

66 Ways to Build Stamford into the New American City

Note: These are the notes from 22 tables of small group discussion at the November 17, 2010 Reinventing Stamford Town Meeting. The tables were sorted by five broad themes: entrepreneurship, education, place, housing and transportation. Each table was asked to identify, from the perspective of their theme, the “goldmines” that would help build Stamford into the New American City, and the “landmines” that might cause us to stumble. A “scribe” at each table was asked to write down the three most interesting things they heard and email them to me. I cleaned up the grammar and typos, and combined some elements where there was overlap, but the language is the voice of each scribe and the ideas those of each table. –Kip Bergstrom

Create an Ecosystem for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

1. What jumpstarts reinvention is education and job creation.
2. Leverage Stamford’s abundant talent. We should be looking at the intersection of marketing and tech and services and financial – that mix is Stamford’s special sauce. People here know how to put the deal together.
3. Use the iconic architecture of Old Town Hall to provide the central hub of an ecosystem for entrepreneurship and innovation, and to create a powerful message that Stamford wants entrepreneurs and innovators.
4. Big companies are cash rich, but growth challenged. They have difficulty working on new ideas. We should connect our rich pool of problem solvers with the companies that need their help, including modeling this symbiotic relationship in the mix of uses at OTH; e.g., the innovation center at OTH could have a corporate R&D center, so long as it does not crowd out the entrepreneurs.
5. We can make things simpler for starting a business locally.
6. Leverage the six Angel Networks that are active in Connecticut.
7. Need more business incubation and acceleration.
8. Need to overcome a weakness in the local culture of handling failure productively. Document failures so others learn. Almost every successful entrepreneur was first a failure. Need to seamlessly recycle failed entrepreneurs.
9. Need to overcome the high cost of living and taxes as personal barriers to make a move to entrepreneurship.
10. Need a process for making creative adults.
11. Need to increase mentors and incentives for mentoring.



12. Need to keep FIRE burning while we build more ICE. Our financial sector is a huge plus. Attract the next generation of financial services by developing a Financial Think Tank, located in Stamford and associated with Yale or another major university.
13. Some key ICE sectors that could develop in Stamford include: Film/Digital Media/Video Content; Communications/Advertising/Marketing Services; Health Services; Mobile; Energy (especially natural gas); Education.
14. Nothing gets done until someone makes money at it. There is a need for underlying “pressures” to push the overall Reinventing Stamford program forward. There aren’t enough pressures evident yet. It is critical to tap younger citizens and a broader diversity from the community, in part to increase the pressures.

Mentor the Next Generation of Problem Solvers

15. There is lack of choice and lack of variety within the public school system. Even with the advent of AITE and magnet programs it’s hard to look at education in Stamford today and say that we have moved far from a “one size fits all” mindset – this against a backdrop of a population of students with a wide variety of needs, backgrounds, interests, life goals. Children learn differently. Having different environments and models creates the best opportunities to match a child with the best environment for her or him. In our region, we seem to have more interest, innovation, and affluence than most areas and this creates opportunity for a wide menu of educational options. The remarkable diversity of Stamford’s school population can be looked at as a brick wall, or as a compelling creative challenge. Ideas for **variety** and **choice** in Stamford public education are potentially as plentiful as the differing needs of the students. Vastly expanded charter school options; Litky’s “College Unbound”; NCC’s “middle college” concept; a really good career-tech high school focused on next generation jobs rising from Wright Tech’s ashes – there is no reason all of these and more could not be part of Stamford’s future educational landscape.
16. The Stamford Public Schools have structures in place for the community to support the schools and students, with an enriched educational experience through corporations, community centers, The Volunteer Center, libraries and more. Mentoring and other supports that marry the classroom experience with real world experience are already in place and can be expanded. We have a vibrant business community and corporate base located in Stamford. How can the business community play a more vital role in K-12 education in Stamford? How can we be more creative in tapping into the business community?
17. Stamford Public Schools has excellent models using technology as a tool, such as AITE, where teachers, students and parents interact using laptops. One new technology concept is to use technology over the summer to challenge students with problems that could be addressed using the social network. Students would be recognized for innovative ideas and success in solving problems. Another suggestion for the summer is to use mobile phones to enrich students’ experience with various applications. Maybe these applications could be linked to business models, if corporations are involved in this concept.
18. Stamford does not have a downtown university that offers a full educational curriculum to prepare a workforce for Stamford corporations. Make UConn a real place with thousands of students. UConn Stamford should be a residential university with an expanded program, including more masters programs beyond the MBA and other specialized programs. The administration at Storrs needs a different vision and commitment to make these changes. Programs in engineering, healthcare technology, computer science, finance technology should be assessed for current and

projected future needs. How about a virtual business school? More foreign students? Why not offer Columbia space? What about NYU or CT College?

19. The entrenched bureaucracy of government regulation and labor unions has to be overcome, as it creates a bulky model not naturally open to innovation.
20. For the new population of immigrants, there seems to be a lack of understanding that "every child can go to college if he or she wants to." This may be a cultural nuance but in any event, overcoming it would unlock an enormous potential pool of new brainpower.
21. How can Stamford attract education leaders like Dennis Littky (Big Picture Company-Met Center Schools)? One of the old churches in downtown could possibly serve as a site for one of Dennis Littky's schools.
22. Need to overcome a lack of flexibility and creativity that hampers CT education generally: e.g., CT didn't qualify for Race To the Top funding; CT lagging in charter school development; CT ranks 49th in US in achievement gap between high and low socio-economic groups. CT is not serving well the education needs of our neediest. Hard system to change; many teacher rights are written into state law, not just union contracts.
23. In Stamford specifically, need to address perception that Stamford school administrators have a "don't tell us, we know best" attitude + pressure to meet test score requirements stifles ability to pursue innovation. Also, the debate in Stamford around student "grouping" in elementary and middle school English and math classes crowds out discussion of other ideas. Discussions about public education reform get politicized so quickly in Stamford, as well as other Connecticut communities. Many stakeholders have deeply vested interests.
24. Stamford has some great assets that could enable innovation in education: Geographic diversity (urban areas, rural areas / open space, seashore, etc.) + cultural diversity + large corporate base = Great "raw materials" for learning. City's inclination to change...Desire to re-invent itself. Extensive mailing list of Reinventing Stamford + visibility with Mayor and Gov-elect = Human resources to get things done.
25. Launch innovative new school in South End / Waterside / West Side: Support the commercial and residential development activities in the area. Pursue in partnership with South End developers? Opportunity to launch desirable school is mutually beneficial to developers and city. Does relocation of Waterside School create an opportunity / need? Is the Pitney Bowes building a potential site?
26. Launch formal city mentoring program to fully mobilize city's corporations and residents: Model on Norwalk program, which has a full-time program director to act as liaison and coordinator between schools, corporate partners and residents (J Glass can provide referral to Norwalk program). Makes it easy for employees at local corporations to become mentors.
27. Teacher mentoring program: Teacher turnover is highest in first few years of teaching. If new teachers had greater access to mentoring themselves, could they be more successful? Initiative would be to find best practices for successful teacher mentoring programs and to explore how to adopt and implement in Stamford.
28. The community is generally not engaged in the issues surrounding education in Stamford and generally not committed to public education. This includes the business community, the public at large and even many parents of Stamford school children. There are few resources available to create this engagement in a positive way. In fact, one such resource within the SPS system, the Office of Community and Family Engagement, is defunct. Many young parents in Stamford are

confused about the public schools. We need an excellent marketing campaign to help them understand the strengths of the Stamford Public Schools. Many Stamford residents have not visited Stamford schools; we need to get residents into the schools. We need to build awareness about the deep connection between Stamford real estate values and the quality of the Stamford Public Schools. All Stamford residents, especially homeowners, need to understand that we need a high quality school system to maintain our real estate values. This appeals to residents' self-interest. For example, not enough people know about Rogers School, and that many parents – including North Stamford parents – are choosing to send their children to this school. The Stamford Public Schools' annual report and other communications materials are potentially excellent ways to communicate to the wider community about successes and challenges. Also, the Open Houses for prospective public school parents/families are an excellent communications strategy. They should be continued. Even in the face of the negativity that surrounds the system's faults, SPS does have success stories to mine. There are many great Stamford student stories to mine. The most compelling of those are stories of individual students (and families) who are overcoming family and financial distress, language and social barriers and more – in short, beating the odds and achieving academic success. The stories and the kids behind them are “assets” which need to be celebrated and could be used in a concerted “campaign” to better engage the community in public education here in Stamford.

29. There is still the widespread misperception that addressing the achievement gap means reducing the achievement of high-performing students. We need to grow the pie of Stamford residents who truly care about the achievement of other peoples' children.
30. School desegregation now means that many Stamford children travel all over the City to get to their school. This happened because while the schools were desegregated, the City itself [and residential housing patterns] was not. This means that the Stamford schools are not truly community schools, because students do not necessarily live near their own school. There are now fewer schools actually located downtown than in the past. Stamford's diversity is both a gold mine and land mine. Diversity does not truly benefit Stamford until the public school system works for all students.
31. The annual school budgeting process is a huge land mine. There is no real long-term investment in the public schools. Residents are often opposed to tax increases to benefit the schools because they often cannot see discrete improvements connected to increased investment. The Stamford Public Schools' budget needs to be very transparent: “\$X in investment will yield Y in results.”
32. For the foreseeable future, economic resources (and the political will for increased investment) will be strained. But, education here in Stamford is not only about financial resources. A major “goldmine” for Stamford is the talent, brains and energy of its workforce and residents, not only in Stamford, but surrounding communities (FUTURE 5 can attest to this). Yes, a “landmine” is the fact that the public is not engaged. But have they been asked? Have large-scale attempts really been made to mobilize and harness Stamford's human capital outside the school walls?

Make Downtown Stamford a Place of Discovery

33. The physical and ethnic diversity of our community is a strength to be leveraged. We are seashore and backcountry with small town in between. Need to recognize these facts as goldmines, but so far we've treated them as landmines. What can be unifying factors? Should there be walking trails, biking trails, park trails that run thru the entire city so that it feels more connected? Where are the spokes that lead back to the center? Is downtown the center? How do we connect the areas? Improved transportation throughout the community is essential, especially on weekends. Again where is the Center? East-west movement is a problem. Better

connections need to be made between neighborhoods. Essential to improve unification of elements of downtown and connection to other parts of the community. How do we connect the ethnic communities or celebrate so that we not only learn about who the groups are, but cross paths more often.

34. Trees on Bedford need improved pruning to raise the branches so that when walking, one can see around and feel eager to walk around. There are still too many barriers to having a walk around town. We want to create a feeling that people will say, "let's walk around and see what's going on." We tend to go to our event, restaurant, movie, and return to our cars. There are little parks that are a respite, but not enough connections. Still not a cohesive downtown even with all the business development. Should there be a pedestrian row?
35. We have tried and failed to save much of the architectural heritage of our town. Can we turn that into a goldmine and build only exceptional buildings? Then we celebrate what we have instead of what has been lost. We have a Saarinen designed church—we should stress such buildings and have more built. Plan to celebrate the city with exciting architecture.
36. The South End development appears to be a goldmine—will speculation of property create problems for current renters who will then be evicted as property is sold? Will speculation create other problems for the area? _Concern that South End development will create speculation problems that will impact other parts of town.
37. Mill River Park will be a world-class open space of regional significance that will draw people to the downtown and provide a much-needed amenity to the downtown. This will form the backbone of a public realm that could permeate the downtown, building out from this success. There are thousands of people in the city that can be harnessed to utilize and become stewards of the city's public realm, if only they knew about the existing resources.
38. There is a serious information gap between the efforts already underway or planned and what people know about what's going on around the city. The vision represented by ongoing private and public space development is a strong one, but it is not clearly articulated to the public (e.g. the general public still has little idea about what Mill River Park is – there should be signage with descriptions and renderings at its borders describing the ultimate vision, the timeline, and why it currently looks the way it does). A downtown development storefront would be a tremendous opportunity to advertise the future of Stamford to visitors to the downtown. More information equals involvement. A compelling vision of the future will spur people to make changes to achieve that vision if it is perceived as better than the current situation.
39. Stamford needs to grow out of a suburban mentality. We're still zoning for the automobile. Both the single family residence and the single use office building result in an introversion that discourages engagement with the broader city, resulting in a lack of awareness of what exists in shared areas of the city, resulting in further disengagement. Residents and workers are not yet seriously engaged in weaning themselves off of their car addiction. Many people (some in places where decisions are made about the downtown and the public realm) have an inability to recognize that some people may want a different lifestyle from that which is currently offered in single family neighborhoods and that providing those alternatives within the city does not threaten their current lifestyle.
40. Old style, city promotion is expensive and basically useless with its brochure-ware. We need more happening on the streets and more viral word of mouth. Cultural activities are great, but need to increase even more. Need a jazz club, and even more restaurants. Expand the Public Market.

41. Atlantic and Bedford sidewalks are the “center of town.” Why not begin by closing traffic to this area on weekends?
42. Expand the 1% for the arts requirement to all new buildings, not just public buildings and URC projects.
43. Need to create better alignment on land use issues among the Mayor, the Board of Finance, the Board of Reps, Planning Board, Zoning Board and others.
44. Stamford has the advantage of proximity to New York, which it has leveraged with a development process that in the past has enabled good projects to be approved and constructed in a reasonable period of time. This openness to development and relatively expeditious approval of well-designed large projects (e.g., UBS, RBS) are why Stamford evolved into Wall Street North, and why the Harbor Point Project was conceived and executed here. We need to sustain this ability and build on it.
45. Stamford needs to leverage the fact that it is a waterfront city.

Embrace Diversity and Density

46. Our diversity is a strength, especially in attracting young people. Maintain and expand it.
47. Stamford needs more workforce housing. Stamford suffers from high housing costs. If you're a young person, neighboring communities offer more bang for the buck, especially New Haven and Bridgeport.
48. Stamford has ample downtown sites for in-fill residential development. Use them to create a livable city with affordable housing seamlessly integrating various income levels and activities.
49. Key is density: people bring energy, intensity. Need additional housing, vesting new residents, including Latinos.
50. School quality is crucial to attracting new residents.
51. Evolve new approaches for corporate and business ‘ownership’ of City’s needs & growth.
52. Motivate and provide incentives to developers, including density or height bonuses for mixed use TOD.
53. Stamford needs more flexible (and/or form based) zoning to develop new and preserve existing housing—free up use, density and parking requirements that are particular problems, but so are yard setback and other requirements. Parking requirements should promote residential/office sharing. Allow residential uses in existing buildings.
54. Need to overcome land banking (e.g. Parcel 38, “the Hole in the Ground”).
55. Look to the West Side as a place to build modest scale livable residential neighborhoods through rehab and infill development. Get Stamford Partnership to produce a neighborhood housing plan or map to demonstrate renewed connectivity between downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.
56. The large potential in-fill TODs in Stamford, Norwalk, Bridgeport and New Haven are CT’s best opportunity to really move the needles on workforce/affordable housing, and in general, to

integrate economic development, housing, transportation and environmental policy. The new governor is a goldmine to make this happen. There may be more appetite for TOD in Bridgeport because Bridgeport is in trouble; many people believe Stamford is just fine--this is a land mine. The governance of transportation planning in CT—many small MPOs—is a landmine.

57. CT cities are each very small. This is in some ways a landmine, but in other ways a goldmine: e.g., Stamford has fewer residents than NYC has city employees. Bridging the silos in NYC is a major undertaking; in Stamford, and the other CT cities, it is a matter of walking down the hall or across the street.

Create a Fully Integrated Transportation System

58. We are in a position to benefit from gas prices should they skyrocket, as many believe they will.
59. South End is being developed partly due to proximity to the train station, but even more so because of the vehicular access made possible by the Urban Transitway. We need to do more to make sure South End development is designed to make transit access the default option. We should establish a park & ride lot under the I-95 bridge (approx. where the East Side Station would ultimately go), that would provide ridership for a frequent (every 10 min) shuttle along the Transitway to the station. The shuttle would also guarantee transit access to locations along the Transitway that are converting to new uses, as new tenants move in and establish commuting patterns.
60. Lack of cross-urban transportation system. Need to support local transit (i.e. buses). It's easy to cut funding and disinvest in the bus system if most citizens do not feel they will be impacted because they never take the bus. One idea is to provide a circulator shuttle that would eliminate the need for many of the private bus shuttles and help individuals and corporations to feel ownership of the local bus system. Might it be possible to license multi-passenger gypsy cabs and vans? Or a fleet of gypsy vans all working off of LP engines? A downtown streetcar system is feasible and should be pursued.
61. Downtown has small pockets of unconnected places, such that downtown does not feel like one whole place. Walking from the current station to anywhere in town is difficult, but the station is adjacent to downtown so there should be opportunity for better connections. Getting from some of the major corporate complexes (UBS, RBS to name a few) to downtown is difficult. This doesn't encourage walking. Increased bus service and shuttles + more bike-friendly routes are important. Current bike routes are not felt as safe and don't encourage usage.
62. Underpasses are both ugly and threatening, especially at night walking to and from the train station. A relatively inexpensive and vibrant painting of the underpasses, while also amping up the existing lighting, would be one answer.
63. Approach parking on a regional basis to induce greater use of coordinated public transportation.
64. Need to overcome ConnDOT's inability to complete critical transportation projects in a reasonable amount of time.
65. The coastal corridor of which Stamford is part is both a landmine and a goldmine in that our rail and highway infrastructure is very old and very over capacity and not very well connected. Still, the existing right-of-way offers opportunities for developing a 21st century, multi-modal transportation network throughout the state in a seamless integrated system. The high (billions of \$) to make this happen is a landmine...but our new pro-transportation governor (and his

connections in DC) is a goldmine. Lack of a statewide transportation master plan is a landmine. The Transportation Strategy Board's reports (a potential goldmine) can be used to jump-start the master planning process, prioritizing and time lining transportation projects and identifying funding mechanisms.

66. TOD, both commercial and residential (aka "smart growth" development), is a goldmine and seemingly taking off around Stamford's Transportation Center. The landmines are up the line where CT's traditional home rule mindset is a serious challenge to achieving similar development east and north of Stamford. Advancing proposals offering shared benefits and common cause amongst the "burbs" could eventually germinate into acceptance of broader initiatives.

Do you have other ideas?

Email them to: kbergstrom@reinventingstamford.com

Do you want to help make some of these ideas happen?

Join one of Reinventing Stamford's four Action Teams!

- **Action Team 1 is focused on creating an ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship**
- **Action Team 2 is focused on mentoring the next generation of problem solvers**
- **Action Team 3 is focused on making downtown a place of discovery**
- **Action Team 4 is focused on building a learning network among the transit –connected cities from New Haven to Newark**

If you want to join one of the teams, work on one of the team's projects, or simply serve as an occasional resource to a team, email your interest to:
kbergstrom@reinventingstamford.com