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A New Approach to Gentrification: Using the case of Hartford to discover the reasons  
certain cities have not gentrified.

Matthew Boyle

Abigail Fisher Williamson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Honors in Public Policy and Law

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a new way of looking at and studying gentrification in light of the significant differences of opinion on the subject still found in scholarship roughly 50 years after it first appeared in scholarly literature. Understanding why gentrification does not occur may provide the broadly accepted insights into the phenomenon that studies so far have failed to provide. To initiate this new direction in the literature, I examine the case of Hartford, Connecticut, an old former industrial town that has not gentrified despite having a strong presence of service industry employment and many wealthy suburbs within its metropolitan region. Using the city's own plans of development and local media articles, this thesis looks at Hartford's development history from 1955 to 2011 for evidence as to why Hartford has not gentrified. Based on the evidence I obtained, it appears that Hartford's uniquely extreme subordination to its suburbs, both politically and economically, has impeded gentrification by diminishing any benefits that could accrue to Hartford during times of economic growth. In addition, it appears that the rent-gap has yet to form in Hartford and that rehabilitation in the city has always been economically difficult. Lastly, Hartford's near-total devastation during the recession of the early 1990's cut short what may have been a time of gentrification, set the city back decades economically and required it to completely rethink its economic place in the world. In the aftermath of this setback the city can be seen to more clearly desire gentrification and its actions in Downtown may one day lead to observable gentrification occurring in Hartford.

## Introduction:

From its inception as an urban development concept, gentrification has been a controversial and contentious phenomenon. Up until the 1970's, most scholars that studied urban neighborhood processes had settled on theories that predicted, with few exceptions, consistent neighborhood decline over time.<sup>1</sup> The rapid decline of most older cities in advanced capitalist societies and the growth of the new-build suburbs lent credence to these theories for decades. Then, certain inner-city neighborhoods, American and European, unexpectedly experienced sustained economic revival during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, transforming into the highly exclusive hubs of economic activity they are today. Without having a full grasp of what exactly was occurring in these neighborhoods, popular and scholarly media dubbed it gentrification.

The unanticipated trend arguably put many scholars on the defensive, since it flew in the face of predictions they had been making with a great deal of confidence, undermining their credibility.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it empowered others to claim an opposite extreme, that gentrification would spread to every urban neighborhood and reinvigorate America's cities.<sup>3</sup> As time went on, and gentrification proved neither universal nor unambiguously positive for cities, both sides have had to back off from their more absolutist views, but that early debate over the nature and significance of gentrification has never been fully resolved. In their efforts to resolve these questions, many scholars have, understandably, sought to answer the questions "what causes gentrification to occur,"<sup>4</sup> or more commonly, "what were the conditions of cities when

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<sup>1</sup> Beauregard, Robert. A. "Trajectories of Neighborhood Change: The Case of Gentrification." *Environment and Planning A* 22, no. 7 (1990): 855-74. doi:10.1068/a220855.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 855

<sup>3</sup> Zavarella, Mario D. "The Back-To-The-City Movement Revisited." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1987): 375-90. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9906.1987.tb00489.x.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Neil. "Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 45, no. 4 (1979): 538-48. doi:10.1080/01944367908977002.

they began experiencing gentrification?”<sup>5</sup> Those interested in urban development, but outside the world of scholarship, such as city leaders, have eagerly attempted to apply the often-divergent findings on gentrification in the hopes of revitalizing their cities. Therefore, there is a real-world cost to the continued confusion and uncertainty surrounding gentrification.

After decades of intensive study of gentrification’s causes, our understanding of the phenomenon is as concrete as it was when it first emerged in the literature. Indeed, one current scholar of urban development has gone so far as to suggest that “it is often a mystery” why people flock to some cities and not others and that “‘wise’ city leaders are really just lucky.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, this thesis takes the opposite approach from most scholars. I do not seek to answer why some cities gentrify – countless studies have tried already, with mixed results. Rather, my question is, why have some cities never gentrified? In examining this question, I will focus on Hartford, CT, which has struggled economically for decades despite some characteristics that, according to other scholars, might make it a candidate for gentrification.

I argue that most of the forces working against gentrification occurring in Hartford are found beyond the city’s boundaries. The most perennial cause is that the presence of robust economic growth in some areas can preclude it from occurring in others. In this competition, Hartford is outnumbered and outperformed by suburbs that are firmly integrated into Hartford’s economic sphere but do not have to pay the city’s taxes or be constrained by its physical lack of land for development. It is certainly evident from my research that the pull of the suburbs has long been, and in many cases continues to be, stronger than the pull of the city. This is something

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<sup>5</sup> Lees, Loretta. "Gentrifying Down the Urban Hierarchy: The 'cascade Effect' in Portland, Maine." In *Small Cities: Urban Experience Beyond the Metropolis*, edited by David Bell and Mark Jayne, 91-104. Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Schragger, Richard C. *City Power: Urban Governance in a Global Age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. 42, 192



the city has tried to overcome for decades but it has had only limited success in retaining resources it acquired prior to its decline. With each business and industry that left for the suburbs or other cities, Hartford's ability to build on its strengths diminished as well as its perception as a successful city. Another external factor that has clearly played a role is economic recessions. Gentrification is a form of economic growth and so it only makes sense that widespread economic decline or slowing growth leads to a decline in gentrification. Economic recessions stalled Hartford's growth at critical junctures, including at times when the city appeared to be gentrifying.<sup>7,8</sup> Lastly, the one clear impediment to gentrification confined to Hartford's boundaries is its housing infrastructure, which has never been amenable to private rehabilitation without the use of city funds to cover some of the costs. Such support really only became available after the late 1990's, and even then, it was necessarily limited by the funds available and the extent of financial support needed to make rehabilitation economically viable.

To understand the absence of gentrification in Hartford, I begin by explaining what qualifies as gentrification and what is believed to promote and discourage it. After, I will discuss the consequences of gentrification for a sense of why it is so politically divisive. I will then provide a brief overview of Hartford's particular local context and history. Then, I will discuss the theories I will use to analyze why gentrification is not occurring in Hartford. Together, these sections will situate Hartford within theories of gentrification that it is rarely featured in, explaining how it defies some conventions while being emblematic of others. These theories provide a glimpse of what is at stake in debates over gentrification and how Hartford is not completely immune to wider realities about gentrification. Lastly, they will show how

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<sup>7</sup> Lees, Loretta, and Liz Bondi. "De-Gentrification And Economic Recession: The Case Of New York City." *Urban Geography* 16, no. 3 (1995): 234-53. doi:10.2747/0272-3638.16.3.234.

<sup>8</sup> Zavarella. 375

gentrification is not automatic. Instead, it is initiated by broader economic forces and promoted by either the nature of the built environment or through political will.

### Defining Gentrification

A major issue in the study of gentrification is that scholars never came to a consensus on what its actual definition should be, or how to measure it. Nevertheless, there are several reoccurring themes and concepts in gentrification research. By far the most consistently featured component of gentrification is the displacement of the inner-city poor by middle and upper income individuals.<sup>9,10</sup> Displacement can occur for a wide variety of reasons, but the most obvious and longest studied form is direct, physical displacement.

Physical displacement continues to be the most widely accepted criterion for determining where gentrification has occurred.<sup>11</sup> Broadly speaking, scholars can be split into two camps when it comes to disputes over the particulars of gentrification: those who use a restrictive definition and those who use an inclusive definition of gentrification.<sup>12</sup> Adherents of the restrictive definition only consider a neighborhood to be gentrifying if an influx of higher-income groups move into formerly low-income neighborhoods and physically displace the lower income population.<sup>13</sup> In their view, it is not gentrification if the lower-income residents manage to remain in the neighborhood, even if there is an influx of wealthier people. They would consider

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<sup>9</sup> Glass, Ruth. "Introduction: Aspects of Change." In *The Gentrification Debates*, edited by Japonica Brown-Saracino, 19-30. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Hackworth, Jason. "Postrecession Gentrification in New York City." *Urban Affairs Review* 37, no. 6 (2002): 815-43. doi:10.1177/107874037006003.

<sup>11</sup> Bourne, L. S. "The Demise Of Gentrification? A Commentary And Prospective View." *Urban Geography* 14, no. 1 (1993): 95-107. doi:10.2747/0272-3638.14.1.95.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 96

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 97

this either redevelopment<sup>14</sup> or “positive gentrification.”<sup>15</sup> These scholars often find that gentrification receives far too much attention compared to its real-world significance and blame those who use the term more liberally.<sup>16</sup>

Adherents of the inclusive definition consider any neighborhood to be gentrifying if there is an influx of wealthy newcomers coinciding with rapid economic growth and a changing built environment. Physical displacement is not a necessary component, nor does the neighborhood need to be predominantly lower-income.<sup>17</sup> For example, the displacement of the middle-income families by upper-income families in Brooklyn Heights has been dubbed “super-gentrification.”<sup>18</sup> Development that occurs in abandoned industrial areas or on undeveloped land can also be considered gentrification by some definitions, even though there is no community that is directly displaced.<sup>19</sup> With such a wide gulf between the two schools of thought, it is little surprise that opposite conclusions have been reached about gentrification’s significance and prevalence. At one extreme, scholars have found evidence that suggests gentrification will transform urban structures and make suburbanization seem like a historical anomaly.<sup>20</sup> On the other, scholars have found evidence that gentrification itself is the historical anomaly and that suburbanization and inner-city decline are hardly offset by it.<sup>21</sup> Gentrification is also popularly associated with certain racial dynamics, namely the residential displacement of urban racial

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 97

<sup>15</sup> Davidson, Mark. "Spoiled Mixture: Where Does State-led 'Positive Gentrification End?'" *Urban Studies* 45, no. 12 (June 2008): 2385-405. doi:10.1177/0042098008097105.

<sup>16</sup> Beauregard, Robert A. "Politics, Ideology and Theories of Gentrification." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 7, no. 4 (1985): 51-62. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9906.1985.tb00094.x.

<sup>17</sup> Bourne. 97

<sup>18</sup> Lees, Loretta. “Super Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn Heights, New York City.” In *The Gentrification Debates*. 45-50.

<sup>19</sup> Bourne. 97

<sup>20</sup> Lees, Loretta, and Liz Bondi. "De-Gentrification And Economic Recession: The Case Of New York City." *Urban Geography* 16, no. 3 (1995): 234-53. doi:10.2747/0272-3638.16.3.234.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 234-5

minorities by suburban non-Hispanic whites or “racial turnover”.<sup>22</sup> However, many scholars would not go so far as to say racial turnover must occur for something to be considered gentrification as it occurs with much less consistency and clarity than popular portrayals would make it seem.<sup>23</sup> Still, by virtue of the correlation between racial and economic status in the U.S., the potential for racial turnover cannot be discounted entirely and would be more likely to occur the more racial characteristics overlap with economic status.

Fortunately, the definition debate does not need to be resolved here because Hartford’s neighborhoods would not be considered gentrified in even the broadest definitions of the term. While signs of gentrification in the city have been reported in decades’ past,<sup>24</sup> high unemployment, low levels of homeownership, significant poverty and other signs of economic decline point to a city that has not experienced gentrification. Nevertheless, my conception of gentrification will be based on the following definition: “the process by which central urban neighborhoods that have undergone disinvestments and economic decline experience a reversal, reinvestment, and the in-migration of a relatively well-off middle- and upper middle-class population.”<sup>25</sup> The actual causes of this process are not all agreed upon, but several theories have significant support in the literature.

### Factors Promoting Gentrification

One of the oldest and persistent explanations for gentrification relies on a “cultural” approach to the phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> My own hypotheses about gentrification do not rely on these

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<sup>22</sup> Hwang, Jackelyn, and Robert J. Sampson. "Divergent Pathways of Gentrification." *American Sociological Review* 79, no. 4 (2014): 726-51. doi:10.1177/0003122414535774.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 727

<sup>24</sup> Zavarella. 382

<sup>25</sup> Hwang and Sampson. 727

<sup>26</sup> Smith. "Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People." 538

cultural understandings as I have found the explanations to be less convincing and solidly grounded than theories based on economics and legal structures. However, since they have been a persistent element from gentrification's earliest days to today, it is worth discussing the cultural explanations in broad terms. Essentially, the idea is that some neighborhoods have a *je ne sais quoi* that attracts particular groups, such as artists<sup>27</sup> or gays and lesbians.<sup>28</sup> In the latter case the term "pink economy" has even been coined due to the supposed ability of gay enclaves to form their own distinct, lucrative segment of the market.<sup>29</sup>

More recently, the scholar Richard Florida has put forward the theory that these and other supposedly more open and tolerant groups form an important "Creative Community."<sup>30</sup> An elementary part of Florida's Creative Community idea is that cities, in the current economy, have to focus more on creating a good people climate and less on a good business climate, although the latter is still important.<sup>31</sup> Of course, the goal of creating a good people climate is attracting a vaguely defined group of "creative" people to cities.<sup>32</sup> This isn't necessarily code for white people since diversity is apparently highly valued by creative people.<sup>33</sup> Florida even expresses a dislike for gentrification, but his grand theory of city development would seem to put cities on an inevitable collision course with gentrification.<sup>34</sup> This is in many ways consistent with the findings of other scholars taking a cultural approach. What begins as "authentic"<sup>35</sup> enclaves of

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<sup>27</sup> Zukin, Sharon. "From Arts Production to Housing Market." In *The Gentrification Debates*, edited by Japonica Brown-Saracino, 119-126. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Sibalís, Michael. "Urban Space and Homosexuality: The Example of the Marais, Paris' Gay Ghetto," In *The Gentrification Debates*. 221-234.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 227.

<sup>30</sup> Florida, Richard. "Building the Creative Community." In *The Gentrification Debates*. 345-54.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 351

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 351

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 351

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 351

<sup>35</sup> Brown-Saracino, Japonica. "Social Preservationists and the Quest for Authentic Community." In *The Gentrification Debates*. 261-275.

“gritty”<sup>36</sup> city life eventually gives way to gentrification, much to the chagrin of the very “creative” people who helped put the neighborhood on the map and are perhaps more responsible than anyone for the gentrification they bemoan. I nevertheless find these explanations wanting, if for no other reason that every struggling city is “gritty” and “authentic,” insofar as they physically cannot afford to be anything else, but they do not all gentrify. Moreover, the notion that having certain groups, who are defined by non-economic qualities, reliably leads to economic revivals seems extremely tenuous.

In contrast to cultural theories, my understanding of gentrification’s causes is significantly informed by the influential “rent-gap theory.”<sup>37</sup> According to it, gentrification and physical displacement occur because developers are attracted to inner-cities with depressed land values and inexpensive buildings. Theoretically, these central parcels of land could be quite valuable if they were just well maintained or rebuilt.<sup>38</sup> After successful redevelopment, land and building values should increase until the inner city is once again wealthy and highly valued. However, many lower-income city residents are renters that, because they do not own the land they live on, do not benefit from this rise in value.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the rise in land values tends to result in increasing rents that become prohibitive and force the poor to move to neighborhoods that have not yet gentrified, perhaps even out of the city altogether.<sup>40</sup> They are replaced by luxury condominiums, upscale restaurants and other amenities that only those in the middle and upper income bracket can afford. Admittedly, this particular theory has been challenged<sup>41</sup> and revised<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lloyd, Richard. “Living Like an Artist.” In *The Gentrification Debates*. 185-194

<sup>37</sup> Smith. “Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People.” 538-48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 545

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 547

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 547

<sup>41</sup> Beauregard. “Politics, Ideology and Theories of Gentrification.” 51-9

<sup>42</sup> Hackworth. 818

on multiple grounds. However, I hypothesize that one cause of Hartford's lack of gentrification is that an economic situation such as the rent-gap has yet to emerge. Thus, the kind of private rehabilitation that would make Hartford's neighborhoods more amenable to upper-income individuals, and would not require much funding from the struggling local government, never occurred.

Another strain of thought that is related to the spread of gentrification is the concept of historically distinct waves of gentrification, often applied to major US cities.<sup>43,44</sup> Thus far, a total of three waves of gentrification have been identified, with transition periods in between each.<sup>45</sup> According to the theory, the first wave began in the late 1960's and ended in the mid 1970's. During this wave, gentrification was not a large-scale enterprise and was led by individual gentrifiers taking advantage of the rent-gap in neighborhoods that required little effort to revitalize.<sup>46</sup> The second wave emerged out of the economic recession of the mid-1970's, was far more widespread than the first wave and witnessed more intense political struggles over displacement than any other wave.<sup>47</sup> Lastly, the present and third wave emerged out of a recession in the early 1990's in which gentrification came to a halt in many neighborhoods.<sup>48</sup> It is considered the most aggressive and widespread wave of gentrification.<sup>49</sup> The emergence of both waves supports the notion that economic decline is a prerequisite for gentrification, and that the amount of gentrification may even increase when the decline is more significant.<sup>50</sup> Most

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<sup>43</sup> Hackworth. 818

<sup>44</sup> Hackworth, Jason, and Neil Smith. "The Changing State of Gentrification." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 4 (2001): 464-77. doi:10.1111/1467-9663.00172.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 466-468

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 466-68

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 466-68

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 466-68

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 466-68

<sup>50</sup> Lees and Bondi. 235

importantly, the theory holds that the current wave of gentrification is dependent on state support to a degree not seen in the earlier waves.<sup>51</sup> In fact, it is argued that, because the neighborhoods most amenable to redevelopment have already gentrified, private developers require state support because of the risk inherent in the neighborhoods they are now investing in.<sup>52</sup> This theory is disputed for, among other things, too rigidly confining particular forms of gentrification to particular time periods.<sup>53</sup> However, it is still a useful theory because it establishes that economic recessions can have a broad and inhibitory effect on gentrification; gentrification can occur in a wide variety of ways; and that we should expect gentrification today to be a largely state-backed undertaking that is occurring in less logical locations, since the risk is underwritten by the state. Perhaps most importantly, this theory of gentrification indicates that conscious attempts at gentrification by Hartford's leadership should be less evident early on and become more prevalent since the 1990's.

The great change underlying the difference between post 1990's gentrification and that which came before was the replacement of Keynesian policies by neoliberal ones. This shift had begun in the 1980's, but became cemented after the 1990's recession. Keynesian economic theory created a significant role for governments as socially responsible institutions whose intervention was necessary to mitigate the amount of inequality the free market would create (Smith 2002).<sup>54</sup> Thus, prior to the 1980's, the state was much more involved and generous in providing housing, welfare and other amenities.<sup>55</sup> Relatedly, gentrification occurred mostly as a

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<sup>51</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 469

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 469

<sup>53</sup> Smith, Heather, and William Graves. "Gentrification as Corporate Growth Strategy: The Strange Case of Charlotte, North Carolina and the Bank of America." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 4 (2005): 403-18. doi:10.1111/j.0735-2166.2005.00243.x.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, Neil. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, 2002, 427-450. doi:10.1002/9781444397499.ch4. 429

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 428



trickle under very particular circumstances during this time.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, neoliberalism rests on two assumptions, that individuals pursuing their own self-interest leads to the optimal situation for society as a whole and that the market knows best.<sup>57</sup> The realization of the negative-sum game that devolution and decentralization produces is what scholars have called the “entrepreneurial state,” a municipality dominated by neoliberal ideology and market impulses, as opposed to concerns for social welfare and reproduction.<sup>58</sup> The rise of the entrepreneurial state is crucial for the spread of gentrification and has been a definitive feature of the current “third wave” of gentrification.<sup>59</sup>

During the era of Keynesian dominance, normative arguments that relied on placing equity and community before economic growth were more salient and forceful in policy circles.<sup>60</sup> Current political and economic realities make it much less likely that local governments will intervene on behalf of gentrification’s opponents, as was crucial in many successful efforts to halt gentrification in the 1970’s and 80’s.<sup>61,62,63</sup> It is not that local governments are necessarily vindictive towards the poor, though they can be,<sup>64</sup> but the devolution of responsibilities has put such economic strain on cities that they have to look for sources of revenue wherever they can.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 440

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 429

<sup>58</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 470

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 475

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 471

<sup>61</sup> Robinson, Tony. "Gentrification and Grassroots Resistance in San Francisco's Tenderloin." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1995): 483-513. doi:10.1177/107808749503000401

<sup>62</sup> Engelsman, Udi, Mike Rowe, and Alan Southern. "Community Land Trusts, Affordable Housing and Community Organising in Low-income Neighbourhoods." *International Journal of Housing Policy* 18, no. 1 (2016): 103-23. doi:10.1080/14616718.2016.1198082.

<sup>63</sup> Ley, David, and Cory Dobson. "Are There Limits to Gentrification? The Contexts of Impeded Gentrification in Vancouver." *Urban Studies* 45, no. 12 (May 2008): 2471-498. doi:10.1177/0042098008097103.

<sup>64</sup> Smith. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." 429

<sup>65</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 470

Even the most ruthlessly entrepreneurial city governments still struggle with debt caused by devolution and the mismatch of resources and responsibilities.<sup>66</sup>

Neoliberalism is such a radically pro-market and anti-government ideology that anything that makes government too weak to effectively regulate the market is usually characterized as promoting freedom and good economic policy.<sup>67</sup> Thus, neoliberal ideology has supported the devolution of responsibility from central governments to regional and local governments.<sup>68,69</sup> According to the theory, smaller units of government are inherently more legitimate than larger, centralized units, whether regional or national.<sup>70</sup> Supposedly, a balkanized system of many small, local governments, like that of Connecticut's municipalities, is ideal for economic and administrative efficiency.<sup>71</sup> The competition that develops between uncooperative municipalities is a feature, not a defect, of the system because the competition is what makes the local governments more economically efficient.<sup>72</sup> The greater number of municipalities is also considered better for democracy as it allows for greater consumer choice than centralized systems.<sup>73</sup> In essence, the government is treated as a business that sells social services and amenities. Inefficient governments are like struggling businesses, and instead of being artificially propped up, they should be allowed to fail because they will never learn fiscal responsibility if

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<sup>66</sup> Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés, and Nicholas Gill. "The Global Trend towards Devolution and Its Implications." *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 21, no. 3 (October 7, 2003): 333-51. doi:10.1068/c0235.

<sup>67</sup> Stansel, Dean. "Local Decentralization and Local Economic Growth: A Cross-sectional Examination of US Metropolitan Areas." *Journal of Urban Economics* 57, no. 1 (2005): 55-72. doi:10.1016/j.jue.2004.08.002.

<sup>68</sup> Rogriguez-Pose and Gill. 333

<sup>69</sup> Markusen, Ann. "American Federalism and Regional Policy." *International Regional Science Review* 16, no. 1-2 (1993): 3-15. doi:10.1177/016001769401600102.

<sup>70</sup> Rogriguez-Pose and Gill. 338

<sup>71</sup> Stansel. 63

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>73</sup> Levine, Joyce N. "The Role of Economic Theory in Regional Advocacy." *Journal of Planning Literature* 16, no. 2 (2001): 183-201. doi:10.1177/08854120122093320.

they do not suffer the consequences of mismanagement.<sup>74</sup> City residents are like customers and it is assumed that they can simply leave their current municipality and move to another, as though they are going to a shop across the street because the one they are currently in has terrible service.<sup>75</sup>

Devolution is particularly rampant in the U.S., in part because the territorialized, federal system of semi-autonomous, sovereign states already created the sort of subnational inequities and competition for resources even before the rise of neoliberalism.<sup>76</sup> Thus, whereas in other countries regionalism is a sign of devolution,<sup>77</sup> it is the counter-narrative to devolution in the U.S.<sup>78</sup> Advocates of regionalism emphasize that, while devolution might generate more economic growth overall, the growth is distributed in a highly unequal manner.<sup>79</sup> Another regionalist argument, that works within the dialectic of neoliberalism, is that globalization has made municipal competition a negative-sum game.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, faced with increased global competition, municipalities cannot afford to be undermining each other and actually need to cooperate to have any hope of succeeding in a hyper-competitive world market.<sup>81</sup>

In the midst of all this competition and runaway economic development, some cities are simply ignored or left behind by financial markets that evidently do not consider them good investments.<sup>82</sup> Thus, devolution and neoliberalism simultaneously promote and impede

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<sup>74</sup> Stansel 66-7.

<sup>75</sup> Tiebout, Charles “A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures” *Journal of Political Economy* 64, no.5 (1956): 416-424.

<sup>76</sup> Markusen. 4

<sup>77</sup> Rodriguez-Pose and Gill. 339

<sup>78</sup> Rojas, Jason and Lyle Wray. “Metropolitan Hartford: Regional Challenges and Responses.” In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England’s Forgotten Cities*. Edited by Xiangming Chen and Nick Bacon. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 239

<sup>80</sup> Levine. 191

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 188

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 195

gentrification in cities. Those cities that “win” the competition for attention from corporate interests are likely to become heavily gentrified, while those that do not attract enough interest from private investors rarely have the capital to underwrite significant redevelopment projects that risk encouraging gentrification. In the case of Hartford, I hypothesize that Tiebout’s theory about municipality shopping has proven only half true, much to Hartford’s detriment. It has continually been on the “losing” side of economic competitions, global and regional, and has experienced population loss and out-migration as a result. Where Tiebout’s theory is shown to be inaccurate, it is in the context of Hartford’s losses depriving the city of the resources needed to maintain even basic, mandatory services such as education. Hartford’s situation demonstrates how competition with suburbs cannot “discipline” the city because for Hartford to learn discipline there would have to be a clear course of action Hartford has not taken that would improve its standing relative to the suburbs. This would mean the solutions to Hartford’s economic woes are known and that the city has nevertheless refused to act upon them for ideological or non-economic reasons, which is highly doubtful.

Admittedly, there is a possibility that at least some Hartford residents would hope to avoid strategies that might make Hartford more economically competitive if they also increased its odds of gentrifying. Gentrification is not without negative consequences and even its benefits are often provided unequally. Still, those most vulnerable to the negative aspects of gentrification would be Hartford’s poorest and most insecure populations. It is unlikely that individuals in this population would be able to control Hartford’s policy decisions. Perhaps this could happen if they had powerful allies in city hall willing to sacrifice their own potential prosperity for egalitarian ideals, but the poor are less likely to have such valuable political connections. Heated debates might occur over the impact of certain developments but city leadership in general, and

Hartford is no exception, is more likely to focus on the positives of gentrification for the whole city than the negative consequences for some families.

### Consequences of Gentrification

When gentrification was first recognized, physical displacement of the poor was seen as the primary exception to what was an otherwise welcome economic development.<sup>83</sup> However, just like gentrification in general, some scholars set out to prove that physical displacement was also a relatively insignificant phenomenon. Consequently, gentrification-induced displacement is a disputed concept within a disputed concept.<sup>84,85,86</sup> Gentrification is a heavily politicized topic and some argue that scholarship that discounts physical displacement has become a cover for politicians to pursue policies of “social-mix” that make cities more amenable to the wealthy while claiming that everyone will benefit.<sup>87</sup> Gentrification proponents argue that with higher income individuals leading in neighborhoods, the benefits will be shared among people of different classes because more businesses will be attracted to the community, the middle-class will be more effective at demanding better services from the city, and contact with the higher-income individuals might help the lower-income individuals tap into more resourceful social networks.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Zavarella. 376

<sup>84</sup> Shaw, Kate S., and Iris W. Hagemans. "Gentrification Without Displacement and the Consequent Loss of Place: The Effects of Class Transition on Low-income Residents of Secure Housing in Gentrifying Areas." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 2 (2015): 323-41. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12164.

<sup>85</sup> Hyra, Derek. "The Back-to-the-city Movement: Neighborhood Redevelopment and Processes of Political and Cultural Displacement." *Urban Studies* 52, no. 10 (May 18, 2014): 1-21. doi:10.1177/0042098014539403.

<sup>86</sup> Hwang and Sampson. 727

<sup>87</sup> Davidson. 2386

<sup>88</sup> Hyra. 3-4

True to the basic tenor of gentrification research, counterarguments strongly question the likelihood of any of the benefits social mix advocates claim. For one, social mix assumes that the relationship between the lower and middle-income groups will be defined by harmony and trust, not distrust and discord, as has often been the case.<sup>89,90</sup> In such situations, where one or more sides distrusts the stated, benign motives of the other, every new development can turn into a bitter dispute, even if the issue is more symbolic than substantive.<sup>91</sup> These conflicts can lead to emotional distress and eventually even physical displacement,<sup>92</sup> especially when the middle-income population grows large enough relative to the lower-income population that they are able to speak for and represent “the community” in local government.<sup>93</sup>

Known as political displacement, middle-income domination of local politics can lead to the enactment of policies that are directly at odds with the interest of the poor, such as increased policing of “quality of life” crimes like loitering or homelessness.<sup>94</sup> The exclusion of the poor from the political realm often leads to their marginalization in the newly constructed cultural and social identity of the neighborhood. The viewpoint of middle-income individuals on what is and is not appropriate for the neighborhood becomes the only viewpoint that is reflected in the public sphere. Thus, social, cultural and economic venues associated with undesirable elements are aggressively removed from the neighborhood and replaced with more acceptable venues.<sup>95,96</sup>

When lower-income individuals perceive these changes as personal attacks on their own way of

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<sup>89</sup> Martin, Leslie. "Fighting for Control." *Urban Affairs Review* 42, no. 5 (May 2007): 603-28.  
doi:10.1177/1078087406296604.

<sup>90</sup> Shaw & Hagemans. 327

<sup>91</sup> Chernoff, Michael. “Social Displacement in a Renovating Neighborhoods Commercial District: Atlanta.” In *The Gentrification Debates*. 295-304

<sup>92</sup> Shaw and Hagemans. 339

<sup>93</sup> Martin. 605

<sup>94</sup> Shaw and Hagemans. 334

<sup>95</sup> Davidson. 2392

<sup>96</sup> Shaw and Hagemans. 332

life, they can become so alienated from their own neighborhoods that they move to find a less hostile community.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, even without direct, immediate physical displacement due to issues of development and affordability, gentrification often causes class conflicts to boil over as people with higher incomes increasingly claim ownership of lower-income neighborhoods.

There have been times, less so in recent years, when conflict and hostility to gentrification and its consequences had a chilling effect on it occurring. Since gentrification is far from guaranteed to occur in any given city or neighborhood, any impediments to it once it actually gets under way could succeed in halting or limiting its reach. Yet, in the grand scheme of things, there are numerous potential impediments to gentrification beyond mere resistance by low-income communities and many of these have proven more significant hindrances.

#### Impediments to Gentrification

Some commonly identified gentrification deterrents are affordable housing projects,<sup>98</sup> a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minorities,<sup>99</sup> perceptions of crime and disorder,<sup>100</sup> and, for gentrifying families, poor school systems.<sup>101</sup> Among the most well studied and obvious reasons gentrification fails to occur in certain neighborhoods is that the local community is highly mobilized, politically engaged and unwilling to be displaced without a fight. Particularly during the 1970's and 80's, community protest and political activism halted the advance of gentrification in major cities like San Francisco, New York and Boston.<sup>102,103</sup> Depending on the situation, so-called "antigrowth movements"<sup>104</sup> use anything at their disposal to combat

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<sup>97</sup> Davidson. 2399

<sup>98</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2471

<sup>99</sup> Hwang and Sampson. 745

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 745

<sup>101</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2490

<sup>102</sup> Robinson. 483

<sup>103</sup> Engelsman *et al.* 103

<sup>104</sup> Robinson. 483

gentrification, though they are most effective when assisted by sympathetic politicians or government agencies.<sup>105,106,107,108</sup> Indeed, when governments are unsympathetic or hostile to community antigrowth efforts, even well-organized community organizations tend to fail in the final count.<sup>109</sup> This may explain the noted lack of formidable community resistance to gentrification in recent years, as governments at all levels are far more likely to favor economic growth over the social preservation of the poor.<sup>110</sup> Even communities that successfully resisted earlier attempts at gentrification have succumbed to it rather quietly since the start of the “third wave” of gentrification in the 1990’s.<sup>111</sup>

Fortunately for neighborhoods that do not wish to gentrify, the legacy of past antigrowth activity may be enough to deter investors on its own. In particular, the presence of significant public housing projects has been consistently identified as a hindrance to gentrification.<sup>112,113</sup> Indeed, gentrification has occurred in many cities only after strong local governments pursued an aggressive policy of demolishing neighborhoods with significant public housing and converting them into “mixed-income” areas.<sup>114,115</sup> By contrast, one particularly effective community organization intentionally placed non-aesthetic housing projects on the boundaries of its district

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<sup>105</sup> Pearsall, Hamil. "Superfund Me: A Study of Resistance to Gentrification in New York City." *Urban Studies* 50, no. 11 (2013): 2293-310. doi:10.1177/0042098013478236.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson. 500

<sup>107</sup> Englesman *et al.* 116

<sup>108</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2471

<sup>109</sup> Lees, Loretta, and Mara Ferreri. "Resisting Gentrification on Its Final Frontiers: Learning from the Heygate Estate in London (1974–2013)." *Cities* 57 (February 10, 2016): 14-24. doi:10.1016/j.cities.2015.12.005.

<sup>110</sup> Hackworth. 825

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 825

<sup>112</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2471

<sup>113</sup> Lees and Ferreri. 14

<sup>114</sup> Weber, Rachel. "Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment." *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, 2002, 172-93. doi:10.1002/9781444397499.ch8

<sup>115</sup> Lees and Ferreri. 14



to deter gentrification.<sup>116</sup> Community Land Trusts (CLT) are also an important legacy in select neighborhoods that created them. CLTs place control of the land outside of the control of the market or the state and ensure affordability through internal regulations.<sup>117</sup> Lastly, and somewhat ironically, communities can utilize stigma to their own benefit. Poor communities, especially those of color, are often associated with crime and disorder, which can deter gentrifiers and investors (Hwang & Sampson 2014).<sup>118</sup> Local minority residents can utilize the willingness of suburbanites and whites to believe they are violent, suspicious characters to create a sense that the neighborhood is “ready-to-rumble” should they try to gentrify the area.<sup>119</sup>

In addition to locally specific impediments like affordable housing projects, gentrification can also be limited by broader economic forces like recessions. However, it appears that not all recessions have a negative effect on gentrification, at least to an equal degree. A recession in Canada during the 1980’s appears not to have impeded gentrification, at least in cities that had significant amount of employment in advanced services.<sup>120</sup> This suggests that the particular nature of the recession is important, as sectors of the economy that are relatively unaffected may be able to continue the gentrification process.

Yet, perhaps the single most important recession in the history of gentrification occurred from around 1989 to 1993.<sup>121</sup> Urban scholars have not seemed interested in understanding why, but this recession had such an impact on gentrification that scholars during

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<sup>116</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2483-4

<sup>117</sup> Engelsman *et al.* 104-7

<sup>118</sup> Hwang and Sampson. 726

<sup>119</sup> Wilson, David, Jared Wouters, and Dennis Grammenos. "Successful Protect-Community Discourse: Spatiality and Politics in Chicagos Pilsen Neighborhood." *Environment and Planning A* 36, no. 7 (July 31, 2004): 1173-190. doi:10.1068/a36121.

<sup>120</sup> Ley, David. "Gentrification In Recession: Social Change In Six Canadian Inner Cities, 1981-1986." *Urban Geography* 13, no. 3 (1992): 230-56. doi:10.2747/0272-3638.13.3.230.

<sup>121</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 467

and shortly after it were writing about the end of gentrification and “de-gentrification.”<sup>122,123</sup> Evidently, gentrification was stopped dead in its tracks, and even receded in some cases.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, the force with which this recession hit in some cities may have wiped out any gentrification that might have occurred from the 1970’s to 1980’s. If economic powerhouses like New York saw gentrification decline for years, then it stands to reason that cities with far less economic strength could have seen gentrification drop off for much longer, possibly even ending altogether.

All of the impediments mentioned have merit, but it is evident that none of them can stand alone and explain why urban neighborhoods have not gentrified. For instance, so-called “dis-amenities,”<sup>125</sup> can be found in practically every neighborhood that has ever gentrified. In addition, the neighborhoods that successfully resisted gentrification in earlier waves were one of the last non-gentrified neighborhoods left in their cities and some of these very neighborhoods still gentrified, just at a later time.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, there must be a combination of inhibiting factors that explains why some poor, minority-majority neighborhoods gentrify while others do not. Based on the literature, the most important factors inhibiting gentrification are the ever-present competition for resources between municipalities, the economic damage caused by severe recessions and the underlying inability to rehabilitate old, deteriorating properties for a profit without government assistance. I will examine these factors more closely in the context of Hartford.

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<sup>122</sup> Bourne. 95-107

<sup>123</sup> Lees and Bondi. 234-253

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 244

<sup>125</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2488

<sup>126</sup> Hackworth. 816-7

Hartford is a useful case study for understanding why cities do not gentrify because it is representative of the many old, former industrial towns that have also not experienced gentrification. The New England region is dotted with towns with a fairly similar back-story and economic outlook to Hartford, such as Worcester, Lowell and Springfield, Massachusetts. Studying these urban areas from an urban development context is crucial because scholarship has tended to ignore cities on the scale of Hartford and other so-called middle-sized cities.<sup>127</sup> More recent scholarship has sought to address this deficiency,<sup>128</sup> but metropolises like New York and San Francisco continue to be the most studied cities, especially when gentrification is considered. In choosing to study the most obviously gentrified and most economically powerful cities, studies of gentrification may have inadvertently exaggerated how widespread of a phenomenon gentrification truly is, as some critics suggest.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, studying these smaller cities may provide a better sense of the true strength of gentrification as an economic force. In addition, examining why an entire city does not experience sustained gentrification is completely novel. Gentrification is typically approached as a neighborhood process and as a result, even studies that examine why specific neighborhoods have not gentrified occur in the context of a city that is experiencing gentrification in other neighborhoods.<sup>130</sup> By contrast, Hartford has neighborhoods with suburban style, single-family detached homes and it is often the case that they would be losing population if not for the in-movement of minorities from other parts of

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<sup>127</sup> Bowers, James R., and Wilbur C. Rich, eds. *Governing Middle-sized Cities: Studies in Mayoral Leadership*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

<sup>128</sup> Bell, David and Mark Jayne, eds. *Small Cities: Urban Experience Beyond the Metropolis*, Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2006. 2

<sup>129</sup> Bourne. 96

<sup>130</sup> Ley & Dobson. 2478

Hartford.<sup>131,132</sup> Lastly, by gaining a better understanding of what has prevented gentrification in cities that are not terribly different from others where gentrification has occurred, it should be possible to gain a better understanding of gentrification overall. Since attempts to understand why gentrification occurs have not satisfactorily addressed the controversy, it is time to explore a new approach to the phenomenon.

### The Local Context

Scholars have concluded that unique local conditions have a significant impact on how gentrification does, or does not occur.<sup>133,134</sup> Therefore, general theories of gentrification can only explain so much without accounting for Hartford's historical and present context. Hartford is only 18 square miles, which is small even by New England standards (Chen & Bacon 2013).<sup>135</sup> While other cities have grown by annexing suburbs, including New England cities like Boston, Hartford has actually shrunk since it was never able to annex its suburbs and West Hartford actually separated from it in 1854.<sup>136</sup> This has serious implications for economic growth because the city relies on property taxes for revenue and there is not much property to tax in such a small city. The situation is further compounded by the fact that much of the city's land is tax exempt due to the presence of state government buildings, hospitals, and universities, so the city has even less revenue generating power than its size would imply. At the same time, Hartford has been uniquely endowed with a cluster of insurance providers, including a Fortune 500 company,

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<sup>131</sup> Total Population: Non-Hispanic: White, 1990. *Social Explorer*, (based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau; accessed May 28 2019).

<sup>132</sup> Total Population: Non-Hispanic: White, 2000. *Social Explorer*, (based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau; accessed May 28 2019)

<sup>133</sup> Beauregard. "Trajectories of Neighborhood Change: The Case of Gentrification." 856

<sup>134</sup> Lees. "Gentrifying Down the Urban Hierarchy: The 'cascade Effect' in Portland, Maine." 91

<sup>135</sup> Chen, Xiangming, and Nick Bacon, eds. *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015. 16

<sup>136</sup> Condon, Tim. "A Sobering Era with New Possibilities." In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. 259-275

and is the core city of one of the wealthiest Metropolitan Areas in the world.<sup>137</sup> Thus, it should, in some ways, have been more likely to experience gentrification than other disinvested New England cities, as there has long been substantial capital in the area that could be reinvested in the city. In fact, the local business elite and the state of Connecticut have made numerous efforts to revive Hartford's economy since the 1970's.<sup>138</sup> Yet, some of Hartford's greatest revitalization attempts would also be its most visible failures and disappointments. The city has remained stubbornly in between stagnation and decline in spite of these efforts.

Two aspects of Hartford and the Hartford region were dominant throughout most of its history but have arguably weakened in recent decades. One of these aspects is that Hartford is situated in a state and region where localism is deeply ingrained, as the secession of West Hartford exemplifies.<sup>139</sup> In 1960, the state of Connecticut decided to make the death of regionalism official by abolishing county governments altogether.<sup>140</sup> As a result, efforts to approach economic issues on a more regional basis usually fail as suburbs, and to some extent Hartford itself, have a long history of independent decision making that they are unwilling to relinquish.<sup>141</sup> The other aspect, is that Hartford once had a strong manufacturing base and a stronger base in financial and insurance industries. Hartford was home to such famous manufacturers as Colt, Pratt & Whitney, Underwood Typewriters and the company that would later become United Airlines.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, there were underlying weaknesses in Hartford's

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<sup>137</sup> Chen, Xiangming, and Nick Bacon. *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015. 6

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 37-41.

<sup>139</sup> Condon. 264

<sup>140</sup> McKee, Clyde. "Mike Peters and the Legacy of Leadership in Hartford, Connecticut." In *Governing Middle-sized Cities: Studies in Mayoral Leadership*. 31

<sup>141</sup> Rojas and Wray. 241-2

<sup>142</sup> Walsh, Andrew. "Hartford: A Global History." In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. 21-45.

prosperity even then, in that the city had a large, low-skilled working class population that would struggle to find employment outside of these industries. Thus, two important Hartford legacies are thwarted regional ambitions and an extreme mismatch between the kinds of jobs available in Hartford and the skills of those who live in Hartford.

Following urban renewal in the 1950's and 60's, Hartford had several experiences with attempts at economic development that had the potential to cause gentrification but did not. The first major attempt to redevelop Hartford after urban renewal occurred in the early to mid-1970's. Hartford's business community at the time, referred to as "the Bishops,"<sup>143,144</sup> took the lead on this project and created the Greater Hartford Process, also known as Process, to coordinate development. They decided to lead this effort because, in addition to being incredibly difficult to navigate,<sup>145</sup> Hartford's local government had pursued a policy of urban renewal that, if anything, hastened Hartford's decline.

Improving the economy is a constant concern for any government, indeed, it is what makes gentrification so alluring to some, and it can be assumed that projects are under way even if they are not grand in scale. Various actors in Hartford's history have tried to counteract its negative economic trends in large and small ways for decades. It is worth observing whether they appear to have made any progress. The area that Hartford's leaders have clearly had the least success is in reversing or halting the demographic trends that have taken place since the 1950's.

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<sup>143</sup> Burns, Peter. "The Intergovernmental Regime and Public Policy in Hartford, Connecticut." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2002): 55-73. doi:10.1111/1467-9906.00114.

<sup>144</sup> Simmons, Louise. "Poverty, Inequality, Politics and Social Activism in Hartford." In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. 85-109

<sup>145</sup> Burns. 57-60

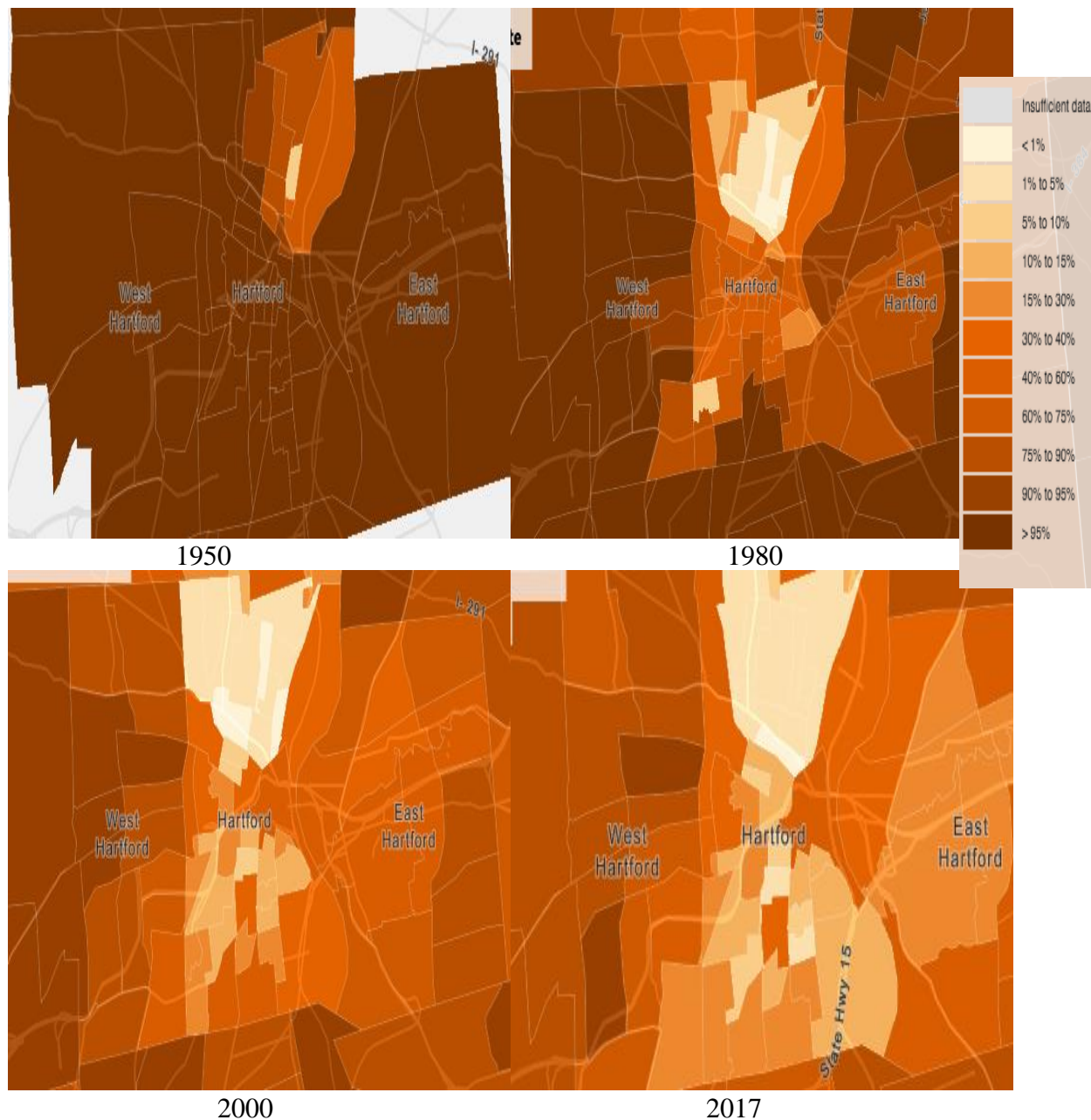


Figure 1: Non-Hispanic white population of Hartford and its western and eastern suburbs over time. Courtesy of Social Explorer. Data provided by U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey.

Figure 1 provides a snapshot of how Hartford's white population has declined significantly since the 1950's. Unfortunately, racial categories in the Census have changed significantly since 1950, so it is only in 1980 that it is possible to separate white Hispanics from non-Hispanic whites. However, in 1950, the white population broadly should represent the non-

Hispanic white population fairly well since the community had a much smaller presence in the city. That said, it is clear that there has been no significant rebounds of the non-Hispanic white population in any of Hartford's census tracts. The census tract comprising Downtown (the central tract on Hartford's eastern border) may be the only exception but it is hard to tell as it was divided into several tracts as recently as 1990. Some tracts, mainly on Hartford's western border, have consistently retained the largest percentages of non-Hispanic white population throughout the period under study. However, it is quite astonishing how few of Hartford's tracts are even 30% or more non-Hispanic white in 2017. North Hartford clearly comes across as the historical and current epicenter of heavily concentrated minority populations in Hartford, with the Arsenal area having a more than 90% African American population as early as 1950. Since then, that reality has spread throughout most Hartford neighborhoods north of the I-84 highway. Interestingly, it is not only within Hartford that the minority population appears to grow. The suburbs immediately around Hartford have also become less and less white, most evidently since 2000. This is most evident in East Hartford, which is more like Hartford in its economic situation, but the minority population in West Hartford has also clearly grown in many of its census tracts. Those on the border of Hartford appear most strongly affected by this growing minority population. Since Hartford contains the vast majority of the region's minority population, this suggests out-migration of minorities from Hartford to the suburbs. Yet, without a corresponding rise in Hartford's white population, indeed it continues to shrink, this suggests Hartford's population is not leaving because of displacement from gentrification, but because more minorities simply have the ability to leave for the suburbs.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> One census tract in the North deserves clarification, as it appears to lose white population from 1980 to 2000 and then regain it from 2000 to 2017. I had to conclude that this was simply an anomaly or census error because neither experts on Hartford's history nor archival sources reference any such demographic turnover in that area, which, given how substantial it appears in the data, one would



While demographics are a fairly good indicator of gentrification, especially in a metropolitan region as racially and socioeconomically segregated as Hartford's, median household income is also important to observe. It is another key figure when assessing a city or neighborhood's economic well-being.

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expect. Based on the fact that the loss of white population coincides with a loss of total population in the thousands it appears that somehow the white population just was not accurately counted that year. When the population resurges in the next available census the white population is back to where it was before 2000, reinforcing the idea that some sort of error occurred.

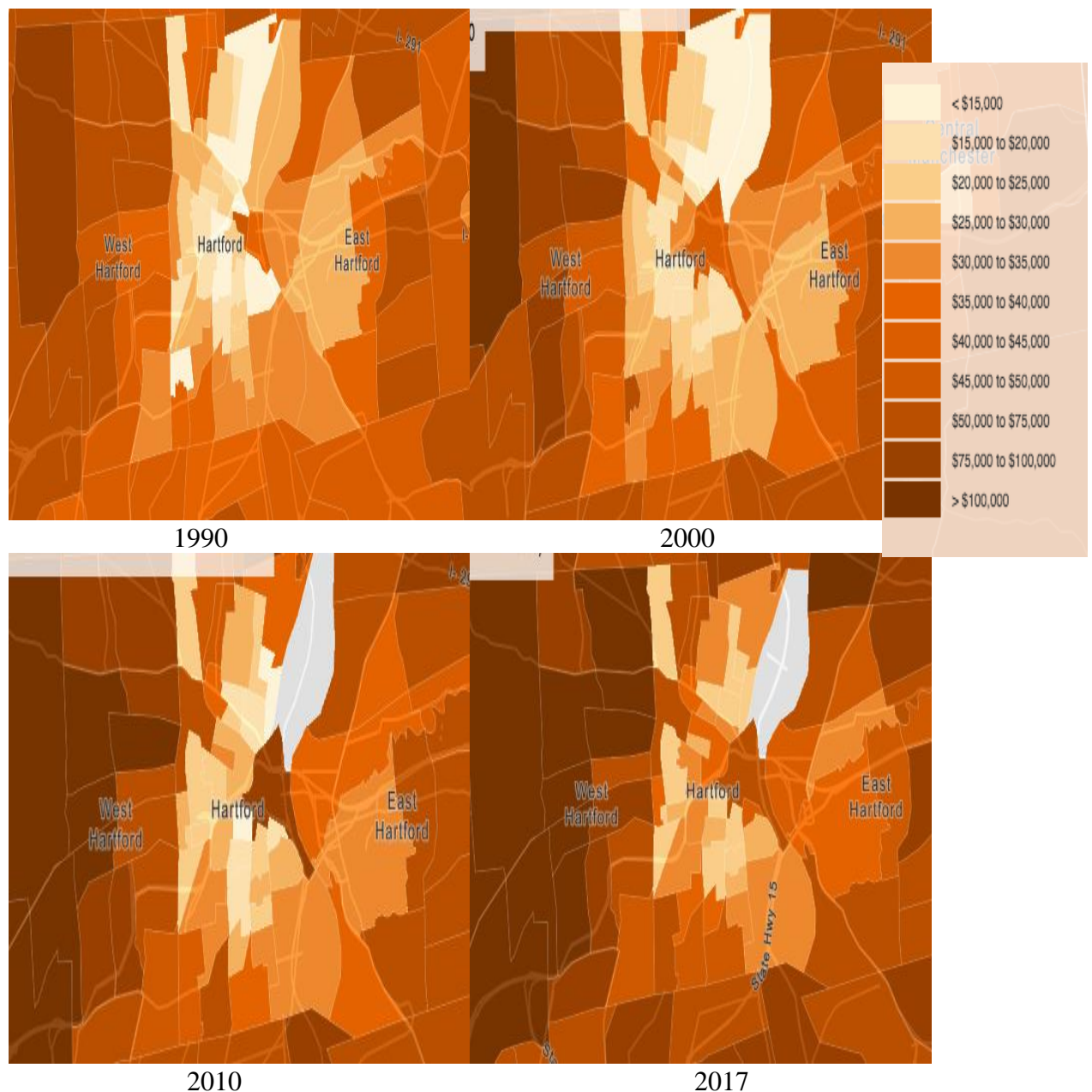


Figure 2: Hartford's median household income from 1990 to 2017 (not adjusted for inflation). Courtesy of Social Explorer. Data provided by U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey.

While Figure 2 is not adjusted for inflation, it is still useful for the main purpose of comparing Hartford's economic fortunes to that of its surrounding suburbs. The relationship between the city and its suburbs is such a dominant theme in any discussion of Hartford's economic potential that its economic status relative to the suburbs is more important information

than the specific dollar amount at today's inflation rate. Unfortunately, displays of median household income for the city's census tracts are not available prior to 1980, but Figure 2 at least provides a look at the last 30 years of Hartford's economy. Notably, median household incomes for most census tracts in 1990 pale in comparison to most suburban tracts. Perhaps the recession was already registering in the census data, but archival evidence supports the notion that incomes for Hartford residents did not actually improve during the prosperous decade of the 1980's. It is also evident that many of the census tracts with the largest median household incomes also had the largest non-Hispanic white populations, supporting the use of demographic information as a rough proxy for socioeconomic status. It is clearly imperfect as a proxy, as Figure 2 shows that some tracts with a high minority concentration still have relatively good median household incomes. West Hartford, in particular, appears to be seeing growth in most of its census tracts even as its minority population becomes more significant. Lastly, it is evident that the economic strength of Hartford's Downtown is not entirely gone and continues to outperform the census tracts on its southern and western borders in terms of median household income. Still, it does not appear to be a guaranteed march towards greater wealth as median household income actually declines in the Downtown from 2010 to 2017. Also, Hartford's Downtown has an extremely small residential population, which the city is actively trying to change, but in the meantime the significance of its economic success for actual Hartford residents is unclear.

Therefore, if there was any doubt as to whether Hartford has experienced gentrification, this brief overview of its demographic and economic situation over time should make it clear that once Hartford's decline began in the 1950's nothing has reversed it for long. It has only fallen further and further behind its suburbs in terms of its percentage of white population and, to a lesser extent, its median income. Yet, the census data cannot provide the whole story for

Hartford's decline. For one, demographic categories have changed substantially over time, as have census tracts themselves, making the kind of decades-long examination I want to perform incredibly difficult. Raw data also cannot tell me anything about the goals of Hartford's leaders at the time and what they considered Hartford's strengths and weaknesses and their own failures and successes. Consequently, I will perform content analysis in order to get a better sense of the story of Hartford's decline and attempts to revitalize.

### Methods

In order to determine the underlying causes of Hartford's lack of gentrification, I will examine the economic development strategies pursued by the city of Hartford. Through content analysis, I searched for evidence of the likely causes I identified as preventing Hartford's gentrification. As I suspected, the evidence points to Hartford's relationship with its suburbs being highly competitive, and to Hartford's disadvantage, for decades. The archives also contain numerous instances of Hartford's housing infrastructure being unfit for rehabilitation by purely market forces, forcing the city to either pay part of the cost of rehabilitation, demolish the structure or allow it to decay and become abandoned. Last, but not least, two particular economic recessions in the 1970's and 1990's ended periods of significant privately funded development that might have led to gentrification if they had not been cut short.

In order to test my hypotheses, I analyzed the Plans of Development produced by Hartford's Commission on the City Plan (the Commission) and later its Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC). Hartford's Commission on the City Plan was formed in 1907 and was the first permanent planning commission in the United States.<sup>147</sup> Similar to its modern-day equivalent, the Commission was responsible for both drawing up city plans and zoning

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<sup>147</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Commission on the City Plan. *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*, Hartford. CT. City of Hartford, 1996. 92

ordinances. Ironically, this does not mean development in Hartford occurred in an orderly fashion since 1907. Indeed, by the time the Commission was established most of Hartford was already developed, giving it little opportunity to direct growth before unplanned development became entrenched.<sup>148</sup> It is likely because the city had developed in such a disorderly fashion that the Commission was created. The Commission's composition changed significantly over time since Hartford has undergone several major changes in its general governmental structure since 1907. As implied above, it actually does not exist under the same name anymore and has become the Planning and Zoning Commission since the charter was reformed in 2002. Hartford's charter was significantly changed two other times, in 1947 and 1967, the former creating the non-partisan council-manager system in place for the earliest period under study and the latter reintroducing partisanship and an independent office for mayor.<sup>149</sup> I am only concerned with the Commission from the 1950's onward and it appears that the Commission was comprised of political appointees, appointed by the mayor or city manager, who tended to have some relevant experience in planning, such as being an architect. Still, lawyers, educators, doctors and reverends also appear on the Commission so it is likely that anyone significantly engaged in Hartford's internal affairs, as a member of the Democratic town committee for instance, could be appointed to a position on the Commission.<sup>150</sup>

Coincidentally, the Commission would produce its first general plan for the city in 1955, perfect for the period under study. It had produced some larger plans between 1907 and 1955 but they only dealt with specific projects or aspects of the city,<sup>151</sup> as opposed to proposing general

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 92

<sup>149</sup> McKee. 33-4

<sup>150</sup> Seline, Anita. "South End may hold key to Democratic Party's power struggle." *Hartford Courant*. February 20, 1992

<sup>151</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 92

goals for the city. Including the one from 1955, the Commission on the City Plan and Planning and Zoning Commission have produced five Plans of Development. Unfortunately, two of the plans, from 1955 and 1972 respectively, were not officially adopted by the City Council, which appears to have had an unclear but negative impact on the proposed development strategies being carried out.<sup>152</sup> It seems as though the City did some of what the Commission advised in those documents but was not as bound to follow the plans as if the Council had adopted them. Still, they provide valuable insight into the time period and the fact that they were not adopted is interesting in it of itself. It cost the city money to create these plans so it indicates significant divisions in City Hall if the Commission put in time to create a general plan for Hartford that the Council refused to champion as its own.

I will supplement the general plans of development with the Community Renewal Program, produced by the same Commission, and the city's Consolidated Plan for 2000-2005, produced by various members of the city's planning department. The reason for using these plans is that they also provide a city-wide overview of the economic conditions of the time and the future goals at least some experts within city hall hoped to achieve. While most are advisory documents, they are the closest to a general overview of development in the city available. They therefore allow me to see what the city's priorities were in terms of protecting residents from displacement, attracting higher income families and individuals to live in Hartford and whether this changed at all over time. Most importantly, they provide insight into how the city handled suburban competition, rehabilitation of residential areas and major economic recessions.

Since gentrification first emerges in scholarly literature in the late 1960's and 1970's, the timeframe I will be examining is from 1955 to 2011. I thought it would be wise to look at

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 92.

Hartford's development priorities immediately before gentrification became a household word. 2011 is when the most recent Plan of Development was produced and was intended to guide the city until 2020. Thus, it is the closest to the present time I could reach using the plans. The 1950's and 60's represent a sort of baseline, during which Hartford was little different from other cities like New York and Boston in struggling economically. In the 1970's and 1980's, Hartford would continue to share significant similarities with other nearby cities that have gentrified, such as a building boom in the 1980's. In fact, Hartford is practically a model of second wave gentrification, which took place from the mid-1970's to the late 1980's.<sup>153</sup> During this time in Hartford there is clear evidence of the two most notable aspects of gentrification's second-wave, intense political struggles over development and corporate revitalization efforts.<sup>154</sup>

It is from 1990's onwards that Hartford's economic trajectory truly diverges from those of cities that have experienced gentrification. While the circumstances of the early 90's that began the third wave were also present in Hartford, the desire for third wave gentrification has been more prevalent than its actual occurrence. During the changes to Hartford's economy that occurred over the decades I will examine the shifts in economic models and strategies. For instance, I will determine when urban renewal ceased to be a viable solution and how long it took for neighborhood rehabilitation efforts to replace it. I will also look for signs of optimism and how those on the Commission understood Hartford's potential for growth or lack thereof. I will be particularly interested in any mention of displacement caused by private development, as opposed to government interventions such as urban renewal. Likewise, I will focus on efforts by the city to attract the middle class to live in Hartford as a possible solution to its economic woes.

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<sup>153</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 467

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 467

Unfortunately, the Plans of Development cannot provide a full sense of the political dynamics at the time, which are sure to be relevant for gentrification's potential. Therefore, I have supplemented a review of the Plans with archived articles from the *Hartford Courant* from as early as 1907, when the Commission was founded, to the current year. In order to find the articles, I utilized the *Courant* website's search tool to find archived articles. A major source of material was looking up the names of Hartford's mayors during the time period under review. I was particularly interested in knowing how they came to power, what issues seem to dominate their tenure and what their relationship was with the City Council, which held the real power in Hartford until 2003. I also searched for names and institutions featured prominently in secondary sources about Hartford, such as Nick Carbone, a Deputy Mayor, John Bailey, a Democratic Party boss and Greater Hartford Process, an ambitious but failed attempt by Hartford's corporations to revitalize the region. Occasionally, articles about one individual or group would lead me to other noteworthy individuals and groups since they were discussed as powerful players in Hartford politics. The rise, fall and conflicts between these individuals and groups forms the backdrop for many of the Plans of Development.

### Chapter Outline

Using these methods, I found evidence for the beginnings of gentrification in Hartford in the 1980's and a city far more open to the prospect of gentrification in recent decades. In Chapter 1, I establish the background for Hartford's economic peak and subsequent decline. Using the 1955 Plan of Development and the 1965 Community Renewal Program, I demonstrate that Hartford had a powerful and quite healthy Downtown economy even while the rest of the city struggled. Yet, even at this early stage, Hartford was already struggling for its economic survival against the allure of the suburbs. In a theme that will be constant throughout the decades, the



early plans explicitly refer to the need for greater regional governing and resource sharing if Hartford is to thrive. Yet, in the absence of any movement on this front, the city continues to reluctantly compete with suburbs it knows it cannot beat.

In Chapter 2, the decline of urban renewal becomes apparent, as the federal government backs away from the program and it is increasingly seen in a negative light. Without the federal spending, the Commission makes its first mention of Hartford's troubled financial state and inability to collect adequate revenue. It would have to turn to new, lower cost methods of development to survive, such as tax abatements and public-private partnerships. By the 1980's, Hartford seems to have overcome the economic slump of the 1960's and 1970's as a building boom in Downtown leads the Commission and city to actually worry about too much development and how it will impact residential areas. It is at this moment that gentrification might be occurring, but a closer reading suggests that much of the development under way at the time was actually commercial in nature and threatened to undermine residential areas instead of enhancing them. With housing prices soaring at the same time, the potential for wide scale, private rehabilitation of residential areas became even more remote, except where there was government support.

In Chapter 3, the bubble fueling the building boom has burst, and Hartford's economy has gone into free fall. The savings and loans crisis, and the resultant recession, undermined Hartford's core remaining industries to such a degree they have never fully recovered. Since the 1990's, Hartford has struggled more than ever to deliver basic services, eventually requiring humiliating state interventions that undermined its autonomy and added to the impression Hartford cannot solve its own problems. It has also been actively trying to attract industries other than insurance because its dependability proved misleading and Hartford suffered for relying too

much on it. Hartford now aims to be a part of the “information economy” and hopes to attract young professionals and college students to live in the city. Downtown is the center of this new activity and it is still unclear how successful their endeavors will be. What is clear, however, is that the recession of the early 1990’s had an even greater impact than scholars indicated it would. With the last vestige of Hartford’s old economic system in shambles, the city becomes markedly more comfortable with language that approaches open advocacy for gentrification.

Lastly, I conclude with my findings that all three factors, Hartford’s weak position relative to the suburbs, the difficulty of rehabilitating its residential properties and major economic recessions, appear to have impeded gentrification in Hartford where it otherwise might have occurred. I then recommend, assuming that Hartford’s goal is to develop economically without gentrification, that Hartford’s leaders pursue the formation of a regional government with Hartford at its helm. This is followed by a brief discussion of the shortcomings of this thesis and questions that should be asked in future papers.

## Chapter 1-Beginning of Decline

### Introduction:

Gentrification is an economic phenomenon with a fairly long history, and was recognized as long ago as 1964.<sup>155</sup> Over the decades, it has taken on various forms and occurred with more or less intensity.<sup>156</sup> In some cases, gentrification has even come to an abrupt end.<sup>157</sup> In this chapter, I will briefly describe Hartford's history from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and then provide a more in depth look at it from the 1950's through the 1960's. This will encompass the early period of its decline and how city leaders first sought to reverse it. To do so, I will analyze the Plans of Development created by the Commission on the City Plan in 1955, as well as the Community Renewal Program created in 1965, to provide a glimpse into the economic theories guiding development at the time and examine how effective the city was at implementing the plans. The 1950s-1960s was an important era in Hartford's history that saw economic highs and lows. It is in these decades that negative economic trends so apparent today began to manifest for the first time and there was no gentrification promising to bring people back to the city. Under intense pressure, and heavily incentivized by the federal government, the city put its faith in urban renewal in hopes of stemming the tide of businesses and individuals leaving for the suburbs.

### The Unplanned City:

One trend that stands out in Hartford's history is unplanned development. It is not unique among cities in this sense but, because of the city's extremely small size, the years of unplanned development had a significant impact on any attempt to plan going forward. Ironically, this

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<sup>155</sup> Glass, Ruth. "Aspects of Change." In *The Gentrification Debates*. 19-30.

<sup>156</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 467

<sup>157</sup> Bourne. 95-107.

occurred despite Hartford creating the first permanent planning commission in the country in 1907.<sup>158</sup> The Commission on the City Plan even acknowledges that its early plans had limited usefulness because they only addressed specific projects and never looked at city development comprehensively.<sup>159</sup> Funding and resources for planning were also a consistent issue and the Commission still did not have its own dedicated staff in 1955.<sup>160</sup> Yet, perhaps the greatest problem for planning in Hartford is that the Commission could only make recommendations. Even when it did produce comprehensive plans, it was up to the City Council to approve them and then actually execute them.<sup>161</sup>

By the time the Commission produced its first comprehensive city plan in 1955, it was already true that almost all of the land in Hartford was in use. The sole exception to this reality were the neighborhoods of South and North Meadows, which contained the vast majority of undeveloped land in Hartford.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly, the plan from 1955 also says that neither redeveloping obsolete areas nor developing new areas will significantly change the fact that most of Hartford is already fully developed.<sup>163</sup> Rather, the plan is mainly focused on the reordering of land that is already in use but poorly organized. It also seeks to protect productive land uses through zoning more effectively than previous efforts, which largely failed to change pre-existing land uses.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Commission on the City Plan. *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. Hartford, CT: Commission on the City Plan, 1955.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 38

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 16

### Setting the Stage, Hartford's Decline:

Since economic decline must occur before gentrification is possible,<sup>165</sup> it is important to understand Hartford in the 1950's and 60's. The economic forces that would beleaguer Hartford and all older industrial cities were already well underway in the 1950's, but the decade nevertheless represents the peak before the city's fall. 1960 is an important milestone as the first census year since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the city's population declined overall, even when immigration is included.<sup>166</sup> This time period is also worth studying because Hartford's economic situation was not significantly different from cities like New York or Boston, which have had radically different trajectories from Hartford following this era. Indeed, the decline of cities at the time was considered virtually irreversible, and gentrification's later emergence would challenge and upend widely held theories.<sup>167</sup> Thus, these decades represent a sort of base line, where gentrification is hardly if at all recognized as a real phenomenon, either in the metropolises like New York City or smaller cities like Hartford.

Beginning with the political situation in Hartford, political machines are said to dominate in the 50's and 60's, as with most urban centers at the time.<sup>168</sup> The important features of a political machine are that party officials, rather than elected representatives, tend to be the real power brokers and decision makers in government. Party officials might also be elected in their own right but it is their status as local or state party chairmen rather than their elected office that is their real source of power. Effective political machines also do everything in their power to avoid party infighting and will seek to control who the party standard-bearers are from behind

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<sup>165</sup> Smith. "Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People." 538-48.

<sup>166</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Commission on the City Plan. *Community Renewal Program*. Hartford, CT: Commission on the City Plan, City of Hartford, 1965. II-33

<sup>167</sup> Beauregard. "Trajectories of Neighborhood Change: The Case of Gentrification. 855-74.

<sup>168</sup> McKee. 33

the scenes. In Hartford specifically, this was done by nominating loyal candidates for office, helping them get on the ballot, and holding private meetings before public council meetings to minimize the amount of debate and haggling that occurred in public.<sup>169</sup> This was the case not just in Hartford, but also in Connecticut more broadly, which were both dominated by the unabashed party boss and chairman of the state Democratic Party, John M. Bailey.<sup>170</sup> As party chairman from 1946 to his death in 1975, he would be Connecticut's last true party boss.

While machine politics remained constant during these decades, Hartford nevertheless went through some significant changes to its political system shortly before and during this time. In 1947, the city adopted a non-partisan council-manager form of government.<sup>171</sup> It should be noted that this was not really the beginning of weak mayoral power in Hartford, as the previous system had been a weak mayor-commission system, which is more or less the same as council-manager except that it was not non-partisan and commissioners were both local legislators and administrators of major departments.<sup>172</sup> While the change was presented as a good-government reform, there are some who argue it was really an effort by the fading Republican Party machine to prevent Democratic control of the influential capital city.<sup>173</sup>

If this were indeed a political ploy by Republicans, it backfired immensely in the short term. The “non-partisan” system ironically resulted in a council that was more completely dominated by Democrats than what had existed before or since. Three seats are reserved for a minority party on Hartford's city council, but this becomes moot in an officially non-partisan system. While not officially members of the Democratic party, John Bailey could get an entire

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 33

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 33

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 33

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 29

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 32

council of Democratic loyalists by supporting “unaffiliated” candidates of his choosing.<sup>174</sup> The “non-partisan” nature of the Council was widely understood to be a formality that lacked substance. For instance, when Ann Uccello became mayor, the Council was still officially non-partisan. Yet, she is clearly identified with the Republican Party and was considered a Republican mayor.<sup>175</sup>

Ann Uccello’s victory in 1967 was a major blow to the Democratic Party machine. She managed to win in a city where Democratic voters outnumbered Republicans three to one thanks to the political system in place at the time.<sup>176</sup> Between 1947 and 1969, the mayor of Hartford was simply the Councilmember that received the most votes overall.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, one did not have to directly vote against a Democrat to get a Republican mayor. In fact, every Councilmember was technically in the running for mayor, whether they wanted it or not, because any of them could receive more votes than their colleagues.<sup>178</sup> Uccello’s victory may well have prompted the Democrats to make a deal with Republicans over charter revisions that brought back partisan elections in 1969.<sup>179</sup> Notably, the Democratic aspect of the deal was that the office of mayor would become a separate office, elected separately from and without a vote on the Council.<sup>180</sup> Considering that the mayor at the time was a Republican, this seems intentionally designed to weaken the mayor’s influence and ensure that the Democratic Party is in control of Hartford’s major offices. In return, Republicans would be practically guaranteed three seats on the Council, since they were the only noteworthy minority party at the time. While this often left them

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 33-4

<sup>175</sup> Zaiman, Jack. “It’s Mayor Ann Uccello by 170 Votes: Republican Scores Victory in Recount.” *Hartford Courant*. November 15, 1967

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>177</sup> McKee. 33

<sup>178</sup> Zaiman. N.p.

<sup>179</sup> McKee. 33

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 34

virtually powerless in times of Democratic cohesion, they could become important power brokers when the Democrats became divided, as will become evident later in Hartford's history. Uccello had benefitted from Democratic infighting herself, and as the Democratic machine's sway over voters became ever more tenuous, Republicans would become increasingly influential.

Naturally, the Commission on the City Plan would not have been unaffected by these larger political upheavals and shifts. Indeed, its very composition would need to change with the charter reform of 1947. For instance, the original composition included members of the board of aldermen, which no longer existed after 1947.<sup>181</sup> Likewise, the responsibility for appointing Commissioners seems to have changed over time and possibly even been a shared authority. In the original 1907 composition, the mayor was the presiding officer of the Commission and appointed two of its members who did not have any other public office. The rest of the Commission would be comprised of appointed city officials, such as the City Engineer, and elected officials, such as a Councilmember, to be appointed to the Commission by the other Councilmembers.<sup>182</sup> The composition presented in the 1950's and 60's is substantially different from this. Instead of the mayor as presiding officer, a director-secretary was the head of the Commission and was elected by Commission members.<sup>183</sup> The Commission members, in turn, were appointed by the city manager, the executive office created by the 1947 reforms. The manager was not a strong executive and could be fired at any time if enough Councilmembers wanted to do so. Therefore, the city manager likely served as the indirect link between the Council's politics and the composition of the Commission. Interestingly, attorneys have a

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<sup>181</sup> "Commission on City Plan." *Hartford Courant*. January 15, 1907

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>183</sup> O'Hara, James. "D. A. Barker Appointed City Planning Director." *Hartford Courant*. February 21, 1964



significant presence on the Commission at this time, reflecting perhaps the legal difficulties of planning in a city full of entrenched interests. Architects, planners and businessmen make up most of the remainder. Being a member of the Commission likely was not the top patronage job in Hartford and so its members were probably low-level party loyalists who had some relevant experience in any of the broad issues the Commission would face in planning.

### The 1955 Plan

The first comprehensive plan created by the Commission on the City Plan emerged in the context of a city where politics and public offices were heavily controlled and regulated by officials from the Democratic Party. According to the plan itself, it needed to be created because unplanned development was starting to have potentially dangerous impacts on a city newly in competition with suburbs over the location of businesses.<sup>184</sup> As a city that was fully developed before the age of the automobile, Hartford had significant disadvantages relative to the suburbs and could not rely on haphazard development to create the necessary transportation infrastructure in a timely manner. Interestingly, the outflow of people seems to be less of a problem as the plan also says that Hartford had been more fortunate than most American central cities in holding its population.<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, preserving the condition of valuable parts of the city, while clearing or redeveloping the poorer parts, receives significant attention.<sup>186</sup>

In terms of its economics, Hartford was a somewhat unique industrial city in that it already had a substantial non-industrial economy in the 1950's thanks to its early concentration of major insurance companies.<sup>187</sup> These corporations, Aetna chief among them, would be

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<sup>184</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 7

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* 8

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* 7

<sup>187</sup> Chen, Xiangming, and John Shemo. "Shifting Fortunes: Hartford's Global and Regional Economic Dimensions" In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. 193-218

significantly involved in Hartford politics in later decades, but more or less stayed out of public policy decisions at this time.<sup>188</sup> The plan from 1955 is largely quiet regarding these major corporations except to say the city economy depends almost exclusively on them and the manufacturing industry, and that the city's economic future depends on retaining major businesses and attracting similar businesses to the city.<sup>189</sup>

There are multiple possible explanations for the relative lack of discussion regarding the major insurance and financial industries in Hartford. One potential reason is that the plan was largely meant to address the city's issues and the insurance and financial sectors presented few problems to the city beyond the threat of their relocation. Another, more cynical, explanation could be that the influence of major businesses deterred the Commission from making any negative comments about their practices. It is also notable, from the perspective of gentrification, that the plan does not similarly call for attracting people to relocate in the city. This would be consistent with its assertion that Hartford had managed to hold onto its population fairly well, while at the same time saying that major businesses and industry had a tendency to locate in other parts of the Metropolitan Area.<sup>190</sup> Evidently, business moved to the suburbs faster than people did.

The only business practices the plan really takes issue with are those that occur in the neighborhoods and outside of the central business district, where the major banks, department stores and insurance companies were located.<sup>191</sup> The plan takes issue with the "ribbon-like" development along major streets in neighborhoods and advocates that they be made into more

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<sup>188</sup> McKee. 36

<sup>189</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 7

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 7, 8.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. 7, 11

definite business centers, primarily to reduce traffic and congestion issues.<sup>192</sup> It is also opposed to sub-central business development more broadly because the encroaching non-residential uses apparently made residential uses less secure, discouraging new residential development and eventually resulting in poorly maintained housing and abandonment.<sup>193</sup> Interestingly, the encroachment of non-residential uses into residential areas would reappear as a major issue in the 1980's,<sup>194</sup> indicating that this could be an unavoidable side-effect of economic growth in Hartford, where so little land is available for development.

It is also apparent from the 1955 plan of development that Hartford still had a significant, if diminishing, manufacturing base and industry was still considered a critical component of its economy.<sup>195</sup> North and South Meadows therefore receive a significant amount of attention because they contained the only large, undeveloped plots of land left in the city that factories from inside and outside the city could relocate to.<sup>196</sup> However, the lack of development, especially in the North Meadows, also created some significant barriers to future projects because the area did not yet have basic utilities or access to the highway, as I-91 was not yet constructed.<sup>197</sup> It is unclear whether the Commission anticipated that a highway through North Meadows would have the effect of cutting the city off from the Connecticut River but they more or less got the highway they asked for, though it did not do much to bring manufacturing to North Meadows.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>194</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Department of Planning. *Hartford Plan of Development, 1985-2000*. Hartford, CT: City of Hartford, Dept. of Planning, 1985. 33

<sup>195</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 7

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>198</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Commission on the City Plan. *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*, City of Hartford, CT. Commission, 1996. 36

Two problems commonly associated with Hartford and declining cities generally are population decline and inadequate educational systems. However, the 1955 plan indicates that neither of these issues were manifest at the time. At the very least, they were not recognized by the Commission as issues. Population decline, in particular, which would be noticeable as soon as 1960, would seem to be completely unanticipated by the Commission in 1955. Rather, the Commission writes, “it is highly probable that Hartford’s population will stabilize at about 200,000 within the next 25 or 30 years”.<sup>199</sup> To be fair, Hartford’s population had been growing consistently during the previous 60 years,<sup>200</sup> including during the Depression, so their completely inaccurate estimates may have resulted from looking at historical population trends and failing to appreciate the changes going on around them.

Unfortunately, when it comes to education much has to be inferred from the plans of development as, “the General Plan is not normally concerned with...the operation and administration of facilities.”<sup>201</sup> Despite having a section of the plan dedicated to schools, it is almost solely about upgrading the physical facilities and making sure schools were conveniently placed relative to the school-age population.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, it is still apparent that Hartford was starting to struggle to maintain its schools in the face of a growing school-age population since several primary and secondary schools needed to be reconstructed or discontinued due to a combination of their age, lack of space and shifting population centers.<sup>203</sup> In addition, the plan mentions, almost in passing, that about one-quarter of students drop out after reaching the age of 16.<sup>204</sup> This is oddly not presented as an issue and is actually only mentioned because a lower

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<sup>199</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 8

<sup>200</sup> *Community Renewal Program II*-33

<sup>201</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 17

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* 17

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* 19

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* 19

drop-out rate would increase enrollment beyond what the plan was predicting.<sup>205</sup> Perhaps at a time when manufacturing jobs were readily available finishing high school was not considered as crucial for employment.

Urban renewal was still in its prime in the 1950's and this is reflected in the plan, although it is called urban redevelopment. Urban renewal could be considered a kind of government sponsored gentrification effort in that it involves buying rundown property, relocating occupants, razing the buildings and then selling the vacant land to private developers at fair market value for redevelopment.<sup>206</sup> Naturally, there were safeguards to make sure those displaced were offered decent housing they can afford to rent or own.<sup>207</sup> However, based on the public's concerns about urban renewal a decade later, it would seem these safeguards were not entirely adequate.<sup>208</sup> It seems as though the Commission itself is also somewhat wary of endorsing urban renewal and sees it primarily as a weapon of last resort against the worst forms of blight.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, it does not offer any new proposals for urban renewal that the Hartford Redevelopment Agency was not already looking at. At the time, the project that would become Constitution Plaza, then referred to as the Front-Market Street Project, was really the only redevelopment plan well under way.<sup>210</sup> The areas identified for possible for future redevelopment projects are primarily in the Frog Hollow, South Green, Sheldon Charter Oak and Clay Arsenal Neighborhoods, as well as the area of Downtown known as Downtown North.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>208</sup> "150 Albany Ave. Residents Hear City Views on Renewal Questions." *Hartford Courant*, September 14, 1965.

<sup>209</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 29

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 30

<sup>211</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 28

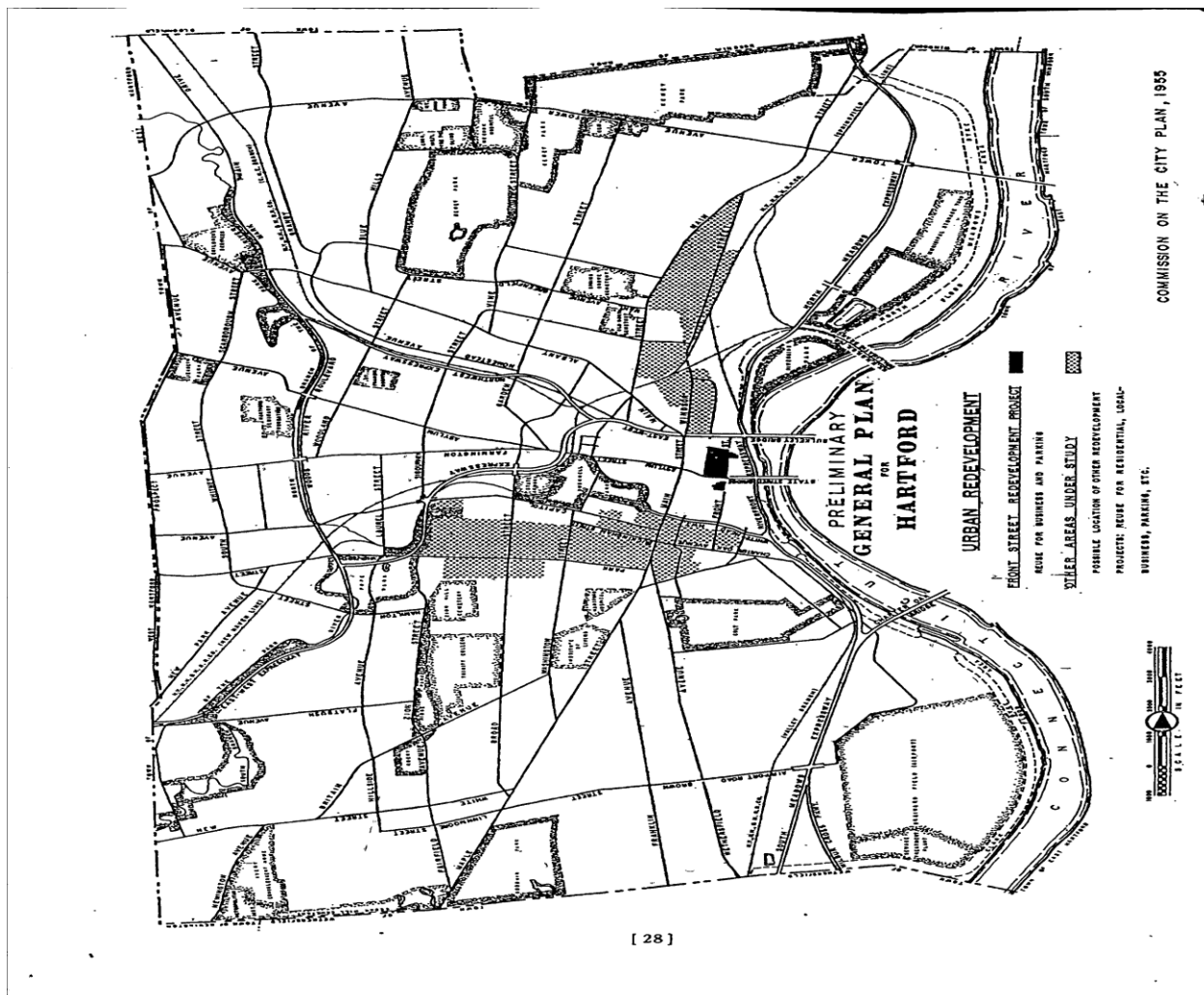


Figure 3: Map of ongoing and proposed urban redevelopment sites in 1955

Constitution Plaza was Hartford's first urban renewal project and possibly the most controversial. Downtown had 7,000 residents in 1950 but lost nearly 4,500 by 1960, thanks in part to slum clearance and the removal of the residential neighborhood in Downtown.<sup>212</sup> Hartford had to relocate 1,800 families because of urban renewal before 1965 and it can be assumed the bulk of this was from Constitution Plaza, which was by far the largest and most ambitious project.<sup>213</sup> Significantly, minorities had a much harder time relocating due to resistance by white

<sup>212</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. IV-111

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* V-38-39

communities and ended up either relocating to North Hartford or public housing projects in South Hartford.<sup>214</sup>

The Commission provides two noteworthy reasons, beyond Downtown being a slum, for why renewal was necessary. First, the city needed to revamp its central shopping district in order to compete with the parking and infrastructure provided by shopping centers emerging in the suburbs.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, as far back as 70 years ago, the constraints put on Hartford by suburban competition were at the forefront of its development concerns. The third reason for “renewing” Downtown was in anticipation for construction of a federal highway (I-91) along the riverfront, which the current neighborhood street system could not support.<sup>216</sup> I-91 would still be unfinished in Hartford as of 1963.<sup>217</sup> Work on the Hartford highway that divided Hartford in half, I-84, was similarly in the building stage by 1965. Thus, Hartford’s development priorities have never been entirely its own and it has had to balance competing with the suburbs and developing around federal, and state, projects while paying attention to its own internal needs.

Lastly, the plan discusses the possibility for greater regional cooperation between Hartford and its suburbs. It is fairly significant that, even at a time when Hartford had substantial economic strength and a middle class that was not entirely depleted, greater regionalism was considered important.<sup>218</sup> It is also significant that, in providing an example of regionalism that already existed, the plan cites the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), which mainly handles the sewage and water systems for Hartford and six surrounding towns.<sup>219</sup> Connecticut did not abolish county governments until 1960, so the fact that the MDC was mentioned as a

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid. V-40

<sup>215</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow* 29

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. 30

<sup>217</sup> “4.5-Mile Section of Interstate 91 To Open Jan. 8.” *Hartford Courant*. December 17, 1963.

<sup>218</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 40

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 40

basis for regionalism, and not the county government, suggests that the abolition of counties was not as significant as supporters of regionalism make it out to be.<sup>220</sup> It is quite likely that Connecticut's counties had very few powers or responsibilities as this is usually the case in New England states where counties do exist.<sup>221</sup> Connecticut's parochialism is therefore much more deeply ingrained and much less unique than it may appear.

#### The 1960's: End of the bosses, beginning of decline

The political situation in Hartford was more or less the same for most of the 60's, but this started to change towards the end of the decade. The most important structural change occurred in 1967 with the reintroduction of partisan elections in Hartford and creating a separate office for the mayor that was elected independently of the council every two years but had no vote on the council.<sup>222</sup> Previously, the mayor was usually the councilmember who got the most votes.<sup>223</sup> It is important to appreciate how dysfunctional and nonsensical this innovation was. In a council-manager government, the city manager is the chief executive. However, they are not executives like the president, with separate powers and authorities, but like a company CEO, who can be hired and fired by a board of directors, or in this case, the city council.<sup>224</sup> I never came across a Hartford city manager who was considered the most powerful individual in Hartford and more often than not they seem like political tools of the council or the mayor.<sup>225</sup> Regardless of the wisdom of having such a weak executive, creating a separate executive office, in the form of an independent mayor, would seem to confuse and undermine the purpose of having a council-

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<sup>220</sup> McKee. 31

<sup>221</sup> Chen, Xiangming, and Nick Bacon "Introduction: Once prosperous and now challenged" In *Confronting Urban Legacy: Rediscovering Hartford and New England's Forgotten Cities*. 16

<sup>222</sup> McKee. 33-4

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 33

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 29

<sup>225</sup> Roessner, Barbara "Perry Carries On." *Hartford Courant*. December 26, 1993



manager system. Yet, perhaps the greatest irony is that, for the most part, executive authority was practiced by neither the mayors nor the city managers. Oddly, real executive authority was mostly exercised by deputy mayors in Hartford.<sup>226</sup> Hartford essentially had no executive office with substantial power or independence, so controlling five votes on the City Council was more important than any job title. The leader of the Council majority typically held this title to formalize the power they held regardless. Assuming they could keep enough Councilmembers in line, these deputy mayors had the real power to hire and fire city managers as well as department heads.

The other important development in Hartford was demographic change and population decline. While non-whites were only 4% of the population in 1940, they had become 15% by 1960.<sup>227</sup> More importantly, minorities constituted 22% of the under 20 population, meaning that the minority population looked set to grow even more in the future.<sup>228</sup> Related to these population changes, and Hartford's increasingly obvious decline, riots broke out, mainly in the northern part of Hartford where minorities were concentrated.<sup>229</sup> Once again, Hartford was still far from alone in the problems it faced and it would seem Hartford's riots were comparatively small.<sup>230</sup> However, the riots would heighten the perception of Hartford as a declining, unsafe city. Despite the growing minority population and shrinking white population, it would still be some time before people of color really took the reins of leadership in Hartford.

#### The Community Renewal Program (CRP)

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<sup>226</sup> McKee. 34

<sup>227</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. II-38

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* II-38

<sup>229</sup> Waters, Robert. "Timing of City Riots Poor; They Are Not in Season Now." *Hartford Courant*. September 14, 1969.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

The beginning of all the negative trends associated with Hartford today can be seen in the 1965 Community Renewal Program (CRP), which highlighted a declining educated population, greater unemployment, reductions in income relative to the suburbs, and a shrinking white population.<sup>231</sup> The CRP was produced before Hartford experienced any riots and before it adopted a partisan council system. The circumstances surrounding its creation were probably very similar to those in the 1950's, but with the impact of ten years of noticeable decline. This decline is evident throughout the CRP, despite its fairly optimistic outlook overall. Interestingly, despite experiencing significant population loss between 1950 and 1960 the city still seems to predict population increase, albeit at the very slow pace of two or three thousand more people by 1980.<sup>232</sup> Economically, the CRP found that virtually all economic indicators, such as manufacturing employment, population, retail sales and personal services, were on the decline.<sup>233</sup> The only economic activities that did not trend downward were banking, savings and loans associations, downtown department stores and insurance operations.<sup>234</sup> This is something of a mixed-blessing since Hartford's remaining industries of strength were in fields increasingly out of reach of its growing low-skilled and uneducated population. These activities were almost entirely located downtown and reflect the CRP's finding that much of the downtown had been revitalized by urban renewal and that revitalizing the inner residential neighborhoods was the next step.<sup>235</sup>

The Commission asked for more resources and staff in the 1955 plan<sup>236</sup> and based on the Community Renewal Program it would appear their requests were answered. The CRP is much

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<sup>231</sup> *Community Renewal Program* II-36-38

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* II-52

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.* II-50

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* II-43-44

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.* ii

<sup>236</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow.* 38

more expansive than the 1955 plan and is several times its length. The Commission also finally had its own staff and even hired professional consultants to produce the CRP.<sup>237</sup> It may seem trivial but official endorsement of the CRP by the City Council is actually significant as it was not always granted.<sup>238</sup> It seems as though plans that lacked official approval would be used when convenient and ignored otherwise since the City Council never made any commitment to carry out the plans.<sup>239</sup> The city may have adopted an incredibly ambitious CRP in 1965 because there was significant federal support for urban renewal at the time and a comprehensive plan endorsed by the city council was necessary to receive the funds.<sup>240</sup> The less ambitious plans of development made shortly before and after 1965 might not have been adopted because there were no federal grants contingent on their adoption.

Regardless of the city's motivations, the CRP is perhaps the most ambitious plan ever produced by the Commission and is reflective of the Great Society era in which it was created. The federal funding was so generous during this period it even paid the majority of the cost of producing the plan.<sup>241</sup> Inspired by this largesse, the plan calls for the total renewal of Hartford and the removal of all blight from the city over a 15-20-year period.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, its plans require the displacement and relocation of 7,005 families and 1,156 businesses over the same time period.<sup>243</sup> Based on the CRP's description of earlier relocation efforts, the most the city ever had to do at one time was 1,500 families.<sup>244</sup> Despite the massive displacement and relocation

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<sup>237</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. N.p.

<sup>238</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 93

<sup>239</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Commission on the City Plan. *Plan of Development*, City of Hartford. Hartford, CT: Commission, 1972. N.p.

<sup>240</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. I-9, I-25

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* i

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* V-42

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* V-38

called for, the creators of the CRP took pains to emphasize that the renewal they were talking about was not a “bull-dozer type operation,”<sup>245</sup> like earlier urban renewal projects. They also explicitly wanted to avoid what happened with relocation after earlier renewal projects, where minorities were almost uniformly confined to the north end of Hartford, unless they moved to one of the public housing projects in the south.<sup>246</sup> Still, their possibly misplaced confidence that they had learned enough from the past to have urban renewal without its negative impacts is also apparent.<sup>247</sup>

According to the CRP, urban renewal practices had become more “sophisticated” since the earliest renewal projects and now rehabilitation and conservation were recognized as valuable tools, in addition to clearance.<sup>248</sup> However, spot clearance, the demolition of individual blighted properties to prevent blight from spreading, is considered a form of conservation so it is a somewhat misleading label.<sup>249</sup> Interestingly, the CRP also says that “the lion’s share of the rehabilitation...should be undertaken privately. The city’s role should be one of upgrading an area through conservation, and of helping certain area residents to obtain the necessary financing to privately rehabilitate their own structures.”<sup>250</sup> Therefore, the city is primarily responsible for clearance of heavily blighted areas and conservation, which includes spot clearance, of less blighted areas. The areas that are most intensively studied are also those with the worst blight, which all qualified for federally assisted clearance and redevelopment in part or all of the

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<sup>245</sup> "150 Albany Ave. Residents Hear City Views on Renewal Questions."

<sup>246</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. V-40

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.* V-41

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* I-6

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* IV-13

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* IV-14

neighborhood.<sup>251</sup> It would seem demolition is still a central aspect to urban renewal, their claims to the contrary.

Some of the reasons the CRP chose not to emphasize rehabilitation are quite telling, such as “The city does not have any areas that possess the unique environmental charm that has stimulated upper class rehabilitation in other cities.”<sup>252</sup> This fairly harsh assessment came from a separate study on housing rehabilitation that appears to have been produced by an outside group, based on the directness of its negativity.<sup>253</sup> It basically says that Hartford lacks the “charm” necessary to attract gentrification. The CRP seems to accept this assessment and elsewhere says “it is somewhat moot to conclude that the middle and upper income groups...will return to Hartford in any large numbers.”<sup>254</sup> Still, another reason given is that “rehabilitation and the resultant rent increases...compared to the rents required for new co-op housing does not make rehabilitation very appealing.”<sup>255</sup> Thus, it would seem that rehabilitation was not only difficult but that the consequences of it would not serve the purposes of the CRP.<sup>256</sup> In addition, the federal government did not appropriate funds that would have assisted rehabilitation and the CRP suggests that the rehabilitation policy could change if these funds are appropriated.<sup>257</sup> This indicates that urban development at the time was substantially tied to federal initiatives that heavily favored demolition over rehabilitation. In this pre-gentrification era, it probably seemed highly unlikely that a market for historic housing would form and attract those with higher incomes. In the process, Hartford may have inadvertently sabotaged its own potential for

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid. IV-20-65

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. V-85

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. V-84

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. II-52-53

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. V-85

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. V-85

<sup>257</sup> Ibid. V-86

gentrification by destroying much of its older housing. Eventually, cities would also have to alter their approach to development significantly when federal funds in general began to dry up. Ironically, they would realize the potential for private rehabilitation only after engaging in large-scale, public clearance.

Some statements make it difficult to really pinpoint the CRP's opinion of the possibility or desirability of a return to the city by suburbanites. For instance, immediately after it says it is "moot" to expect the higher income groups to return in large numbers, it says the city needs to provide attractive new neighborhoods in part to encourage some of the same higher income groups to move back to the city.<sup>258</sup> The only way I can see these statements as not contradictory is to place significance on the difference between "large numbers" and "some". The desirability of attracting higher income families actually appears throughout the CRP as a major goal.<sup>259</sup> Yet it is also invariably preceded by the goal of retaining the higher income residents who are still in the city.<sup>260</sup> Perhaps this is another subtle qualification that explains why the CRP seems to simultaneously want gentrification even as it thinks it is unlikely or has negative consequences. Instead of a primary strategy, gentrification was more of a secondary objective to retaining the middle-income population that still lived in the city.

Another sign that the CRP was mostly focused on improving the lives of residents is that it acknowledges that physical renewal is only part of the revitalization process and that without social and educational resources, it will not be enough to create renewed communities.<sup>261</sup> The vast majority of these resources are educational in nature, reflecting the extent of the declining

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. II-53

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. III-3, III-9

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. III-3, III-9

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. V-90

educated populace.<sup>262</sup> Another large category is work training, due to the rising low-skilled, unemployed population.<sup>263</sup> Finally, reflecting the demographic changes toward female-headed households with young children, day care services, childcare instruction and a distinct category for services to unwed mothers are included in the CRP.

As for the actual renewal program, the CRP's map of heavily blighted areas has many similarities to the 1955 plan's map of current and possible redevelopment sites.<sup>264</sup> However, the sites are significantly larger than they were in 1955 and a couple of sites are located in the Northeast neighborhood, which was not under consideration earlier.<sup>265</sup> This indicates some level of continuity, even though the 1955 plan wasn't officially adopted by the city council. It also suggests that certain areas of the city were epicenters of blight that began deteriorating earlier than the others. The Arsenal area in the neighborhood of Clay Arsenal seems to be the most deteriorated of them all. Aside from the CRP's evaluation that it is essentially a slum, the area is over 90% black in a city that is 85% white.<sup>266</sup> Such high concentrations of a minority group in a small segment of the city are indicative of redlining and similar policies that steered minorities towards certain less desirable neighborhoods.

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid. V-90-99

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. V-90-99

<sup>264</sup> *Community Renewal Program IV-16 and Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 28

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. IV-16

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. IV-20

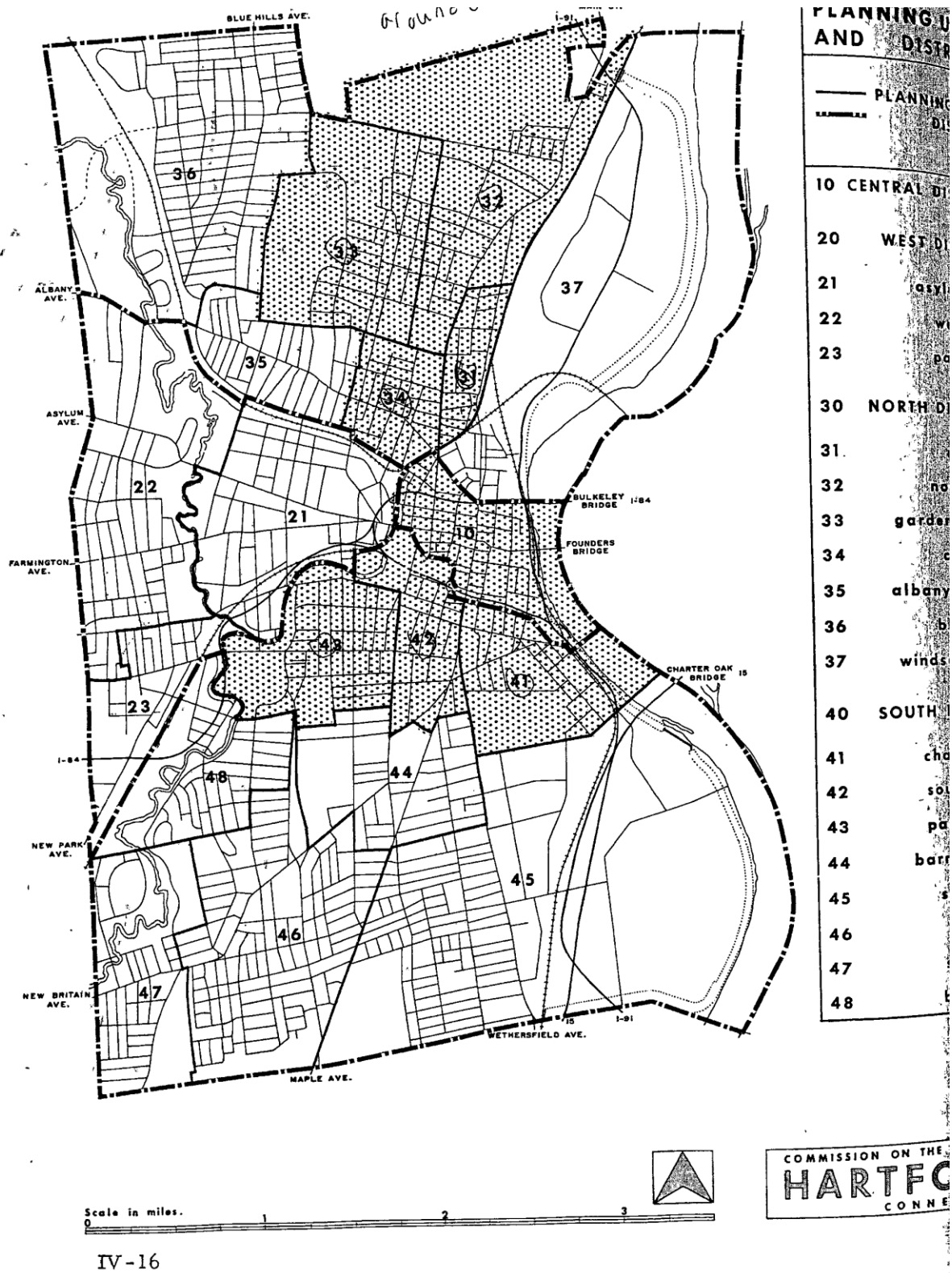


Figure 4: *Community Renewal Program's* Map of heavily blighted areas in 1965



Based on Figures 3 and 4, a pattern becomes apparent that the northern section of Hartford, as well as the immediate environs of Downtown, are identified as the worst sections of the city. Three neighborhoods are exceptions to this general rule but blight was becoming more apparent in most of them. Asylum Hill was the only residential neighborhood bordering Downtown that was not yet heavily blighted. However, it bordered multiple heavily blighted neighborhoods and signs of deterioration were becoming apparent.<sup>267</sup> In north Hartford, Upper Albany and Blue Hills were northern neighborhoods not considered heavily blighted.<sup>268</sup> Upper Albany bordered more blighted areas but does not appear to be declining as much as Asylum Hill, though fears of minority in-migration and rising rents were expressed by the community.<sup>269</sup> Blue Hills, by contrast, was one of the best neighborhoods in the city at the time with residents that were more likely to be home-owners than renters and had higher incomes and educational attainment than the rest of the city.<sup>270</sup>

The CRP presents Downtown, South Meadows and North Meadows as “special study areas’ distinct from the major and minor blight categories applied to the other neighborhoods.<sup>271</sup> As with the 1955 plan, the Commission was still trying to make both Meadows into industrial areas, especially North Meadows, but little seems to have occurred in the intervening decade.<sup>272</sup> The city would eventually abandon these efforts after repeated failure and the incursion of non-industrial uses.<sup>273</sup> By contrast, it seems as though past urban renewal accomplished what the Commission hoped it would in the downtown area, with the exception of causing significant

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid. IV-16

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. IV-16

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. IV-81-84

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. IV-85

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. IV-109

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. IV-121-133

<sup>273</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 36

depopulation in the Central Business District (CBD).<sup>274</sup> Even being at the crossroads of highways I-84 and I-91, one of which cut Hartford in half while the other cut it off from the Connecticut river, is presented as a “strategic location” that could “augur well” for the CBD.<sup>275</sup>

However, pockets of blight remained despite their successes and another grand project was called for, this time a civic center that would have several entertainment venues from sports facilities to concert halls.<sup>276</sup> As Constitution Plaza was a “commercial center”, the creation of this new entertainment complex can be seen as complementary to Hartford’s original downtown renewal project.<sup>277</sup> Constitution Plaza was aimed at retaining and attracting businesses to the city and the civic center was aimed at retaining and attracting individuals. The Commission’s vision for the surrounding area centers on creating more residential, cultural and institutional uses in the CBD.<sup>278</sup> New retail and commercial activities are only discussed to say they should be developed to complement the cultural and other uses.<sup>279</sup> Based on this vision, it appears that the Commission thinks the city’s commercial development is in good shape and does not need to be expanded significantly. In addition, the confusion around the Commission’s apparent desire for both gentrification and protecting residents becomes somewhat clarified. Downtown Hartford is clearly treated as its own economy entity, virtually distinct from the other neighborhoods. As the center of suburban power in Hartford, it receives a great deal of attention and is treated far differently from other neighborhoods. The deference the city had to wider economic interests in Downtown is demonstrated by their willingness to turn it into a mostly non-residential neighborhood just to compete with the suburbs. Thus, Downtown and the neighborhoods seem

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<sup>274</sup> *Community Renewal Program* IV-111

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.* IV-112

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.* IV-115

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.* I-16

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* IV-115

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.* IV-115

set on two very different tracks and dominated by two very different constituencies and the Commission tries to cater to both.

Finally, the need for greater regional cooperation is once again apparent in the CRP. The issue might be getting even more important because it says that many of Hartford's problems are regional in scope and difficult to solve strictly at the local level.<sup>280</sup> As with the 1955 plan, the CRP sees positive steps being made toward the realization that Hartford's revitalization is important for the suburbs as well as the city.<sup>281</sup> Of course, aside from noncommittal regional meetings and other efforts that do not actually create concrete results, there really is not much progress being made.<sup>282</sup> The need for greater regionalism will be a constant throughout the plans, as it still has not been realized to a significant degree. Yet, at the same time, regional governance comes with risks that even Hartford, the supposed would-be beneficiary of a more centralized system, might come to regret its creation. As the federal highways and demolition incentives make clear, even when autonomy is traded for something highly valued, the consequences of sacrificing agency for short-term goals can be far reaching. The 1970's would provide further proof that not all regionalist institutions provide solutions to regional problems.

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid. II-50

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. III-18

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. III-18

## Chapter 2-Hartford During the Early Years of Gentrification

### The 1970's – Carbone and the Bishops

The 1970's was a time of transition and change in both the U.S. and Hartford. Between 1970 and 1980, Hartford's population would shrink by roughly 13% from 158,017 to 136,392, losing an astounding 20,000 people.<sup>283,284,285</sup> This still holds the record for greatest population decline over a decade in Hartford's history. Those who left Hartford were, predictably, white people. Hartford was around 64% non-Hispanic white in 1970 and by 1980 it was a majority-minority city with non-Hispanic whites reduced to 45% of the population.<sup>286</sup> While the African American population did increase as a percentage of the total, it was the relatively rapid growth of the Hispanic population that really created the dramatic demographic shift.<sup>287</sup> Hartford's racial politics would now be split three ways instead of two, with African Americans, whites and Puerto Rican Hispanics forming uneasy racial coalitions in order to be palatable to the whole city.<sup>288</sup> These growing racial divides exacerbated the decline of the old Democratic machine, which had been built by ethnic whites.

While John Bailey would not die until 1975, the machine he had dominated for so long started losing its grip on politics, especially in Hartford. As previously mentioned, Ann Uccello's victory in 1967 would be the first major sign of the faltering Democratic Party machine. Thomas Meskill, also a Republican, would then become governor in 1971, but not before the Democratic primary was won by a candidate not aligned with Bailey.<sup>289</sup> Later, the most powerful man in

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<sup>283</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Total Population: Hartford, 1970." Social Explorer. Web. April 29, 2019

<sup>284</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Total Population: Hartford, 1980." Social Explorer. Web. April 29, 2019

<sup>285</sup> *Hartford Plan of Development. 1985-2000.* 21

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>288</sup> Noel Jr., Don. "City Manager Inherits Spoils of Racial Division." *Hartford Courant*. October 1, 1984

<sup>289</sup> Zaiman, Jack. "City Democrats: Hot Control Fight Continues." *Hartford Courant*. May 2, 1971

Hartford for most of the 70's, Nicholas Carbone, would be a Democrat that did not owe his position of power to Bailey.<sup>290</sup> Things spiraled out of control even further after his death, when the Democratic lieutenant governor ran against the incumbent Democratic governor.<sup>291</sup>

Carbone emerged in the 70's as a figure of city and state-wide significance.<sup>292</sup> He had been involved in Hartford politics since the late 1960's but the "Carbone era" really begins in the 1970's.<sup>293</sup> In a city government consciously designed to limit executive power, Carbone realized that anyone who had five reliable votes on the City Council was essentially in charge.<sup>294</sup> He would become a polarizing figure in Hartford, variously called a "radical," "progressive" and "populist."<sup>295</sup> The extent of his influence also caused him to be likened to a party boss, both by contemporaries and in hindsight.<sup>296</sup> However, this is somewhat inaccurate as Carbone was more than willing to fuel infighting in the Democratic Party to get what he wanted, which no good political boss would do.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, Carbone's indirect and seemingly subversive method of governing was practically required by Hartford's political system. He could not be the mayor or the city manager, the ostensible executives in Hartford, without forfeiting all of his power, as the mayor had no vote and the city manager could be fired at any time by the City Council.<sup>298</sup> The offices he did manage to hold, deputy mayor and later Democratic town chairman, were really the only ones available that could give his power some legitimacy without limiting it at the same

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<sup>290</sup> Driscoll, Theodore. "Council Makes It Official; Carbone Voted Majority Leader." June 30, 1971

<sup>291</sup> Broder, David. "In John Bailey's Wake: A Party at Its Own Throat." *Hartford Courant*. September 6, 1978.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. N.p.

<sup>293</sup> McKee. 34

<sup>294</sup> Ibid. 34

<sup>295</sup> Clavel, Pierre. "What the Progressive City Was." In *Activists in City Hall*, 16-34. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. And McKee. "Mike Peters and the Legacy of Leadership in Hartford, Connecticut." 34

<sup>296</sup> Zaiman, Jack. "Party Scattered into Rival Cliques." *Hartford Courant*. July 23, 1978.

<sup>297</sup> Broder. N.p.

<sup>298</sup> McKee. 29

time.<sup>299</sup> Indeed, he would not be the last person to rise to power only to be vilified for trying to bring some semblance of executive decision making to Hartford's political structure.<sup>300</sup>

Carbone had many enemies but two of them, Mayor George Athanson and Councilman Robert Ludgin, would bring about his stunning fall from power in 1979. Athanson was mayor of Hartford for a whole decade, from 1971 to 1981, and was well suited to the formally inconsequential and ceremonial position.<sup>301</sup> Ludgin only joined the City Council in 1977, but as a staunch conservative was one of Carbone's most vociferous enemies.<sup>302</sup> Although, in a sense, Carbone brought about his own political end by attempting to seize even greater power at a time when he was already seen as having too much control. Carbone decided to run for mayor against Athanson while simultaneously creating a charter revision commission to create a strong mayor system in Hartford.<sup>303</sup> In the end, the charter revision never happened, Carbone and almost every council member who backed him lost and Athanson continued as mayor for another two years with Robert Ludgin replacing Carbone as deputy mayor.<sup>304</sup> Grand ambitions followed by ignominious defeat will be a surprisingly recurrent theme in Hartford's political history. Often, just when a politician emerges that is able to be both popular with the people and influential with the Council, single incidents or policy positions undo them.

As later plans of development will attest, Hartford was a "company town" for much of its history up to the 1990's.<sup>305</sup> The major corporations headquartered in Hartford had a strong

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<sup>299</sup> Zaiman, Jack. "Democratic Liberals Ready to Endorse". *Hartford Courant*. April 13, 1974.

<sup>300</sup> Seline, Anita. "Perry is Denied Fourth Term in Office." *Hartford Courant*. November 3, 1993.

<sup>301</sup> McKee. 34

<sup>302</sup> Sherman, Howard. "Ludgin Expects To Do 'Surprisingly Well' in Election." *Hartford Courant*. October 29, 1981

<sup>303</sup> McKee. 35

<sup>304</sup> Giacomo, Carol. "City's Democrats Face More Internal Warfare in Coming Year." *Hartford Courant*. January 7, 1980

<sup>305</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 37

history of providing local leadership and being genuinely concerned with local affairs, for better or worse.<sup>306</sup> The CEO's of these major corporations were the so-called Bishops, a name that would seem to be derogatory and indicate their influence was not entirely appreciated. The Bishops had been growing increasingly involved in development as Hartford declined and were major proponents of the urban renewal projects in the 1950's and 60's.<sup>307</sup> Perhaps emboldened by continuing decline in the 1970's, the Bishops changed their strategy from simply supporting government renewal efforts to forming their own development agency, the Greater Hartford Process.<sup>308</sup>

The Process was not a complete failure; its greatest accomplishment was the Hartford Civic Center, which admittedly had its roof collapse in 1978.<sup>309</sup> A few other modest projects were also completed such as rehabilitating apartments and upgrading equipment in Hartford's public schools.<sup>310</sup> However, these represent a significant failure compared to their initial, naïve, ambitions for Hartford and the surrounding region. It almost appears as though Process' leadership considered themselves the regional entity Hartford had been waiting for and wanted to make a more equitable distribution of people throughout the region. The Process called for creating a series of "new towns" in the suburbs, particularly Coventry, that would combat urban sprawl and be a sort of model urban development.<sup>311</sup> Nowhere in the literature is there another example of a corporation or group of corporations trying to revitalize a central city by focusing most of its resources on suburban development. It is completely counter-intuitive to do so but

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>307</sup> *Community Renewal Program* I-22

<sup>308</sup> Walsh. 37

<sup>309</sup> "Roof Collapse Hearings to Resume." *Hartford Courant*. April 19, 1978

<sup>310</sup> McKee. 37

<sup>311</sup> Grava, Bill. "Firm, Discarding 'New Town,' Ponders its Acres." *Hartford Courant*. December 19, 1974

once again reflects how little independence Hartford has from its surrounding region. Hartford's corporate and government leaders were widely in agreement that Hartford's problems could only be solved with regional solutions and the Process is reflective of this. However, the regionalist narrative in the Hartford area often serves to justify the creation of unelected regional agencies outside of the city's control because Hartford's suburbs will vehemently resist any regional government that puts Hartford in a position of power relative to the suburbs.

Unfortunately, both people in Coventry and people in Hartford were suspicious of the Process' motives and thought it was actually a corporate plot to dump poor minorities from the city in eastern Connecticut and redevelop the land they lived on in Hartford.<sup>312</sup> There was a kernel of truth to this, as Coventry was meant to provide a new mixed-income urban community outside of Hartford that at least some Hartford residents could afford to move to.<sup>313</sup> The profits acquired from selling the new developments in Coventry would then be used to fund development in Hartford itself.<sup>314</sup> Public sentiment turned against the Process yet again when a memo leaked from the Process that said Puerto Rican in-migration should be reduced, the welfare dependent population concentrated in Frog Hollow and Clay Hill and the "ghetto" moved away from Downtown.<sup>315</sup> The timing of its release in 1975 was particularly bad, as the Civic Center had just recently opened and suburbanites were greeted by 1,000 protesting Puerto Ricans at one of its first events.<sup>316</sup> The Process had also just been forced to abandon its Coventry project at the end of 1974 due to the combination of a similarly hostile reception in Coventry and

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<sup>312</sup> Walsh. 37

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>315</sup> Simmons. 101

<sup>316</sup> Papirno, Elissa and Bill Grava. "1,000 Puerto Ricans Protest at Center." *Hartford Courant*. January 22, 1975.



growing inflation during an economic downturn.<sup>317</sup> Thus, the 1970's were a decade of false starts in Hartford, with failures so spectacular they tended to drown out the more modest achievements.

The story of the Process is important because it appears that Hartford began the second wave of gentrification a few years too early, with potentially significant consequences. The mid-1970's recession that finally forced the Process to end is the same recession that supposedly ended the first wave of gentrification.<sup>318</sup> However, Hartford in the years before this recession checks off many of the boxes that define second wave gentrification, namely, the presence of significant, successful community resistance to elite development projects and the fact that Hartford's corporate community was leading the development, not the city.<sup>319</sup> The significance of the early start is that the recession that created the conditions for the second wave in other cities arguably prevented any gentrification from occurring in Hartford. Although, the community resistance from Hartford and Coventry was determined to stop the Process, so the recession may have just been the straw that broke the Process' back.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the Plan of Development for the 1970's was made in 1972 because it is so early in the decade. It would have been interesting to see what the Commission thought about the Process, for instance, either during the height of its ambitions or after its disbandment. At least at first, the Process was one of Hartford's most ambitious and promising revitalization attempts and yet one would not know it ever occurred from the Plans of Development. It is not mentioned in any of the plans after 1972 either. It is possible the Commission simply felt the almost exclusively privately funded and organized endeavor was not

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<sup>317</sup> Pappas, Nancy. "1974: Democratic Party Up, Economy Down." *Hartford Courant*. January 1, 1975.

<sup>318</sup> Hackworth and Smith. 467

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. 467

under their purview, although they show a willingness to touch on many subjects they have no direct authority over.

### The 1972 Plan of Development

What is immediately striking about the 1972 plan of development is how much more negative it is than the CRP. The CRP acknowledges that Downtown had been revitalized earlier, and that the residential neighborhoods had not, but this is presented as a “next step” that the CRP was designed to address.<sup>320</sup> By contrast, the 1972 plan presents the situation in a tale of two cities fashion as a “city of contrasts, in part regenerated, in part neglected.”<sup>321</sup> It is tempting to see this as an indication that the CRP was not effective or carried out for some reason, but the first phase of the CRP’s renewal and relocation program was not set to end until 1975 at the earliest.<sup>322</sup> It is unlikely that new leadership affected the plan’s outlook, as the Commission’s chairman and its staff director were both involved in creating the CRP.<sup>323</sup> It seems instead that the Commission is frustrated with the City Council’s failure to adopt the 1955 plan as the official development policy of the city and its use of the Capital Improvement Program on an ad hoc and underfunded basis.<sup>324</sup> The Capital Improvement Program was the city’s mechanism for funding, scheduling and coordinating almost all of the projects related to the Plans of Development.<sup>325</sup> Evidently, miscellaneous items would be tacked onto the Program with little regard for how it might affect the completion of the city’s goals. Thus, Hartford certainly had its fair share of poor management, short-sighted decision making and wasteful practices that went unaddressed for long periods of time.

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<sup>320</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. ii

<sup>321</sup> *Plan of Development*. 1

<sup>322</sup> *Community Renewal Program* n.p.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* n.p. and *Plan of Development* n.p.

<sup>324</sup> *Plan of Development*. n.p., 63

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.* 62

Constitution Plaza, the symbol of urban renewal Hartford, also gets a very different assessment. The CRP presents Constitution Plaza as basically an unmitigated success, while the 1972 plan describes its results as mixed at best.<sup>326</sup> Within the plaza itself was a pedestrian “haven,” but it failed to attract shoppers because it was an island surrounded by heavy traffic.<sup>327</sup> Going forward, they would need to develop a pedestrian system to link the “people generators” in the city.<sup>328</sup> In addition, no new major retail space had been developed since Constitution Plaza opened and the city’s retail sector was starting to struggle against suburban competitors.<sup>329</sup> This is the first criticism of urban renewal projects that goes beyond displacement and challenges instead whether such projects really created much economic benefit.

The Commission also comes across as exasperated, as it begins by saying “very few of the proposals contained in this plan are brand new.”<sup>330</sup> This suggests the city is slow to act on initiatives even when city agencies and private groups provide them with viable options. These likely include the recommendations from the 1955 General Plan since, despite not being officially adopted, the plan talks about the “direction in which the City was being guided by the 1955 General Plan.”<sup>331</sup> Ostensibly, this means the City Council used the 1955 plan the same way it used the Capital Improvement Program, in an ad hoc manner that allowed them to ignore aspects of it on a whim.

In discussing its goals, the plan comes across as more circumspect or modest about its potential. It is the only plan to say that any attempt to provide goals for a future Hartford is

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<sup>326</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. IV-119 and *Plan of Development*. 15

<sup>327</sup> *Plan of Development*. 15

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.* 15

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* 6-8

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

“fraught with controversy.”<sup>332</sup> Other plans will acknowledge that it is difficult to make particular predictions, such as whether rehabilitation makes economic sense or not,<sup>333</sup> but the 1972 plan seems like it is trying not to offend by adding that the status quo is not “all bad or all good.”<sup>334</sup> In another contrast, the 1972 plan says there is no guarantee the goals will be reached within a 10 or 15 year period, while the 1955 plan says it is not “a dream to wait for 5 years, or 10, or possibly more.”<sup>335</sup> Unsupportive local attitudes may have contributed to the plan’s more modest language, since it also discusses facing strong opposition to rezoning and suggests there was some vacant land suitable for housing that could not be used because of a lack of “neighborhood acceptance.”<sup>336</sup> It unfortunately does not clarify which communities or neighborhoods were resistant, though perhaps it was a general opposition and not confined to certain groups or geographies.

The Commission also admits it can offer no ultimate solutions to the city’s housing, education and transportation issues as only regional solutions could truly address them and the Commission can only advise the city.<sup>337</sup> They still offer advice, such as pushing for legislative action to create school districts that cross town and City boundaries.<sup>338</sup> They also suggest more concrete policies the city can take on its own, such as eliminating on-street parking to deal with congestion, while acknowledging that these improvements will not solve the root problems.<sup>339</sup> This reflects a slight but important change between the 1972 and 1955 plans when it comes to regionalism. In 1955, sound growth and development would be best promoted by regional

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>333</sup> *Community Renewal Program* V-81

<sup>334</sup> *Plan of Development*. 19

<sup>335</sup> *Plan of Development* 19 and *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow* 38

<sup>336</sup> *Plan of Development* 29

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. 40

planning, but in 1972 crucial city goals could not be accomplished without regional cooperation.<sup>340</sup> As Hartford's problems increased, regionalism changed from the optimal scale of planning to the necessary scale of planning.

The 1972 plan approaches Hartford's demographic change unlike most of the plans. In regards to school age population, it is more in keeping with the specificity provided by other plans. Despite being majority white overall, the school-age population was only one-third white in 1969-70.<sup>341</sup> The plan practically predicts the outcome of *Sheff v. O'Neill* by saying that "racial imbalance is built into Hartford's school system because of the City's housing and demographic patterns."<sup>342</sup> Relatedly, the plan found that socio-economic balance in classrooms was similarly impossible to achieve on a strictly local level.<sup>343</sup> However, the 1972 plan does not provide a detailed demographic breakdown of the population as a whole, which virtually every other plan does. Aside from the school age population, it does not even provide estimations of the city's demographics. Instead it speaks in vague terms about how a "large group" of middle and upper income residents left the city and were replaced "in part" by southern blacks and Puerto Ricans.<sup>344</sup> It is similarly vague about the size of the dependent population, saying that the young and elderly "have increased as a percentage" of total population.<sup>345</sup> The omission of data backing up these statements is unique and I cannot think of a reason why they would not provide it. It is not because the city lacked access to the recent census because the plan cites it as a source for the data it does present.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid. 19 and *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 40

<sup>341</sup> *Plan of Development*. 50

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>346</sup> Ibid. 4

The diverging fortunes of manufacturing and white-collar industries like insurance and banking continued in the 1970's. In addition to shrinking overall, manufacturing was becoming less diversified, regionally and within the city, and metal fabrication and aircraft/defense manufacturing were really the only remaining forms of industry by this time.<sup>347</sup> The plan appreciates how problematic this dependence could be, as any cuts in federal defense spending could cause higher unemployment, which was already stuck at around 10-11% in the city, compared to the 3-5% average in the Hartford Labor Market Area.<sup>348</sup> It is also apparent that the city was still trying, and largely not succeeding, to attract industry to the North and South Meadows.<sup>349</sup> In addition to these neighborhoods, the Parkville neighborhood is also presented as an area for potential industrial development.<sup>350</sup> Significantly, the plan still refers to Hartford as an industrial center, if an ailing one at that.<sup>351</sup> Therefore, Hartford's industrial base was still considered critical even as it became an increasingly white-collar city.

In 1972, over half the workforce was located in Downtown and Asylum Hill in the white-collar industries, where most growth was occurring.<sup>352</sup> It appears these industries were actually physically growing as well because they were radiating out of Downtown into the "CBD fringe," but mainly to its northern fringe.<sup>353</sup> The southern fringe of Downtown was still undergoing urban renewal.<sup>354</sup> Asylum Hill is considered unique because it is a transitional neighborhood, i.e. in the process of becoming blighted, but its land values were actually climbing.<sup>355</sup> Interestingly, the

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. 6, 37

<sup>349</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>350</sup> Ibid. 11

<sup>351</sup> Ibid. 22

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>353</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>354</sup> Ibid. 9

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. 10

plan says that the challenge for the CBD is to stimulate development, whereas the challenge for Asylum Hill is to control it.<sup>356</sup> This indicates that Asylum Hill is actually developing faster than the CBD and that the development has occurred largely without government supervision. If anything, they seem surprised that Asylum Hill is experiencing so much development.

However, the new development was not without its drawbacks and residential uses in neighborhoods like Asylum Hill were threatened by it. Commercial and institutional uses constituted almost a third of Hartford's land uses by 1972 and their expansion showed no sign of slowing.<sup>357</sup> As a result, Hartford's role as "the commercial, governmental and institutional center of the Region" continued, but it could "no longer remain as the metropolitan residential hub."<sup>358</sup> This reveals a lot about Hartford's relationship with its suburbs, as its economy is so dominated by the strictly non-residential needs of the suburban population that residential neighborhoods are being threatened by uncoordinated growth in commercial and institutional uses.<sup>359</sup> It also necessarily limits the possible areas where gentrification can occur since it is a largely residential phenomenon.

The 1970's would be the last decade that saw significant urban renewal, and the plan reflects this. Even though the large renewal projects proposed by the CRP were ongoing at the time, their complete execution seems to be in doubt as federal and state funds for renewal were notably reduced.<sup>360</sup> Going forward, funds for the renewal program would need to be "used sensitively and skillfully" in order to get the maximum benefit from a now scarce resource.<sup>361</sup> For the first time, the scarcity of public funds, especially at the local level, is presented as

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid. 34

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>358</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. 34-5

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. 63

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. 63

prohibitive to carrying out all of the plan's objectives.<sup>362</sup> Importantly, at the same time that federal funds were diminishing for urban renewal, state legislation was passed that authorized the City to negotiate a "tax break" with developers for the first years of development.<sup>363</sup> Apparently, this had already been used successfully in Downtown by 1972, possibly meaning the Civic Center, and the plan encourages its expanded use in redevelopment areas like Asylum Hill.<sup>364</sup> Recent state legislation also authorized the city to negotiate with private property owners so that their taxes did not increase if they rehabilitated their property.<sup>365</sup> This is significant because the city decided not to emphasize rehabilitation in 1965 in part because there were no state or federal incentives for it.<sup>366</sup> Private rehabilitation and tax incentives for private development are indicative of a shift from government led urban renewal strategies to privately led, publicly incentivized gentrification strategies.

Lastly, the 1972 plan discusses a major transportation project, that would not be constructed ultimately, in fairly dire terms. From the beginning of the age of the automobile Hartford has faced significant challenges with parking and traffic congestion. Every plan has a section on parking and transportation but this one warrants a closer look due to the Commission's evident frustration with, ironically, the Capitol Region Planning Agency.<sup>367</sup> The irony is that the Commission advocates for regionalism throughout the decades, regardless of the politics of the time, and yet in this instance a regional agency makes a decision that seems to infuriate the Commission. The project in question was yet another highway, I-291, that would form a circumferential route around the city of Hartford, presumably allowing through-traffic to

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>364</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>366</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. V-86

<sup>367</sup> *Plan of Development* 41



avoid I-84 and I-91 during heavy traffic.<sup>368</sup> According to the plan, “Hartford will literally be strangled by automobile traffic if at least major portions of I-291 are not completed.”<sup>369</sup> One reason for the extreme language was that the Capitol Region Planning Agency had already adopted a policy of delaying I-291 to pursue a mass-transit program.<sup>370</sup> This warrants a stark assessment about the possibility for mass-transit by the Commission, which finds no indication in Hartford or the country as a whole that the public will switch to mass-transit in large numbers.<sup>371</sup> It is not that the Commission did not support mass-transit – in fact it would prefer if everyone decided to use it instead of cars – but as a practical matter it made no sense to them to abandon a viable solution to present traffic problems for an ideal the public would not support.<sup>372</sup>

However, contrary to the Commission’s dire language the City was not “strangled” by traffic. Indeed, Hartford was about to witness an economic revival that it has yet to replicate, though, given how things eventually turned out, that is probably for the best. The growth seemed so certain that some considered Hartford on the road to a complete recovery of its former economic position. Unfortunately, Hartford was actually on the road to unprecedented economic losses. How much Hartford’s growth in the 1980’s was due to the unsustainable financial practices that eventually cratered the national economy cannot be known for sure. Perhaps the fact that Hartford seemed to be on the cusp of gentrification should have made people concerned about the actual sense behind the investments being made.

#### The 1980’s Boom and Bust:

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>370</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>371</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>372</sup> Ibid. 41-43

The 1980's witnessed some of the most contentious politics in Hartford's history as the city's mayors finally tried to exert more power, mostly unsuccessfully. First, the anti-Carbone alliance that helped defeat him in 1979 quickly unraveled. His successor as deputy mayor, Robert Ludgin, managed to gain an even worse image than Carbone as an "insensitive dictator" in just two years in office.<sup>373</sup> Ludgin decided to run for mayor against Athanson in 1981, though he had little hope of winning.<sup>374</sup> Another candidate not expected to win was Thirman Milner, a state representative for Hartford.<sup>375</sup> Indeed, Milner would technically lose to Athanson in the initial election, but by a meagre 94 votes.<sup>376</sup> He would then take the bold step of accusing the Democratic Party, which supported Athanson, of engaging in an illegal conspiracy to ensure Athanson won.<sup>377</sup> Evidently, there were enough irregularities to convince a judge to void the original primary results and call a new election.<sup>378</sup> The second time around, Milner defeated Athanson by a wide margin and became Hartford's first black mayor.<sup>379</sup>

Critically, Milner seems to have not understood how powerless the mayor's office was on its own. Since the Council was the real source of power, mayors tended to run with slates of Council members who supported them. For instance, Athanson ran as the party favored candidate with a slate of Council candidates also endorsed by the party.<sup>380</sup> Milner, however, ran for mayor by himself and the entire slate of party-endorsed candidates for Council won, a pattern

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<sup>373</sup> Sherman. October 29, 1981.

<sup>374</sup> Sandberg, Jon. "Candidates Welcome News of Ludgin's Mayoral Bid." *Hartford Courant*. June 12, 1981

<sup>375</sup> Gunther, Marc. "Athanson, Milner Battle Down to Wire." *Hartford Courant*. September 9, 1981.

<sup>376</sup> Cahill, Kay. "Milner to sue for New Vote." *Hartford Courant*. September 11, 1981

<sup>377</sup> Cahill, Kay. "Milner Alleges Vote Conspiracy." *Hartford Courant*. September 16, 1981

<sup>378</sup> Sandberg, Jon. "Vote Recount Shows Milner Still Winner." *Hartford Courant*. October 17, 1981

<sup>379</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>380</sup> Gunther. N.p.

that continued in his subsequent two elections.<sup>381,382,383</sup> Thus, Milner would have a combative relationship with the Council for his entire time in office as he felt boxed out of important decision making.<sup>384</sup> He would have an even worse relationship with Democratic Party leadership, namely town chairman James Crowley, whom he essentially accused of rigging the Democratic mayoral primary.<sup>385</sup> Finally, possibly frustrated with the limits of the office, Milner decided not to run for re-election in 1987, but endorsed Carrie Saxon-Perry, black woman and state representative for Hartford, as the next mayor even though she was not running at the time.<sup>386</sup> Her time as mayor would be relatively uneventful until the 1990's.

Beginning in the late 1970's, but really taking off in the mid 1980's, the city experienced a stunning recovery that caused city officials and scholars alike to describe, at least parts of the city, as "rejuvenating"<sup>387</sup> and "revitalizing".<sup>388,389</sup> The growth was fueled by a boom in Downtown office development that lowered vacancy so much that Downtown became a tight and competitive real estate market.<sup>390</sup> Within this new economic context, an issue known as linkage came to dominate Hartford's politics. Linkage was a fairly broad term that could describe any set of policies or regulations designed to share the wealth created by downtown

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>382</sup> Williams, Larry and Mark Pazniokas. "Endorsed Democrats Rout Challengers." *Hartford Courant*. September 11, 1985.

<sup>383</sup> Sherman, Howard and Jon Sandberg. "Smith May Drop Independent Bid." *Hartford Courant*. September 15, 1983.

<sup>384</sup> Pazniokas, Mark. "Veto Brings Milner's Rift with City Council in Focus." *Hartford Courant*. June 1, 1987.

<sup>385</sup> Cahill. "Milner Alleges Vote Conspiracy."

<sup>386</sup> Pazniokas. "Milner Surprises City with Decision Not to Seek Re-Election." *Hartford Courant*. June 10, 1987.

<sup>387</sup> *Hartford Plan of Development, 1985-2000*. 12

<sup>388</sup> Degiovanni, Frank F. "Patterns of Change in Housing Market Activity in Revitalizing Neighborhoods." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 49, no. 1 (1983): 22-39. doi:10.1080/01944368308976193.

<sup>389</sup> Zavarella. 382.

<sup>390</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 3

development with the neighborhoods.<sup>391</sup> However, linkage supporters in Hartford were particularly inspired by existing programs in Boston and San Francisco, which essentially created an extra tax on office development that would pay into a fund for neighborhood improvements like affordable housing.<sup>392</sup>

Milner, Perry and neighborhood organizations supported linkage because they felt the benefits of downtown development were only felt by suburbanites and downtown developers, while the negative consequences were borne solely by poor minorities.<sup>393</sup> In addition, a new third party called People for Change supported linkage, as well as generally being to the left of the mainstream Democratic party.<sup>394</sup> From 1987 to 1993, the entirety of Perry's time as mayor, People for Change would control at least two of the council seats reserved for a minority party and all three from 1991-1993.<sup>395</sup> Their timing is somewhat coincidental as, even though the party supported Perry, she was not involved in their formation.<sup>396</sup> Although, her defeat in 1993 arguably caused the group not to contest any further elections.<sup>397</sup> None of her successors would be as bold in challenging the Democratic establishment or downtown business interests.

Based on Milner's strictly populist political style, I would say the plan produced during his time in office is not really reflective of his views. Instead, the vision of the Democratic Party establishment, with its long connection to Downtown and business interests, comes across most strongly. The Plan does not fawn over the growth of businesses by any stretch, it even has criticism for the way development has occurred in residential areas, but it is devoid of the

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<sup>391</sup> Clavel. 57, 66

<sup>392</sup> Simmons. 103

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. 102-3

<sup>394</sup> Ibid. 103

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>396</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>397</sup> Clavel. 21

bombastic language and accusations that populists like Milner were wont to use against political elites.<sup>398</sup> The primary difference is the plan's relative lack of urgency and concern about out-of-control downtown development.

### The 1985 Plan

The 1985 plan represents a significant departure from previous plans in many ways. For one, it was the first plan of development created by the Commission that was officially endorsed by the City Council.<sup>399</sup> A possible explanation for the Council finally deciding to endorse the Commission's plan was the rapid and problematic office development that was occurring downtown. The city actually imposed a six-month downtown construction moratorium in 1983 to give themselves time to develop new zoning rules and better manage the development.<sup>400</sup> The unusual magnitude of new development may have finally driven home how potentially self-defeating unplanned development could be.

Yet, even more importantly, Hartford in 1985 appears like it might finally be emerging from the slump of mid-twentieth century urban decline, though weaknesses in the city's revitalization are not hard to find. After decades of substantial population loss, Hartford's population decline began to slow and would actually grow slightly between 1980 and 1990.<sup>401</sup> Still, after losing over 20,000 people between 1970 and 1980, Hartford's population was greatly diminished from its 1955 high.<sup>402</sup> Hartford was also experiencing job growth and the expansion

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<sup>398</sup> Adams, Debra. "Support of North End voters clinched mayor's win." *Hartford Courant*. September 12, 1991.

<sup>399</sup> *Hartford Plan of Development, 1985-2000*. 3

<sup>400</sup> Sandbegr, Jon. "Milner Vetoes Key Elements of Downtown Plan." *Hartford Courant*. December 7, 1983.

<sup>401</sup> *Hartford Plan of Development, 1985-2000*. 21 and *Plan of Development for the City Of Hartford*. 19

<sup>402</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 19

of major industries like finance and insurance.<sup>403</sup> However, many actual residents of Hartford remained unemployed because they lacked the skills to fill the jobs that were being created.<sup>404</sup> The expansion of financial and insurance companies also had the side effect of threatening residential neighborhood stability.<sup>405</sup> In short, the benefits of most growth and development were skewed towards white-collar, suburban people while Hartford's residents found themselves increasingly irrelevant in the city's economy.

The 1980's would appear to be the first and only time, outside of the context of urban renewal, that displacement of low and moderate income households was an issue.<sup>406</sup> Displacement is one of the main features of gentrification, making this one of the clearer indications that gentrification at least started to occur in parts of Hartford.<sup>407</sup> At the same time, gentrification does not necessarily follow displacement and Hartford represents a unique situation in which one could happen without the other. While the plan discusses neighborhood stability and displacement, it talks about using land use controls to preserve the residential character of neighborhoods.<sup>408</sup> If the displacement were occurring due to gentrification, the residential character of neighborhoods would not be threatened. The occupants may change but the land use remains the same. On the other hand, if displacement is occurring because of the growth of office buildings and other non-residential uses, the plan's concern makes sense. The 1972 plan supports this possibility as it more clearly describes the problem of commercial uses threatening residential areas in Asylum Hill.<sup>409</sup> Thus, one reason Hartford has not gentrified

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<sup>403</sup> *Hartford Plan of Development, 1985-2000.* 33, 55

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.* 33

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.* 55

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.* 55

<sup>407</sup> Beauregard. "Trajectories of Neighborhood Change: The Case of Gentrification." 855

<sup>408</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development 1985-2000.* 55

<sup>409</sup> *Plan of Development.* 34-5

could be that, when it was experiencing growth in the 80's, the particular economic forces at work actually undermined its residential areas by favoring offices at the expense of houses.

Another, somewhat surprising, reason for a lack of real gentrification during this decade is that Hartford still contained “various stable middle-class neighborhoods.”<sup>410</sup> The existence of these neighborhoods is less surprising than the fact that they are considered stable in a city that has seen substantial white flight and population decline. The plan divides Hartford into development, rehabilitation, maintenance and preservation areas. It appears that the parts of the city referred to as maintenance areas more or less reflect the stable middle class neighborhoods as they are similarly described as “basically stable.”<sup>411</sup> Surprisingly, the map would suggest around half the city lies in maintenance areas.<sup>412</sup> The only parts that are indicated as troubled, or rehabilitation areas, are the neighborhoods of Northeast, Frog Hollow, Upper Albany, South Green, Sheldon Charter Oak, Clay Hill and isolated areas where public housing projects are located.<sup>413</sup> Thus, the entire western portion, and most of the south, would still be middle class at this time.

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<sup>410</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development 1985-2000*. 13

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* 64

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.* 64

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.* 64

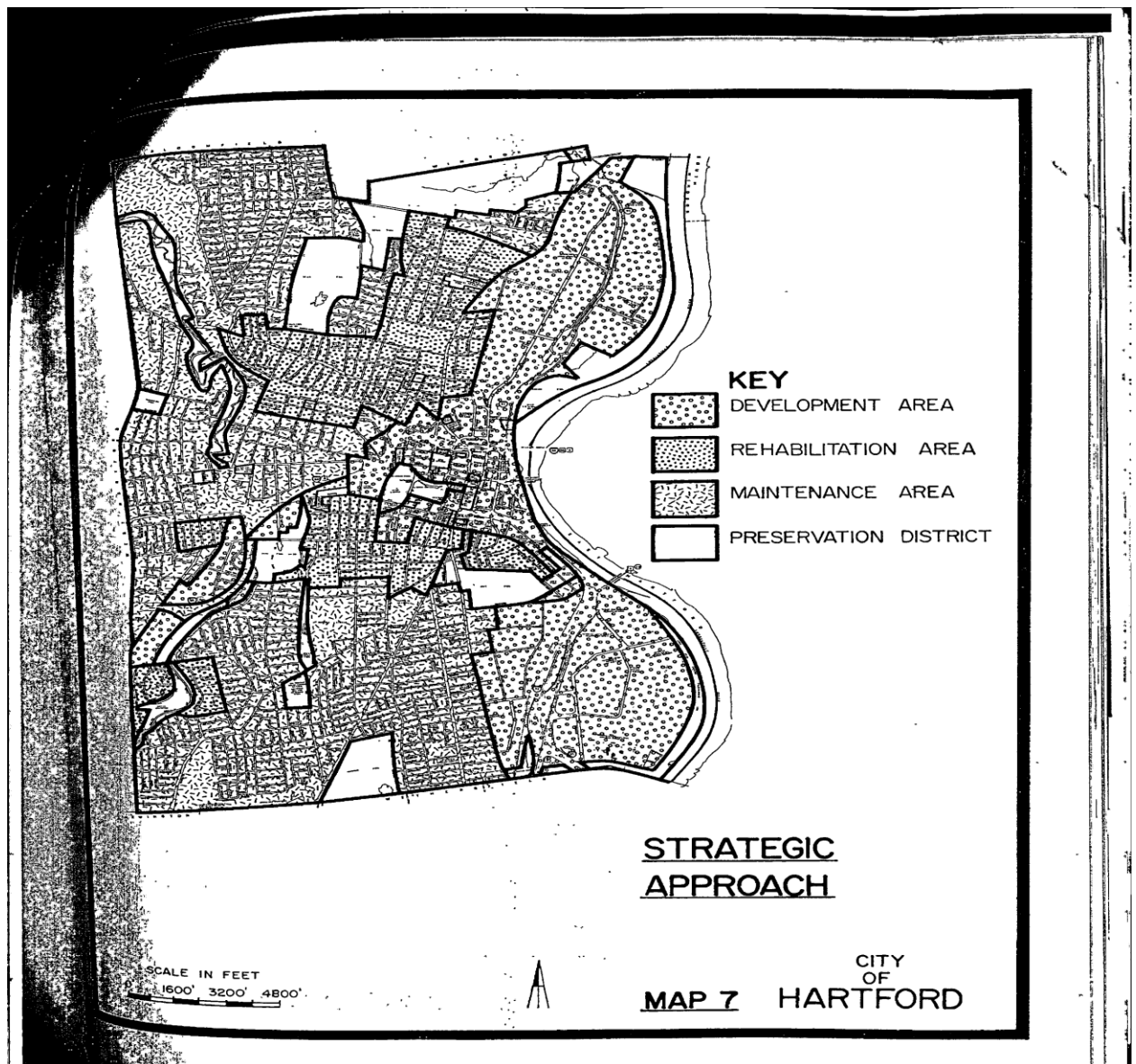


Figure 5: 1985 map of Hartford neighborhoods' differing economic conditions

Figure 5 is reflective of both shifts and continuity in Hartford's economic development strategies. The rehabilitation areas are roughly located in the same neighborhoods that were targeted for renewal by the 1955 and 1965 plans, except they are once again larger and now public housing complexes create pockets of rehabilitation areas in neighborhoods that are mostly maintenance areas. This suggests that the problems meant to be addressed by urban renewal never were and did not succeed at halting the spread of blight. It also foreshadows the later



demolition of Hartford's public housing complexes once they became unsalvageable. In addition, Figure 5 shows that Downtown and the Meadows neighborhoods are still being treated as distinct or special areas that receive their own designation as development areas. Notably, they are all largely non-residential areas and so it is likely that it was easier for the city to develop extensively in them without as much residential push-back as if they had tried to redevelop the residential neighborhoods extensively.

Whether gentrification occurred or not, the Commission of the 1980's had a very different view of rehabilitation than the one in the 1960's. Whereas the Commission in 1965 decided not to emphasize rehabilitation, the "rehabilitation areas" in the 1985 plan roughly correspond to the areas of major blight in 1965.<sup>414</sup> With the reduction in federal funding that began in the 1980's, usually a necessity for urban renewal, Hartford and other cities were forced to find other means of providing the same services.<sup>415</sup> Evidently, this meant addressing the issues found in the worst-off neighborhoods with rehabilitation strategies. Interestingly, the plan actually calls for community development corporations (CDCs) to do most of actual rehabilitation while the city is just supposed to provide better services not directly related to housing.<sup>416</sup> The plan also seems to accept that some displacement will occur, as the goal is to minimize, rather than avoid or prevent, the displacement of low and moderate income households.<sup>417</sup>

The plan reflects an attitude toward development not entirely in line with neighborhood activists concerned about the impact of downtown development.<sup>418</sup> Its stated goal is to use

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid. 63 and *Community Renewal Program*. IV-16

<sup>415</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development 1985-2000*. 14-5

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. 64

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. 64

<sup>418</sup> Simmons. 94-7

economic growth to increase the income of city residents.<sup>419</sup> Critically, the plan expresses support for a linkage program to ensure Hartford residents benefit from the economic growth.<sup>420</sup> Again, linkage is a vague concept and it does not appear that the plan is endorsing a linkage fee of the kind that existed in Boston or was advocated for by groups like Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART).<sup>421</sup> Instead, it would have the city use its regulatory powers to require that developers give first preference to Hartford citizens when it comes to jobs and encourage them to include low and moderate income units in housing developments.<sup>422</sup> These are much less ambitious, and less redistributionist, linkage policies.

The 1985 plan would seem to have some goals that are incompatible with each other or with their stated objective of benefitting Hartford's residents. Most notably, their objective to create sound housing for all persons is to develop a housing supply in which "30% of the total units will be affordable to low and moderate income residents, 70% will be market rate units, and 30% will be ownership units, some of which will be affordable..."<sup>423</sup> Yet, earlier it states that the majority of Hartford residents do not have enough income to afford market rate rents or ownership.<sup>424</sup> It is difficult to see how creating a housing supply that most Hartford residents cannot afford is in their best interest or prevents displacement. In fact, it would seem to guarantee displacement, or at least significant socioeconomic change. Perhaps this was meant to occur after residents' incomes were successfully raised by the plan's other recommendations. Regardless, the Commission was planning for a future Hartford very different from the city that existed in 1985.

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<sup>419</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development 1985-2000*. 53

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.* 42

<sup>421</sup> Simmons. 103

<sup>422</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development*. 1985-2000

<sup>423</sup> *Hartford, Plan of Development 1985-2000*. 61

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.* 33

### Chapter 3-Hartford in the New Economy

#### The 1990's Back to Square One:

Two events of national and global significance occurred in the late 80's and early 90's that would wreak havoc on Connecticut's economy in general and Hartford's in particular. Real estate values plunged as the national economy fell into a recession that even halted gentrification in New York for a time.<sup>425</sup> Cities like Hartford that had just been experiencing a development boom and tight housing market suddenly found themselves with an oversupply of housing and new office buildings that were either never finished or stood vacant.<sup>426</sup> The first signs of recession began with bankruptcies in the savings and loans industry, created in part by financial deregulation during the 1980's, but spread to the financial industry more broadly.<sup>427,428,429</sup> The weakness in the financial sector led to numerous mergers and acquisitions around the county and Hartford's once prominent commercial banks were all acquired by larger banks based outside of Hartford.<sup>430</sup> Insurance was not spared either, as major companies like Connecticut General, Connecticut Mutual and Travelers were absorbed by larger companies.<sup>431</sup> Naturally, these developments contributed to thousands of jobs being shed by companies struggling just to remain in business.<sup>432</sup> Thus, Hartford's greatest sources of growth and employment since the

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<sup>425</sup> Lees and Bondi. 244

<sup>426</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 98

<sup>427</sup> Thurow, Lester. "U.S. won't have a recession because it can't afford one." *Hartford Courant*. August 21, 1990.

<sup>428</sup> Walsh. 39

<sup>429</sup> Young, Joni J. "Getting the Accounting "right": Accounting and the Savings and Loan Crisis." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 20, no. 1 (January 1995): 55-80. doi:10.1016/0361-3682(93)e0006-3.

<sup>430</sup> Walsh. 40

<sup>431</sup> Ibid. 40

<sup>432</sup> Ibid. 40

decline of manufacturing were undermined to an unprecedented degree in the course of a few years.

As if this were not bad enough for Connecticut's economy, a separate and completely unrelated event further diminished what manufacturing was left in the state. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended. Unfortunately for Connecticut and Hartford, their manufacturing industry was largely dependent on receiving defense contracts from the federal government.<sup>433</sup> Unsurprisingly, defense spending fell off sharply with the collapse of the United States' greatest adversary and made the unemployment situation in Connecticut even worse.<sup>434</sup> Therefore, Hartford entered the 1990's with its most valuable industries virtually in free fall because of wider politico-economic changes. Even by 1996, Hartford's economy appears only to be leveling off, as opposed to growing again.<sup>435</sup>

Several development projects took place in the later 90's that would restore some of the successful image that Hartford lost earlier in the decade. Known as the Learning Corridor and Adriaen's Landing, they were comprised of a number of new educational facilities in the area around Trinity College and new entertainment venues downtown.<sup>436</sup> However, none of these projects came about thanks to city leadership. Instead, Trinity College's president, the governor of Connecticut and the CEO's of Pratt and Whitney and the Phoenix provided the leadership City Hall evidently could not provide.<sup>437</sup> In reference to the last time Hartford's elite institutions tried to take the lead in revitalizing the city, this group was dubbed the "new bishops" by some.<sup>438</sup> The fact that an educational institution and the state government were now the primary proponents of

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<sup>433</sup> Campbell, Joseph W. "Signs point to long, hard recession for state." *Hartford Courant*. May 5, 1991.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>435</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 44-45

<sup>436</sup> McKee. 43-4

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. 43-4

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. 43-4

new development is reflective of Hartford's changing economy and the loss of many private institutions that once played similar roles.

Politically, the early 1990's would be no less tumultuous during Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry's final term in office. Perry's first two terms had many similarities to Milner's experience, with the exception of having the infrastructure of the Democratic party behind her when she first became mayor.<sup>439</sup> She was an independent-minded mayor who had a solid base of support in Hartford's black north end, but she was still mostly powerless and ignored by the City Council.<sup>440</sup> Unlike Milner, when Perry grew frustrated with her powerlessness she decided to revolt against the Democratic party establishment by rejecting their endorsement and running with her own slate of councilors that would be loyal to her.<sup>441</sup> Together with the third party People for Change, Perry's challenge slate defeated every incumbent and took complete control of the city council.<sup>442</sup> For some of her supporters, including Milner, the upset was a repudiation of the council's close alliance with downtown business over the neighborhoods.<sup>443</sup>

However, the next two years would not be a period of unified, populist council leadership. Despite the fact that most of the council won solely because of Perry's "coattails," it became clear fairly quickly that Perry did not actually have full control over their votes.<sup>444</sup> The fight between Perry and the council during her last term had almost nothing to do with policy differences and was instead essentially a power struggle.<sup>445</sup> Perry and her council had run on revising the city charter to give the mayor more power, but Perry wanted a strong mayor system

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<sup>439</sup> Rodriguez, Joseph. "Lawlor supporters bow to greater force." *Hartford Courant*. September 16, 1987

<sup>440</sup> Simmons. 95

<sup>441</sup> Adams. n.p.

<sup>442</sup> Simmons. 95

<sup>443</sup> Adams. n.p.

<sup>444</sup> Seline, Anita. "Power shifts in city." *Hartford Courant*. July 31, 1992

<sup>445</sup> Noel Jr., Don. "Mayor Perry would not make a good 'strong mayor.'" *Hartford Courant*. August 12, 1992

in which she was the chief executive while five of the councilors were only willing to give the mayor a vote on the council.<sup>446</sup> Crucially, because her opponents had five votes, they could block charter revision from going through, and virtually anything else Perry wanted.<sup>447</sup> Thus, Perry actually ended up with yet another hostile council that limited her authority despite her stunning success in 1991. Unfortunately for Perry's image, all of this infighting occurred largely in public view and tarnished her reputation as both a leader and someone capable of bringing Hartford together.<sup>448</sup>

The defeat of Mayor Perry and the victory of Mike Peters in 1993 was a unique occurrence almost without parallel in the time period under consideration. Hartford is an overwhelmingly Democratic city and usually Democratic primaries are more meaningful than the general elections. However, 1993 was an exception. Despite the breakdown of her coalition, Mayor Perry managed to defeat her own deputy mayor and her allies defeated most of the Democratic councilors who turned against her in the Democratic primary.<sup>449</sup> Despite this, she lost by a wide margin to Mike Peters in the general election, who ran as an independent.<sup>450</sup> Peters' political strength was similar to George Athanson's, he was not really a leader on any issues but he was a likeable individual who ran a campaign that was upbeat and optimistic at a time when Hartford was going through a severe recession.<sup>451</sup> Even though he was white, he made a point of having Hartford's minority groups represented in positions of power while avoiding

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid. n.p,

<sup>447</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>448</sup> Seline. n.p.

<sup>449</sup> Swift, Mike; Neyer, Constance; Rodriguez, Cindy; Lipton, Eric and Tom Condon. "A wait, then jubilation for Perry's supporters." *Hartford Courant*. September 15, 1993.

<sup>450</sup> Seline. "Perry is denied fourth term in office."

<sup>451</sup> McKee. 40

talking about racial disparities.<sup>452</sup> He considered the job of the mayor to be “sell[ing] the city”<sup>453</sup> and his reputation as a weak mayor and “cheerleader” are fairly reflective of his approach to governing.<sup>454</sup> He tried to get along with everybody, neighborhood groups, downtown businesses and suburbanites, in the belief that they would all help Hartford if they were on friendly terms with the city.<sup>455</sup>

Peters’ rise would coincide with a unusual moment of political empowerment for Hartford’s Republicans, who had not held all three seats on the City Council reserved for a minority party since 1985.<sup>456</sup> Republicans defeated all three People for Change candidates in 1993, and with the help of Peters and two Democratic councilors that were cross-endorsed by the Republican party, the position of council majority leader would go to a Republican in Peters’ first term from 1993 to 1995.<sup>457</sup> This unique power sharing agreement ended in Peters’ second term, when the council’s Democrats reunited and the usual arrangement of Democratic control of the council returned.<sup>458</sup> Still, the Democrats that were elected were moderates or conservatives on issues like welfare reform, tax cuts and privatization so they had a mostly positive relationship with the Republican minority.<sup>459</sup> One of the most controversial decisions made under this more conservative atmosphere was the hiring of a private organization, Educational Alternatives Inc., to manage the entire Hartford public school system.<sup>460</sup> Begun by the school board, and then somewhat reluctantly accepted by the city council in November of 1994, the

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid. 40

<sup>453</sup> Green, Rick. “Wide victory margin leaves man’s hopes slim.” *Hartford Courant*. September 12, 1991

<sup>454</sup> McKee. 42

<sup>455</sup> Swift, Mike. “Peters’ game plan for city: Befriend the suburbs.” *Hartford Courant*. January 25, 1994.

<sup>456</sup> Seline. “Perry is denied 4<sup>th</sup> term in office.” N.p.

<sup>457</sup> Swift. N.p.

<sup>458</sup> McIntire, Mike. “Can Democrats maintain ballot unity on city council?” *Hartford Courant*. November 9, 1995.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>460</sup> “The road is cleared for EAI.” *Hartford Courant*. October 26, 1994.

experiment with EAI would last a little over one tumultuous year.<sup>461</sup> Shortly after the failure of EAI, which had as much or more to do with political infighting as it did with EAI's own shortcomings, the state stepped in to administer city schools for the rest of the 1990's and into the early 2000's.<sup>462</sup>

The Commission in 1996 is reflective of both the particularly weak Democratic Party at the time and the more consistent racial realities of Hartford since the 1970's. Ensuring that Hartford's three racial communities had representation in government was particularly crucial for Mike Peters, a white man who defeated a polarizing black woman known for challenging powerful Democratic Party interests.<sup>463</sup> The director of the Housing Department at the time was a black man, the city manager a black woman and the Commissioners themselves a mix of non-Hispanic whites, blacks and Hispanics. Furthermore, three of the seven Commissioners, or nine if alternates are counted, were Republicans. Old fault lines had faded away over the previous decades and now new ones were forming. Hartford's entrance into the new, post 1980's economy, reflected this sense of upheaval.

### The 1996 Plan

The economic context for the 1996 plan is significantly different from all the plans that came before it. Put briefly, the plan says almost every economic sector considered important or necessary in previous plans is no longer reliable for future growth. Insurance, finance and aircraft manufacturing are not just described as diminishing in value, but as sectors that cannot be relied

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<sup>461</sup> Green, Rick and Robert Frahm. "Private business, public schools: a clash of cultures." *Hartford Courant*. May 20, 1996

<sup>462</sup> McKee. 45

<sup>463</sup> McIntire, Mike. "Peters chooses his chief of staff." *The Hartford Courant*. January 6, 1994



on to lead a recovery or provide job growth.<sup>464</sup> For a city that was known for its strong insurance industry, this was probably as much a hit to its identity as it was a hit to its economy.<sup>465</sup> The plan suggests as much when it states that “Hartford is no longer a ‘company town.’”<sup>466</sup> In addition, the apparent bitterness of the Commission towards these companies for leaving comes across with surprising clarity for an official city document. Besides describing them as monolithic corporations, it says “the time when a handful of corporate bishops could meet privately to plan future development of the City is in the past.”<sup>467</sup> This is the only plan to actually use the term “bishops” to describe Hartford’s corporate leadership and the context makes it clear that it is not a term of endearment. Their industries had been considered recession proof because they continued to grow throughout Hartford’s decline but the swiftness with which they cut off their decades-old relationship with the city was a shock. The withdrawal of these corporations from local leadership is significant, as they were behind every large-scale development project Hartford had pursued, from Constitution Plaza to the Civic Center and the downtown office boom of the 1980’s.

In the midst of this major economic recession, unique demographic shifts were allowed to occur that would exacerbate Hartford’s population loss and increase the minority population of Hartford’s suburbs. For a sense of just how bad the real estate market became, many of Hartford’s minority residents who had long been priced out of the suburbs found themselves able to purchase homes.<sup>468</sup> Another reason this happened was a change in how Section 8 vouchers could be used.<sup>469</sup> Previously, they were place-specific, but this practice was criticized for

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<sup>464</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. V, 36

<sup>465</sup> Chen and Shemo. 201

<sup>466</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 37

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.* 18

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.* 18

resulting in concentrated poverty since eligible individuals had to live in specific units, often located in high-poverty areas.<sup>470</sup> In 1983, Congress made portable Section 8 vouchers for low-income families that, while issued locally, could be used to rent anywhere in the United States that had a Public Housing Authority.<sup>471</sup> The Commission seems to have mixed feelings about these changes. In a way, the recession had made possible the kind of upward mobility the city wanted for its residents by breaking down the suburban pay wall.<sup>472</sup> Yet, this also drained the city's population at a critical time and left it with an even poorer population as only those who could not afford even the greatly diminished suburban housing prices remained.

After discussing the unexpected population shifts, the Commission wonders out loud if, perhaps, the recession might actually provide a similarly unexpected benefit for the city. Particularly, the plan tries to predict when economic and social forces would begin to encourage in-migration into Hartford, as opposed to the significant and ongoing out-migration.<sup>473</sup> Without actually using the term rent-gap, the plan states it is possible that market forces driving down housing demand and prices in the city could lead to a turnaround when prices are sufficiently low.<sup>474</sup> However, the plan quickly recognizes that quality of life issues like education and crime get in the way of this strictly market-based "solution" to attracting and maintaining middle and high income residents.<sup>475</sup> Still, the Commission seems like it would be glad to see gentrification occurring in Hartford.

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<sup>470</sup> "An Overview of the Section 8 Housing Programs: Housing Choice Vouchers and Project-Based Rental Assistance." EveryCRSReport.com. February 7, 2014. Accessed April 30, 2019.

<sup>471</sup> "Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet." HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Accessed April 30, 2019.

<sup>472</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 22

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.* 22

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.* 22

<sup>475</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 22

The Commission's recommendations for lead abatement are perhaps the clearest example just how economically depressed the city was and how far it was willing to go to avoid further economic damage. Lead was a major problem in Hartford because it had been used in paint until 1978 and the vast majority of homes in Hartford were built before then.<sup>476</sup> The cost of abating lead in Hartford convinced the Commission that total abatement would not be possible and that the realistic goal would be to minimize lead poisoning among Hartford's children.<sup>477</sup> The Commission also recommends against a strict policy requiring property owners to abate lead because doing so would have a negative effect on already low property values and encourage more abandonment.<sup>478</sup> However, this is somewhat odd reasoning given that houses having lead paint by itself lowers property values, deters home buyers and makes rehabilitation prohibitively expensive.<sup>479</sup> Nevertheless, both the prevalence of lead based paint in Hartford's built environment and the city's inability or unwillingness to address it demonstrate quite well the simultaneous barriers to growth Hartford faced. On the one hand, it had severe structural problems that hurt the city's image and its economy. On the other hand, it was largely helpless to act, even in its own economic interest, as a real loss of economic power and outside funds combined with a fear of losing even more to make the Commission extremely cautious.

In the absence of corporate growth and political leadership, Hartford would have to find a new economic paradigm to rely on. One way the plan hoped to do this was by building on the successes of neighborhood commercial strips that had shown more resilience than the big employers downtown.<sup>480</sup> Neighborhoods would be especially important for preserving Hartford's

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid. 3, 100

<sup>477</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>478</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>479</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Planning Department. Housing and Community Development. *Hartford: Building for a New Millennium*. Hartford, CT: City of Hartford. N.p.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. 37

retail sector after the closure of Hartford's last department stores and other major downtown retailers basically ended the city's position as a regional retail center.<sup>481</sup> This is a fairly ironic reversal of fortune as most of the previous plans focused on supporting downtown retail while characterizing the "strip" commercial development occurring outside of downtown as problematic because of traffic concerns.<sup>482</sup> The Park Street area in Frog Hollow is given as an example of a successful neighborhood retail district, along with Franklin Avenue in South End and Albany Avenue in Upper Albany.<sup>483</sup> Importantly, all three commercial strips are explicitly identified with particular ethnic groups, Latino, Italian, and African-American and West Indian respectively.<sup>484</sup> This reflects a broader hope to, essentially, capitalize on Hartford's diverse racial and ethnic makeup based on the belief that the "richness" of various ethnic and cultural groups would benefit efforts to develop an arts and entertainment district downtown.<sup>485</sup> Commodifying ethnic identity is a potential strategy for gentrification, one that is more amenable to minorities who live in the targeted neighborhood because it is technically community focused and celebratory of ethnic culture even as its primary motivation is economic development and making the city more attractive to outsiders.<sup>486</sup>

Much of the economic vision espoused by the 1996 plan fits with this more palatable form of gentrification. First, the more controversial and plainly neoliberal sentiments expressed by the plan are presented as necessary adaptations that the city has little choice but to adopt. The plan states that, in addition to technological changes, ideological changes are limiting the capacity of urban centers to control their economic

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid. ii, 36

<sup>482</sup> *Hartford Plans for Tomorrow*. 7 and *Plan of Development*. 10

<sup>483</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 36

<sup>484</sup> Ibid. 36

<sup>485</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>486</sup> Wilson *et al.* 1179

health, forcing them to redefine their roles in the nation's economic life.<sup>487</sup> It is interesting that the plan does not specify what those ideological changes are but the following quote provides a good sense of the new direction the city was "forced" to follow:

The long term economic recession has changed the city's land use agenda. Economic Development has become paramount, as the role of municipal government is shifting from being a regulator which ensures that development is in the public's interest to the greatest extent possible, to being an initiator of economic activity, committing public resources to private enterprise as a means of generating jobs.

The quote almost perfectly describes the entrepreneurial state.<sup>488</sup> In fact, it describes it with such precision I would not be surprised if the Commissioners were familiar with Neil Smith's works. In a neoliberal state, the concerns of the market and private capital take precedence over the concerns of labor and consumers. Yet it appears that the Commission is not describing its own view on development. Instead, the quote is describing the "objective reality" that the Commission is faced with. Contrary to the implications of the above quote, the 1996 plan, in keeping with every previous plan, makes a point of saying economic development needs to be balanced against improving the quality of life of residents.<sup>489</sup> However, it is likely that the city's commitment to this balance would not be as strongly as it once was since its understanding of its role in the new economy was radically different from what came before.

Not only did the Commission feel the government's role had changed, but the economy of Hartford had as well. The need to adapt to these new realities comes across strongly in the plan. As previously stated, Hartford lost in a very short amount of time all or most of the

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<sup>487</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 33

<sup>488</sup> Smith. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." 427

<sup>489</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. vi

industries that had defined it for decades. The commissioners worried that the city's economic structure continued to narrow, being increasingly dependent on the financial, insurance and real estate (F.I.R.E.), services and government sectors.<sup>490</sup> Overdependence on a few major industries is one of the reason's the recession was so bad in Hartford and the Commission was keen on diversifying Hartford's portfolio. The Commission especially wanted Hartford to find something to replace the FIRE industries as its mainstay because it was not predicted to grow and was clearly not wise to rely on in the future.<sup>491</sup> In this context, attracting businesses would be a far more serious and important tactic for the city because it now lacked the certainty of being able to fall back on the FIRE industry no matter how bad things got. Attracting business and industry had always been a part of Hartford's playbook, but only in this plan of development does it talk about the need to "aggressively market the city for new business."<sup>492</sup> Given that Hartford would have to recreate its economic niche in a hyper-competitive world, almost from scratch, it is understandable why they thought the recruitment effort needed to be intensive.

The Commission offers some indication of where it expected and hoped Hartford's economic future would lie. By their reckoning, Hartford had six promising opportunities to change its economy for the better.<sup>493</sup> Two of them I have already touched upon, neighborhood businesses and "arts, entertainment, culture and tourism," but the others were the health industry, a light speed rail project, "deconcentrating" public housing and Hartford's physical location.<sup>494</sup> The last supposed opportunity was quite fanciful because the Commission evidently hoped that Hartford's location would give it an advantage in becoming a "destination on the Information

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>492</sup> Ibid. 69

<sup>493</sup> Ibid. N.p.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid. n.p.

Superhighway.”<sup>495</sup> In other words, they considered Hartford becoming a home to advanced technology firms and information industries as a possibility worth pursuing.<sup>496</sup> They at least didn’t bother to pretend like Hartford residents who could not get jobs in the insurance industry would somehow benefit from the growth of advanced technology firms in Hartford. Residents would instead find employment in the growing health industry, which already employed a higher percentage of residents than the City of Hartford itself.<sup>497</sup> The expansion of Hartford’s health industry was largely limited to two large hospitals, St. Francis and Hartford Hospital, and the Commission wanted Hartford to attract even more medical technology and related firms since they continued to grow while every other sector in Hartford was stagnant or shrinking.<sup>498</sup>

Lastly, the Griffin Line, a light speed rail line that would have connected downtown Hartford to Bradley International Airport and Bloomfield, was considered an extremely important opportunity that should become a reality.<sup>499</sup> Unfortunately, like I-291 before it, this heavily favored transportation project was shut down by an apparently hostile state DOT.<sup>500</sup> Thus, with the exception of entertainment, tourism and an aspiration for advanced technology firms, most of Hartford’s new economic opportunities were actually located outside of downtown for a change.

I have skipped over deconcentrating public housing because it deserves a less cursory treatment. That the dispersal of poverty is considered an economic opportunity is indicative of the Commission’s, and the nation’s, shifting priorities for development. Hartford’s approach to deconcentration was like many cities in the 1990’s; it demolished some of its oldest and largest

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid. 62

<sup>496</sup> Ibid. 62

<sup>497</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>498</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>499</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>500</sup> Surwilo, O. Barbara. “Griffin Line Was Perfect for Region.” *Hartford Courant*. June 7, 1998.

public housing projects, notably Charter Oak Terrace in the neighborhood of Behind the Rocks.<sup>501</sup> The decision to completely demolish the projects is described as a dramatic policy reversal by the Hartford Housing Authority, which had been seeking federal funding to rehabilitate the projects.<sup>502</sup> Once again, national economic development priorities had a substantial effect on local development. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development was willing to provide HHA with millions of dollars to raze the projects while it ignored its requests for rehabilitation funding until the projects were unsalvageable.<sup>503</sup> In the place of this low-income housing project they would build townhouse apartments and single family houses, not exactly the kinds of homes tenants of the project would be able to afford.<sup>504</sup> Indeed, the HHA would have to revise the plan at a later date to have more of the replacements be rentals because they realized wide-scale homeownership would not be possible.<sup>505</sup> However, the main reason demolishing public housing was considered an economic opportunity was because it provided the city with plenty of land to develop for commercial purposes, in this case on prime land next to a major highway and West Hartford.<sup>506</sup> This development would actually be successful, despite labor union opposition, and is now a shopping complex dominated by a Wal-Mart.<sup>507</sup>

Clearly, Hartford in the 1990's was a city in transition and unsure of where exactly the vast, global economic changes that were occurring would take it. The Commission hoped to be able to take advantage of the health industry and the information economy but these come across

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<sup>501</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 61

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.* 61

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.* 61

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.* 61

<sup>505</sup> Chedekel, Lisa. "City's housing plan revamped." *Hartford Courant*. January 14, 1997

<sup>506</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 61-2

<sup>507</sup> Carmiel, Oshrat. "Environmental Issues Raised Against Wal-Mart Plan." *Hartford Courant*. October 13, 2003.



as highly aspirational goals. More promising, and proven, would be Hartford's ability to grow and regain a positive image through ethnic local markets and downtown entertainment venues. Of course, as much as the Commission seems to have given up on them, there were still several large insurance companies in the downtown area and these would continue to be important to Hartford's economy.

#### The 2000's: Charter reform at last

The most significant change to Hartford's political system, since 1947 at least, would occur in the first decade of the new millennium. In this decade, Hartford would join the likes of Boston, Chicago and New York by adopting a strong-mayor form of government.<sup>508</sup> After three decades of different city politicians trying and failing to bring this about, including as recently as 2000, it seems Hartford's populace finally warmed to the idea of having a strong mayor.<sup>509</sup> The charter revision won every voting district in Hartford in 2002 and no organized and powerful opposition emerged against it.<sup>510</sup> It greatly enhanced the powers, independence and salary of the mayor, giving them full authority to hire and fire department heads in the interest of increasing efficiency and accountability.<sup>511</sup> Presumably, there would be less infighting over appointments and the mayor would from now on have to own all the credit or blame for decisions made by the city's departments. It also extended the terms of mayors and council members to four years instead of two, starting in 2003.<sup>512</sup> Charter reform further altered the makeup of the school board

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<sup>508</sup> Pazniokas, Mark. "Voters Place a Strong Mayor at Hartford's Helm." *Hartford Courant*. November 6, 2002.

<sup>509</sup> Budoff, Carrie. "Minority Caucus Supports Creation of Charter Panel." *Hartford Courant*. January 3, 2002

<sup>510</sup> Pazniokas. "Voters Place a Strong Mayor at Hartford's Helm." N.p.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid. n.p.

in the mayor's favor. Previously, it was made up of seven members and only three were mayoral appointees. Now, it would have nine members and five would be appointed.<sup>513</sup> Lastly, charter reform would create a new planning and zoning authority, rendering the Commission on the City Plan defunct and replacing it with the Planning and Zoning Commission that exists today.<sup>514</sup>

Hartford's first strong mayor would also be its first Latino mayor, Eddie Perez, a former community organizer deeply involved in Trinity College's Learning Corridor project.<sup>515</sup> Similar to Carrie Saxon Perry's final term, Eddie Perez and his council slate ran on a promise to carry out charter reform and create a strong mayor.<sup>516</sup> However, Perez's first campaign was much less eventful. After eight years in office, Mike Peters had decided not to run for re-election after 2001, meaning there was no incumbent to run against.<sup>517</sup> Despite this, the election was not a wide-open field and Perez, who had never held elected office before, emerged as essentially the only viable Democratic candidate early on.<sup>518</sup> Indeed, unlike the gregarious Mike Peters, Perez was a notably poor public speaker who made virtually no specific promises, besides charter reform, during his first campaign. Even the *Hartford Courant*, which endorsed him, described him as "the best on the B-list."<sup>519</sup> Perez's avoidance of the issues, and his willingness to substitute his council slate with three Party loyalists, despite arguably having the upper hand, caused many to underestimate to him.<sup>520</sup>

However, Perez would quickly surprise those who doubted him by wielding immense power even before charter reform went through. As many predicted, the three council candidates

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>515</sup> Pazniokas, Mark. "Perez's Power Play." *Hartford Courant*. November 17, 2002

<sup>516</sup> Budoff. N.p.

<sup>517</sup> Simpson, Stan. "Party Gets a Call to Get Stirring." *Hartford Courant*. May 9, 2001

<sup>518</sup> Simpson. "Perez Had the Cards, and Folded." *Hartford Courant*. July 23, 2001

<sup>519</sup> "A Lackluster Mayoral Campaign." *Hartford Courant*. October 26, 2001

<sup>520</sup> Simpson. "Perez Had the Cards, and Folded." N.p.

that were tied to the party establishment quickly turned on Perez, in this case over the appointment of an interim city-manager.<sup>521</sup> In something of a repeat of Mike Peters' coalition council, though more aggressive, Perez froze out the rebellious council members by forming a five-vote majority with two loyal Democrats, the council's two Republicans and its one Green party member.<sup>522</sup> In this coalition, Republicans once again held leadership positions, including deputy mayor, in an overwhelmingly Democratic town.<sup>523</sup> Perez's surprisingly deft political maneuver would be characteristic of the kind of leader he was. He was a blunt and unpolished public speaker who, after winning election, would not shy away from telling hard truths and flexing his political muscles to control city decision making.<sup>524</sup>

One thing Perez viewed as problematic was the "abdication of responsibility at city hall for the major issues facing Hartford."<sup>525</sup> Particularly in the realm of education and economic development, the city had become increasingly dependent on initiatives managed outside city hall. For one, there was the Learning Corridor, which was brought to fruition by Trinity College and Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA), not the city. Then, there was Adriaen's Landing, a major downtown development project conceived of and funded by the state of Connecticut and managed by the Capital City Economic Development Authority, a quasi-public entity.<sup>526</sup> Last, but not least, the city invited the state to take over its failing school system and it would be more than five years before the city would resume control of them.<sup>527</sup> It was

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<sup>521</sup> Pazniokas. "Perez's Power Play." N.p.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>523</sup> Budoff. N.p.

<sup>524</sup> Pazniokas. "Perez's Power Play." N.p.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid. n.p.

Perez's aim to provide the strong leadership and accountability that seemed present everywhere but city hall.

Ironically, Perez's ignominious end would be brought about by "mistakes" he made involving certain development projects. First, a city contractor who was being paid millions by the city for a reconstruction of Park Street remodeled Perez's home for no pay, which seemed incredibly suspicious.<sup>528</sup> It did not help Perez's case when the contractor later testified that he did so with the expectation that Perez would help him remain on the Park Street project, which was mired in problems.<sup>529</sup> Secondly, Perez was connected to an attempt by one of his powerful supporters to extort \$100,000 from a developer trying to buy a valuable parking lot.<sup>530</sup> Interestingly, all of this began to emerge as early as 2007, and was even weaponized by his political opponents, to no success.<sup>531</sup> Thus, the investigations surrounding these actions hung over his entire third term, eventually dominating his time after his arrest in September of 2009.<sup>532</sup> He refused to step down unless he was convicted, so Hartford had to face months of having its mayor divide his time between being mayor and being in court.<sup>533</sup> The saga was not good for Hartford's public image, and regardless, Perez was convicted in June 2010 and resigned shortly after. Perez would be succeeded by Council President Pedro Segarra, "the accidental mayor."<sup>534</sup> Given how promising a leader Perez seemed to be, his very public and humiliating downfall must have been yet another demoralizing shock for Hartford.

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<sup>528</sup> Kovner, Josh. "Lies and Silence Hurt the Mayor, Observers Say." *Hartford Courant*. June 19, 2010

<sup>529</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>531</sup> Goren, Daniel and Mark Pazniokas. "Easy for Eddie." *Hartford Courant*. September 12, 2007.

<sup>532</sup> Kovner. N.p.

<sup>533</sup> Roberts, David. "Should Mayor Perez Resign?" *Hartford Courant*. September 15, 2009.

<sup>534</sup> De La Torre, Vanessa. "Segarra Unsure About November." *Hartford Courant*. September 17, 2015.

Perez' rise and fall would show that, like regionalism, strong mayor governance was not without its drawbacks and was not a panacea to Hartford's problems. Both reforms are aimed at centralizing political power and there is always an inherent danger that empowering local politicians will simply allow them to make errors on a grander scale. Moreover, they implicitly assume that the problems facing cities like Hartford stem from its governance and not structural issues that are unaffected by how powerful the mayor is or how equally resources are distributed. The Consolidated Plan for 2000 is the clearest of all the plans in finding that barriers to gentrification are literally built into Hartford's infrastructure and amending the city charter would do little to change that.

#### The 2000 Consolidated Plan

The Commission on the City Plan/Planning and Zoning Commission would not produce a Plan of Development between 1996 and 2011. Fortunately, it is still possible to get a broad sense of the city's economic development agenda for 2000-2005 from the Consolidated Plan. This was produced during Mike Peters' last term in office, but most of the City Council at the time was not in office during 1996. Unlike the Plans of Development, which were largely designed for the city's own purposes, producing a Consolidated Plan was a requirement for obtaining Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and various other grants from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).<sup>535</sup> Thus, it was written by a combination of personnel from different city departments, though primarily from the Offices of Housing and Community Development and Grants Management.<sup>536</sup> Moreover, its focus is exclusively on low and

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<sup>535</sup> *Hartford: Building for a New Millennium*. N.p.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.* 5

moderate-income people, as the grants HUD provides are targeted towards those populations.<sup>537</sup> It is therefore much less concerned with the middle-class population in general, making it less likely they would discuss gentrification directly. Still, the Consolidated Plan provides some valuable information regarding Hartford's self-image, its continuing problems and the way it advertises itself even as it struggles.

Immediately, the Consolidated Plan makes it evident that some significant changes have occurred since 1996. Or, at least, that the city is trying to create that impression. Compared to the slump of the 1990's, Hartford is described as having "optimism and vitality" as well as a construction boom that is evident "across the city."<sup>538</sup> Yet, this rosy picture is just as quickly dashed by the revelation that, "after one of the longest economic expansions in recent history," Hartford had actually grown poorer since 1990.<sup>539</sup> Frankly, it is hard to see the vitality in a city where more than seven out of ten residents spend more than 30% of their income on housing alone.<sup>540</sup> Bearing in mind, also, that owning a car is an additional cost most Hartford residents would need to be able to maintain employment. It would seem that by 2000, Hartford had returned to its more familiar pattern of simultaneously seeing new development while its residents became poorer.

One of the most striking problems the city faces is what the plan refers to as an "appraisal gap" making substantial rehabilitation efforts difficult.<sup>541</sup> This is noteworthy as it appears to be the exact opposite of the rent gap, indicating a situation where "the cost of repairs or demolition and new construction exceeds the appraised value of new or rehabilitated housing."<sup>542</sup> Lead paint

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid. 104

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid. 30

<sup>541</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid. n.p.

abatement, which was still an issue, is mentioned specifically as something creating this gap.<sup>543</sup> It is also likely that some of the findings from the CRP of 1965 were still applicable, given how old Hartford's housing was, in which case most of Hartford's housing would be three decker rental units.<sup>544</sup> As that plan so bluntly put it, "a rehabilitated three decker is still a three decker (i.e. not highly valued)."<sup>545</sup> The city was already making a short term effort to address this by providing public subsidies to overcome the appraisal gap and allow private development to occur.<sup>546</sup> However, the size of the gaps that the city had to close limited the number of projects it could assist.

From a strictly economic perspective, this would mean gentrification was physically impossible for many Hartford properties because the economic incentive to rehabilitate cheap houses and sell them at a profit was not there. Many have argued that there are cultural and non-economic reasons people engage in gentrification, but this nevertheless would close the door on a subset of gentrifiers. The city's three priorities for housing are all geared, to a greater or lesser degree, at eliminating this barrier by "expanding home ownership, rehabilitating multi-family rental housing units and demolition of abandoned residential properties that have outlived their usefulness."<sup>547</sup> This is a rather interesting change as well because when rehabilitation was found to be economically unfeasible in 1965, the Commission decided not to emphasize rehabilitation as a strategy.<sup>548</sup> Yet, at this time, rehabilitation comes before demolition and new construction as a priority.

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>544</sup> *Community Renewal Program*. V-85

<sup>545</sup> Ibid. V-85

<sup>546</sup> *Hartford: Building for a New Millennium*. 54

<sup>547</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>548</sup> *Community Renewal Program* V-84.

Another trend that comes across is the notion that Hartford has done all it can for certain communities and that it is up to suburbs to provide a real solution to issues like homelessness and concentrated poverty. The notion that only the region can address certain issues is not new but Hartford's willingness to apparently give up on assisting the population until the suburbs do their fair share is. Even though homelessness is a major topic of the Consolidated Plan, per HUD requirements, the plan states "Hartford is working to address the needs of the homeless on a regional basis. No new emergency shelters will be developed in the city."<sup>549</sup> Perhaps, as the plan suggests, regional cooperation was receiving "more than mere lip service" and the idea that shelters might be constructed in the suburbs was not so far-fetched.<sup>550</sup> However, there is no clear-cut evidence provided that Hartford's work to address the needs of the homeless was having any progress and in the meantime, they presumably had overcrowded shelters that not every homeless person could utilize. Depending on a regional solution to anything in Connecticut is a significant leap of faith and their willingness to take it on behalf of the homeless is noteworthy. Perhaps as a sign of the time period's new emphasis on "taking responsibility and accepting consequences", the city preferred to focus its resources on helping the homeless gain independence and self-sufficiency.<sup>551</sup>

Yet, it would appear that Hartford's resources for housing assistance were already strained beyond their capacity without adding homeless who would otherwise stay in shelters to the list. The waiting list for Hartford's Section 8 program and the waiting list for public housing were so overwhelmed by requests that the former had been closed since 1996 and the latter since 1999.<sup>552</sup> By the plan's estimates, 60% of Hartford households needed some type of housing

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<sup>549</sup> *Hartford: Building for a New Millennium*. n.p.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.* 6

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.* 16

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.* 31



assistance.<sup>553</sup> This is a staggering number and one would think more homeless shelters would be necessary between Hartford's lack of resources for housing assistance and the number of people who needed them to remain in their homes.

The public housing situation in the city is an even clearer sign of a shift away from feeling responsible for certain populations to forcing them to accept responsibility for their status. The demolition of Charter Oak Terrace, the first public housing project to fall, is invariably referred to as the "Charter Oak success story."<sup>554</sup> Their success was in turning a deteriorated public housing project into a shopping complex. Evidently the parallels between their actions and what the city did during urban renewal were lost on them. Just like with Constitution Plaza, albeit on a lesser scale, they destroyed a blighted residential area to build a shopping center in the suburban style. It also notable that city officials thought it was a good idea to demolish most of Hartford's public housing at a time of rising homelessness and chronically inadequate housing assistance.<sup>555</sup> It appears that at least some of these demolitions created a population of involuntarily displaced people who were still on the Section 8 waiting list at the time of writing.<sup>556</sup> While it does not specifically say they were displaced by the demolition of public housing, it is unclear how else they would have been displaced involuntarily. The continued demolition of public housing likely prolonged the outmigration of low-income and minority families from Hartford because the plan states that they were provided Section 8 vouchers and that a sizeable number of residents opted to take their housing assistance to the

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>554</sup> Ibid. 45

<sup>555</sup> Ibid. 31-32

<sup>556</sup> Ibid. 32

suburbs.<sup>557</sup> It is therefore possible that greater economic and racial integration was under way at this time, at least in the suburbs.

As previously mentioned, the plan suggests regionalism is finally receiving more than lip service from the state and suburbs. Their claim is not without evidence, as the Capital Region Growth Council (CRGC), MetroHartford Millennium Project, Adriaen's Landing and Capital City Economic Development Authority (CCEDA) all formed or began within the past decade.<sup>558</sup> The plan's understanding for why the long hostility to regionalism has diminished is interesting. In essence, they believe the recession of the 1990's, which heavily impacted all of Connecticut, finally gave the suburbs a sense of economic insecurity and prompted the realization they could not succeed on their own.<sup>559</sup> *Sheff v. O'Neill*, which forced suburbanites to realize just how racially segregated Hartford was, while also giving them a stake in Hartford having at least some decent schools, is also credited.<sup>560</sup> Perhaps most interesting, the plan claims the out-migration of Hartford residents which began during the recession brought "inner-city challenges" to the inner ring suburbs, forcing them to contend with issues they had avoided and causing them to appreciate Hartford's struggles more.<sup>561</sup> If this were truly the case, it could be argued suburbs started taking more of an interest in Hartford once it became apparent that Hartford's problems would eventually become their problems if they did nothing to help. Moreover, if the suburbs had become more concerned with Hartford's future then they would likely form a powerful pro-gentrification constituency, certainly at the state level, but possibly even within the city itself. Already, there seems to be tension over ultimate goals, as one of MetroHartford Millennium

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid. 40, 46

<sup>558</sup> Ibid. 6-7

<sup>559</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>560</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>561</sup> Ibid. 6

Project's major economic development initiatives is marketing Hartford to young professionals as a desirable place to live.<sup>562</sup> Rightly or wrongly, the young professional, or "yuppie", is often associated with gentrification and their decision to use those words exactly would suggest that the group is okay with that. At the same time, Hartford's Neighborhood Revitalization Zones (NRZ's), recently created by state legislation, were meant to represent community interests and in many cases were more interested in building local potential than attracting it from the outside.<sup>563</sup>

#### Present decade: slow, cautious progress

The most recent decade has been much less eventful than the two that immediately preceded it, at least in terms of political intrigue and economic volatility. Surprisingly, even the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis seems to have had a relatively muted effect compared to the recession of the early 1990's.<sup>564</sup> Since that world-economy threatening calamity, the United States has experienced an abnormally prolonged period of, admittedly slow and unequal, growth. Thus, it is worth wondering how much of Hartford's positive developments over the past decade will survive the next economic downturn. As the 1990's made clear, a particularly bad recession prompted by the failure of key industries can lead to an overall collapse of Hartford's economic fortunes.

A more perennial and local economic concern that has become particularly acute is government debt and the budgetary constraints that come with it. Hartford's finances have long been problematic, and complaints about the over-dependence on the property tax are an indirect

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid. 63

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. 5, 94

<sup>564</sup> Hartford (Conn.). Planning and Zoning Commission. *One City, One Plan*. Hartford, CT: City of Hartford, Dept. of Development Services. 2011.

reflection of that.<sup>565</sup> However, a little more than a year ago, the city was on the verge of declaring bankruptcy.<sup>566</sup> It only managed to avoid this by getting the state to agree to take on Hartford's debt as its own, in exchange for the city's finances being put under state oversight.<sup>567</sup> Notably, the state of Connecticut is hardly in a better position than Hartford when it comes to its own debts, which are equally daunting and seemingly unpayable.<sup>568</sup> Like Hartford, the state of Connecticut has had to raise taxes several times in quick succession, only to find the politically toxic move hardly makes a dent in the debt.<sup>569</sup> Thus, it is hard to understand the economic sense of assigning the debt of a city on the verge of bankruptcy to a state heading towards its own fiscal crisis, other than that it is just kicking the can down the road.

The state takeover of Hartford's debt is an interesting repeat of what happened with Hartford's school system in the mid-1990's. Once again, the state was forced to step in when Hartford found it could no longer carry out one of its basic functions as a local government. Hartford's failure to run its own school system or pay its own debt, while most likely caused in part by actions made outside Hartford, nevertheless give the city and its government a bad image. These state interventions also have the tendency to erode Hartford's independence and reinforce the idea that Hartford can only be saved from the outside.

The past nine years has seen two mayors of very different backgrounds come to the helm of Hartford through very different means. First, Pedro Segarra, Hartford's first openly gay mayor, was unexpectedly elevated to the post after Eddie Perez's conviction in 2010. He had

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<sup>565</sup> *Plan of Development*. 61

<sup>566</sup> Carlesso, Jenna. "Under New Deal, State Will Pay Off Hartford's Debt." *Hartford Courant*. March 22, 2018.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

<sup>568</sup> Phaneuf, Keith. "A legacy of debt: Connecticut standing on its own fiscal cliff." *CT Mirror*. January 30, 2017.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.* n.p.

been City Council President at the time and thus the first in line in the event the mayor could not carry out his term.<sup>570</sup> In order to restore public trust, he immediately asked for resignation letters from all the city's department heads, the Corporation Counsel and Perez's chief of staff.<sup>571</sup> He did not intend to fire them all but felt changes needed to be made and this would allow him to do so.<sup>572</sup> Some of these changes would take place because of budgetary constraints as opposed to creating a sense of accountability. Segarra merged several departments and placed them under the same leadership structure so as to cut costs and shrink the number of people required to run city departments.<sup>573</sup> He further placed a hiring freeze on most city positions.<sup>574</sup>

One again, progress did not last long in Hartford and Segarra would face significant criticism for a deal he had made, mostly without public input, to build a minor-league baseball stadium for \$60 million.<sup>575</sup> At a time of fiscal crisis, betting so much on the success of a sports stadium seemed incredibly irresponsible. It would be an issue that his challenger, Luke Bronin, consistently emphasized.<sup>576</sup> Beyond the expense of the project, it seemed as though Segarra was making the deals without much public input or discussion.<sup>577</sup> The timing probably was not well thought out, either, as the decision to pay for the new stadium emerged in 2014,<sup>578</sup> a year before the next mayoral election, and all the uncertainty surrounding the stadium would only help his political opponents. As it happened, Segarra's eventual successor, Bronin, already had more valuable allies than Segarra.

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<sup>570</sup> Carlesso, Jenna. "Council Leader Prepares for New Role." *Hartford Courant*. June 19, 2010.

<sup>571</sup> Carlesso, Jenna. "Segarra Sworn In." *Hartford Courant*. June 27, 2010.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>573</sup> Goode, Steven. "Segarra Setting a Money Saving Example." *Hartford Courant*. September 17, 2010.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>575</sup> Carlesso, Jenna, Lender, Jon and Don Stacom. "Whole New Ballgame." *Hartford Courant*. June 5, 2014

<sup>576</sup> Carlesso, Jenna. "Park Naming Rights an Issue." *Hartford Courant*. June 12, 2015.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. n.p.

<sup>578</sup> Carlesso *et al.* "Whole New Ball Game." N.p.

Even though Segarra won an election in his own right in 2011, the Democratic Party endorsed Luke Bronin in 2015 over him.<sup>579</sup> This may have been a sign of how politically damaging the stadium deal and subsequent issues were, but it is also true that Bronin was better connected to political powers beyond Hartford. Immediately prior to running for mayor he had been general counsel to then-governor Daniel Malloy.<sup>580</sup> Segarra tried to paint Bronin as an outsider and he had, in fact, only moved to Hartford in 2006 and lived a total of five years here between then and the 2015 election. He had gone to Washington D.C. and Afghanistan for four years as part of a former job fighting financial crime.<sup>581</sup> Either Hartford voters are not as distrustful of newcomers as they are made out to be or people had grown so sick of Segarra that his background was less important. In any event, Bronin became mayor in 2015 and continues to serve at the time of this writing. He has had to deal with some of the aftermath of the stadium deal and the proposed projects for the surrounding area, known as Downtown North (DoNo). The original developers, hired during Segarra's tenure, were fired in 2016 for failing to reach multiple deadlines and cost overruns.<sup>582</sup> The city then awarded development rights for the DoNo area to another developer,<sup>583</sup> prompting Centerplan to sue for alleged breach of contract.<sup>584</sup> While the case is in the courts, Hartford cannot actually develop the land, and thus the mess of this project continues into the present day.

#### The 2011 Plan of Conservation and Development

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<sup>579</sup> "Public Notices." *Hartford Courant*. August 28, 2015.

<sup>580</sup> Carlesso, Jenna. "Bronin to Run Against Segarra." *Hartford Courant*. January 15, 2015.

<sup>581</sup> De La Torre, Vanessa. "Segarra Claim Proves False." *Hartford Courant*. March 5, 2015.

<sup>582</sup> Goode, Steven. "Hartford, Centerplan, Agree to Mediation in Park Dispute." *Hartford Courant*. December 2, 2016.

<sup>583</sup> Graziano, Frankie. "Hartford Picks New Developer in Latest Attempt At 'DoNo' Redevelopment." Connecticut Public Radio. July 18, 2018. Accessed April 18, 2019.

<sup>584</sup> "About Time for DoNo Project." *Hartford Courant*. October 5, 2017.

Despite being published in 2011 during Pedro Segarra's time in office, the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is likely more reflective of the economic strategies of the Perez administration, assuming they differed at all. This is because work on the plan began in 2006 and would thus have been largely finished by the time Segarra became mayor in 2010.<sup>585</sup> The plan is distinct for being the only Plan of Development produced since the Planning and Zoning Commission took on the role of the Commission on the City Plan. It also evidently has a greater focus on sustainability, as the addition of conservation to the name suggests, and the plan itself states.<sup>586</sup> While it was created early in Segarra's term, and long before Bronin's, the plan is explicitly meant to guide Hartford's development through 2020 and thus, with some amendments, should be representative of the broader economic strategies for the whole decade.<sup>587</sup>

The plan is perhaps the most openly welcoming of gentrification as an economic strategy of them all. One of the goals is to develop Hartford's "Creative Economy."<sup>588</sup> This strongly indicates that the city's planning leadership bought into Richard Florida's development theories. Importantly, his theories focus on attracting a desired group of "creative" people, and convincing them to move into cities.<sup>589</sup> What gives away that he is basically advocating gentrification is that he considers the ability to attract gay people and so-called bohemians to be key for the revitalization of cities.<sup>590</sup> These are two groups commonly associated with engaging in or initiating wider gentrification.<sup>591,592</sup> It is also unlikely that the Planning and Zoning Commission

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<sup>585</sup> *One City, One Plan*. 1-3

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.* 1-7.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.* 1-7

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.* 2-6

<sup>589</sup> Florida. 351

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.* 351

<sup>591</sup> Lloyd. 185-194

<sup>592</sup> Sibalis. 221-234

was not referring to his specific conception of the Creative Economy because it is written with capital letters as though it were a proper noun, not just a generic concept.<sup>593</sup> Moreover, two of the means by which the Commission intended to develop the Creative Economy was by encouraging residential development that appealed to artists and young business professionals and promoting the growth of the arts community around colleges in Hartford.<sup>594</sup>

Downtown is clearly ground zero for the city's efforts to gentrify the city. Not only is it the site of decades of other revitalization attempts, from Constitution Plaza to Adriaen's Landing, it also lacks a sizeable neighborhood population that could be displaced or resist the encroachment of gentrification.<sup>595</sup> Evidently, many of the people who did live in Downtown at the time were young professionals who moved there within the previous decade.<sup>596</sup> The plan suggests that no less than 6,000 to 8,000 additional residents will be needed for Downtown to become self-sustaining.<sup>597</sup> Among the desired population for Downtown are college students and even more young professionals.<sup>598</sup> Admittedly, the plan does say that including an affordable housing requirement could be created to address the fact that residents of Hartford's neighborhoods are almost uniformly incapable of affording Downtown housing.<sup>599</sup> Still, it begs the question why every Downtown housing development built in the previous decade was only for market-rate housing.<sup>600</sup> Considering that young professionals came to occupy many of these

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<sup>593</sup> *One-City, One Plan*. 2-6.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.* 6-13

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.* 7-3

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.* 7-15

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.* 7-4

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.* 7-14, 7-15

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.* 7-14

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8.



new units, it would seem like a somewhat belated concern to suggest, only as a possibility, that 10% of units in new developments be set aside for affordable housing.<sup>601</sup>

The POCD makes an interesting break with the 1996 plan. It is made all the more peculiar by the fact that it repeats, almost verbatim but with a critical difference, an important finding of the previous plan. When the 1996 Plan of Development said Hartford was no longer a “company town” it added that, “Growth must come from multiple sources-small firms and neighborhood economies-not monolithic corporations.”<sup>602</sup> By contrast, the POCD also states that Hartford is no longer a “company town” but follows with “future growth *will* come from multiple sources, *including* small firms and neighborhood economies (emphasis added).”<sup>603</sup> This is a rather significant modification of the earlier statement and suggests a city far more open to the corporations that the 1996 Commission seemed so hostile towards. They excised the derogatory “monolithic corporation” comment and reduced small firms and neighborhood economies to a supporting role instead of an essential one. Their decision to simultaneously evoke the past plan while sending a substantially different message comes across as a deliberate statement of changed values.

In another instance of similarities with the 1996 plan, the POCD is concerned that Hartford’s economy is not diversified enough.<sup>604</sup> This time, the two plans are much more aligned on objectives and the three sectors the POCD hopes to attract are scientific/technical services, medical, arts and entertainment.<sup>605</sup> It is interesting that, in a city with such a large low-skilled population, the Planning and Zoning Commission wants to tether the city’s economic fortunes to

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid. 7-14.

<sup>602</sup> *Plan of Development for the City of Hartford*. 37

<sup>603</sup> *One City, One Plan*. 6-5

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. 7-5

<sup>605</sup> Ibid. 7-27

industries most residents could not participate in. The Commission does state that it is important to get Hartford residents the education required to obtain jobs in the new industries, but it would seem like the pace of development would be faster than the pace of a broken education system.<sup>606</sup> Moreover, since education is a separate department they have no control over, the Commission usually just ends up recommending job training programs in any instance where they actually address the mismatch between the jobs they're trying to create and the skills of the people who actually live in the city.<sup>607</sup> Job training is proposed in practically every Plan of Development, which does not build confidence that it is an effective way to address the problem.

Despite an apparent move towards more gentrification friendly strategies, it does not appear as though gentrification was occurring outside of Downtown. The size of the non-Hispanic white population is often a good indicator of gentrifying neighborhoods, particularly when it grows substantially. It would be a particularly good indicator in Hartford, where the percentage of the minority population in the city, 76%, is roughly the same as the white percentage in the metropolitan region, 77%.<sup>608</sup> It would have to be a very peculiar circumstance for suburbanites to move into Hartford in large numbers and not increase the size of the white population. However, the data shows Hartford's white population was still in decline in 2011.<sup>609</sup> The only neighborhoods that had even a plurality white population were the West End, South West and Downtown.<sup>610</sup> The former two neighborhoods are peripheral neighborhoods that have long had some of the best, single family housing in Hartford and are directly adjacent to West Hartford, the city's much whiter and wealthier neighbor. However, the city's development of

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid. 2-7

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. 6-11, 6-12

<sup>608</sup> Ibid. 15-5

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. 15-6

<sup>610</sup> Ibid. 15-6

Downtown could have a significant impact on the future of gentrification in Hartford if they succeed in creating a residential population of 8,000 to 10,000 people.<sup>611</sup> This will also depend on what the eventual make-up of that population will be, as of now it is substantially whiter and wealthier than most Hartford neighborhoods.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Ibid. 7-4.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. 7-14, 15-6

## Conclusion

The story of Hartford thus far, from the 1950's to the present, has been of a city willing to try anything to maintain, or reclaim, a position of economic superiority in the region. Many scholars make it seem as though the most important difference between places that gentrify and places that don't is resistance to gentrification in the latter.<sup>613</sup> Yet, unless gentrification is in Hartford's near future, the past 20 years of more or less gentrification-friendly development policies in Hartford would seem to disprove that local policy has a determinative effect on the presence of gentrification. Rather, the barriers to gentrification in Hartford would appear to lie outside of City Hall and in some cases outside the city itself.

First, Hartford's position relative to its suburbs has been inimical to its growth for decades. While Hartford was not alone in facing competition from suburbs, white flight and the host of other mid-twentieth century ills that afflicted urban areas, its desire from as early as the 1950's was greater regional governance. Yet, invariably, what regional activity has occurred has not actually empowered Hartford as a city. Frankly, it should not be surprising that this has been the case because even advocates of regionalism in Hartford claim "Localism and regionalism do not have to be mutually exclusive goals."<sup>614</sup> Thus, in the spirit of maintaining Connecticut's proud local traditions,<sup>615</sup> and recognizing the political infeasibility of anything else, the city of Hartford has never sought or been offered the chance to actually lead and guide a regional development entity. Regional entities that have formed in the Hartford region are either overseen by the state of Connecticut or unelected private interests that are feeling philanthropic. As the plans make clear, state agencies alone have thwarted the development of at least two major

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<sup>613</sup> Ley and Dobson. 2471

<sup>614</sup> Rojas and Wray. 253

<sup>615</sup> Ibid. 253

transportation projects that the Commission viewed as critical. When it comes to corporate development, the Greater Hartford Process' grandiose plan to bring urbanism to the suburbs before starting any major projects in Hartford was a monumental mistake with potentially significant consequences. Had millions of dollars been poured into Hartford's neighborhoods, instead of buying up plots of land in Coventry, the face of several neighborhoods could have been radically changed. Instead, the great achievement of the Process was a Downtown entertainment complex directed towards suburban consumption whose roof collapsed a few years after opening.

At times, regional interventions also directly undermined Hartford's power and autonomy, even if the city technically asked for it to occur. This has actually accelerated somewhat in recent decades as some of Hartford's problems have grown truly unmanageable from decades of neglect and inadequate resources. It is not a good look for a city to have such a poorly functioning education system that it has to ask the state to take over the responsibility. Then, just last year, the city was saved from having to declare bankruptcy by getting the state to take on its debt in exchange for what is effectively financial probation. These public episodes of government failure reinforce the perception that Hartford's problems are a result of the city government's mismanagement or incompetence and make it even less likely that suburbanites would ever agree to a situation that gave Hartford power or influence over the suburbs.

Normally, such significant economic declines might cause a rent-gap to occur and gentrification to follow, but the evidence points to Hartford having a particularly poor housing stock that simply cannot attract gentrification. It is fairly incredible that, after one of the worst recessions in Hartford's history, in which housing prices plummeted nationwide, much of Hartford's housing stock could not be bought, rehabilitated and resold for a profit. Without a

rent-gap, or government support covering the costs of rehabilitation, the crucial financial incentive for large scale, private rehabilitation simply does not exist. Therefore, as long as this remains true, the only gentrification that will occur in Hartford will be for non-economic reasons. It is not an unheard-of phenomenon, but gentrification that occurs at a large enough scale to be neighborhood-altering tends to be driven by economic forces.

Lastly, economic recessions have certainly undermined Hartford's economy at critical moments in its development. First, the mid-1970's recession put the last nail in the coffin of the Greater Hartford Process, easily the most ambitious and underwhelming revitalization effort in Hartford's history. It is impossible to know for sure whether the Process would have done anything more substantial had it continued. In Hartford, like in so many cities across the nation, the hostility to gentrification and elite development projects was not just strong but mobilized. It is in this instance that consciously anti-gentrification actions could arguably be said to have prevented its occurrence in Hartford. However, this does not explain why, unlike many of the neighborhoods that successfully resisted gentrification in the 1970's and 1980's, none of Hartford's neighborhoods gentrified in the 1990's, when opposition to such developments weakened.

In this case, once again, it was economic recession that really put an end to any possibility of Hartford becoming gentrified. The significance of the 1990's recession cannot be overemphasized in Hartford's history. Indeed, as the recession that inaugurated the current wave of gentrification, it is significant in gentrification history in general. The bizarre reality of Hartford prior to the 1990's, in which the Downtown economy grew thanks to white-collar, suburban employment while the neighborhoods declined, came to an abrupt and unceremonious end with the virtual collapse of Hartford's major industries. The early 1990's made the 1970's

look good by comparison, at least the city had a wide array of anchor institutions at the time. Others have since filled in for the role played by the former “bishops,” among them Trinity College and the State of Connecticut, but they are far more financially constrained than a group of large financial and insurance firms.

Notably, the recession of the 1990’s essentially forced Hartford to reinvent its economic niche. City leaders could not rely on those industries that remained in Downtown because they had proven to be sensitive to market downturns. Briefly, there was a moment when city leadership put more faith in the neighborhood economies than they did in Downtown. However, Hartford’s efforts of the past 20 years or so have been directed at attracting new development, and new people, to a Downtown it hopes to remake into a residential neighborhood again. Thus, Hartford is largely left to hope that, despite not being known for its medical or technology industries, businesses in those fields will relocate here if properly incentivized. Hence, as of this writing, gentrification appears to be the main way Hartford’s leaders expect to restore Hartford’s economic position.

#### Limitations and further research

Naturally, this thesis cannot provide the definitive answer to what impedes gentrification in so many old, industrial cities. Time and logistical constraints simply made it too difficult to perform some of the research I would have liked to perform. First and foremost, future studies seeking to address this issue should try to engage in a comparative study of a city that has not gentrified with a relatively similar city that has. One possibility that could build off of this paper is comparing Hartford to New Haven, which has improved relative to Hartford in recent years. It would also be valuable to compare neighborhoods that have not gentrified in otherwise gentrified cities to neighborhoods in cities that have seen no gentrification at all.

It was difficult to determine which sources to rely on as a proxy for the City of Hartford's views on development. It is likely that this paper could be improved upon by using a wider variety of sources from other agencies involved in development, such as the Hartford Housing Authority and the Hartford Redevelopment Authority. Admittedly, part of the difficulty was the sheer quantity of agencies that could conceivably have some relation to economic development and the number of reports they would have produced over a 70-year period. Since the Plans of Development were meant to be comprehensive, long-term plans, I relied on them even though they are advisory and the ones from 1955 and 1972 were not adopted by the City Council. There may be other plans I am not aware of that had a better track record for being carried out and also addressed development somewhat broadly.

Unfortunately, I was also unable to get a sense of how Hartford's current leadership really felt about gentrification explicitly because I did not perform interviews. The plans tend to be coy around the term gentrification and one is left to guess whether they really see their goals as something distinct from gentrification or whether they are simply avoiding the term because it is politically toxic. Getting a sense of how Hartford's leaders view the prospect of gentrification, and what they understand that term to mean, would be valuable in assessing my finding that they are currently trying to advance gentrification

### Policy Recommendations

Part of the difficulty with making a policy recommendation regarding gentrification is that, unlike crime for instance, there is no consensus on whether it is better to have more or less of it. However, since the City is already pursuing a development strategy that is geared towards gentrification, even if it will not use the exact word, my recommendation will for avoiding gentrification while encouraging economic growth. Admittedly, this is a daunting task and it may



be that, realistically, there is no way for Hartford to grow economically without experiencing some amount of gentrification. Certainly, as a city that is over 80% non-white, any significant economic growth would likely cause that statistic to shrink considerably.

Crucially, Hartford's education system needs improvement. That is not a groundbreaking statement but if Hartford is going to be a city with a healthy middle-income population, without experiencing gentrification, a decent high school education is the bare minimum that Hartford's current residents need. An affordable and adequate college education would also be necessary but that is out of the city's control. The middle-class was first created in cities but they have evidently lost or forgotten the ability to create it in today's economic conditions. They have become accustomed instead to attracting already middle-income populations from suburbs and other cities while those that lose this competition for people simply sink into increasing poverty. If Hartford wants to avoid gentrification it will have to stop looking for outsiders to save it and start focusing on building up its own population.

However, my main recommendation for Hartford would be to advocate for a regional governing body that it actually leads. This body would have to have the ability to allocate resources and engage in regional planning that its members actually have to comply with. Of course, suburban governments would be immediately hostile to the idea, but expecting them to come around on this issue without any pressure is not supported by historical precedent. Hartford is the capital city of the state and the economic center of the Hartford region, despite all that has befallen it. Aside from historical accident and parochialism, it makes no sense why Hartford should have to be subordinate to its suburbs. This would not be a regional dictatorship and Hartford's powers would be much less than absolute. However, if Hartford's leaders are truly interested in creating an economic revival in the city then the detrimental activities occurring in

the suburbs need to be addressed. Regional governance would make it possible for people to experience the benefit of many towns' shared resources without having to move to those towns. Thus, if and when an economic revival occurred in Hartford as a result of a better allocation of resources, suburbanites would not feel compelled to actually move to Hartford to benefit from the gains being made. Therefore, economic growth could occur within Hartford's boundaries without gentrification and displacement.

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