

**Regularize business hours.** Inconsistent hours of operation in Windsor Center are a frequent complaint of Windsor residents. In FTDT's consumer survey, the hours of operation ranked as the number two issue, somewhat below variety of stores and way above parking. Unlike malls, there is no master lease that requires particular days and hours; and most low-margin businesses cannot afford to staff up to maximize hours of operation. Each business will understandably respond to the idiosyncrasies of their trade—e.g., donut shops need to be open early; bead stores need to be open weekends. In FTDT's 1996 survey, only one out of six businesses were open in the evenings, and half of the businesses were closed on Sundays. FTDT would do well to promote business openings on Friday evening and on Sundays, consistent with the more specialty quality of shopping. Tellingly, roughly half of the surveyed businesses indicated that Friday is their best sales day.

**Emphasize frequent, Town-wide events; rather than one-time regional events.** The many small-scale events now scheduled on the Town Green are just what are called for. Merchants intuit this emphasis as well. When asked in the FTDT 1996 survey, half of the businesses said that events do not help their business; and of those that said that it helped, most said it helped as a public relations tool, not at the time of the event. In the FTDT survey, the smaller events were considered just as helpful as the blockbuster Shad Derby. Indeed, many businesses close during the boisterous Shad Derby.

**As the prime example: Put a priority on a farmers market.** This market should be three-season; well publicized; and in a highly visible place. One possibility is the former Town Hall site. Another is within the Poquonock/Palisado shopping center's parking lot; the part furthest from the stores but closest to the corner is most logical. According to the Public Market Collaborative, farmers markets can boost the sales of local grocers and food stores, by creating a larger and more loyal clientele for the center. The seasonality of the farmers market is offset by the imports available in these nearby stores—whether the imports are from Florida or France, California or Chile.

**Emphasize town residents in marketing.** The primary population to target is the residents of Windsor. The Town Recreation Department's current seasonal publication—"There's a Lot to Do in Windsor"—is quite attractive and does a good job. Word of mouth and repeat business are, according to businesses surveyed in 1996 by FTDT, the most effective media; and can expect to remain so in the Sociability Option.

**Augment with selective marketing to local workers.** There are many thousands of employees nearby in Day Hill close to the Interstate Highway. Local workers could be marketed through joint advertising of Windsor eateries. The capture rate will still be low, given Windsor Center's off-center location. The primary population is in fact Windsor residents who also work in town—which, as described earlier, numbers over 5,000 people, representing roughly one-third of all local residents and coincidentally one-third of all local employees.

**Add spice with targeted marketing to local visitors.** The SummerWind Performing Arts Center draws thousands of people to the town, some of whom might combine an evening concert with a fine meal out. There are five major hotels in Windsor, plus an-

other two in Windsor Locks, representing over one thousand hotel rooms. SummerWind and hotel patrons could be marketed with special dining discounts for ticket holders and hospitality guests.

Consistent with the overall strategy, these populations should not be emphasized. But however small the capture rate, these patrons can contribute to the sense among residents that Windsor Center is a place to be proud of.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

***One virtue of the Sociability Option is that, unlike the Destination Option, it relies on the synergy of many small actions rather than one big project or theme. Each project, intervention, etc. can move at its own pace. Many different implementers are involved. One issue is coordination—which this study effort and report hopes to help with. Another issue is keeping momentum—which can only come from seeing progress.***

**Next Steps**

One of the participants (Peter Gross, a communications/business development consultant) put it succinctly when he suggested that the Windsor community think in terms of “What...Can...We...Do?”—meaning objective (what), strategy (can), teamwork (we), and next immediate action (do). This would clearly require an entire set of workshops. It is best understood by illustration, however. Therefore, some of the elements of a “What We Can Do” strategy are presented below (with all due apologies to Peter for any misconstruing of how best to employ his brainchild).

**Table 11. Illustrations of One Approach to Implementation**

<u>What</u>	<u>Can</u>	<u>We</u>	<u>Do (Next)</u>
Kayak business	Development	Town	Negotiate favorable terms
Radio Museum	Development	Town	Explore land swap
Faculty housing	Development	Loomis	Explore 33 Mechanic
Commuter railroad	Transportation	State reps	Lobby
Parking lane striping	Transportation	DOT and Town	Proceed
100% corner redesign	Transportation	DOT and Town	Fund study
Music theme	Marketing	Loomis	Convene group
Farmers market	Marketing	Town	Make lot available
Farmers market	Marketing	FTDT	Contact shopping center
Kayak business	Tenancing	Town	Enter into negotiations
Gourmet restaurants	Tenancing	FTDT	Promote joint marketing
Bead store	Tenancing	FTDT	Approach Lucinda
Parking lane stripes	Capital improvements	Town and State	Incremental
100% corner redesign	Capital improvements	Town and State	Re-study
Kiosks	Capital improvements	Town and FTDT	Place kiosk at the Library
Sandwich signs	Zoning	Boards	Enact design guidelines
Signage, facades	Zoning	Boards	Adopt guidelines
Outdoor dining	Zoning	Boards	Simplify rules

*Source: PPSA and workshop participants, 2003*

### **Implementation Resources**

Windsor Center has more than advocates for its improvement; it has several advantages in terms of “carrots and sticks” not available to most older downtowns.

First the sticks: The Town is in the midst of updating its Plan of Conservation and Development. Elements of this strategy are easily integrated into the Plan, which remains in draft form as of this writing. Zoning and other regulatory revisions would logically follow. The low vacancy rate in Windsor Center points to the affordability of the design guidelines to property and business owners. In any case, existing businesses and conditions would be “grandfathered”—meaning that they could remain indefinitely as is; the regulatory obligations only get triggered in the case of redevelopment or re-tenanting.

Second the carrots: The Town is in a position to continue to provide tax incentives. Windsor has a small population and a huge tax base—thanks to Day Hill and the Interstate Highway. The Town’s tax rates are considered reasonable in the context of what other Hartford region municipalities are compelled to levy. Tax incentives are well within the Town’s fiscal reach—though politics and politicians may argue otherwise. These incentives apply to residential properties over 25 years of age, and to commercial properties over 40 years of age. As such, they encompass 33 Mechanic Street and the Plaza Theater, two important projects. The incentives take the form of a phasing in of the increase in taxes following from property improvements; i.e., the tax base stays the same; tax increases are deferred.

Most important, little Windsor Center has an unusually talented set of existing and potential advocates.

First, the Town’s long-time planner has proved masterful at development reviews—as evident by the high design standards achieved in Day Hill in connection with the CVS building. Now is the time to codify his experience—frankly, well before any possible retirement plans. Similarly, the Town’s traffic planner has embraced the roundabouts and other traffic calming techniques that most traffic engineers pay only lip service to.

Second, Loomis Chaffee provides another source of connections for projects like the commuter rail, if not largesse for projects like sidewalks between the school and Center. Partnering with Loomis Chaffee will of course involve getting past the usual history of “town and gown” conflict; e.g., it seems apparent that the Town’s recent objections to privatizing the roads between the school and Center was motivated more by emotional than fiscal considerations. It will also involve persuasiveness in the face of the usual conservatism of non-profit boards of directors; and an embrace of (not just realism about) the school’s enlightened self-interest.

For its part, Loomis Chaffee can and should step up its involvement. Noted and additional ideas include joint marketing of music venues, opening up more of their performances to the public, pursuing the redevelopment of 33 Mechanic Street, and maybe even endowing streetscape improvements.

Third, FTDT has a proven track record. Its members include a balance of merchants, property owners, and local residents. It benefits from the personal enthusiasm of Con-

necticut Main Street's current executive director—who was the first executive director of FTDT. It appears to enjoy the support of key business and Town leadership.

**Conclusion**

The timing is ripe to implement a consensus-driven plan for Windsor Center. The Town has engaged the highly reputable Planimetrics planning consultancy to update its Plan of Conservation and Development. FTDT is in the midst of an amicable change in staff and leadership. The 33 Mechanic Street and the Plaza Theater projects are at critical junctures. Windsor Center is likely to face new competition from proposed development at the Interstate Highway—motivating merchants and property owners to be more engaged. Loomis Chaffee, Windsor Library and Windsor True Value are expanding. There is growing confidence that a commuter railroad station may be more than a pipe dream.

In this context, it is hoped that this technical assistance effort will help to clarify how strategic market, design, planning, regulatory and access improvements can be channeled into creating added value in Windsor Center, and greater community pride in its historic civic center.