



Health &
Wellness District
in Stamford, CT



A Planetree Hospital



AUGUST 2013

Submitted to:

CHARTER OAK COMMUNITIES

22 Clinton Avenue, Stamford, CT 06902 (www.charteroakcommunities.org)

in partnership with

STAMFORD HOSPITAL

Shelburne Road, Stamford, CT 06902 (www.stamfordhospital.com)

Submitted by:

Gamble Associates, Boston, MA
Architecture + Urban Design

Madden Planning Group, Boston, MA
Community + Economic Development

Development Strategies, St. Louis, MO
Economic Impact

Reisen Design Associates, Cambridge, MA
Landscape Architecture

Tripp Umbach, Pittsburgh, PA
Best Practices

Balance Health Communications, Stamford, CT
Community Outreach + Content

This report is made possible by a "Sustainable Communities, Community Challenge Grant" to the City of Stamford from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Additional funding was provided from the Building Blocks Equitable Development technical assistance program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), both under the direction of Vincent J. Tufo, the grant's principal director. (Contact: vtufo@charteroakcommunities.org).



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY + OVERVIEW

1. HEALTH + WELLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Opportunities to enhance quality of life and well-being

2. HEALTHY EATING: URBAN AGRICULTURE + NUTRITION

Community engagement, opportunities for improved nutrition, and access to healthy food

3. ACTIVE LIVING: FITNESS + PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Public realm improvements, connectivity and identity for a safe, healthy environment that fosters exercise

4. PROMOTING GOOD JOBS + LOCAL BUSINESSES

Workforce development and support for small businesses around health and wellness opportunities

5. HOSPITAL + COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Hospital growth potential and community redevelopment

CONCLUSION

ENDNOTES



VITA HEALTH & WELLNESS DISTRICT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Vita Health & Wellness District will improve the health and resilience of the neighborhood surrounding Stamford Hospital. The multifaceted plan described in this document is designed to revitalize Stamford's West Side community and to begin improving the health of its residents within a few short years, an ambitious set of goals that can be achieved via the realistic, practical strategies outlined herein.

While programs aimed at solving the various challenges faced by this community have been successfully implemented elsewhere, Vita is unique in the manner in which they are interwoven - integrated by design - in the emerging theater of national healthcare reform. Vita program designers have conducted extensive research into national best practices; that evidence has guided some of our approach and recommendations. The result will produce a vibrant residential and commercial district in an off-campus location, literally at the doorstep of a revitalized Stamford Hospital.

It is often said that crisis begets opportunity. There is no question that Stamford's West Side faces challenges; it has struggled to maintain economic vitality and diversity during recent decades; the recently conducted Community Health Needs Assessment identifies its residents as having the highest incidence of chronic medical conditions – poor health – within the greater Stamford area. However, a serendipitous set of circumstances presents the opportunity to create an innovative and impactful model that will set a new precedent for how a hospital can prosper in the Affordable Care Act environment. We aim to develop the Vita Health & Wellness District into a lively, thriving neighborhood by the time the new Stamford Hospital opens its doors in 2016.

HOW DID THE VITA CONCEPT EVOLVE?

The strategic collaboration between Stamford Hospital and Charter Oak Communities (Stamford's public housing authority) began over a decade ago. The Hospital needed to expand its physical footprint for construction of a new primary inpatient facility and support infrastructure, while Charter Oak focused on demolishing and replacing the obsolete Vidal Court public housing project. The leadership of these two institutions entered into an unconventional real estate transaction, a critical land swap that required no exchange of monies but achieved goals important to both. Stamford Hospital acquired acreage for its major expansion while Charter Oak Communities got the land it needed to build new housing and to help stabilize parts of the neighborhood suffering from disinvestment. Further collaboration to obtain Village Commercial District zoning; to convert blighted lots into Fairgate Farm; and by obtaining federal grant funds to develop and refine the Vita plan have brought their partnership to where it is today -- poised to create a model community focused on healthful living that will elevate the neighborhood, its residents, business owners and stakeholders, and the Hospital, all at once.

WHAT WILL VITA ACCOMPLISH?

Vita invigorates the West Side community and achieves three vital goals: Improving the health of a vulnerable population; helping to reduce excessive spending linked to the inefficient delivery of medical services; and strengthening the neighborhood surrounding Stamford Hospital.

The 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment, conducted jointly by Stamford Hospital and the City of Stamford, identified this neighborhood (Census Tracts 214 and 215) as the locus of Stamford's neediest, least healthy residents. High incidences of chronic medical conditions include obesity, coronary/cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancers. Many residents rely on federally subsidized clinics or Stamford Hospital's emergency department in response to emergent conditions because they are uninsured or qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. Many are without a relationship to a primary care physician and/or do not receive preventive health services on a regular basis.

The Vita Health & Wellness District will give residents access to the essential services required to support healthy lifestyles. Within their own neighborhood, they'll not only be able to access preventive medical care that can keep them out of the hospital, but they'll also have access to a network of case managers and peer advisors whose job it is to make sure they have the information and resources they need to get and stay healthy.

But medical care alone, even preventive health care, cannot achieve significant, lasting change for this vulnerable population. Charter Oak Communities had the foresight to address some of the housing challenges, but without good jobs and a robust small business community these changes are unsustainable. Our plan includes workforce development initiatives to help prepare residents for better jobs, along with supports for existing and new businesses. Vita benefits the City of Stamford, Stamford Hospital, and the West Side neighborhood – it is truly a “win-win” for all involved.

THE COMPONENTS OF OUR PROPOSAL

- **Health & Wellness in the Community.** Our plan recommends multiple strategies to improve the population health metrics, including initiatives to bring health and medical services into the community; outcome measurements to track progress; a network of peer trainers who work within the community; and improved access to health services with the goal of reducing hospitalizations and unnecessary use of the emergency room.
- **Healthy Eating: Urban Agriculture and Nutrition.** Fairgate Farm will be enhanced to provide better connections to the community, including more opportunities for cultivation; a plan to host a busy calendar of food-based programs and activities; and mentoring programs for community gardens throughout the area and the City. Healthy restaurants and specialty grocers to provide greater access to nutritious, whole foods are also included in our plan.
- **Active Living: Parks and Connections.** A pedestrian network, including walking paths connecting the Hospital campus to the broader community, is an integral component of Vita. The mixed-use building proposed for the new south entry road will house a culturally relevant fitness center for hospital employees and

community residents. Other recommended strategies include outdoor exercise equipment; cycling paths and programs to promote bike usage; and a schedule of seasonal community events to promote physical activity.

- **Promoting Good Jobs and Local Businesses.** Since economic factors are key to achieving health and wellness, our plan includes supports to help existing businesses adapt to anticipated changes in the community, as well as innovative programs for workforce development. Especially exciting is an initiative to create a Vita Health Sciences Institute in partnership with local colleges, led by Norwalk Community College and also including UCONN Stamford, Sacred Heart and Fairfield University.
- **Hospital and Community Connections.** Establishing a health-focused community at the doorstep of the new Stamford Hospital campus will help both the Hospital and the neighborhood to flourish. Flanking the Hospital entrance with a vibrant mixed-use building that houses health-oriented retail, a fitness center and workforce training programs on one side and a lively, working farm on the other makes a visible statement – literal and metaphorical -- about the Hospital's commitment to health and wellness in the community. A shared parking facility enhances the ability of local businesses to succeed and also provides additional parking for Hospital employees and visitors.

WHAT RESEARCH HAS INFORMED THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

- In designing the interface between the West Side neighborhood and the Hospital, we were guided by the 2010 Stillwater Avenue Implementation Plan that outlined zoning and concepts for hospital access.
- Sponsored by the West Side Revitalization Zone (WSNRZ), we held multiple community meetings and visited with local business owners throughout the fall and winter of 2012/13 to learn about their many concerns and incorporate their priorities and ideas into our plan.
- We've done a comprehensive market analysis to test the retail opportunities available in the new commercial spaces.

- We've researched the job outlook, locally and regionally, for well-paying, sustainable jobs in the health care professions.
- We have evaluated the physical connections that affect resident access to fitness, health care and nutritious food, as well as the ability to reach employment opportunities and other services in Stamford's vibrant downtown.
- We have also assessed the potential connections with other providers, partners and assets in our community to learn how we can work together with these valued organizations to ensure a more efficient delivery of services around health and wellness.
- We've compiled an analysis of Best Practices throughout the country to obtain information about what works and doesn't work in achieving the many important objectives we've set forth.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR VITA?

There is a great deal of work ahead, undoubtedly even more than is outlined in this report, but our vision is an important and highly achievable one. We have outlined a program that will transform Stamford's West Side community from the top down, through improved delivery of health care services under the auspices of a progressive Stamford Hospital, as well as from the bottom up, with residents taking personal responsibility for managing their health. We've already attracted and obtained support and financial resources at the federal, state and local levels and will continue to do so. Working in partnership with our West Side neighbors and the City of Stamford, we will realize the integrated vision of the Vita Health and Wellness District and its potential to influence the well-being of area residents for generations to come.

OVERVIEW

What is Vita? Overview of the Initiative

THE VISION

The creation of the Vita Health & Wellness District will transform Stamford's West Side neighborhood into a thriving community focused on healthful living. Thoughtful real estate development will invite and attract retail clients in the areas of health, wellness and medicine. The community's central theme will be health promotion, incorporating principles of healthy building design and opportunities for physical activity into interior and exterior environments at every opportunity. Even the lowest income residents will live in safe, attractive homes. A variety of programs will help the men, women and children in the neighborhood to get and stay healthy, including not only accessible medical care but also preventive programs designed to keep them from getting sick. Streetscape improvements and signage will invite people to walk and ride bikes as part of their daily routine and a fitness center will offer a robust schedule of fun, affordable and culturally relevant classes and workout groups. The neighborhood will be known for its abundance of healthy eating opportunities, from restaurants to specialty grocers



Left: Marc Brodsky, MD, Medical Director of Stamford Hospital's Center for Integrative Medicine, tending plants at Fairgate Farm.

IMAGINE A NEW HEALTH SCIENCES INSTITUTE FOR THE WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD.



Above: A multi-use building on Stillwater Avenue can house the new Vita Health Sciences Institute.

to the Fairgate Farm and its associated farmers' market. We envision growing and expanding this popular community asset right up to the hospital's entrance; it will continue to be a magnet that inspires residents and others from the Stamford community to participate in raising food from seed to harvest.

The new Vita Health Sciences Institute will have its front door on Stillwater Avenue. It will be a centerpiece for workforce development, health care training programs and other community uses. A new access road with inviting landscaping and design will connect the hospital's south entry to Stillwater Avenue, providing foot traffic that will facilitate success for retailers. A shared parking facility will serve local businesses, existing and new, while also supporting development and providing visitor and employee parking for Stamford Hospital.

The Vita initiative will bring new health resources to this neighborhood. With broader insurance coverage and more convenient access to primary and specialty care, patients will be better able to manage chronic conditions (such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma and obesity), thus minimizing the need for costly and inefficient emergency-room care. Peer trainers will work seamlessly in the community to ensure that everyone has the information and resources to achieve their personal health goals. Many residents will use clearly organized online tools to track and measure their progress on healthy lifestyle change.

The Vita vision includes distinct initiatives directed toward healthier housing, improving nutrition, increasing physical activity, helping people find good, well-paying jobs and providing better access to health care services. The overarching goal is to improve the health and vitality of a community rife with medical problems and chronic disease, while also reducing wasteful spending on and inefficient use of medical service. While effective programs aimed at achieving each of these individual goals have been successfully implemented elsewhere (see “Best Practices” at www.vitastamford.com), Vita is unique in interweaving them to facilitate success in the challenging environment of the Affordable Care Act.

A serendipitous set of circumstances – an unconventional real estate transaction, nationwide health care reform and the building of the new Stamford Hospital – presents an opportunity to create a solution that addresses multiple concerns at once. Vita will invigorate the West Side community and achieve three vital goals: Improving the health of a vulnerable population, reducing wasteful spending on the inefficient delivery of medical services and enhancing the neighborhood where Stamford Hospital is located. The result of these efforts will be a model community devoted to health improvement that will achieve national attention and renown.



Above: A new access drive replacing the existing Finney Lane will forge a stronger relationship between the West Side and Stamford Hospital. Capitalizing on the popularity of Fairgate Farm and the connection between health and nutrition, the street extends the urban farm to the hospital's entrance. A new mixed-use building anchors the neighborhood on Stillwater Avenue by providing space for programs that both Stamford Hospital and the neighborhood need.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Vita Health & Wellness District is a new initiative launched by Charter Oak Communities, in partnership with Stamford Hospital, the West Side community, and the City of Stamford. Vita, which means “life” in Latin, aims to integrate health and wellness principles into daily living at every opportunity, while strengthening the community and managing positive change in the neighborhood. As Stamford Hospital continues to strengthen its commitment to patient-centered care and community needs, the Vita project will also help incorporate the changing role of the Hospital in the neighborhood.

The current phase of work began in the fall of 2012 under a Sustainable Communities Challenge grant, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In many ways, however, Vita was already well underway with the recent development of Fairgate Farm, the Optimus/Fairgate Community

Health Center (a federally qualified health center, or “FQHC”), new healthy housing opportunities, and Stamford Hospital’s health and wellness programs, including KIDS’ FANS (the childhood obesity prevention program), the Mobile Wellness Unit, and the Center for Integrative Medicine and Wellness.

Vita continues the evolution of recent planning efforts in and around the neighborhood with a strategy for implementing the concepts that arose from those early efforts. In 2010, the Stillwater Avenue corridor was the focus of an Implementation Plan that led to the new Village Commercial Zoning and the concept of a new south entry to the hospital. Stamford Hospital is just now launching a major expansion, and the new Mill River Park opened recently after many years of planning and design.

The project is also inspired and affected by larger forces. Changes spurred by the 2010 Affordable Care Act have placed a new focus on preventive care in order to improve health care outcomes. Constrained budgets at the federal, state, and local levels affect funding for capital projects and programs, and shape the way that the Hospital and its partners deliver health care.



Top: Fairgate Farm greenhouse.
Above: Fairgate, a new housing development on Stillwater Avenue.

Within the neighborhood, a variety of interests and points of view must be considered in charting a course for the future. The current project, which is being supported by an interdisciplinary consultant team, has involved the local neighborhood under the auspices of the West Side NRZ (including residents and business owners), along with different City departments, non-profit organizations, civic leaders, program leaders and others at Stamford Hospital, Charter Oak Communities and its board, and other involved stakeholders.

VITA PROCESS



Above: Individual conversations with many stakeholders occurred in November and December 2012, and working sessions with stakeholders and the public were held in January, March, and May 2013. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency ran a workshop in April 2013 focusing on workforce development as a way to help support equitable development.



CONTEXT

Right: Stamford Hospital's expansion will connect the campus to nearby parks and help create a health and wellness district as part of the revitalization of Stamford's West Side neighborhood. (Image courtesy of WHR Architects.) Opposite: The new Mill River Park.



Stamford's West Side is a neighborhood in transition, with over 330 units of new mixed-income housing that have replaced aging public housing and introduced workforce housing opportunities. Stamford Hospital is making a significant investment in the community with a \$450-million new hospital and park-like campus, along with associated site improvements. The Hospital is committed not only to creating a secure and healing environment, but also to extending it into the surrounding area, connecting the campus to nearby parks and helping to foster a health and wellness district as part of the revitalization of Stamford's West Side neighborhood.

Climbing up from downtown and the Mill River, Stillwater Avenue forms the spine of the Vita Health & Wellness district. Within this one-mile area, a mix of small markets, local restaurants, and other commercial uses is interspersed with residential buildings, offering a walkable village scale that is unique in this part of the city. At the center of this corridor, Fairgate Farm was conceived as an interim use on vacant house lots, but quickly developed into a prized community asset that engages residents of all ages in health and wellness activities. In the



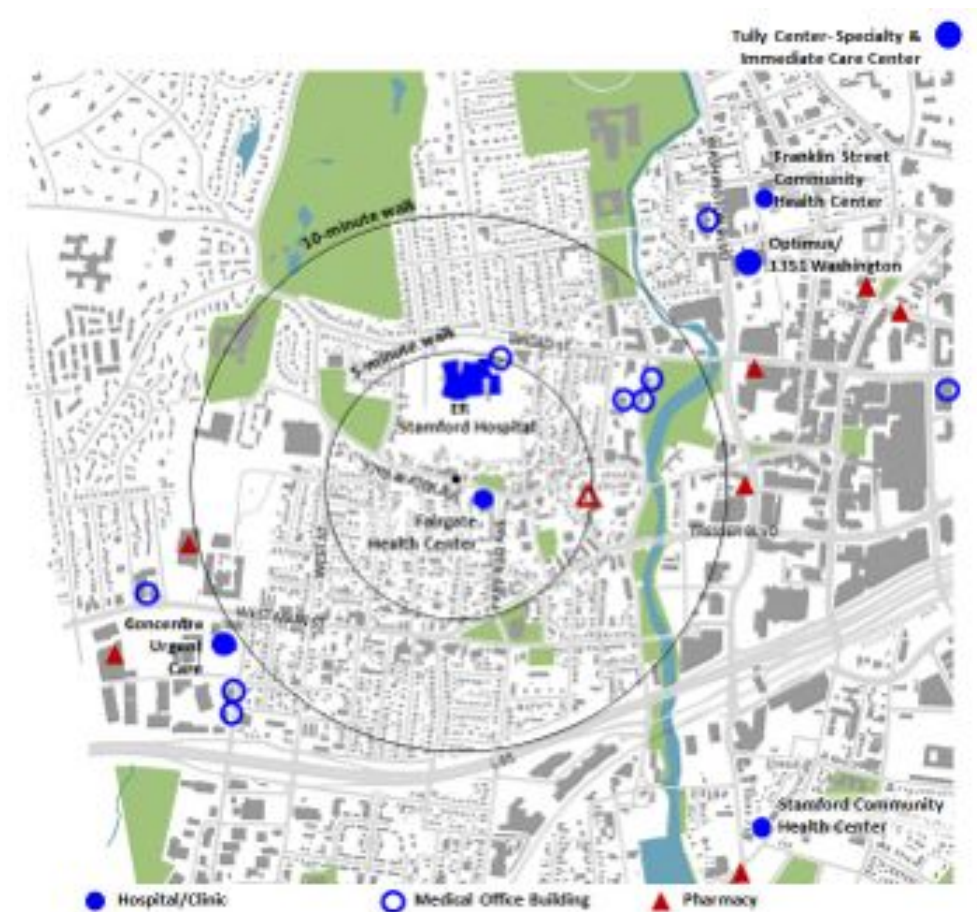
Above: In 1867, Stamford had strong connections between downtown and the West Side. (Image courtesy of Stamford Historical Society).

surrounding area, West Main Street offers a completely different commercial character, with automobile-dominated uses and major “big box” grocery and other retail stores on a busy regional artery (U.S. Route 1).

Stamford Hospital is a regional and local destination for health care and a major employment center in the West Side, but lacks a connection to Stillwater Avenue. With over 2,500 employees and annual visits that total in the hundreds of thousands, it’s clear that a large population will benefit from convenient shopping and places to eat outside the main medical facilities. For the most part, the Stillwater Avenue businesses serve a very local resident population and are not geared toward serving a large and diverse customer base. Parking along Stillwater Avenue is limited. In the new ground floor retail space in the redeveloped Fairgate housing complex, the Fairgate Community Health Center provides acute, non-urgent primary health care services for low income, uninsured and underinsured members of the community. A new pharmacy is proposed for an adjacent space.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

For residents in the neighborhood, access to health care is complicated by a number of factors. Many are directed to federally subsidized clinics because they are uninsured or qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. Wait times can be long; hours in the small satellite clinics are inconsistent; and public transportation to the larger facilities is indirect. Not all residents have primary care physicians and access to specialty care is sometimes hard to navigate. Health and wellness facilities at Stamford Hospital's Tully Center are too far to be conveniently used by residents who walk or use mass transit. Stamford Hospital and the City Department of Public Health both operate Mobile units that offer a variety of health screenings at various times and places in the city and the region. Annual health fairs are held at the Yerwood Center and other venues, although these large events may not be the most effective way to deliver services. Stamford Hospital's emergency room is often used for medical care that could be treated more proactively in a primary care setting.



Above: Stamford Hospital is a not-for-profit hospital with 305 beds and 389,000 system visits annually. Optimum Health Care sees 250,000 patients per year, with about a third of its practice in Stamford and the rest centered in Bridgeport.

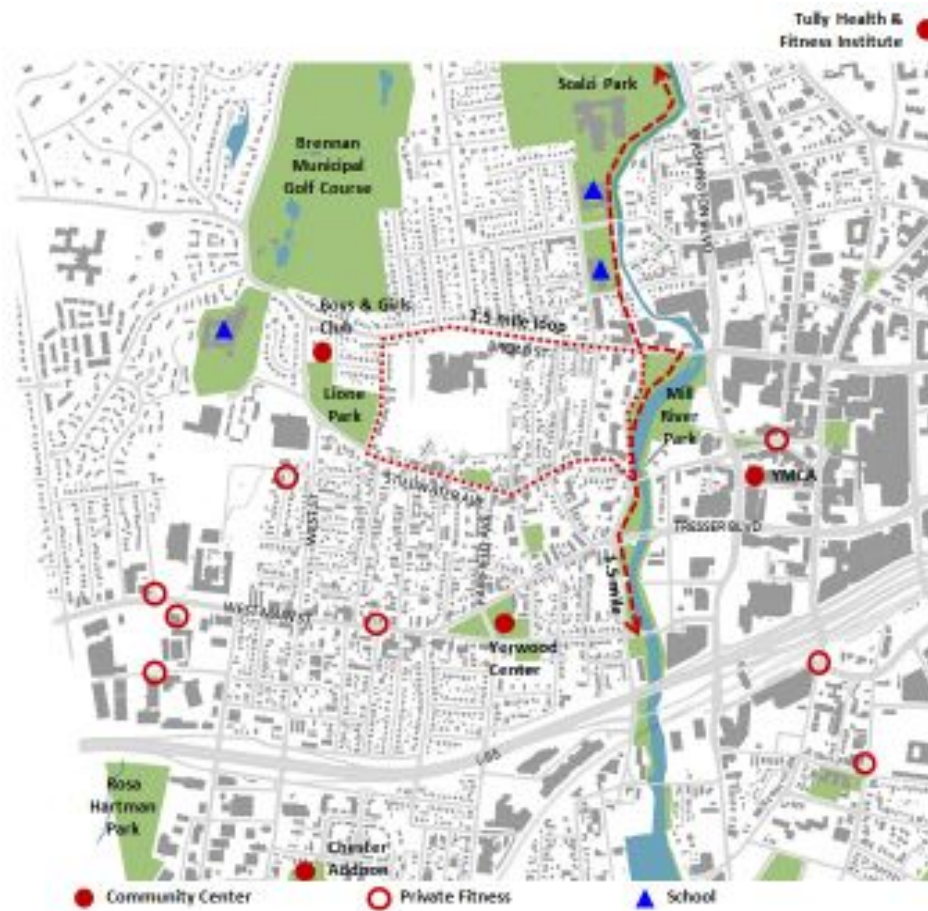
WALKING AND FITNESS ENVIRONMENT

The City has invested in improvements to all the nearby parks in recent years. With over five acres, Lione Park functions as a major multi-ethnic gathering area during the summer months, with a mix of active and passive recreational uses. The other three neighborhood parks, smaller in size, feature playgrounds, a ball court and/or walking paths as the primary fitness facilities. The Mill River Park, which is meant to serve both the West Side residents and the downtown population with walking paths and a playground, will ultimately provide access to other recreational resources to the north and south. The streetscapes that connect the neighborhood parks are uneven in condition and character, often with poor lighting, cracked and unmaintained sidewalks, and sparse street trees. The lack of affordable indoor fitness facilities is another deterrent to exercise for many



Above: A system of buses connects the West Side to downtown and the Stamford Transportation Center, both of which are within a mile of the Vita Health & Wellness District. More distant employment and health care destinations in other parts of the city are harder to reach as they require a bus transfer as part of a hub and spoke transit system.

residents on the West Side. For children, the Boys & Girls Club and the Yerwood Center offer recreation after school, while the nearby YMCA provides fitness and recreation for all ages.



Above: Opportunities to engage in fitness are improving with the completion of Mill River Park and new walking and biking trails. Stamford Walks, a City of Stamford Health Department program, publishes an online directory of walking routes in Stamford. The YMCA and Stamford Hospital's Tully Health & Fitness Institute have fitness facilities, but the community would benefit from a space close to Stamford Hospital.



Above and right: The Kids' Fitness and Nutrition Services (KIDS' FANS), part of Stamford Hospital's Obesity-Prevention Program, and Fairgate Farm are healthy eating initiatives.



ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Fairgate Farm is a highly visible, active and engaging urban farm that connects West Side residents to healthy food at the source. Community residents of all ages work the farm together, cultivating fresh produce for local nutritional, obesity-reduction and healthy medicine programs. Planting seeds, caring for growing fruits and vegetables, and harvesting the crops teaches children about nutrition in a meaningful way. Many of the community centers and some of the area schools also have small gardens and some host cooking and nutrition classes. There is a community garden adjacent to the Martin Luther King apartments on Spruce Street where gardeners can cultivate individual plots, but without more management resources, a number of plots remain fallow.

Grocery, meats, convenience items, and small household goods are the primary offerings in the six small markets on Stillwater Avenue, with many items targeted to the Latino and other ethnic populations. A wide selection of fresh produce,

which the markets purchase once or twice a week, is difficult to sustain with a small or infrequent customer base; residents with cars drive to the nearby supermarkets for these products, while those without cars either take buses or do without. The local restaurants offer a variety of traditional cuisines – Italian, Latino, and Jamaican, among others - but none specialize in fresh, locally grown food. The closest farmers market is downtown.



Above: There are limited opportunities to buy fresh produce in the many local markets and bodegas that are located along Stillwater Avenue. There is a farmers market located downtown. While many local markets are well stocked with a wide variety of goods, unpredictable customer volume necessitates higher food prices.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES

The City of Stamford is a major regional employment center with 68,000 jobs, many of which are concentrated in the nearby downtown area. Approximately 40% of Stamford Hospital's employees live within a 10-minute drive (zip code 06902). Other major commercial employers in the neighborhood are ACMI, the CT Film Center and Cytec. Retail employment is concentrated on West Main Street. Many local residents are not able to access good jobs due to a lack of training, language barriers or immigration status.

On the edge of downtown, the nearby University of Connecticut Stamford offers many business programs and is hoping to expand its allied health program.

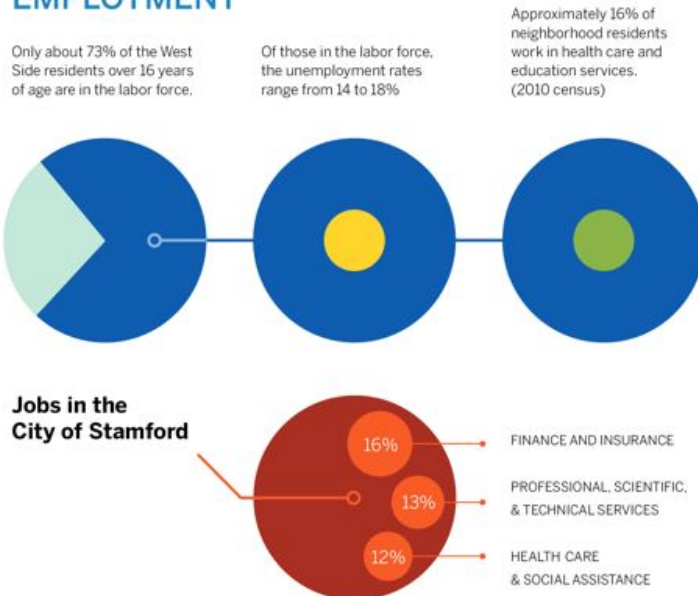
Many residents find their way to Norwalk Community College, which is accessible



Above: The University of Connecticut in downtown Stamford.

by bus, where they have access to a greater range of programs targeted to local employment opportunities. Sacred Heart University has a limited presence in Stamford, but is also hoping to expand some programs. The J.M. Wright Technical School, operated by the state, has been closed for several years, but will be renovated and opened again in 2014. The public schools in the West Side are city-wide magnet schools, which serve residents but don't function as centers for neighborhood culture or gatherings.

EMPLOYMENT



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS



Above: West Side residents share their vision in an early community planning meeting.

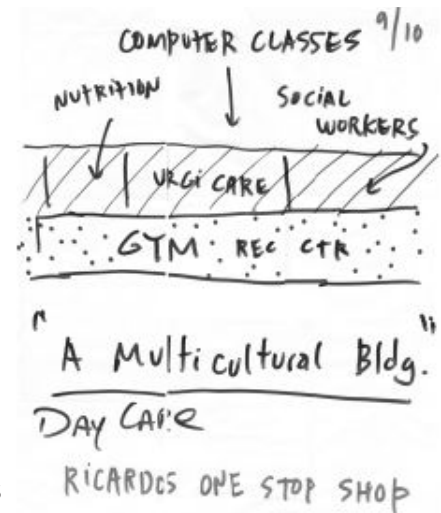
COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

Community insights are woven into every element of this report. Ongoing conversations with residents, non-profits, local business owners, and city officials have helped to guide the understanding of place and the recommendations. In general, residents prize the walkable scale and the small-village feeling that also has the benefit of being so close to downtown. The neighborhood has always been diverse and residents would like it to remain so. The new housing units and the increased safety in the neighborhood are highly valued, although concerns about being “priced out” and dismay at the loss of very low income housing have also been expressed. The local businesses worry about losing loyal customers as the demographics change from one ethnic group to another. Many participants note that improvement to the sidewalks and the lighting are needed; it’s widely believed that traffic-calming is needed on Stillwater Avenue to make it easier to cross. Many residents expressed the desire for better access to jobs and job training.

At the outset of the project, participants mentioned a wide range of program ideas to enhance the retail offerings and provide more opportunities for healthy living in the Vita Health & Wellness District.

RETAIL

- Farmers Market
- Bakery
- Coffee Shops
- Green Grocer
- Florist
- Pharmacy
- Convenience stores



MEDICAL SERVICES



Above: The planning process included over 40 individual meetings, three community meetings and multiple resident focus group sessions. Automated Response Technology was used to identify community priorities and to help craft neighborhood goals relative to health and wellness.

- Expanded Walk-in Medical Clinics
- Dental Clinic
- Wellness Center
- Urgent Care Centers
- Outpatient Services

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Health Care Professional Development Facilities
- Workforce Training
- Basic Job-Readiness Programs

ACTIVE LIVING

- Recreational Walking Paths
- Improved Streetscapes
- Expansion of Land Cultivation
- Youth Activities
- Affordable Fitness Center
- Group Exercise Rooms

DOCUMENT INTENTIONS

This document is organized into five chapters that provide more information about the essential components of the Vita Health & Wellness District.

1. Health and Wellness in the Community
2. Healthy Eating: Urban Agriculture and Nutrition
3. Active Living: Parks and Connections
4. Promoting Good Jobs and Local Business
5. Hospital + Community Connections

Each chapter includes comprehensive information about its topic: a vision statement, context, and a number of key strategies to implement the recommendations. Interwoven into this narrative are examples of best practices in other communities, evidence-based data, quotes and insights and relevant facts that provide additional information. Maps, photos, and illustrations offer another way to navigate through the findings and recommendations.

A number of objectives have been established for this project at the outset and are documented in this overview and the subsequent chapters:

HEALTH-BASED PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD:

Ideas for new health and wellness activities were generated through discussion with residents and other stakeholders, research into best practices elsewhere, and market analysis. These program ideas are woven into Chapters 1 through 3 and Chapter 5.

PROJECTS THAT ARE TIED TO MARKET REALITIES:

The market analysis tested the retail opportunities, medical office building, and parking structure, evaluating likely costs, rents, third party funding sources, and other factors that affect feasibility. The Appendix provides detailed studies that support the recommendations in Chapter 5.

A GREATER NETWORK OF PHYSICAL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

Physical connections affect resident access to fitness, health care, and nutritious food, as well as the ability to reach employment opportunities and other services

in the downtown (see Chapter 3). In addition, the Vita project valued the network of community connections, which can be strengthened to ensure a more efficient delivery of services around health and wellness. All of the strategies and the overall Action Plan are based on this understanding.

DESIGN CONCEPTS FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD/HOSPITAL INTERFACE:

The 2010 Stillwater Avenue Implementation Plan guided subsequent actions around zoning and concepts for hospital access. Rather than duplicate this work, the Vita project set a goal of advancing the vision for the geographic area between the hospital and the Stillwater neighborhood (see Chapter 5).

CLARITY IN ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PHASING PRIORITIES:

No plan can be implemented without a clear understanding of leadership, partners, a focused set of actions, and priorities. Each chapter presents a set of suggested strategies, and the Action Plan provides more detail on responsibilities and phasing.

An appendix provides additional relevant information.



Above: Progress is being made, but the West Side neighborhood is in need of improvement.

1

HEALTH + WELLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Opportunities to enhance quality of life
and well-being





1

HEALTH + WELLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Opportunities to enhance quality of life
and well-being



HEALTH + WELLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Opportunities to enhance quality of life
and well-being

THE VISION

In a few short years the Vita Health & Wellness District will be a healthy community, with an identity focused on nutrition and fitness, especially in relation to preventing and managing heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other chronic diseases. The community will be transformed from the top down, through improved delivery of health care services under the auspices of a top-performing community hospital, as well as from the bottom up, with residents taking personal responsibility for managing their health. A major goal of the new Affordable Health Care Act is expansion of health insurance coverage, so many more residents will have access to care.

An ongoing outreach program of engaging, culturally relevant communications in a variety of media will keep residents involved in and focused on their health. The ongoing partnership between Stamford Hospital, public health providers, community-based organizations, and educational entities will promote prevention and wellness as well as encourage better chronic disease management. Residents will be using state-of-the-art technology to report their health care data on line, so that health care professionals can monitor any issues.

*IMAGINE ALL YOUR HEALTH
NEEDS MET WITHIN
YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.*





Above: Madhu Mathur, MD, MPH, Chair of Stamford's Obesity Task Force and Medical Director of Stamford Hospital's KIDS' FAN program, discusses healthy eating with a young boy.

Stamford Hospital will continue its vital role as a center for tertiary care, with updated facilities and the latest technology. Stillwater Avenue and the new entry road will be a vibrant retail hub and home to medical offices, including primary care and other specialty care that does not require a hospital visit. Fairgate Community Health Center will be thriving as a walk-in center and a gateway to primary care, tied more closely with the neighborhood. Health care case managers and peer advisors will work in the community to ensure that residents are aware of their options. These improvements will put the health of West Side residents on par with other parts of the city and the county.

For the first time since its founding on this site in 1913, the Hospital will open an entry toward its neighborhood to the south. The park-like hospital campus will offer many connections to outdoor spaces for patients, families and staff. At its heart is a new, 11-story, 647,000 square-foot specialty health care pavilion, designed to reflect Planetree principles supporting a calm, welcoming and healing environment.

CONTEXT

Residents of Stamford's West Side face many challenges in managing their health, contributing to the health disparities in the neighborhood relative to other parts of the city. Many residents are uninsured or cannot afford health care, so they rely on Federally Qualified Health Care Centers such as Optimus or the emergency room at Stamford Hospital for routine care. As is the case in lower income neighborhoods throughout the country, health disparities are significant due to a variety of environmental, economic, and social factors. Measures of healthy eating and physical activity are lower than in other parts of the city, and many people find it difficult to afford prescription medications. The incidence of obesity, hypertension, cancer, diabetes, and asthma are high, while on the mental health front, cases of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse abound. Additionally, language barriers and cultural differences also pose difficulties that affect residents' access to health care services.¹

COMMUNITY HEALTH PRIORITIES



Above: Stamford Hospital has recently completed a Community Health Needs Assessment. Strategic Priorities and Action Plans are being developed to address the needs of the community with evidence-based desired outcomes and evaluation procedures. (Image adapted from JSI Inc.)

EDUCATION & LANGUAGE

Over half the residents in the study area have only a high school diploma or less (62%).

Two-thirds speak a language other than English at home...

...with about one-third speaking English "less than very well".



Above: Many practical challenges make it harder for West Side residents to get healthy. One of Vita's goals is to connect with organizations, such as NeighborsLink, to spread awareness of available resources and services and to educate the community about the importance of fitness, nutrition and healthy lifestyle habits.

Against this backdrop, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 seeks to increase the number of individuals with health insurance and to focus on preventive care as a means of reducing health care costs.² Triggered by the ACA, Stamford Hospital completed a Community Health Needs Assessment in 2012, which has become the basis for multiple strategies to improve health care delivery in the community, including participation in the Vita initiative.

As a Planetree hospital, Stamford Hospital is committed to patient-centered care. The Planetree philosophy emphasizes personal responsibility for health, nutrition, a healing environment and integrative therapies, among other components.³ Among many innovative programs at the hospital, the Center for Integrative Medicine & Wellness provides an alternative approach to patient treatment, addressing physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental influences.⁴ The Kids' Fitness and Nutrition program (KIDS' FANS) promotes healthy eating, physical activity, and a healthy weight for children, working in collaboration with the City and community partners. The Hospital is known for its work in prevention of cardiovascular disease. Both the Hospital and the City Department of Health operate mobile medical units that provide screening and information. In 2013, Stamford Hospital was awarded a grant for the Connecticut Cancer & Heart Disease Integrated Health Screening Program.

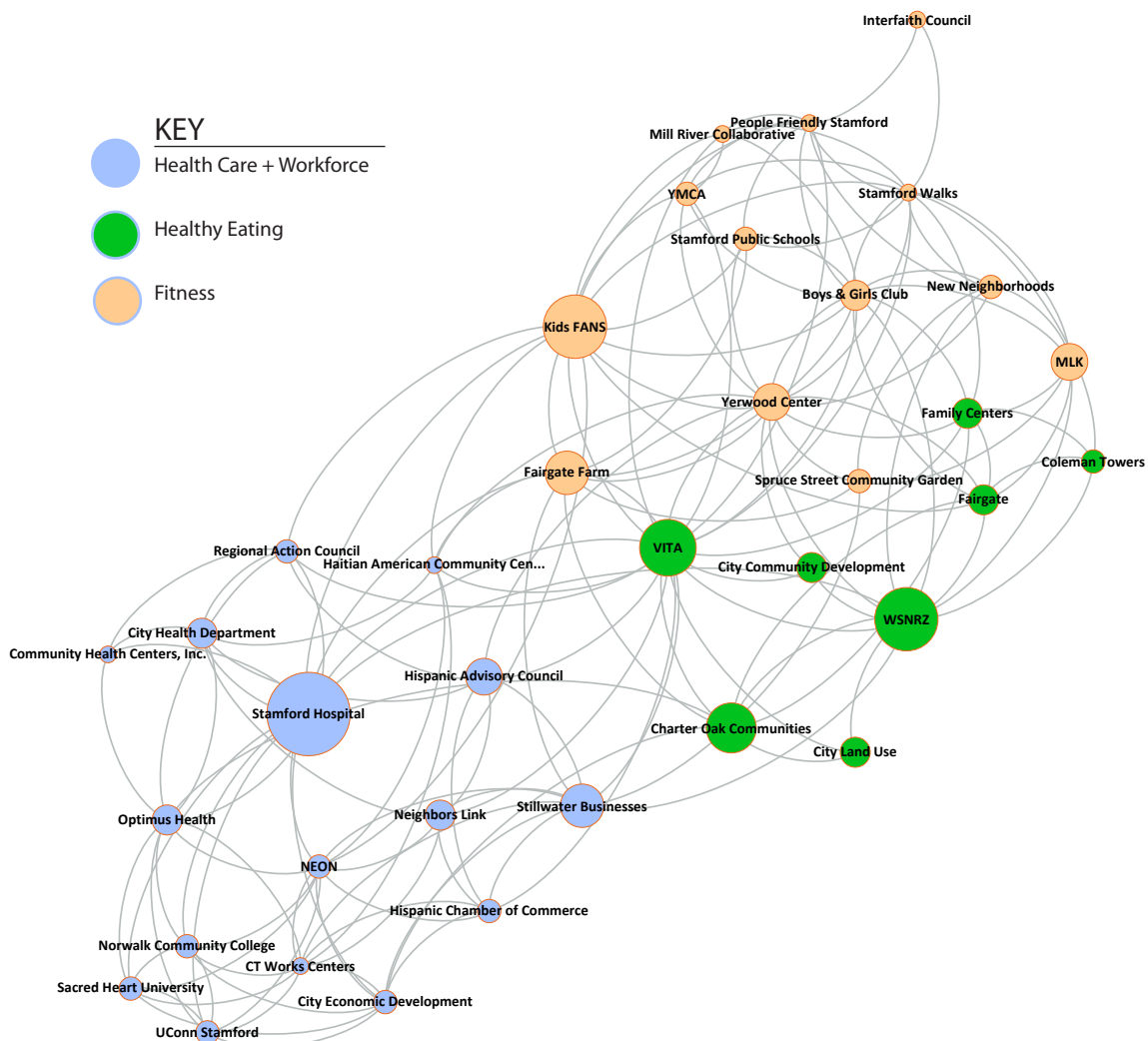
Optimus Health Care partners with Stamford Hospital to provide outpatient care to uninsured and low-income patients. The City's Department of Health and Social Services and many faith-based and community development organizations also play a role in health and wellness, but these activities are not always well-coordinated.



Above: The Hospital's \$450-million expansion will include a new emergency department, new inpatient bed tower, new pediatric unit, expansion of the intensive care unit, and a central location for the Heart and Vascular Institute, with construction expected to be complete in 2016. The plan includes a new entrance to Stillwater Avenue, improving its connections to the community. (Image courtesy of WHR Architects)



Left: Stamford Hospital's mobile medical clinic and the Fairgate Community Health Center provide opportunities for care beyond the walls of the hospital.



Above: Many entities are focused on improving health in Stamford, but better connections between them would benefit all, including residents of the West Side. This image identifies potential connections that could be made or reinforced between Health Care and Workforce (blue), Healthy Eating (green) and Fitness (orange).

STRATEGIES

In order to improve health and wellness in the Vita District, the following strategies are recommended.

1. Establish an ongoing entity responsible for systemizing and coordinating with the many programs involved in health and wellness to ensure that the Vita goals are aligned with each group's mission, capacity and ability to reach targeted population. Tactics include creating a coordinated calendar of community screening opportunities, including smaller and more intimate health fairs and delivery of health and wellness information that is culturally relevant, multilingual and delivered across multiple modes of access (digital, print, personal, workshops, lectures, etc.).

2. Track outcomes at the personal and community level. Promote personal



Above: A goal is to make sure that all West Side residents know about available health resources.

responsibility for health care, such as a website that can serve as a patient dashboard, summarizing personal health care data and tracking outcomes. Establish benchmarks for community health objectives to track outcomes, such as residents' access to insurance, Medicaid/Medicare, primary care providers, specialty care and prescription services.

3. Support the efforts of peer trainers and health care managers who work within the community in expanding awareness of strategies for chronic disease self-management.

4. Help to build a stronger role for the Fairgate Community Health Clinic within the community by increasing demand with an active outreach program in order to justify additional staffing and more consistent hours.

5. Provide appropriate sites within the neighborhood to accommodate health and wellness activities as they migrate out of the hospital setting and into the community, including fitness, screening, and nutrition classes, among others.

BEST PRACTICES

HEALTHY CITY FALL RIVER INITIATIVE, FALL RIVER, MA

The Healthy City Fall River Initiative recognizes the inter-relationship of jobs, housing, and education for people living in poverty and its effect on their access to health care. Launched by Partners for a Healthy Community in partnership with the City of Fall River, the initiative has tackled several projects that address community health. An existing health center was expanded and revitalized to become a one-stop resource for multiple providers, making it more family-friendly. The program has empowered youth around public health improvements, such as a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies, drug abuse, bullying, and violence.

Another focus was to raise the profile of exercise through shared camaraderie, along with providing access to programs and fitness centers for little or no cost. Partners for a Healthier Community is a state-designated Community Health Network, a local coalition of public, non-profit, and private sectors that works together to build healthier communities.⁵ The organization is governed by a 15- to 25-member Steering Committee and is funded by a combination of public and private sources. The Healthy City Fall River Initiative was awarded the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation Roadmaps to Health Prize.



2

HEALTHY EATING: URBAN AGRICULTURE + NUTRITION

Community engagement, opportunities
for improved nutrition, and access
to healthy food





2

URBAN AGRICULTURE + NUTRITION

Community engagement, opportunities
for improved nutrition, and access
to healthy food



URBAN AGRICULTURE + NUTRITION

Community engagement, opportunities
for improved nutrition, and access
to healthy food

THE VISION

With Fairgate Farm at the heart of the Vita Health & Wellness District, the community naturally focuses on fresh fruit and vegetables as integral to health and wellness. The farm provides a natural forum for educational programming to address community wellness objectives and contributes to healthy lifestyles in a myriad of ways. The Fairgate Farm will be a highly visible demonstration for urban agriculture, providing a model and mentoring for other community gardens throughout the neighborhood and the City. Residents will also have access to fresh produce through new activities such as a farmers' market, more and better quality fruit and vegetables in the local markets, expanded dining options, and a specialty green grocer. An ongoing schedule of cooking and nutrition classes held in many different venues throughout the neighborhood will encourage spontaneous recipe exchanges and community suppers, providing natural reinforcement of the role nutrition plays in health and wellness.

*IMAGINE THAT
STILLWATER AVENUE
IS A DESTINATION FOR
HEALTHY FOOD AND
CREATIVE COOKING.*



CONTEXT



Above: At Fairgate Farm residents are involved in growing fruit and vegetables for themselves and their families.

Farmer's markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), community gardens and urban farms are making a growing impact in urban centers throughout the country by providing access to high-quality fresh food, offering education and expertise about food and cultivation techniques, and providing added social and cultural benefits by bringing together community members across generational and cultural lines.

The Vita Health & Wellness District is already following this trend. Fairgate Farm currently distributes its crops to volunteers, visitors, and to non-profit agencies in the community. The Farm serves as a platform for activities for youth programs such as KIDS' FANS and the Boys & Girls Club. The neighborhood also is home to smaller community gardens such as the Martin Luther King community garden, the Yerwood garden, the YMCA garden, the Chester Addison garden and some schoolyard gardens.

Residents can purchase fresh produce in the local Stillwater Avenue markets, and more distantly, the major supermarkets on West Main Street and the downtown farmers' market. While the Stillwater markets are convenient and stock a wide variety of goods, including fresh produce, the customer volume isn't high enough to price fresh fruits and vegetables competitively.



*IMAGINE GREATER CULTIVATION OF THE LAND
AND MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GARDENING.*

Above: Fairgate Farm enjoyed a remarkable second year in 2012. Productivity has more than doubled since 2011, and volunteer hours have more than quadrupled. While the Farm's presence as a community facilitator has flourished, even more can be done to engage residents and enhance productivity.

STRATEGIES

The proposal to increase and amplify urban agriculture operations and improve access to fresh produce in the district involves several key strategies:

1. Increase the cultivation of Fairgate Farm through hands-on demonstrations, training, and participation, promoting its role as a centrally located and highly visible urban farm and a resource for raising healthy food choice awareness. Using Fairgate Farm as a resource center, enhance opportunities for community cultivation of the land at diverse scales by producing best practices and mentoring local groups and residents to create pocket gardens, community gardens, and home gardens.

2. Create food-based programs, such as food festivals, recipe exchanges, cooking classes, and cooking demonstrations, with the goal of celebrating cultural

diversity with multi-lingual outreach. Establish partnerships among Stamford Hospital, institutions operating health and wellness programs, and schools to produce curricula supported by hands-on experience at Fairgate Farm and/or community gardens. These farmers' market programs can also emphasize healthy lifestyle choices, leadership training for youth, and job training supported by hands-on experience at the farm.



Above: Many varieties of produce can be grown in large quantities in urban locations.

3. Build relationships with nearby farms and CSAs and identify opportunities for a neighborhood farmers' market and/or joint purchasing of fresh, locally grown produce for neighborhood businesses, schools, the Hospital and area residents.

4. Establish a platform with local business and organizations for food-centered activities that promote social and cultural exchange within the community while raising nutritional and healthy lifestyle literacy. Encourage Stillwater businesses to participate in the KIDS' FANS program, offering healthy menu choices within their diverse cuisines.

BEST PRACTICES

THE FOOD PROJECT operates on a regional scale in the Boston metropolitan area with a combination of urban and rural farms, allowing them to cultivate and distribute high-quality fresh food to food-challenged communities while emphasizing social exchange between socio-economically diverse cohorts of suburban and urban adolescent youth.

CITY SPROUTS, also in Boston, partners with urban public schools and teachers to develop schoolyard urban food gardens where healthy fruits and vegetables are grown. Children and their families are educated about environmental stewardship and food literacy through hands-on learning incorporated into school curricula and afterschool programs.

In addition to its urban agriculture activities, BETH GARDEN FARM in Newark, New Jersey, operates as a hub for social exchange in a demographically diverse community through recipe exchange and storytelling programs where people from many cultures and generations can engage with one another while also learning about healthy eating.

The FIVE BOROUGH FARM PROJECT in Brooklyn, New York, establishes metrics of production and impact within the scale of the neighborhood and city. The project synthesizes technical and organizational information developed in the city's many community gardening programs with technical and scientific data from academic sources working with urban food production, economic data, and the implications of policy and legislation.



3

ACTIVE LIVING: FITNESS + PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Public realm improvements, connectivity
and identity for a safe, healthy environment
that fosters exercise





ACTIVE LIVING: FITNESS + PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Public realm improvements, connectivity
and identity for a safe, healthy environment
that fosters exercise

ACTIVE LIVING: FITNESS + PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

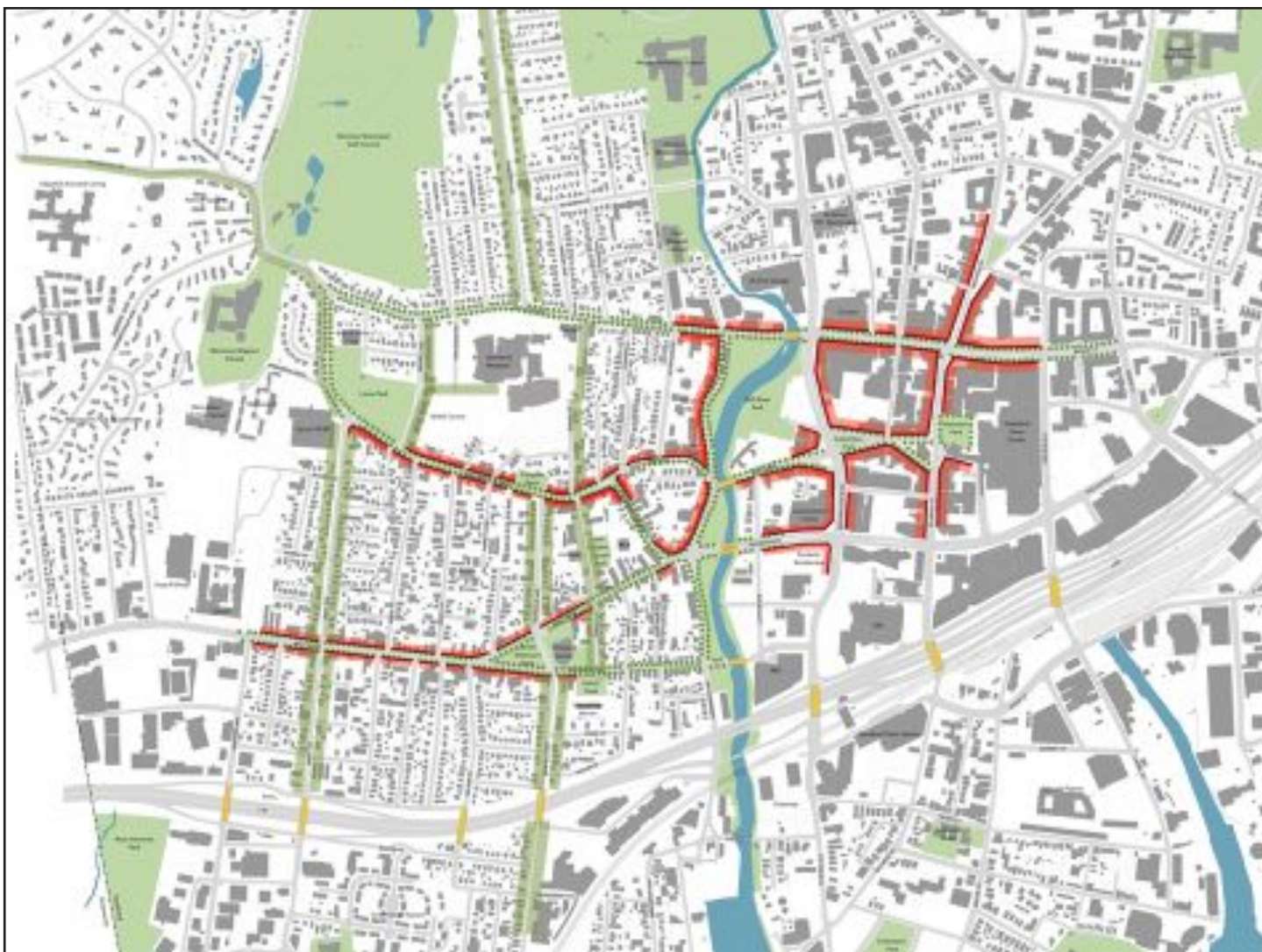
Public realm improvements, connectivity and identity for a safe, healthy environment that fosters exercise

THE VISION

As part of the Vita Health & Wellness District, a pedestrian network is seen as the road for both fitness and healing. The network will operate at multiple scales, with the most intimate loops found within the hospital corridors and campus, a number of active walking loops within the neighborhood, and important connections to the downtown and to walking trails along the Mill River Park and the City's larger open space network. Within the hospital campus, the pathway will be a therapeutic tool, used by clinicians to help patients gain mobility, set goals and measure progress as strength and confidence increases. As healing progresses, patients will be able to venture further, eventually tackling greater distances within the neighborhood environment and re-entering the world with greater confidence and mobility.

*IMAGINE A STRONGER
CONNECTION BETWEEN
THE WEST SIDE AND
DOWNTOWN.*





Above: A good deal of attention has already been placed on the north-south connections in Stamford. Making similar infrastructure investments in the east-west corridors will produce a safer, friendlier and more active environment to better link the West Side to downtown.

In order to promote more exercise within the community, the quality of the walking environment will be improved along important corridors such as Stillwater Avenue, Smith Street, Main Street, and Fairfield Avenue. These corridors in turn will connect the major open spaces from Lione Park to the Mill River Park, from Fairgate Farm to Jackie Robinson Park. Investing in a more appealing and robust streetscape, including pedestrian-scaled lights, enhanced signage, wider sidewalks and safer streets, will not only help to alleviate congestion and vehicular/pedestrian conflicts, it will also provide a welcome option for those seeking exercise, recreation, and access. Public infrastructure improvements to Stillwater Avenue will stimulate private development and help connect community assets to one another.

IMAGINE FITNESS WOVEN INTO YOUR DAILY ROUTINE.

The creation of new, mixed-use development along Stillwater Avenue will be important in establishing this corridor as a destination within the neighborhood and the City. The addition of a southern entry to Stamford Hospital, and improved access to the hospital's Specialty Building, will reinforce Stillwater Avenue's place at the heart of the Vita District. From here, connections to the other parts of the city will be straightforward, whether travelling by car, foot, bicycle, or transit, and well-designed signage will help make these paths clear. Additional options for fitness and physical activities, indoor and outdoor, will also help raise overall activity level within the neighborhood.

Below: Opportunities for enhanced fitness abound with a greater utilization of existing spaces and creating new places for active recreation for all ages.

Bottom: Increased opportunities for walking and biking will be made possible with safer and better lit streets and sidewalks connecting to downtown.



CONTEXT



Above: West Main Street, Stillwater Avenue and West Broad Street are all east-west connectors. Strategic investments along these corridors with safer sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, bike lanes and traffic-calming devices will diminish the perception of distance to downtown.

The Vita District is less than a mile from downtown and the Transportation Center, yet a change in elevation contributes to the feeling that the distance is much greater. The compromised quality of the streets and sidewalks along the route further exacerbates this perception. Narrow sidewalks, inadequate lighting, unsightly overhead utilities, illegal dumping, and a dearth of street trees render the pedestrian environment inhospitable.

Although traffic-calming plans were prepared by the City in 2011, these improvements have not been implemented, and crossing Stillwater Avenue can be dangerous. Personal safety, while much improved on the West Side, continues to be one of the most important measures for creating a healthy and active walking environment. For bicyclists, there are no marked routes on the streets in the Vita District. There are few places for adults who want to engage in fitness activities, indoor or outdoor.

For most of the 20th century, the Mill River was seen as an edge defining Stamford's downtown, yet it is now becoming an open space amenity embraced as a middle ground that brings communities together. The landscape investment in the new Mill River Park is not only changing the character of the open space itself, but it is adding significant value and may create development pressure to the properties that front it.

While the Mill River Park runs north to south, the open space network actually has a role in helping to improve perpendicular east-west connections across town. Recent upgrades to Tresser Boulevard, and the opportunities to enhance connectivity with the Main Street Bridge, bode well for increasing physical activity between destinations. Even though Interstate 95 continues to present a barrier to street-level circulation, the last decade has seen significant progress in connecting downtown to the South End and harbor area. With the Mill River's transformation, Stamford's definition of downtown is now poised to expand in all directions.



Above: With the completion of Mill River Park in the Spring of 2013, residents' perceptions of recreational opportunities downtown are changing. Right: Lione Park is a community-wide asset and is well positioned in the neighborhood to enhance fitness opportunities.

Walking routes for the Mill River Park and the West Side are emerging in tandem with the park's transformation. Greater utilization of neighborhood open spaces such as Lione Park and Jackie Robinson Park are increasing convenient opportunities for both passive and active recreation, as well as underscoring their cultural value to neighborhood residents. The desire to plan for and implement these circulation networks is a testament to the community's hope to increase physical activity and also a recognition that the physical environment itself is changing.



STRATEGIES

A number of specific strategies will help improve connections and a healthy walking environment for safe exercise.

1. Conduct walkability audits and expand walking programs, working with the City of Stamford Health Department and existing community groups (faith-based, residential, open space and other non-profit organizations, etc.). Review and update Complete Streets plans, integrate walkability audit data, design a consistent palette, and advocate for streetscape improvements in a phased approach over the next five years as a means of creating better lit, safer, walkable environments and to improve the overall district image.
2. Coordinate with the City of Stamford Master Plan to ensure that the major east/west corridors between the Vita Health & Wellness District and the downtown are made walkable and usable for maximum mobility via all modes of transportation.
3. Implement cohesive way-finding that builds on the symbols and colors of the Vita brand to create a recognizable identity for the place, coordinating the various forms of identification, information, directional and regulatory signage elements, including hospital and other institutional way-finding.
4. Provide multiple opportunities for physical activity, including a fitness center that is affordable and accessible to people of all income levels, accessible outdoor fitness equipment and ample open space for passive and active recreation (such as Zumba classes).
5. Consider a calendar of seasonal events that are culturally relevant and fun to encourage people to be outside and active in the community, closing key streets for the day as appropriate.
6. Over time, promote more bicycle usage through bike share, bicycle repair, and recycling programs that engage the community and, in particular, youth.

BEST PRACTICES

BUFFALO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

"The Healthy Communities Initiative focuses on developing and improving the neglected infrastructure in the Allentown and Fruitbelt neighborhoods and reconnecting them to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC). The results, an enhanced open space network for pedestrians and cyclists and targeted communications, will increase physical activity and promote wellness for both neighbors and employees." (<http://activelivingbydesign.org/communities/profiles/buffalo-ny>)

ALBUQUERQUE ALLIANCE FOR ACTIVE LIVING

"The idea around Great Streets is to re-build some strategic portions of our major streets so that people don't think twice about walking down the street to reach a destination or a transit stop." (Joanne McEntire, Albuquerque Alliance Director, Active Living by Design Community Partnership Profiles, 2003-2008).



Above: The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) has invested in streetscape and infrastructure enhancements that add bike lanes, bike racks, wide sidewalks, enhanced street lighting, highly-visible ADA-compliant crosswalks, and street furniture to the public right of way on the BNMC.

PROMOTING GOOD JOBS + LOCAL BUSINESSES

Workforce development and support
for small businesses around health and
wellness opportunities





PROMOTING GOOD JOBS + LOCAL BUSINESSES

Workforce development and support
for small businesses around health and
wellness opportunities

PROMOTING GOOD JOBS + LOCAL BUSINESSES



Workforce development and support for
small businesses around health and wellness
opportunities

THE VISION

In the revitalized Vita Health & Wellness District, residents will have lower levels of chronic unemployment and higher levels of educational attainment as a direct result of the focused effort on jobs and growing and preserving local businesses. Bringing together all the critical elements to improve access to good jobs for West Side residents, the new Vita Health Sciences Institute will serve to link employers with educators and community-based organizations.

At an early age, students in elementary, middle school, and high school will be exposed to a variety of careers, including health care professions, through field trips, internships, and job shadowing. The strong partnership between Stamford Hospital and the nearby colleges and universities will have created a sustainable connection between employers and educators, ensuring that academic programs are delivering the skills needed to fill jobs now and in the future.

Meanwhile, community-based organizations (such as NeighborsLink) will focus on the crucial job-readiness skills, including English as a second language, academics, resume building and connections to appropriate training and to employers with positions to be filled. The path to a good job may be community college, apprenticeship, certification, other specialized training, or a four-year degree, matching job applicant interest with needed jobs in the region. Besides health care, other career paths may follow finance, film, or the construction trades.

The local businesses will be thriving in the Vita District, evidence of the financial stability in the neighborhood households, the increase of health-care related jobs in the area, and the ability of hospital employees to shop and dine via the new access onto Stillwater Avenue. With its village feel and pedestrian-friendly streets, the Vita Health & Wellness District will be a destination for ethnic cuisine and related shops, drawing people from downtown and other parts of Stamford as well. Business owners, who have operated shops on Stillwater for years, will benefit from the increased customer base, offering a variety of fresh produce and other products that are affordable and convenient for residents and local employees.

*IMAGINE YOU ARE TRAINING FOR A NEW
JOB IN A HEALTH SCIENCES INSTITUTE IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD.*



Above: A multipurpose facility could provide space for education, fitness, nutrition and affordable housing for the neighborhood. A state-of-the-art, environmentally sustainable building will embody the healthy values of the Vita lifestyle. Recent rezoning along Stillwater Avenue will increase density along the corridor and enhance the viability of mixed-use facilities.

CONTEXT

In both proximity and population, the Vita Health & Wellness District is uniquely situated to help fill what is projected to be a pressing need for a health care workforce trained in technology, problem-solving and customer service. As local and regional colleges and educational institutions are actively looking for ways to expand further into lower Fairfield County, Stamford Hospital and other area health care institutions anticipate growth due to economic and population trends; meanwhile the West Side has higher-than-average unemployment rates, with many workers expressing a desire and need to prepare for good, well-paying jobs. Workforce development is occurring in the region but none of the opportunities are particularly convenient to West Side residents.

New and emerging occupations include patient navigation, health care planning and health information technology. Workforce training programs are offered by NEON (Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now) in Stamford's South End,



Above: Education and training for health care jobs can take place in a new multipurpose building on Stillwater Avenue.

NeighborsLink in Waterside and the WorkPlace in Bridgeport. The West Side lacks accessible workforce training, remedial skills development and job readiness counseling.

There are many business opportunities on the West Side and also some challenges. Though the neighborhood features a multi-cultural mix of businesses and homes that its residents value, the community's origins are residential. Shop-owners have had to adapt properties to suit their needs as best they could and most currently make do without storefront windows, loading facilities or dedicated customer parking.

The health and wellness theme can attract a variety of new businesses to the neighborhood, which would benefit from diversification. There are six small markets on Stillwater Avenue that offer a range of specialized ethnic foods as well as some produce and many staple items. The 11 restaurants serve Latino, Italian, and Jamaican cooking. Changing demographics in the community are of concern to some of the small business owners, since their offerings may need to change to meet new market requirements.

STRATEGIES



Right: An objective of the Vita initiative is to help existing West Side businesses thrive.

The following strategies are recommended to promote good jobs and stronger local businesses:

1. Enhance partnerships between Stamford Hospital and the nearby educational institutions (Norwalk Community College, UConn Stamford, Sacred Heart University, and Fairfield University) to better align academic programs to the skills needed in today's workplace and in the changing health care field. Participate in the planning for health care programs which are proposed for the \$50 million renovation of the J.M. Wright Technical High School, slated for opening in 2014. ⁶
2. Provide a location in the Vita Health & Wellness District where certification, continuing education, and other academic classes can be offered through collaboration between the Hospital and the educational institutions. Partner with The WorkPlace, NEON/CTE, and NeighborsLink to offer GED classes and other basic skills remediation in Stamford, ideally convenient to West Side residents.

3. Provide neighborhood-based career counseling that builds on local relationships and helps residents navigate existing job training and educational opportunities, while also making connections to key employers. Foster peer networks (NeighborsLink, the Greater Stamford Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, New England Minority Business Development Council, the Haitian Community Association, Women's Mentoring Network, and others) as means to better connect residents to workforce development and job opportunities. Participate in the Stamford city-wide initiative for youth development as a part of the national Strive Cradle to Career Network.⁷

4. Develop a stronger organizational structure to manage and fund the Business Development position as a full-time position with a clear set of objectives and accountability for outcomes. Possibilities include exploring Connecticut Main Streets, greater funding through the NRZ, and/or a combined position with another neighborhood.



Above: There are many opportunities for new businesses as well as those already on Stillwater Avenue.

5. Within this framework, recruit a professional staff person to provide one-on-one technical assistance to business, build relationships with government officials and other partners, advocate for small neighborhood businesses, create peer networks among businesses, and identify and pursue grants and sources of finance, among other tasks. One initiative should be community development loans and other incentives to motivate business owners to adapt to changing conditions and become more competitive in their presentation and products.

BEST PRACTICES

The following strategies are recommended to strengthen local businesses and promote good jobs for community residents:

The JAMAICA PLAIN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (JPNDC) in Boston, Massachusetts, offers one-on-one business counseling and technical assistance to neighborhood businesses. Through this process, the group has identified a number of key issues that must be addressed: lack of management knowledge; limited collateral, cash flow and equity; limited business experience; financial instability around rent and utility costs; and cultural and linguistic barriers. The JPNDC business development program includes:

- One-on-one technical assistance in marketing, pricing, recordkeeping and other business topics.
- Assistance in preparing loan application packages and making connections to a variety of financing sources from private banks and non-traditional loan programs.
- Regular workshops on topics such as taxes, legal issues, marketing, personnel, and accounting systems, among others.
- A small business complex that has revitalized a historic mill and is now home to 50 small businesses, employing more than 250 people.⁸

For residents, the JPNDC offers a familiar and accessible location for a variety of workforce development services targeted to job readiness. These programs include a combination of multilingual workshops and one-on-one assistance to guide people in defining their interests, identifying skills, developing resumes and interviewing skills, taking ESL classes, and making connections with employers.



5

HOSPITAL + COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Hospital growth potential and
community redevelopment





5

HOSPITAL + COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Hospital growth potential and
community redevelopment

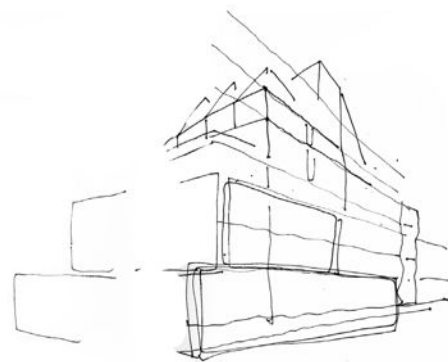


HOSPITAL + COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Hospital growth potential
and community redevelopment

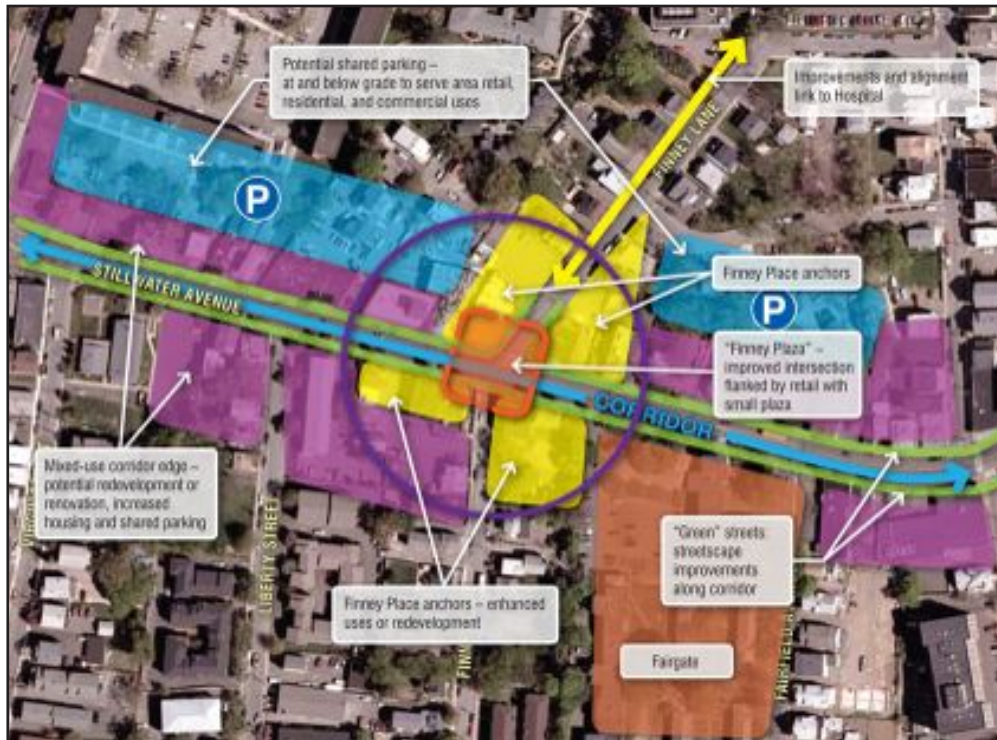
THE VISION

Stamford's West Side will be a national model for health and wellness, with a symbiotic relationship between the city's primary health care provider and its surrounding community. The location and function of the proposed new buildings will contribute to the economic viability of the area by creating jobs, enhancing property values and bringing new businesses into the area. The Hospital's south-facing entry will create an entirely new relationship to the community that never before existed. Establishing this vibrant mixed-use district surrounding a healthy campus environment will help both the neighborhood and the Hospital to flourish.



*IMAGINE NEW DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING
A HEALTH SCIENCES INSTITUTE AND
MIXED-INCOME HOUSING, THAT SUPPORT
SENSIBLE GROWTH.*

CONTEXT



Above: Opportunities to reinforce the relationship between Stamford Hospital and Stillwater Avenue were first identified in the Stillwater Avenue Corridor Study: Implementation Strategy. (Image courtesy of Cecil Group and Newman Architects).

In many cities, the transition areas between large medical facilities and low-rise residential neighborhoods become zones of separation rather than integration. In Stamford, however, the Vita initiative provides an opportunity to anticipate the hospital expansion and make positive changes to soften this transition and seize on the opportunity for positive neighborhood change. The demolition of the Vidal Court public housing project helps to create new sites for community development. The concept of a new south entry was introduced during the West Side NRZ's 2010 Stillwater Avenue Implementation Study. This in turn has helped shape the hospital plans in terms of internal drives, building orientation and other considerations. Vita also provides a framework for joint planning through the partnership and involvement of Charter Oak Communities, Stamford Hospital, the City of Stamford and the West Side NRZ and its participants.

STRATEGIES



Above: The recent demolition of the physically obsolete Vidal Court housing project has drastically changed the landscape of the West Side. The Vita revitalization program will transform the former state-assisted housing complex into a stable, economically balanced community that is physically and socially integrated into its surroundings. New development will be in accordance with the recently adopted Village Commercial District zoning. (Christian Phillips Photography)

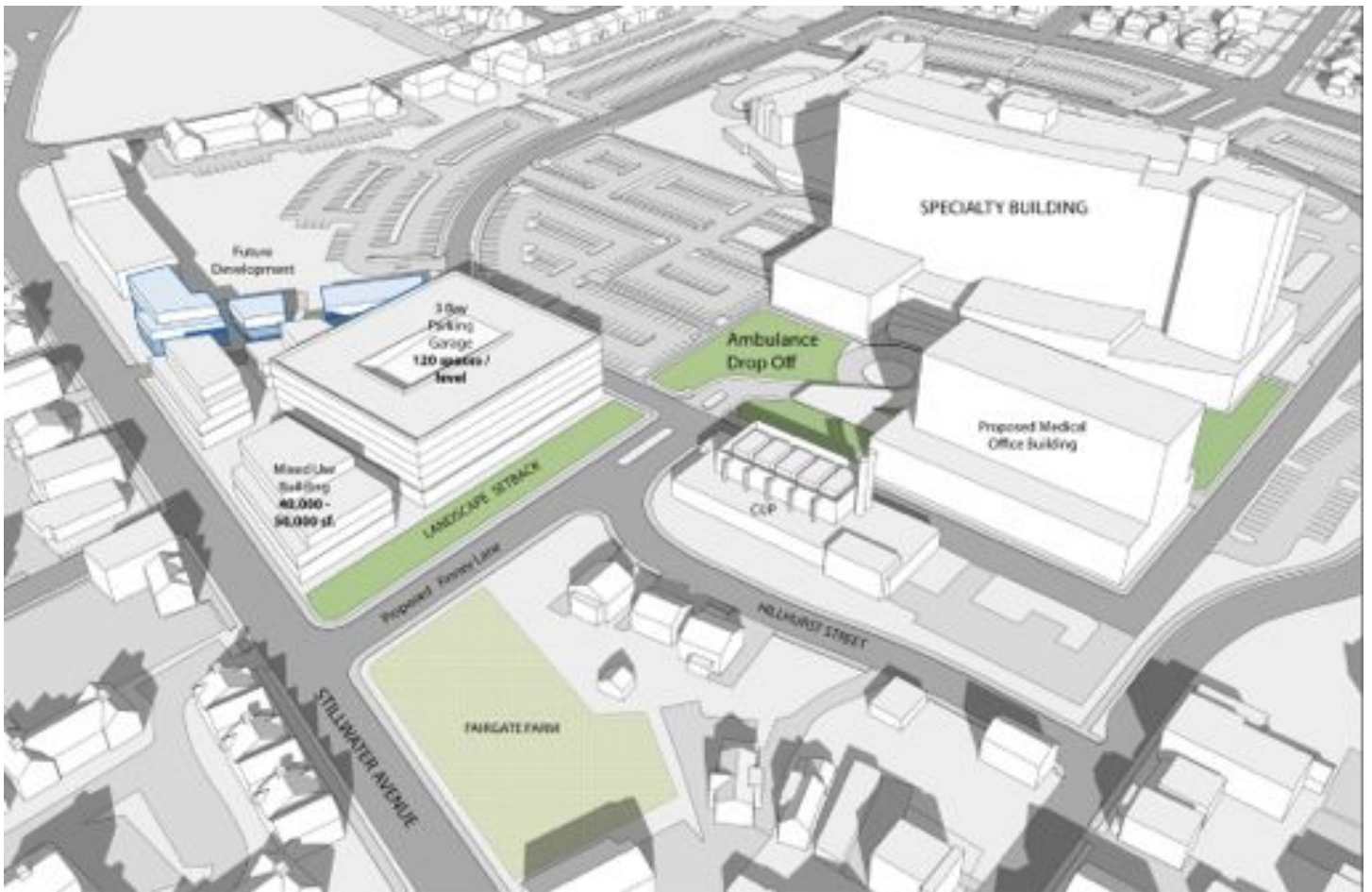
Strategies that will strengthen the relationship between the Hospital and the community include:

1. Embrace the relationship between the Hospital and Stillwater Avenue through the introduction of a new entry road and a mixed-use building, both designed to facilitate traffic and engagement from each direction (i.e, to and from the hospital).
2. Establish a new landscape space that directly connects Fairgate Farm to the hospital, making a visible statement about the importance of nutrition to good health.
3. Locate the shared parking facility between the new hospital facility and the new mixed-use building, in order to mitigate its scale and address demand from both the community and hospital.

THE PROJECT

The initial development project has three design components:

- A new 50,000 square foot mixed-use building.
- A 550-car parking structure with ground floor retail space.
- A new street that aligns both construction projects in relationship to the community's cherished Fairgate Farm.



Above: The Vita Health & Wellness Project brings together civil engineering, landscape architecture, urban planning and design and market analysis to foster a stronger relationship between the hospital's expansion and the Stillwater Avenue corridor. A new alignment of Finney Lane enhances access, provides Fairgate Farm with greater visibility and creates a development footprint for a mixed-use building and a shared parking structure.

MIXED-USE BUILDING:

The mixed-use building allows for a retail storefront presence at the intersection of Stillwater Avenue and the newly-aligned Finney Lane. This enables retailers to benefit from high vehicle and pedestrian traffic along Stillwater, as well as visual appeal to hospital employees and visitors. The garage will sit behind the mixed-use building, serving patrons of retail businesses in the area, institutional and/or office users of the mixed-use building, and hospital employees and visitors.

Realization of the plan will require concerted public/private partnerships—making use of public and private finance programs as well as involvement from institutions and non-profits. The mixed-use building will rely on a market-based retail program that serves the undersupplied needs of area residents and workers. The tenant mix will likely include: a neighborhood grocery store with prepared foods and fresh produce, a fitness center, and a mix of restaurants with an emphasis on “fast casual” dining. The upper floors of the mixed-use building can be occupied by a mix of classroom and office space needed by area academic institutions. Based on the anticipated revenues produced by market-driven lease rates, a significant amount of private financing can be raised toward the construction of the building.

Even so the remaining financial “gap” may require public sector support in order to ensure that the buildings are of a sufficiently high quality to attract the desired tenants and have a catalytic effect on neighborhood investment. Financial analysis indicates that use of New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)—a federal program aimed at subsidizing commercial buildings in distressed areas—would bridge this financial gap.

SHARED PARKING FACILITY:

Shared garages create a significant amount of direct, as well as indirect, value. They:

- Enable nearby sites to be developed more densely, thus increasing tax revenues to the public sector and improving development returns to the private sector.
- Support adjacent business districts by enabling more patrons to access their shops, stores, and offices.
- Increase the marketability of housing, office, and retail development that would otherwise be impaired by a lack of parking.

The proposed garage would generate a significant amount of revenue that could secure private financing. Revenue sources could include:

- Long-term lease from Stamford Hospital for its employees and/or visitors.
- Hourly fees paid by hospital patients.
- Hourly fees paid by hospital visitors.
- Hourly fees paid by patrons of retail in the mixed-use building as well as the broader Stillwater district.
- Hourly fees paid by students and workers in the upper-floor spaces in the mixed use building.

Financing parking garages can be challenging, typically because the cost of construction outweighs the direct income generated by operations. Therefore, several potential sources will be employed to help reduce the burden of financing the garage.

- Capital grant appropriations from the City, State and Federal government.
- Debt financing, against parking leases, in the form of taxable or tax-exempt bonding.
- Equity investment from private sources.
- Capture of local property and/or sales taxes.

ROADWAY REALIGNMENT:

The new roadway achieves five objectives:

1. It solves the challenge presented by the inadequate Finney Lane.
2. It creates an opportunity for a signature development of a new mixed-use building at the intersection of the new drive and Stillwater Avenue.
3. The resulting parcel configuration creates a larger footprint for a shared parking structure to be utilized by the Hospital and the community.
4. The open space setback creates a direct relationship between Fairgate Farm and the Hospital while also making a metaphoric statement about the important connections between nutrition and fitness and wellness.
5. The plan establishes a more direct and pleasing entry and view of the new Hospital building.

Implementation of the Vita plan will deliver a number of needed services to the community, increasing the marketability and livability of the area in the process. While the private sector will participate in financing of the physical improvements and delivery of services, a significant role exists for the public and institutional sectors in order to bring the plan to life. This is also true of the parking garage, which will enhance the economic performance of area businesses.

Below: A new entry road organizes future development that connects the Hospital's southern access drive with the neighborhood's primary commercial corridor.



BEST PRACTICES

The MEMPHIS MEDICAL DISTRICT was created to provide a central location for medical care, serving both Memphis and the Mid-South. It is a relatively small area located between downtown and midtown. The district, anchored by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, is home to hospitals, physicians' offices, medical supply manufacturers and laboratories.

CHURCH HEALTH CENTER is a health and wellness center located in the Memphis Medical District. The largest faith-based fitness facility in the country, it provides services to working individuals who are uninsured. As a certified Medical Fitness Facility, it offers health and wellness programs that are safe and effective for individuals with health conditions like diabetes, hypertension and obesity. The Center works with primary care physicians to provide the correct resources and programming, caring for the whole person in an environment that is supportive and welcoming.

Open since 2000, the 80,000 square foot facility is not connected to a hospital and is not federally funded. The Center has 150,000 visits annually from approximately 4,000 members. Church Health Center believes that individuals have a responsibility to take care of their bodies, so the facility is committed to helping members learn about health education and prevention. This wellness ministry offers programming such as personalized exercise plans, cooking classes and activities for children to learn their ABCs through food identification. The Center is open to the entire community. Fees are charged on a sliding scale based on family size and income. The services offered at the Center help individuals make life-long changes to live healthier, happier lives.



CONCLUSION

As the Stamford community proceeds to realize the vision laid out in this document, we invite you to share our focus for all that can be achieved within this small but vitally important neighborhood. At a time when the rest of the country is just beginning to discuss how to adapt the delivery of health care to the new requirements of the Affordable Care Act, our Vita Health & Wellness District is already well on its way to becoming a reality.

To summarize the hard work that has already been done in Stamford's West Side to improve the health of the neighborhood and its residents:

- Stamford Hospital has championed the Vita vision from the start, demonstrating a clear commitment to the concept that what's good for Stamford's West Side and other underserved neighborhoods is good for the Hospital.
- Obtaining the new Village Commercial District zoning designation for the Stillwater Avenue corridor enables Vita to attract an array of consumer-based health facilities and services, providing a basis for economic growth and sustainability.
- Over the past decade, Stamford's public housing authority, Charter Oak Communities, has built new homes for the area's neediest families, the former residents of the Fairfield Court and Vidal Court properties. All are in attractive, environmentally sound and socio-economically sustainable mixed-income communities.
- Blighted housing lots were bulldozed in 2011 to make room for the immensely popular Fairgate Farm, which produced more than 2,000 pounds of spinach, squash and strawberries (and other produce) in 2012.
- Vita has already attracted national attention and funding: In 2011 the Stamford received a Sustainable Communities Challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to underwrite the Vita strategic plan; and in 2012 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) selected Vita for the Building Blocks Equitable Development technical assistance program.

- Formerly disenfranchised residents and business owners now gather enthusiastically for the monthly West Side NRZ meetings, fully committed to the success of the revitalization efforts that the community wants and needs.

This report has demonstrated that the Vita Health & Wellness District is well underway, especially insofar as it aligns with the goals set forth in Stamford's 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment and the emerging Affordable Care Act. While much has already been accomplished it is important to note that in order to fulfill our community's vision for Vita – the overarching plan to enliven the Stillwater Avenue corridor and bring meaningful health improvement to its most vulnerable population – there remains much to be done. Our goal in creating the report has been to paint a compelling picture that attracts key partners, and moves essential decision-makers to action. We hope to have your support in our continued efforts.



Above: Stillwater Avenue is poised for transformation with health and wellness as the driver. New development will provide a variety of uses the community has identified as important.

CONTACTS

This report is a collaborative effort. It is available for download on the Vita Health & Wellness website: www.vitastamford.com, where we've also published an appendix with relevant research and additional reports.

For more information, please contact:

Vincent J. Tufo
Chief Executive Officer, Charter Oak Communities
vtufo@charteroakcommunities.org
203-977-1400

Pamela A. Koprowski
Stamford Hospital
Cardinale Associates, LLC
Pam.koprowski@gmail.com
203-536-5243

David Gamble, AIA, AICP, LEED AP
Gamble Associates
david@gambleassociates.com
617-292-9912

Kathryn Madden, AICP
Madden Planning Group
kmadden@maddenplanning.com
617-744-0005

Nicole Wise
Balance Health Content, LLC
nwise@balancehealthcontent.com
203-595-8085

ENDNOTES

¹ JSI Community Health Needs Assessment, Selected Major Data Findings, February 8, 2012.

² Brimmer, Kelsey. April 15, 2013. "Less funding, reimbursements cut deep." Health Care Finance News. "CT Hospitals, Malloy Administration trade barbs over budget cuts." April 11, 2013. [Hartford Business.com/Hartford Business Journal](http://HartfordBusiness.com/HartfordBusinessJournal)

³ Planetree.org, accessed May 11, 2013

⁴ "Stamford Hospital Participates in National Integrative Medicine Study". February 15, 2012. Stamford Hospital press release

⁵ Organized by the State Department of Public Health: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/admin/healthy-communities/chna/overview.html> (accessed May 11, 2013)

⁶ Connecticut Department of Construction, www.ct.gov/dcs/cwp

⁷ Strive Network, <http://strivenetwork.org/vision-roadmap>

⁸ Moronta, Alison. "Immigrants as Small Business Owners: Challenges and Recommendations". JPNDC Presentation; http://www.jpndc.org/help_business/business_dev.html